

‘SANDESH ONE’: THE STORY OF A SUCCESSFUL TRIAL IN LIVELIHOOD GENERATION THROUGH WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Rakesh Gupta, Indian Institute of Management–Nagpur (IIM–Nagpur)

ABSTRACT

This article aims to illustrate how innovative ideas can be effectively implemented with proper management. Technology can be used by poor women and with specific guidance; they can be turned into successful micro entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurship and self-employment can act as a catalyst in nation's economic growth. This article also highlights the possibilities of public and private sector partnership in formulating and running projects. The case of 'Sandesh One' is the success story of a network of women entrepreneurs established throughout Kerala. This case can be utilized to teach the intricacies of marketing, management and entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurship, Public Private Partnership, Marketing, Poverty Reduction, Micro-Enterprises.

INTRODUCTION

Present Status of Women

As stated by the 'World Bank, Women, Business and the law 2023' study carried out in Washington DC (2023), both the developing and the developed economies are admitting gender differences in their country's Law, which is true for women in all regions. Worldwide, more than 2.7 billion women are not provided with the same choice of jobs as available for men globally. Out of a total of 190 economies assessed in 2023, approximately 69 economies (more than one third of the total number) have their national law limiting women's decision to work, and a large number of economies has not any law for providing protection against sexual harassment for women at workplace (World Bank, 2023). The gender gap is clearly reflected in various aspects like bank account ownership, land ownership, social protection acquired through employment, such as pensions, maternity protection, access to Internet facilities, safely managed water, menstrual hygiene management, sanitation facilities at home, school or work etc. Women and girls are quite food insecure in comparison to men, as data shows 1.7% in 2019 has increased to 4% in 2021 observed food insecurity in women. (FAO, 2022)

Globally, the gender gap in labour force participation is around 30% since 1990 where men's participation is around 80% and women's participation is only 50% (ILOSTAT). As Women is biologically responsible for giving the birth to new generation children, she is facing the consequences of motherhood in terms of poor labour force participation data. The unemployment rates for women shows that women are slightly more likely to be unemployed than men and experience much larger job gap. Also, nearly 60% of women are employed in informal economy globally in high and medium income countries, whereas this rate is more than 90% in low income countries, according to the latest research carried out in 2018 (ILO, 2018). Women are involved in unpaid Care work which is essential to the functioning of economy. They shoulder, a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work. As per a study by UN Women, by 2050, Women will still be spending almost 2.5 more hours per day, on unpaid Care, unrecognized and household work, than men globally, where no monetary payment is involved (UN, 2023). Women also handles the motherhood wage penalty which increases as the number of children carried by women has increased. Women combats many disadvantages while starting businesses too, due to many barriers in starting a business as well as maintaining it owing to the prevailing inequalities in society. Whereas in lower and middle income countries, it is observed that women have high rate of entrepreneurship because decent job options for women are scarce (GEM, 2021).

There are glaring contrasts in gender roles in society around the world. Women's balanced participation in every facet of society and culture is a fundamental human right of every female.

Unfortunately, there is a gender imbalanced picture everywhere divulging that the consequences are detrimental on economic and future well-being of women and girls, their families as well as communities at large. Women and girls are largely downplayed in all fields from financial independence to workplace; from politics to entertainment (Milazzo, 2018).

Women in Indian Society

In past, a girl child born in an Indian family is considered as a burden for the parents because of several reasons like safety, security concerns during her upbringing, evil custom of child marriage and dowry in India, which caused displeasure of parents at the time of birth of a girl child and eventually limited access to education & facilities for women. Women is undervalued on her skills, business acumen, endurance and commitment. Giving birth to the children of new family, added responsibility of raising little children, their schooling, food, care, security, and managing the home. The people around her overlooks the fact that she is a homemaker who is managing all these things simultaneously; handling multitasking because she is talented, responsible, dependable, and intelligent, but she is utilising and investing all her qualities inside the house only. In India's male dominated society, women are expected to seek permission while stepping out of home, even for financial independence (Gifford et al., 2024).

But there is always a silver lining behind the clouds; with the modernization in society in India, now women can rise above the tag of a full-time home-maker, she can be a working mother who shoulders the responsibilities outside and inside the home. The support system available in small towns in India can provide a safe environment for children at home, children staying with grandparents and both men and women can step out of home to earn livelihood and dream of a bright future for their next generation with a broader spectrum of opportunities with an added income to the family.

The hidden and much-revealed fact for success and development of any economy is 'women empowerment' in the form of women entrepreneurs and self-employment (Wu et al., 2024). Confirming women's participation in economic growth is crucial for a nation building. The main pillar of the economy being an entrepreneur, is one of the basic needs of any country which can only be achieved by safeguarding the participation of females in entrepreneurial activities. In the present time, women are participating, in varied entrepreneurship activities and are competing with men successfully. Such an urbanisation and industrialisation can bring about a transformation; a step towards India's dream to be a superpower by 2047.

The United Nations development programme (UNDP) has released the Human Development Report 2023-24, which has revealed that India has made significant efforts in bridging the gender inequality in country. India's ranking has improved by 14 positions on the gender inequality index 2022 compared to the previous years. India ranked 108 out of total of 193 countries with a score of 0.437 point. Over the past, India's rank in GII (Gender Inequality Index) is improving consistently indicating a stable progress in achieving gender equality in country. The GII, is a multifarious measure that evaluates gender inequality, considering three parameters: 1. Reproductive health (quantified by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates); 2. Empowerment (assessed by relative count of Parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males with secondary education); 3. Labour market participation (gauged by economic status).

Also, the female labour force participation rate FLFPR is consistently improving in India over the years. It has grown from 24.5% to 37% in a period of five years. Unfortunately, when Indian women's participation in the formal economy sector is compared with other countries, according to the World Bank, India is among the lowest in the world. FLFPR is a proportion of number of women who are part of the labour force to the number of women in the working age. Greater than 15 years of age, women are considered to be a part of the labour force if she is either employed or actively looking for work.

Women being weaker sex in Indian social and family set up, requires greater efforts to achieve equality and employment opportunities. According to recent National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) study; over 60%, women who had spent most of their time on domestic duties said that they are doing so because there was no family member or hired person available to help out with household chores. Many of the women who were doing domestic work had shown their willingness to take up regular home-based paid work like tailoring, weaving, embroidery, jute item making, coloring or pottery etc. In this Male dominated

Indian society, women face various challenges like little access to outside community, no available time to explore their skills, no financial support to experiment their ideas due to their commitment to raising children, household work, and preparing food for the family and elders. Some of the women who completed graduation but have to engage themselves full-time into raising the family, if given an opportunity, appropriate skill set, training and seed money, they can achieve wonders in the field of entrepreneurship. *“A nation would not march forward if women are left behind” by Swami Vivekananda.*

The economic empowerment of women by self-employment and entrepreneurship is an uphill task, which is full of risks. Taking a closer look at other countries who are promoting micro credits and self-help groups of women, we can see that such impressive progress can only be achieved by holistic development of women in society. If women were given management training by short term courses to upgrade their skills followed by institutional support for developing various income, generating activities, new ventures, having high local demand and finally providing soft loans by Grameen banks or state-owned banks, only then women empowerment and entrepreneurship can be achieved. A study conducted by Ministry of Labour & Employment, India; indicates that the women's participation in labour force and the workforce has significantly increased over the years in India. During 2022-23, the women participation in labour force has notable increased to 37.0% (Figure 1).

Social Standing of Women in Kerala

There are several myths and actuality in version of the Women in 'Kerala prototype'. Kerala is a distinctive state in India, which shows an inconsistency of social advancement on one side of coin while having economic stagnation on the other side. Women in Kerala are better educated, healthy, competent, hard-working, committed and has traditionally enjoyed a higher status, but the development indicators of the state do not endorse the same. This specific state has multiple dimensions to human development trends. There are several layers within the Kerala society with each layer, having specific gender relations based on cultural, social and traditional customs.

Job creation in Kerala has always been quite poor and slow process compared to the number of graduates in the state market, as is evident from the employment exchange data. The job opportunities are neither created by manufacturing sector in Kerala nor by the factories and labour laws. Kerala is grossly missing on diversity in job market. As Women in Kerala has been in adequately paid, consequently, there is less demand for women to step out of home and to provide financial support to the family, which in turn governs the patriarchal dominance in every walk of society and men continues to hold primary authority.

In order to improve female workforce participation, Kerala must create a diverse pool of jobs, entrepreneurship opportunities to women. It also requires concurrent efforts in all attributes stretching from government schemes for women, improving investments, easing legal barriers which unintentionally disadvantage women and society and must strengthen the support system for women, social security, protection, assurance and care infrastructure. According to the World Bank, Indian women's participation in the formal economy is among the lowest in the world. Only some parts of the Arab world perform worse than India in terms of FLFPR (Female Labour Force Participation Rate, 2023).

Overview of Kerala State

Kerala state is spread over 38,863 km², and there are 978 village panchayats (Figure 2). Till 1971, Kerala had the highest population growth rate in India and thereafter it showed a declining trend. An initiative to make Kerala 100% literate led it to achieve the highest literacy rate in the country. Women's literacy rate though slightly lower than men but still not very different (92% females versus 96% males). Improved worker force participation and Rising female labour force participation is observed in recent trends in state; (Figure 3). Kerala receives heavy rains for about 120-140 days annually from southwest summer monsoon and northeast winter monsoon (Planning Commission, 2007). Various flora and fauna and medicinal plants also provides for opportunities. Over 25% of India's 15,000 plant species are in Kerala. Of these, 900 are medicinal plants and 1272 are endemic to Kerala (Sreedharan, 2004).

Kerala uses innovative ideas and mix of academics, research and industries to power development. 1% of the state's annual budget is set aside for entrepreneurial activities (Information Public Relations Department, 2017). Start-ups are promoted and a start-up policy was introduced in 2014. Many start-ups in the social, agricultural sectors and village entrepreneurship with support from or initiated by government departments have been showcased in national and international exhibitions. It was in such a policy environment, egged by previous success that the ambitious project of 'Sandesh One' was conceptualized. With the objective of turning women into entrepreneurs, KSWDC initiated the project 'Sandesh One'. It was conceived as a completely entrepreneur-driven venture, supported by the government of Kerala. 'Sandesh One' One envisioned to form a network of women entrepreneurs pan Kerala. The project was inaugurated on January 12, 2015. 'Sandesh One' centers planned to showcase and implement high-impact interventions that can positively influence the society and improve the quality of life of the people (Mazumdar et al., 2023).

Sandesh One: Seeds of Idea

The seeds of 'SANDESH ONE' were sown in mid-2014, when, Kerala State Women Development Corporation (KSWDC) was reveling in the success of their She-taxi project and wanted to focus more on women centric initiatives encouraging them to start their own small businesses rather than searching for jobs. She-taxi is a fleet of taxicabs, owned and operated by women for transporting women commuters. It was launched on 19th November 2013 with a fleet of 5 cars [12]. It started with five taxis running in the capital of Kerala, Trivandrum as a government run, 24x7 taxi service. A central control room takes calls for taxis and assigns runs to the women. From their income, the women pay back the loan they had taken from banks for the purchase of the taxicab. Subsequently She-taxi was introduced in other cities of Kerala in a phased manner and the service was doing very well and the women involved in this were very happy and satisfied. The success of She-Taxi gave KSWDC the confidence and fuelled their ambition to work in the space of women entrepreneurship and the organization was keen to start many more initiatives in this direction (Noghanibehambari & Noghani, 2023).

A chance meeting in a conference between the General Manager of Kerala State Women Development Corporation (KSWDC) and Arun Varma, Senior Vice-President Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS)-Education & Training Services (ETS), led to a lot of discussion about what could the possible opportunities for women centric entrepreneurship options to look forward to. It was at this point of time, Arun mentioned about his long-held desire to launch an entrepreneurship training course leading to the start of a real-time business both integrated in a particular programme. The General Manager was very excited about this concept and requested Arun to develop this concept and come out with a concrete proposal. After a lot of brain-storming within his team, Arun finally came up with the concept, where there will be a training programme of three months to train women in the basic aspects of starting a business by trained instructors. Post-training these women will be provided with a tool-kit of potential small business opportunities from where they can pick-up the project, which they will work on to start their business. To get a basket of opportunities, they involved Alterneit, an organization working on the development of innovative low cost and sustainable solutions. This was how the unique concept of 'SANDESH ONE' was conceived involving three major stake-holders, KSWDC, IL&FS-ETS & Alterneit in a public-private partnership. The objective was to provide an end to end solution, starting with identifying the right group of women, training them about how to start a business and then helping them real-time in starting a business (Sreedharan, 2004).

'Sandesh One': The Stakeholders

The project 'Sandesh One' one had kicked off with thousands of aspiring women entrepreneurs who were keen to join the program. It was Kerala's one of the ambitious women centric, social enterprise project. Strong response was received. The project was initiated by Kerala State women's development Corporation under PPP. The selected women participants would be trained to run the micro units after undergoing a certification programme in entrepreneurship followed by a product orientation programme. No single organization can provide this combination of three services, therefore this project involved three stakeholders: The parties involved in project 'Sandesh One' were KSWDC, Alterneit and IL&FS-ETS.

The Kerala State Women's Development Corporation Ltd. (KSWDC): was incorporated in 1988 under the aegis of the Govt. of Kerala for women empowerment. Its vision is to enable women of the state to realize their full potential. The managing director sits at the Trivandrum office. There are regional offices in the cities of Ernakulum and Kozhikode. While for 'SANDESH ONE' project, they played the role of bringing all these parties together and were the lead player in this project. They provided the funding for this project and also channelized the subsidies as well as arranged for the bank loans on soft-terms under various Govt. schemes for the interested women to start their businesses.

Alterneit Lifestyles (P) Ltd. is based in the capital of Kerala. It is a for profit organization focusing on development of innovative low cost and sustainable technological solutions. They are guided by United Nation's 17 sustainable development goals and is a member of United Nations Global Compact Network. For example, in the area of goat farming they specially designed sheds which are easy to assemble and dismantle made from galvanized iron frame and fiber reinforced plastic. High yielding banana sapling prepared using tissue culture technology. Their role in 'SANDESH ONE' project was to provide a basket of simple technological solutions, which these women can use to start their business.

Infrastructure leasing and financial services (IL&FS): with its corporate headquarters in Mumbai is a for-profit organization. ILFS-ETS Ltd. (IL&FS Education and Technology Services Ltd.) has been working in catalyzing investments in the Social Infrastructure in the areas of education. They have already successfully many training programmes and has been focusing a lot on Entrepreneurship & Small Business Development. For 'SANDESH ONE', they collaborated with top-tier management institute to prepare the curriculum and entire training module as well as the third-party assessment.

In general, ILFS and Alterneit decided the areas for training and entrepreneurial assistance were (1) agriculture and dairy, (2) health, (3) forestation, (4) water, (5) waste management, (6) renewable energy, (7) food, (8) safety and (9) ICT solutions.

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP (PPP)

The public private partnership is a relationship which is commercial and legal defined by Indian government as an arrangement between the government owned entities on one side and some private sector entity on the other side in which the investment or management is being undertaken by the involved private sector entity only, for a designated period of time having well defined allocation of risks between the two. The government of India has recognized several types of PPPs in the field of infrastructure, roads, ports, water management etc. It is a mutually benefiting association between government and private companies (Quan & Solheim, 2023). PPP plays a vital role in education sector by enhanced access to education, align educational program design to industry needs and improve teaching quality by using several assessment parameters (Kaiseroglou et al., 2024). PPP can help providing vast access to un-explored areas as well as underprivileged and marginalized segment of public (Agarwal et al., 2023). This initiative will help reduce disparities in education, which is a fundamental right of every citizen.

The ILFS education has presented a good example of the belief that the PPP public private partnership model is as pertinent in building social foundation as it is in core infrastructure. The success of ILFS education is mainly due to its primary acceptance of PPP model in social sector as government funding was allocation was growing in the field of education and skill training. The effective incorporation of PPPs can boost access to education, improve teaching quality, and align educational programs with industry needs (Bhalotra et al., 2020).

Challenges of PPP

There are various risks involved in such associations and partnerships. Many a times the private sector does not provide the service that is not specifically outlined in the PPP contract but is the need of the hour (Gifford et al., 2024). It is very important that some key performance indicators, are precisely laid out in the contract and government must monitor closely the work of these private partners. The coordination of PPP is centralised by the Ministry of finance, and it has the PPP cell in department of economic affairs (Wu et al., 2024). In order to streamline the PPP procedures and strengthen the regulatory framework for the whole nation, a step towards expediting, the PPP project approval, Department of Economic Affairs' DEA

PPP Cell is nominated the main role of public private partnership appraisal committee, PPPAC is the appraisal of ongoing projects, at Central level. The government has also created a funding scheme known as the viability gap funding in eventualities to promote the sustainability of ongoing projects. At particular occasions various projects are launched by the government of India to help finance the cost incurred towards the development of PPP projects.

As a final point, the involved PPP cell will also produce a series of guidance papers and a PPP tool kit to support the project preparations and decision-making processes during the running of the project (Musenero et al., 2023). The sole objective is to extend a helping hand and improve the decision making, improve the quality of PPP is, that are undertaken. The specific tool kit is designed with a focus on supporting the decision making at every stage that is the central, state as well as municipal level (Quan & Solheim, 2023).

The pressure from IL&FS to meet their deadline finally forced KSWDC to convene the first training batch with women from different districts. IL&FS had to give a report of their activities not only to the social welfare department but also to their organization. Their organization was not keen on allowing employees to continue with an earlier project when they had to be moving on to new projects as per the projected time schedule. The approval mechanism of the government also led to major delays in the initiation of the project. The government had planned to form a pool of trainers before initiation, which did not go as they planned. This also hampered their idea of conducting training at different districts and had to be done in the capital city which is at one end of Kerala.

Sandesh One: Pilot Round

‘Sandesh One’ is a Hindi language word meaning “A message”. The ‘Sandesh One’ one Project under PPP has given a beautiful message to the society that if Women given appropriate opportunities, then with their dedication, untiring efforts, devotion & commitment, they can establish themselves as successful self-employed person and they can carve a niche for themselves in the society. These self-employed women can set an example for the society that not only at home, but even outside the home, Women can prove the metal with her qualities. Only one Women participant was selected from each Panchayat, thus only the brightest and most committed candidates got the opportunity. When weaker sections of the society start contributing towards financial growth of family and society, then only developing nation like India can excel in every field.

With the successful completion of pilot round of ‘SANDESH ONE’ project resulting in few successful graduating women taking-up some of the projects for their upcoming businesses. Kerala State Women Development Corporation (KSWDC) called a meeting of all the partners involved in this project to chalk-out the future plans. ‘SANDESH ONE’ was conceived as a public-private partnership initiative involving Kerala State Women's Development Corporation (KSWDC), an organization under the department of social justice, government of Kerala who partnered with ILFS-ETS & Alternet and jointly initiated the project ‘Sandesh One’. It was launched with an objective of training women about how to start and run a small business. The uniqueness of ‘SANDESH ONE’ lied in the fact that this was one of its kind initiatives, which focused on training rural women in Kerala about how to start a small business in the first place and on successful completion of their training, facilitating them in choosing the nature of business they want to start and then actually hand-holding them to start that business. The project was inaugurated on January 12, 2015.

Looking back at the enthusiastic response among the participating women and the smooth manner in which the pilot phase ran, KSWDC was pitching aggressively now to expand this initiative across the entire state of Kerala. In this meeting, the representatives of Kerala State Women Development Corporation (KSWDC), ILFS-Education Services and Alterneit met and discussed the possibility of scaling-up this project. The focus of the discussion was how to scale-up this project across the state of Kerala and the challenges lying in the process. Soon the issue of discussion became, how to scale-up, the role of partners and the time-lines. The issues, which became the focal point of discussion were the impact of scaling-up on the quality of training programme, kind and number of opportunities available to start these small businesses and the socio-economic impact it could have in the rural areas.

‘Sandesh One’: Roll-Out

To kick-start the initiative, the first step was taken by KSWDC to create awareness about ‘Sandesh One’ in all the panchayats (village self-government) across the state of Kerala. Thereafter, applications were invited from women aged between the age of 21 and 45. The minimum educational qualification required to become member of the network and undergo training was bachelor's degree or equivalent. The training was directed at women with decent education but lacking in expertise and capital to start a venture. So the training was meant to equip educated women with business management skills. Applicants gave an online examination which was followed by an interview. Only one candidate was selected from each Panchayat. Demographic data wise demarcation of centres were done in Corporation and Municipality areas. Women who did not have enough capital to start an enterprise were the target beneficiaries who would undergo training and become members of ‘Sandesh One’. The selected candidates had to deposit a caution deposit of about INR500 (\$6.96). The money spent for travel and other expenses in connection with the training were reimbursed to the candidates by KSWDC. Though initially they picked only 50 women to run a pilot run and divide them in 2 batches but the overall plan was to atleast one women from each of 1000 panchayats in Kerala to undergo training under this initiative.

KSWDC formulated a special loan scheme to extend financial support to the women candidates. The training of the first batch of 20 women was conducted at Trivandrum the capital of Kerala. The individual joining the ‘Sandesh One’ network can choose from a range of products to start their own entrepreneurship in a profitable manner. After this, all the members received skill development training, interest free loans, mentoring and necessary support for start-up. Women candidates who would start their business would receive support from KSWDC which facilitated loan applications, provided promotional support and tie-ups with other stakeholders.

There was an elaborate plan and agenda about the first training batch and who its participants would be. The launch got delayed as the initial recruitment of one women per panchayat by the KSWDC took long, and the project was running behind schedule by 6 months.

‘Sandesh One’: How It Works: Curriculum Development

There was need for training the aspiring women entrepreneurs with necessary skills to start and run a venture. Equipping them with business skills was necessary to ensure the start and success of their small businesses. To provide management skills using hands on training on all aspects like planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring IL&FS-ETS designed and developed a training program with the help of a premier management institute in India. The training module had both class-room, field level practical training and real-life training in technologies, services and products. The women joining ‘Sandesh One’ training had to complete basic business education in a short duration of two weeks (excluding assignments). The training included various skill training components like communication skills, inter personal communication, basic finance and marketing using internet and media for communication, accounting and budgeting and other such skills necessary to start a business. Management techniques, finance management, computer skills, inter personal and business communication skills, business analysis and planning, and e-commerce were few of the topics covered in the course curriculum.

Training & Evaluation

The participants were exposed to various subjects during the training. A participatory learning methodology was adopted. It had a flexible structure to enable participants to attend and complete the training at their convenience. After one-week training which was residential, the participants went home to do their assignments. They could then choose when they would attend the second week's residential training. The assignments were given to get hands-on knowledge on various activities and real-life technologies so that the woman could decide on the entrepreneurship of her choice as well as the challenges she needs to be aware of.

The focus of the training concept was: (a) Adopting systems approach to capacity building (b) Ensuring people-centered development (c) Improving social capital (d) Involving stakeholders and their acceptability.

(e) Using Information and communication Technology (ICT) for simple interesting & qualitative training delivery. Training used various teaching techniques in the classroom that enabled creative thinking and presentation of ideas to a wider public platform. Skills like using internet effectively for marketing and dispersion of their activities also formed part of the training curriculum.

Each week, participants filled up a pre and post-training questionnaire. The questions were pre-coded. An independent Management Institute which was not among the partners of 'Sandesh One'-one carried out the training evaluation. This helped in evaluating the lessons taught and its assimilation independently without any biases entering the judgments. All questionnaires were given and collected in a confidential manner. Names or such identifiers were not written anywhere in the questionnaire.

Before the start of the training, all participants were asked their expectations from the course as part of the pre-training questionnaire. After about two weeks of training, the participants expressed that the participatory sessions and reading materials had helped them in gaining these various skills. On completion of the training program, the graduates received IL&FS Certificate in Advancement of Entrepreneurship (I-CARE). The women then went through a product orientation program to familiarize themselves with the products and services offered by "Sandesh One" network.

Field Project

Alterneit is known for growing innovation and cultivating sustainability where they have redesigned future through sustainable innovation in several fields, like Ravi revolutionizing bulk cooking using solar electric hybrid, steamer, designed for restaurants and institutions, tackling municipal food waste, and converting it into compost, providing job opportunities, providing greener solutions for sanitary waste disposal, reducing pollution with various initiatives, providing cutting edge technology for safe contaminant, free fruits and vegetables processing. They are leaders in the field of eco restoration, collaboration with crowd, foresting, rainwater harvesting, and a forestation. Their microclimate analysis and sustainable farming techniques can give hyper plantation methods, they have various sustainable development parks which are designed to tackle different global challenges and results in employment generation to boosting agriculture productivity.

This company simplifies the process of farm land acquisition and guides investors through various complexities of purchasing and managing farm lands in India. They guide farmers to high yield plantations and established joint ventures to boost agriculture productivity, which results in long-term income generation for all the stakeholders involved.

They are the trusted partners for CSR initiatives, governments and development agencies by offering Tailor made consulting services in the field of sustainable agriculture, renewable energy and waste management. They can help organizations create impactful programs that foster economic growth, environment, betterment, and social equity.

Alterneit works on the sustainable development center's model. These SDCs serve as community hubs for water management, sanitation and hygiene, agriculture, healthcare, sustainable energy and waste management. They select the participants to manage each sub center by local entrepreneurs, fostering innovation and sustainability by adopting advanced farming techniques and exploring renewable energy solutions, such initiatives contribute to the community, well-being, efficient recycling of waste, waste reduction strategies which in turn creates cleaner environments. These interconnected sub-centers, form or dynamic ecosystem within SDC which helps in driving economic growth and resilience, which results in addressing critical challenges in their respective communities.

Alterneit also provides the assistance of specialized legal teams in identifying and acquiring suitable land and ensuring the smooth processing of the business model. They are supporting clients in Kerala with a fruit processing, plant and sustainable resort project which will enhance both local agriculture and eco-tourism. Alterneit takes care of the details, allowing investors to benefit from income generating forms without any hassle. They are also bridging the gap by providing specialised guidance in converting agriculture and sewage waste into high-quality bio. Using innovative paralysis machines. As a few states in India are into the business of processing of palm oil, sugarcane, tea, coffee etc., they guide the new entrepreneurs how to turn waste material obtained after processing into valuable biochar. They are taking up

several major projects in India and promoting sustainable agriculture while advancing carbon credit trading as well.

Completion of Sandesh Round-1

After effective completion of six-month-long residential training programme by participants, focusing on developing entrepreneurial skills and knowledge management, participants had furthermore gone through a product orientation programme to get adapted with the products and services presented by the 'Sandesh One' One complete network through PPP. Women Entrepreneurs from 'Sandesh One' project received KSWDC support in terms of facilitating loans, tie-ups with other stakeholders. 'Sandesh One' Centre's had environment friendly projects, products and solutions to reach the grassroots level to help women start their own business.

In addition to this, the Kerala State Women's Development Corporation (KSWDC) had successful support system for self-employed women in the form of a 24/7 information providing emergency helpline for women around, working on the core of outline recommended by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, GoI (Government of India). It ensured that self-employed women and girls had a dependable government intervention to trust on; in cases of emergency or when accurate information is needed. Another toll-free 24 hours' telecom service was operational for women seeking help / guidance or information. On top of it, they provided information about the appropriate government schemes and programs available to the woman with the local gram-panchayat (area/ suburb) in which she resides or is self-employed. These initiatives by Kerala government were a feather in their cap and a step forward towards women-empowerment. Look at the smile on the faces of these women, a sense of achievement, real empowerment achieved and is visible in their expressions (Figure 4).

Selected Success Stories

Girija

Nano Bio is a complete fish food. It contains carbohydrates, fats and proteins in nano form. It has multiple nano probiotic microbes. When I used this feed, weight increase in fishes were fast and fishes remained healthy too. Where I needed 12 fishes to sell 1kg fish, now I only need 8 fishes. Consumers also prefer fleshy fish than small fish. I am also selling Biofeed to other fishing farms. I had to put to use my skills in marketing to make sales link-ups with other farms. Since this feed is costlier than local feed, I had to improve my marketing skills and talk with confidence. I give all credit to the training I received for the boost of my self-confidence and my ability to overcome the feeling that I can't do anything without man's help.

Rashida

My husband was a truck-driver. He met with an accident and got paralyzed. So, it was necessary for me to earn a living. I was happy that I was selected for training in 'Sandesh One'-one. I was determined not to allow my fears to overpower me. The training gave me so much confidence in my abilities. I understood the skills and talents that I had which I never thought about. I understood how best to use my skills. I completed the 'Sandesh One' training in 4 weeks. My children were proud of me. Alterneit has developed many cost-effective items. In the land I have, I am rearing 20 goats using the goats cage developed by Alterneit. It is 12x12x13 ft cage which is 5 ft above the ground. The waste goes down the cage to the ground. There is enough space for the goats to move around. Food and water are separated with partition, thus preventing wastage. Goats can go to eat and drink at will as they are not tied and feed themselves without wastage of food.

Leena Prakash

After completing my training under Sandesh One project, I selected the opportunity of starting a food supply chain. In which, I started transporting cooked food items in bulk from small villages to main town markets and earned good profit. As my husband was already plying auto-rickshaw, I started saving handsome amount in this small business. I am very happy by starting my own business and network.

Asha Kumari

By running a pickle business at my home, I was able to feed my three children properly and got them admitted in a school for primary education, with the money earned by me. Earlier I was unable to meet my monthly expenses, with husband's small income. I am thankful to God for selecting me for Sandesh initiative, which transformed my family member's life.

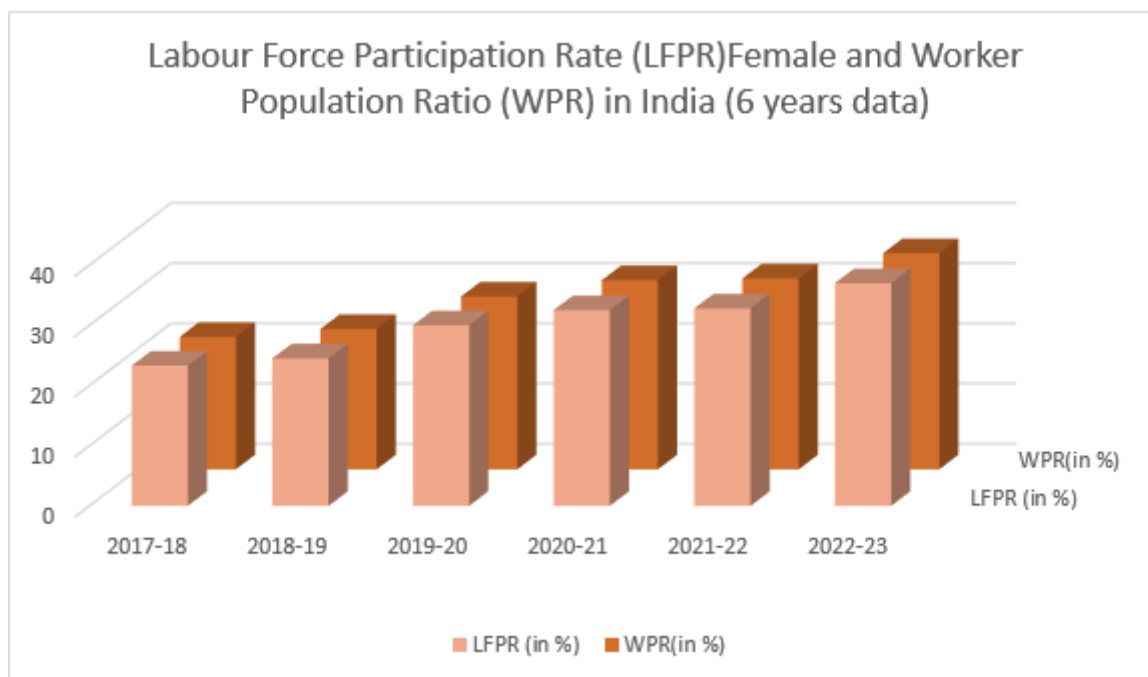
Challenges & Way Forward

'Sandesh One' Centres at the grassroots are conceived as a two-member entrepreneur model, where the lead entrepreneur will be a woman. Can 'Sandesh One' succeed in its effort to generate women entrepreneurs? Or will it be men entrepreneurs enjoying the benefits of loan and other facilities in woman's name?

Low female labour force participation rate in India, as compared to other nations is mainly due to high degree of working women in informal worker range, limited number of jobs in services for women, gender gap in median, earnings of full-time employees, unpaid care, child, care and domestic chores, high incidence of violence against the woman. It is quite significant to enhance female labour force participation for bringing economic boost of country, tackling poverty, self-confidence, and dignity of women and to achieve global commitments

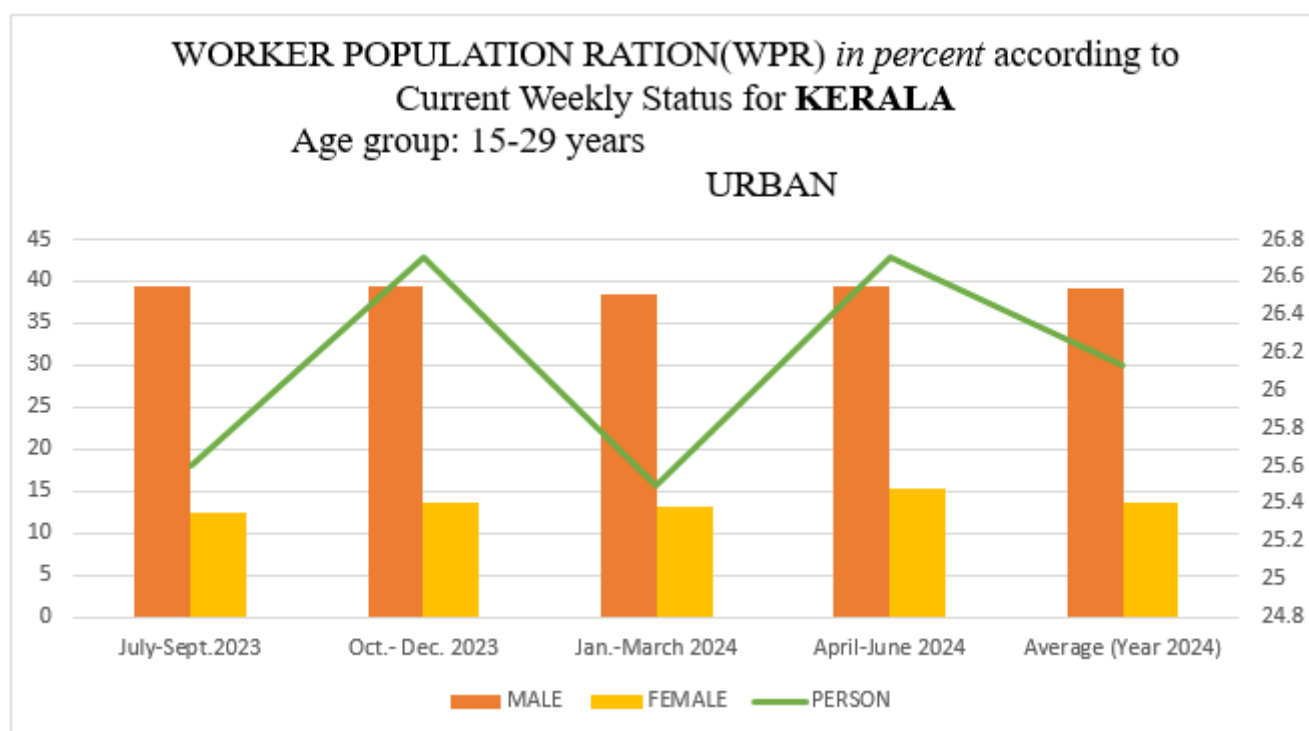
Indian government has taken several steps to enhance female labour force participation by providing maternity benefits, Anganwadi centres, providing affordable food, schemes, facilitating bank loans for women, entrepreneurs, and laws to protect women from sexual harassment at the place of work. Way forward, some measures like child, care, subsidies, creation of some more projects like 'Sandesh one' and use of innovative solutions to improve female retention in industry

Women empowerment is decisive step towards a better growth trajectory of any nation. It is a work in progress in India. There are sociocultural norms and several structural hurdles that continue to hinder women access to scale development opportunities and bridge the gap between men and women entrepreneurs in society. By financing, the women's education and skill development, India can unveil the maximum potential of its rural workforce, and hence bring prosperity for all (Figures 1-4).

**FIGURE 1**

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE (LFPR) FEMALE AND WORKER POPULATION RATIO (WPR) IN INDIA (6 YEARS DATA)

Source: PLFS, MoSPI

**FIGURE 2**

WORKER POPULATION RATION(WPR) IN PERCENT ACCORDING TO CURRENT WEEKLY STATUS FOR KERALA

*Source: Quarterly_Bulletin_PLFS_April_June_2024.pdf.



FIGURE 3

PHOTO GALLERY OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AFTER SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF 'SANDESH ONE' PROJECT [14]

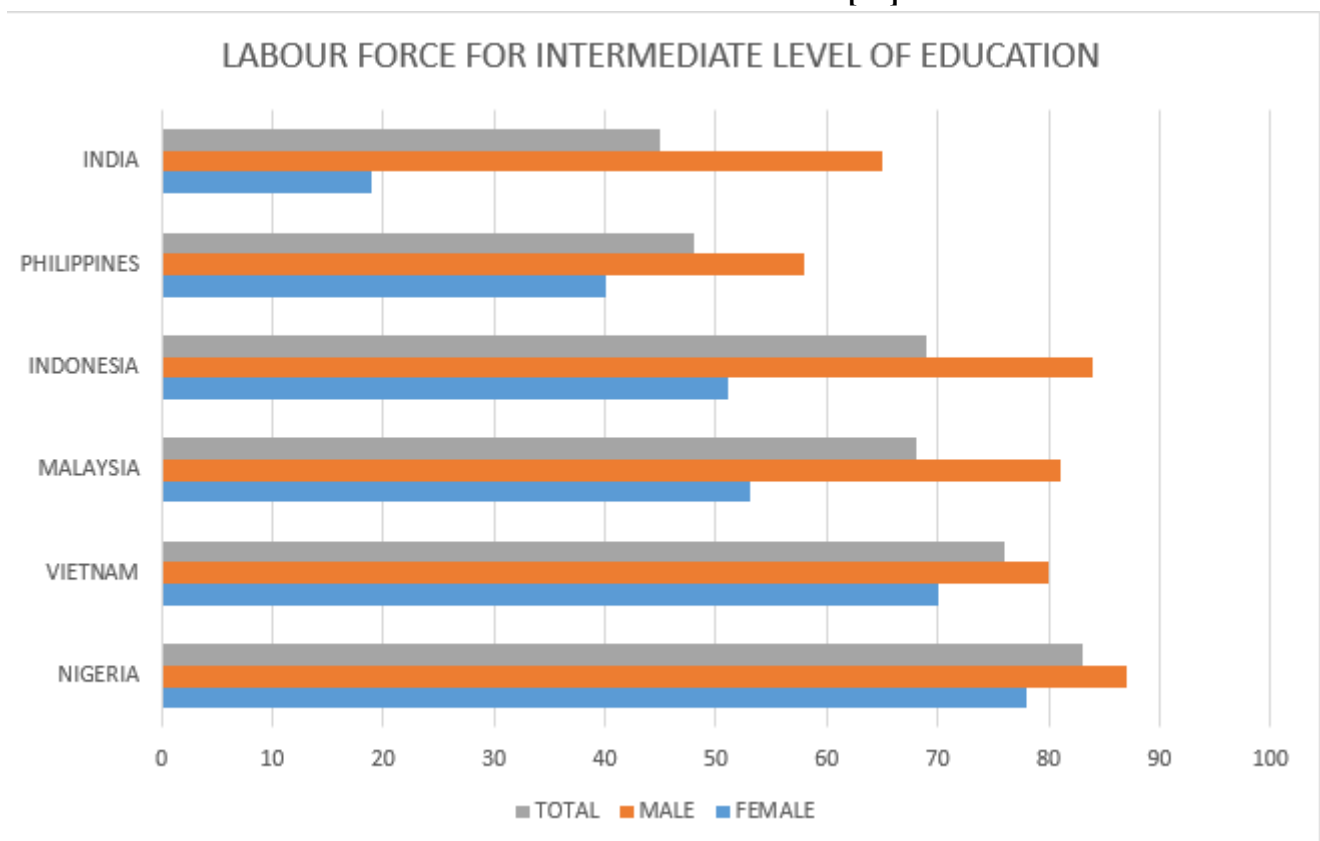


FIGURE 4

LABOUR FORCE FOR INTERMEDIATE LEVEL OF EDUCATION

***Source:** International labour organisation, "Education and mismatch indicators database EMI" ILOSTAT, assessed June 18, 2024.

Data retrieved from World Bank Gender Data Portal.

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