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NITI Aayog

MOVING THE NEEDLE

The Women
Entrepreneurship Platform



March 2021

MOVING THE NEEDLE

The Women Entrepreneurship Platform

**Creating an Enabling Environment
for Women-Led Enterprises**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the preparation of the report, valuable contributions have been made by the International Innovation Corps team. This paper includes contributions by Ankan De, Sumita Soni and Sabyasachi Upadhyay from the NITI Aayog WEP team. Special mention is warranted for Mansha Siraj and Deepika Raman. Others who have contributed towards this paper include Sanjana Mohanty and Siddhant Sawhney.

This paper reflects the design, development and on-ground implementation of the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP), which was launched in 2018. WEP has been supported in its various endeavours by partners who have bolstered its mission to create an enabling environment for India's women entrepreneurs.

FOREWORD

The role of entrepreneurship in the context of people's lives and the economic progress of the nation has never been more important. McKinsey's Gender Parity Report 2018 noted that if India is able to address gender inequality – we could add about \$770 Billion to the GDP or about 18% more than the usual scenario¹. Women's labour force participation has been 18.6% for rural and urban India for the period 2018-2019 as was noted as per the latest PLFS survey². This gap highlights that there is much work to be done with respect to supporting women, to help improve their labour force participation. Entrepreneurship provides a key pathway for achieving this. With the right kind of support, entrepreneurial activities undertaken by women can not only help them improve their lives and enhance their agency, but also has the potential to have a cumulative positive impact on India's economy. A robust support ecosystem is necessary to help women entrepreneurs realise their aspirations.



The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) is one of the flagship initiatives of NITI Aayog that was conceived by the CEO, Shri. Amitabh Kant, at the 8th Global Entrepreneurship Summit in 2017. Through WEP, NITI Aayog has been actively working towards developing a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem necessary for women entrepreneurs to fulfill their goals.

The platform was officially launched on International Women's Day in 2018. WEP has been envisioned as an aggregator of information and services, with a mission to educate, enable and empower women entrepreneurs. To build a vibrant ecosystem for women-led enterprises, the platform works to strengthen industry linkages and increase awareness of existing programs and services. The platform plays a key role in addressing information asymmetry that impacts women entrepreneurs today. WEP also provides a means to bring together numerous programs and initiatives which otherwise are implemented in silos. The platform brings together various offerings and services provided through WEP partners and integrates and curates these offerings.

The platform is agnostic with respect to its "target audience", catering to rural and urban entrepreneurs. Further, it supports and facilitates both established as well as upcoming entrepreneurs. For the first time, the WEP community is now available in regional languages, which is an important initial step in reaching a larger audience.

This report captures some of the efforts undertaken by this flagship initiative to move the needle on women entrepreneurship.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A Roy".

Anna Roy

Adviser, NITI Aayog

1 The Power of Parity Report (2018)

2 http://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/press_release/Press%20Note.pdf

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SETTING THE CONTEXT



1

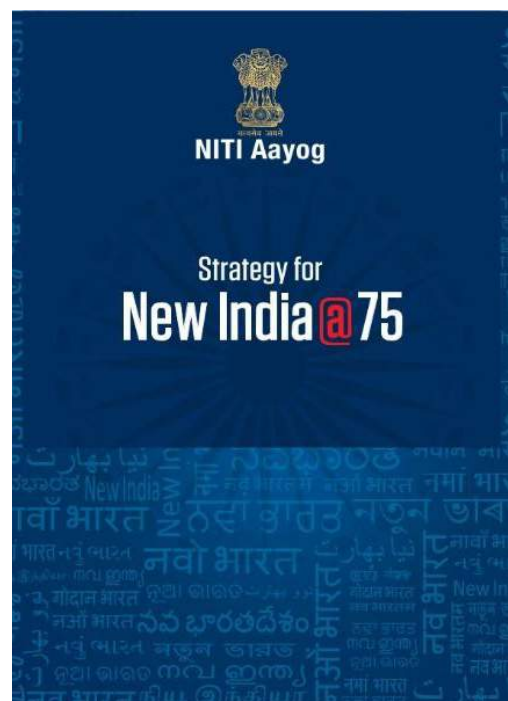
SETTING THE CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

The participation of women in entrepreneurship plays a key role in the socio-economic transformation of any nation. Apart from advancing the economic empowerment of women, entrepreneurship enhances the social status of women through the ownership of assets and the freedom of decision making. Women's participation in the entrepreneurial landscape has multiple benefits, including the latitude that it provides with respect to earning their own livelihoods and gaining financial independence. The generation of income in turn leads to an improvement in the standard of living along with the agency to apply their education and skills to fulfill their professional ambitions.

India can add 18% to its GDP (approximately USD 770 billion), if it can bridge its gender equality gap by improving female workforce participation in the country.³ For developing countries, Women's workforce participation is closely linked with entrepreneurship with self-employment and small and micro business significantly contributing to job creation.⁴ Evidence shows that women led enterprises have a tendency to hire more women and hence female entrepreneurship creates a multiplier effect in generating employment in the wider community.⁵ On their part, Indian women entrepreneurs are revolutionizing the country by taking the lead in fields that have traditionally been dominated by men. It is imperative that an enabling supportive ecosystem is created which can help women achieve their desired economic outcomes and subsequently contribute to the welfare of women in society at-large.

Gendered constraints impede women's entry in the entrepreneurial landscape. A healthy ecosystem requires



3. The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia Pacific – India. (2018). McKinsey Global Institute. Retrieved from: <https://mck.co/37aRT-cb>

4. http://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/press_release/Press%20Note.pdf

5. The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia Pacific – India. (2018). McKinsey Global Institute. Retrieved from: <https://mck.co/37aRT-cb>

conscious efforts to improve women's access to knowledge and the requisite skills. These challenges have been recognized in NITI Aayog's Strategy document, New India@75, that was released following the Honorable Prime Minister's call for building a 'New India' 2022, when India completes 75 years of Independence. Enhancing female labour force participation is one of the key goals listed in this strategy and forms a crucial part of the five-year vision for India. This goal is aligned with research that says that India has much to gain if women exercise their agency beyond the domestic realm and join the formal economy.

In addition to recognizing and addressing these challenges, the strategy also focused on encouraging women to participate in industry and enterprise. The strategy recommended improving access to credit for women entrepreneurs as well as supporting skill development initiatives to motivate women to explore entrepreneurship.

1.2 The Indian Entrepreneurial Landscape

Trade and commerce has always played an important role in India's economy, right from historic times when traders travelled across the globe to exchange goods and services. In the post-liberalization period, India emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Amongst the critical factors that can be attributed for this steady pace of growth is the influx in the domestic and foreign capital and rise in disposable income. However, economists unanimously agree that at the heart of India's economic growth is the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) sector. The sector accounts for approximately 45% of the country's industrial output and generates employment for 60 million people, creating 1.3 million jobs every year.⁶

Smaller businesses have quickly emerged as one of the key drivers of the country's gross domestic product and subsequently, its economic growth. Aided by the technology revolution and the consequent positive disruption to the traditional industrial setup, India's business ecosystem paved the way for a diverse set of new entrants. To this effect, the previous decade has witnessed a rapid mushrooming of enterprises in India, making it the third largest startup ecosystem in the world.⁷ This phenomenon has propelled the country on a path of economic boom, contributing to job creation and fueling the engines of growth and development.^{8,9}

Cognizance of the propensity of startups to stimulate socio-economic progress has also led to a pan India adoption of policies and programs targeted at building a catalytic environment for entrepreneurs. The Indian government has invested substantial resources to spark entrepreneurship through programs such as the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMGEP), Entrepreneurship Skill Development Programme (ESDP) and Startup India. Several state governments, CSR entities, and civil society organizations are also undertaking their own initiatives.

Yet, the participation of women entrepreneurs in this ecosystem remains minimal. According to the latest available estimates, of the 58.2 million micro, small, and medium enterprises operating in the country, only ~14% or 8.05 million are owned by women.¹⁰ Additionally, women owned enterprises in India are largely skewed towards smaller sized firms, with almost 98 percent of businesses falling in the category of micro-enterprises.¹¹

6. SME Landscape in India - Growth, Challenges and Opportunities. Business Standard. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3JRsf23>

7. Indian Startup Ecosystem. (2019). Retrieved from startupindia: <https://bit.ly/2MGs6yV>

8. Indian Tech Startup Funding Report. (2018). Retrieved from INC42: <https://bit.ly/3dKivmR>

9. Indian Startup Ecosystem. (2019). Retrieved from startupindia: <https://bit.ly/2MGs6yV>

10. All India Report of Sixth Economic Census. (2016). Retrieved from Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation: <https://bit.ly/379gVsb>

11. Improving Access to Finance for Women-owned Businesses in India. IFC. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2CVSEuE>

Percentage of Enterprises by Male/Female Owners

Category	Male	Female
Micro	79.56	20.44
Small	94.74	5.26
Medium	97.33	2.67
All	79.63	20.37

Source: Annual Report, 2018-19 Ministry of Medium and Small Enterprises

The limited presence of women entrepreneurs indicates that while India's business environment is improving as reported by World Bank in 2018, the overall ecosystem still poses multiple challenges for women-owned or led businesses. This is backed by evidence as well; India was ranked 52 out of 57 countries when it came to women entrepreneurs' ability to capitalize on opportunities offered by their local environments by the Mastercard Index in 2018.

Stimulating women entrepreneurship can go a long way in bridging gender gaps and empowering women. However, as recognized in the Strategy@75 recommendations, achieving this requires building an enabling environment where the constraints to women entrepreneurship are actively identified and removed. These constraints are instrumental in determining the size, scale and the success of women led businesses and has larger implications for the India's vision for inclusive growth and attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹²

1.3 Women & Entrepreneurship - Key Challenges

In the last decade, there have also been focused institutional efforts such as Mahila e-Haat and Stand-up India to make women an active part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem of India by enabling access to funds, markets and mentors. However, deeply entrenched socio-cultural expectations act as systemic barriers leading to less than ideal participation from women entrepreneurs.

Domestic Responsibilities: For instance, in most Indian families, women are still operating within the framework of pre-assigned gender roles shouldering the sole responsibility for domestic chores and caregiving for dependents. OECD reports that the average Indian woman spends nearly six hours on unpaid work each day with men contributing less than a single hour (52 minutes).¹³ With the management of the domestic realm falling on women alone, the time and energy required to run a functioning enterprise is not always feasible, making women skeptical and hesitant to enter the space.

Access to Credit: Additionally, the risks associated with entrepreneurial ventures play a part in holding back aspiring women entrepreneurs who often have to tackle biased perceptions while seeking credit.¹⁴ Getting a loan from a financial institution requires adequate collateral and the gendered differences in asset ownership and the lack of sufficient savings, often disqualify women for receiving credit. Studies have shown that women are 5%-15% more likely to have their loan applications rejected than men,¹⁵ making women business owners reluctant to apply for business credit. Evidence also indicates that women are less likely than men to seek capital from external financing because of low confidence and expectations of discrimination.¹⁶

12. An Analysis of Women Entrepreneurship in India. (2019). GIZ. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3enhillE>

13. Employment: Time spent in paid and unpaid work, by sex. Retrieved from OECD: <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54757>

14. Improving Access to Finance for Women-owned Businesses in India. IFC. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2CVSEuE>

15. Muravyev et al. Entrepreneurs' gender and financial constraints: Evidence from international data. Journal of Comparative Economics. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/39yOvJr>

16. Coleman, S. 2000. Access to capital and terms of credit: A comparison of men-and women-owned small businesses. Journal of Small Business Management

Gender Biases: The undercurrent of gender biases is most stark in the investment space for women owned enterprises. Women entrepreneurs are often hesitant to approach investors. If and when women do make investment pitches, investors have been found to prefer pitches presented by men as compared to those by women, despite having identical content.¹⁷ In 2018, women entrepreneurs in India received only 5.2% of the total available funding,¹⁸ contributing to the perception of the venture capitalist world as a ‘boys club’, brimming with unconscious biases.

Theoretically the entrepreneurial world should ideally be gender neutral, but the judgement around the likelihood of a startup to survive or not is often based on the broader stereotyping associated with men and women, their skills, financial management capabilities and decision-making prowess. Men are evaluated more favorably than women on characteristics such as persuasiveness, low need for support, low conformity, leadership, propensity to take risks, low emotionally charged decision-making and are thus considered to be better suited to lead successful enterprises.¹⁹ 70% of women-owned MSMEs in the formal economies across developing nations are reportedly either “unserved or underserved” by financial institutions.²⁰

Information Asymmetry: Another key challenge is the information asymmetry that amplifies the lack of access to different resources and support available to women entrepreneurs. Limited exposure to the world of business makes women with entrepreneurial ambitions undermine themselves and question their ability to succeed in the space. This under confidence is only heightened by the lack of formal training and consequent inadequate skillsets. Limited business knowledge coupled with the lack of relevant advisors and mentors is a serious challenge facing women entrepreneurs. In a study on female business owners, 48% of female founders claimed that a lack of quality advisors limited their professional growth.²¹ With the majority of the business world still being male dominated, it is harder for women entrepreneurs to initiate connections into top-notch business networks.

Lack of Role Models: Added to this, is the dearth of role models, limiting the confidence of aspiring women entrepreneurs, making success seem like an unbreakable glass ceiling. Visibility of successful role models in the public domain helps combat stereotypes and trigger change and this lacuna can be felt in the Indian ecosystem with the inhibited development of an “entrepreneurial” spirit among young women.²²

Recognition of some of these systemic roadblocks has led to the Indian government launching several initiatives to encourage and support women entrepreneurs across the country. Some of these include the Startup India vertical dedicated to women entrepreneurship, National Skill Development Program’s ‘Enabling Women Entrepreneurs’ skilling initiative and the special provision of 3% public procurement for MSMEs owned by women. However, siloed implementation of these efforts and limited inter-departmental communication results in many potential beneficiaries remaining unaware of these interventions.

Resolving ecosystem challenges in a holistic manner posits the need for a central hub that can address the challenges faced by women by aggregating knowledge and resources across the entrepreneurial landscape. However, the Indian ecosystem lacked such an entity/avenue of support that could disperse relevant and accurate information along with rolling out programs catered to the specific needs of women entrepreneurs. The various verticals of WEP are designed to address these challenges that limit women entrepreneurs from reaching their true potential.

17. Alison Wood Brooks, Laura Huang et al. “Investors Prefer Entrepreneurial Ventures Pitched by Attractive Men”, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America.

18. Sharma, M. (2019). This equity free program aims to Rebalance the gender disparity in startup ecosystem. Retrieved from Economic Times: <https://bit.ly/3hOPDbQ>

19. Alison Wood Brooks, Laura Huang et al. “Investors Prefer Entrepreneurial Ventures Pitched by Attractive Men”, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America.

20. Sharma, M. (2019). This equity free program aims to Rebalance the gender disparity in startup ecosystem. Retrieved from Economic Times: <https://bit.ly/3hOPDbQ>

21. Understanding Structural Barriers & Hidden Bias in Access to Credit for Women-Led Businesses. Oxfam. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3jYmzU6>

22. Janice Byrne, et al. Role Models and Women Entrepreneurs: Entrepreneurial Superwoman Has Her Say. Journal of Small Business Management. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/30OEVOx>

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE APPROACH



2

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE APPROACH

2.1 Genesis of the Women Entrepreneurship Platform

Identifying the lacunae for an aggregator platform solely dedicated to women entrepreneurship, NITI Aayog launched the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP). It was first proposed at the conclusion of the 8th Global Entrepreneurship Summit in 2017 by Shri. Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog. The platform was announced as a Women's Entrepreneurship Cell, to address the issue of information asymmetry and cater to the needs of women entrepreneurs. Post the announcement, research revealed that while there were multiple such cells and initiatives, they were largely operating in silos with little or no knowledge sharing or collaboration.

Launched on the International Women's Day in 2018, WEP has been envisioned as an aggregator of information and services, with a mission to educate, enable and empower women entrepreneurs. To build a vibrant ecosystem for women led enterprises, the platform works to strengthen industry linkages and increase awareness of existing programs and services.



The platform follows clearly defined objectives to fulfill the vision with which it was developed:

- Enable collaboration among peers, partners and industry players
- Address information asymmetry through a dynamic knowledge portal
- Offer capacity building programs to enable scalability and sustainability
- Create role models by recognizing exceptional women change-makers across India

A key characteristic of WEP is its agnosticism for the kind of user that can benefit from its service offerings; WEP caters to both established as well as aspiring women entrepreneurs and all women owned enterprises are welcome on the portal regardless of the size, sector and type of enterprise. Three guiding pillars inform WEP's 360-degree view to female entrepreneurship:

- *Ichha Shakti* - to motivate aspiring entrepreneurs to kick-start their enterprise
- *Gyan Shakti* - to provide knowledge and ecosystem support
- *Karma Shakti* - to provide hands on support in launching and scaling ventures

Guided by these pillars, WEP is primed to ensure that all women are equipped to reach their full potential and the needs of women entrepreneurs feed into the platform's service offerings. WEP's partnerships form the backbone of the initiative, bringing different kinds of support and service offerings to the users, through tailored content and programs for each vertical of the platform. **Leveraging these different partnerships, WEP pushes the needle on female entrepreneurship by developing quality programs and bringing industry players together to improve access to knowledge and resource.**

2.2 The WEP Platform – Portal Design

WEP is a first of its kind unified-access online portal, designed to host information and services hosted by partner organizations across the six verticals mentioned earlier. The online portal serves as the primary mode for engagement with more than 18,000 registered women entrepreneurs who form the WEP's user base. The WEP team and the technical vendor provide dedicated support to these users with the support of partner organizations, who make premium content especially accessible to the WEP user base. In its current iteration, the WEP portal provides an interactive website with different sections (tabs) that has been streamlined to cater to the requirements of the users and to provide a seamless navigational experience. There is multi-lingual community section that is designed to make the community section accessible to a wider audience.

Key Components

WEP engages with these women entrepreneurs through its online portal and provides access to relevant information and services. The portal houses three modules where WEP partner organizations can host content in their domains of expertise.



The **community module** on the website allows entrepreneurs to connect with fellow entrepreneurs, mentors, partners and the WEP Team



The **knowledge bank module** allows for hosting of blogs, checklists, infographics and videos



All WEP and partner events can be hosted on the **events module** where users can register and express interest in enrolling

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLATFORM

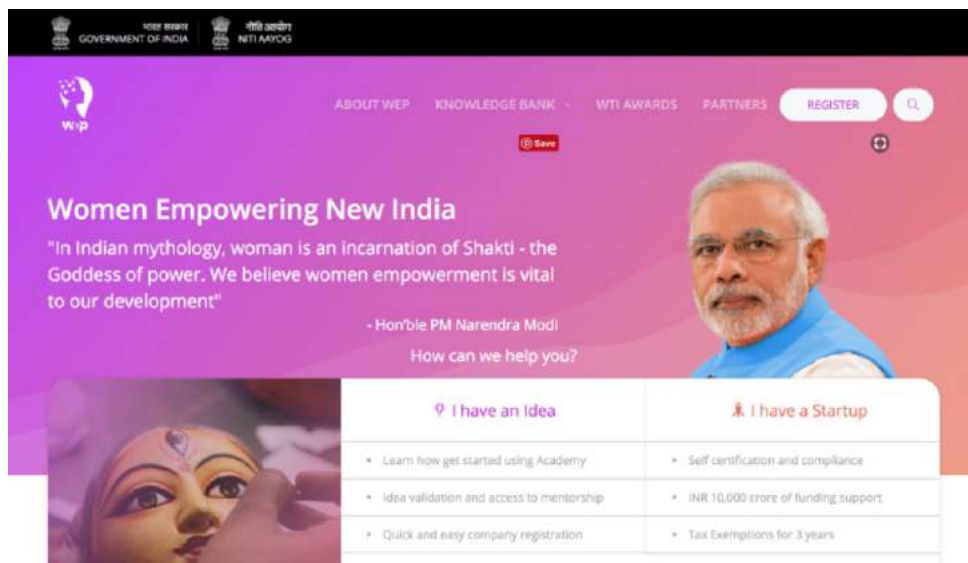


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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLATFORM

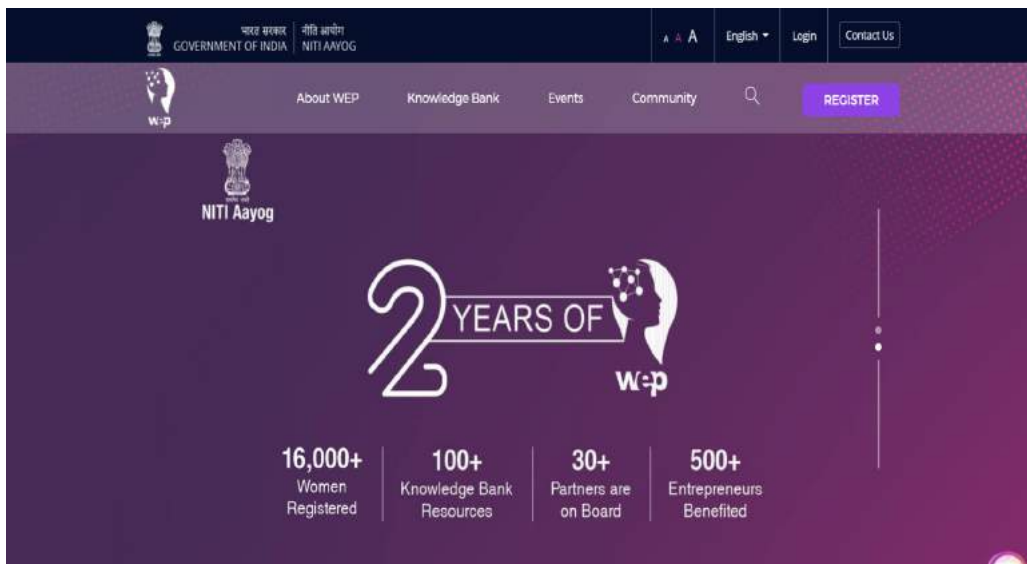
3.1 Portal Evolution

Following the CEO's announcement, the first iteration of the WEP portal was launched on the occasion of International Women's Day in 2018 with an overarching theme of 'Women first, prosperity for all'.

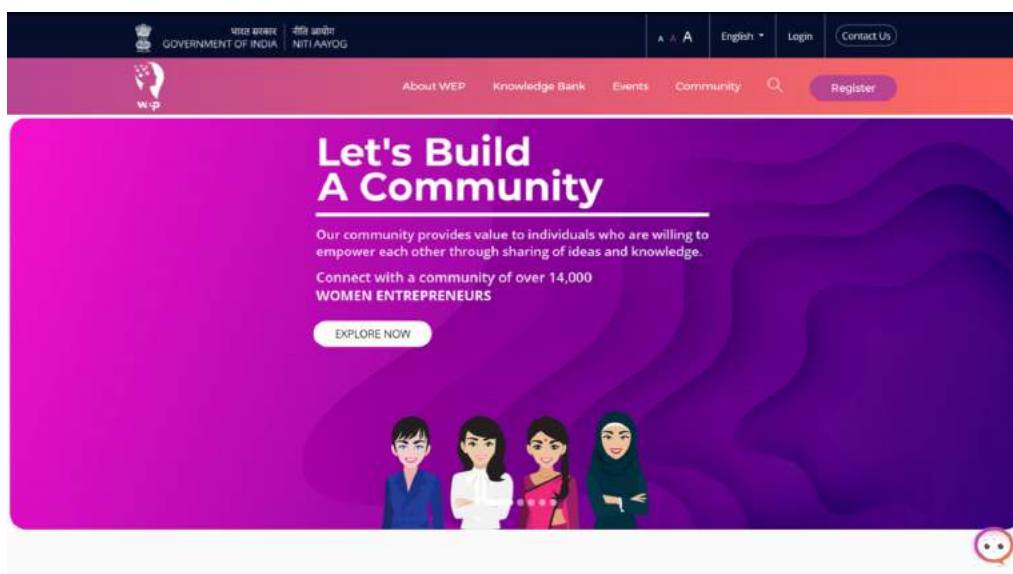


This first version (WEP 1.0) of the portal was envisaged as an interactive platform that would host information to support entrepreneurial initiatives. It was geared towards driving awareness by guiding registered users to schemes, initiatives and products suited to their needs. Designed to help both women entrepreneurs' access relevant information as well as WEP partners to host content, the 1.0 version of the portal was essentially composed of the knowledge bank module that hosted articles, checklists, best practices, etc.

Improved understanding of the needs of the growing WEP user base, led to the decision that the platform must be further customized by a dedicated technical team. These customizations were primarily guided by user input; in November 2018, the WEP team conducted a survey, where 759 out of the total registered users at the time (~3000) responded. These insights were incorporated to create a new vision for the design of the portal and subsequently, a new technical team was onboarded. The new version of the portal was launched as WEP 2.0 on 16 December, 2018, on the occasion of the Third Edition of the Women Transforming India Awards.



WEP 3.0 was launched on the 11th of January, 2021 on 1st January, 2020. This version of the platform presently features a completely revamped community section and now also features multi-lingual automatic language translation support. This version has also introduced a chatbot which helps users access information easily. WEP 3.0 has a revamped homepage and a streamlined login experience which allows for sign-up using Google or Facebook as well.



3.2 Behavioral Insights Workshop

To better understand the behavioral issues and to obtain deeper insights, various subject matter experts and industry leaders need to be consulted.

To this effect, NITI Aayog hosted a workshop on “Leveraging Behavioral Insights for Informed Policy-Making” in October, 2019. Specifically, breakout sessions were organized to ideate how to incorporate a broader assessment of the barriers that women entrepreneurs face into making the portal more user-friendly. This engagement is important to help improve the platform’s understanding and to build an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs. The insights from the workshop helped identify new features which were needed, to make the platform experience more user-friendly and engaging for women entrepreneurs.



NITI Aayog

Behavioral Insights for Informed Policy Making



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Prof. Sarthak Gupte
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Dr. Shweta Chhabra
Senior Economist
The World Bank

CONSULTATION WORKSHOP

Study existing behavioral interventions and nudges in India

Discuss the use of behavioral insights to inform policy making and designing programs

Identify opportunities to incorporate behavioral insights to gender initiatives

16 October, 2019 | 2:00 PM | University of Chicago Center in Delhi







NITI Aayog

CONSULTATION WORKSHOP

LEVERAGING BEHAVIORAL INSIGHTS FOR INFORMED POLICY MAKING

How can government programs for gender equity benefit from behavioral insights?



16 October, 2019



The University of Chicago
Center in Delhi



2:00 PM to 5:00 PM

Knowledge Partners



Hosted By





3.3 Gamma Testing

In an attempt to increase user engagement on the platform and the feedback from the internal WEP team testing the portal, certain friction points were discovered. While the development of all the modules was complete, the final user input on the usability of the workflows was missing. In order to understand this gap between website development and user uptake, the gamma testing exercise was planned. Gamma testing is the final stage of testing that is performed on the product/service with a focus on usability and security. This test aimed to identify friction points that women entrepreneurs using the website might face in order to enhance the WEP user experience and curate a market competitive aggregator platform that enables seamless knowledge dissemination and networking opportunities for women entrepreneurs to avail support for their enterprises.

The WEP team conducted the gamma testing on the WEP website on the workflows through a representative group of users. The portal design was scrutinized and assessed by this group and feedback was captured on the usability of the website, look and feel, and user effort. From the written and verbal feedback, over 200 insights were gathered, of which 101 unique ideas were filtered out. These were then divided across 4 buckets - Bugs, Comments, Questions and Suggestions. This was followed by further scoping these insights to assign priorities in the implementation phase.

The feedback received served as input for WEP's technical vendor to develop a comprehensive plan on incorporating learnings to enable Machine Learning on the website. Overall, the gamma testing process helped WEP identify friction points that impact user engagement on the platform and the exercise has ensured that this portal for women entrepreneurs is built on recommendations by women entrepreneurs. These changes have now been incorporated in the portal, allowing for a seamless user experience for both entrepreneurs and partners. The improved design also enables WEP to remain the go-to portal for users. The presence of glitches or an outdated website is otherwise detrimental for user engagement.

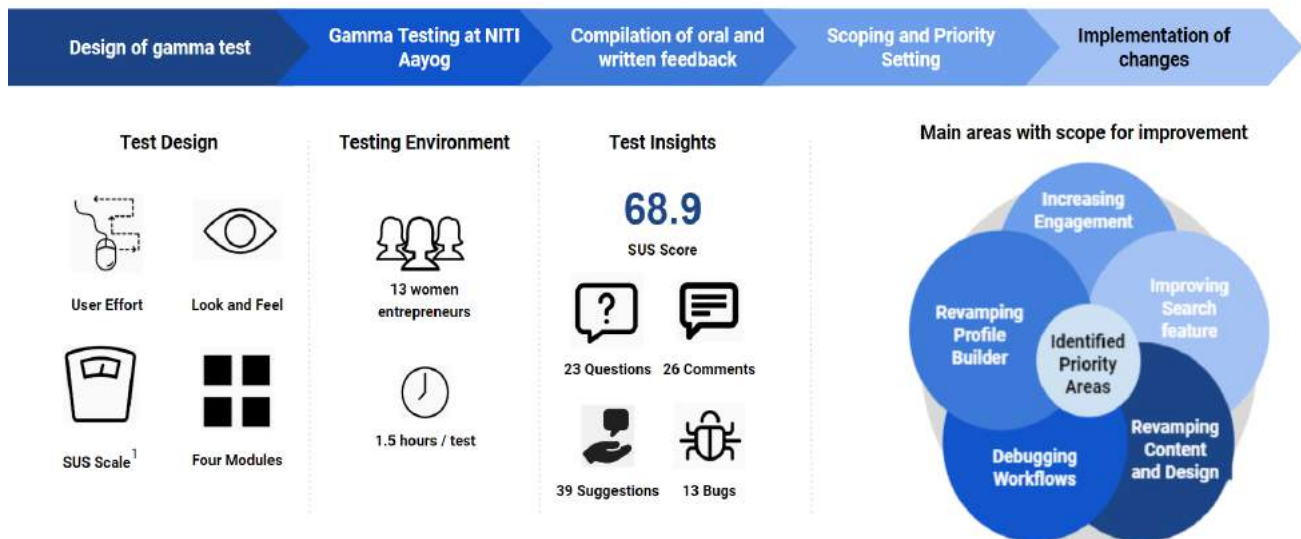
Key Findings

A final portion of the testing included a SUS²³ scale that the women entrepreneurs filled which indicated the overall usability score of the portal.

The WEP portal had a score of 68.9 and the main areas of improvement identified were:

1. Increase engagement on the portal through periodic and relevant updates to the knowledge banks and events module along with visual aids
2. Improve search feature on the website to be uniform and intuitive
3. Revamp the profile builder pages to be more self-explanatory and detailed
4. Debug existing workflows to ensure that they are working as intended
5. Rework content and design to make the services more relatable and obvious for the urban / semi-urban user base

User experience study of the WEP website



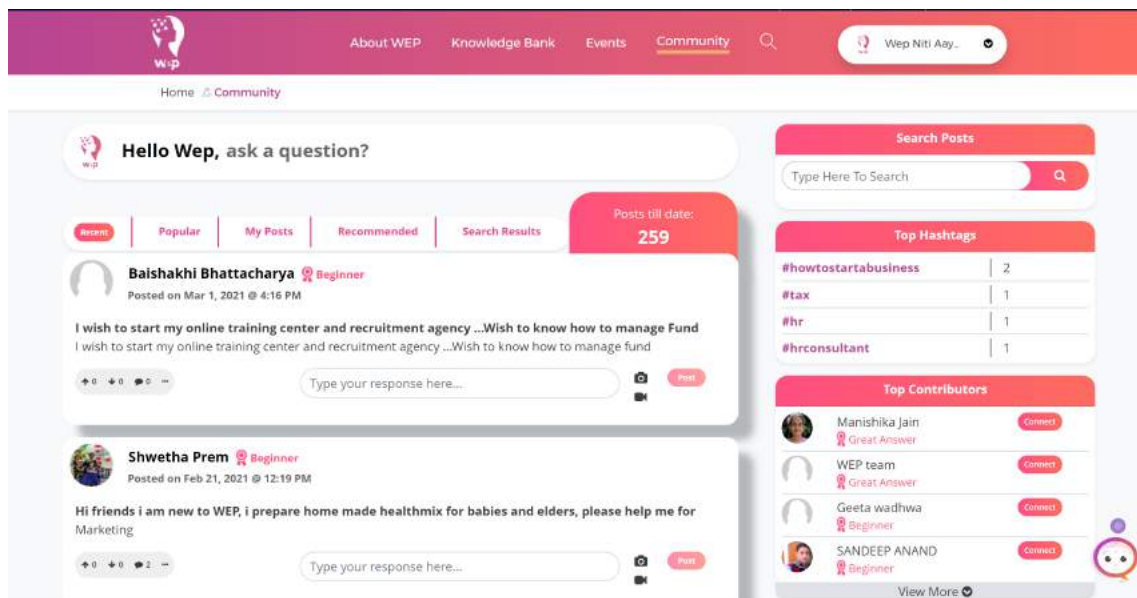
3.4 Partner Support: Flipkart and the Community module

The Gamma testing exercise also brought forth incredible insights and features that could potentially transform the networking and support experience on the community module. In order to translate this refined vision of the community module into reality, the WEP team reached out to partners with prior expertise, for assistance in the revamp process. Therein arose the partnership with Flipkart which aims to provide a new look of the community page through gamification and personalization. The new revised look will enable features like multi-media support, hashtags, predictive text, auto correct, etc. which make the post-building experience more lucrative. The collaboration with Flipkart aims to revamp the community module via:

1. Promoting the idea of 'Community' across WEP website & Social Media
2. Revamping the user experience on the Community module
3. Revamping the user interface on the Community module
4. Improvising on the website's Chatbot

23. The System Usability Scale (SUS) is an industry standard, reliable tool for measuring usability. Originally created by John Brooke in 1986, it allows for the evaluation of a wide variety of products and services, including hardware, software, mobile devices, websites and applications. The average System Usability Scale (SUS) score is 68. Less than 68 indicates serious flaws with the website, 80 and higher indicates that users love the site and would even recommend it to their peers. A score between 68 to 80 indicates scope for improvement.

The updated model is expected to increase user engagement by introducing up-voting, sharing and reporting features that help in the peer to peer moderation within the community. To incentivize participation, a simple interaction metric has been included through the awarding of badges to information seekers and contributors for upvotes for contributor resolutions/discussions, level of engagement, usage of the platform, etc. that encourages greater participation and community building.



The community page in this all new avatar has transformed into a QnA portal so that it is easier for knowledge seekers and providers to interact and engage. The platform is now available in multiple regional languages and is aligned with the larger #VocalForLocal initiative which allows users and mentors to communicate in the language of their preference.

3.5 Future Improvements

Conversational AI

Currently, the website allows entrepreneurs, partners or even unregistered users coming to the portal to ask questions about WEP and its offerings using a chatbot. This enables 24x7 real-time interaction, irrespective of the geographical location and time-zone of the user. WEP's chatbot engages users who are looking for more information about WEP and answers queries on a wide range of topics from registration on the portal to government schemes for different sectors.

In addition to the communication with users through basic text and links, interactive CTA (Call to Action) buttons are also used. The chatbot provides prompts to get the user to engage more effectively. For registered users, based on the areas of interest they have filled, reference links are shared. Moving forward, the chatbot will eventually evolve into a Conversational AI unit that can converse with entrepreneurs to go beyond pointing to information and present intelligent recommendations basis specific organizational needs.

Intelligent Design

Machine Learning capability will also be integrated in the portal in the near future. Recommender engines (REs) also known as recommender systems are software tools and techniques providing suggestions to a user. Introduction of the recommender engine in WEP will help users to discover and interact with content in a more natural way. Using state of the art machine learning algorithms, the RE can recommend the user most relevant content right on the feed's page. Machine learning

tools will also be incorporated to help women entrepreneurs curate content posted on the website for better outreach and visibility as well as ensuring regulation of content suited to the needs of the aspiring entrepreneurs.

This will lead to the following user benefits:

- Reduction in time and effort to look for relevant information by curating content on the on the feed page
- Personalization and customized recommendations according to the user's interest and interaction
- Greater user interaction and engagement with the portal due to personalized feeds
- Discovery of similar peers and mentors thereby building robust networks
- Enhancing capability to customize and curate content for better outreach to fellow entrepreneurs and partners.

UNDERSTANDING THE WEP USER BASE

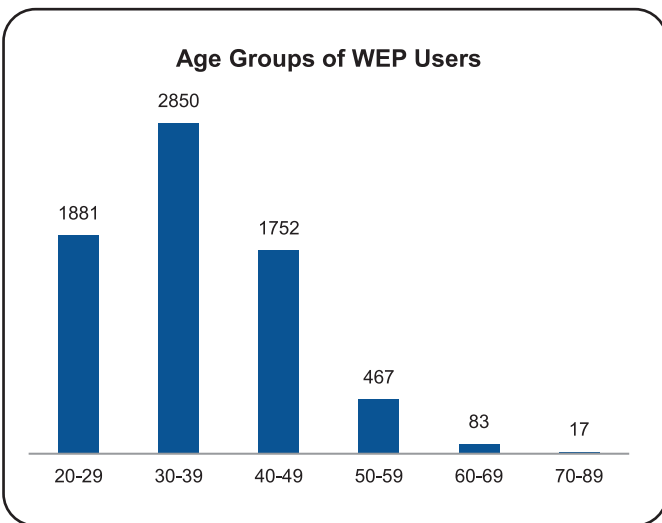


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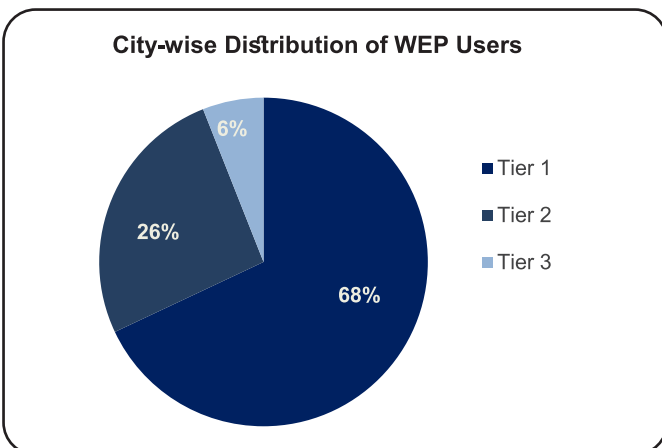
UNDERSTANDING THE WEP USER BASE



The upgradation of portal design and features must go hand in hand with the long-term vision for the platform to cater to the needs and services of its users across its key verticals. To achieve this, it is imperative for the platform to understand its users, the nature of their enterprises and their requirements. This understanding and insights are derived from the user requirement surveys conducted by WEP that reflect the nature of enterprises registered on the platform as well as their unique requirements.

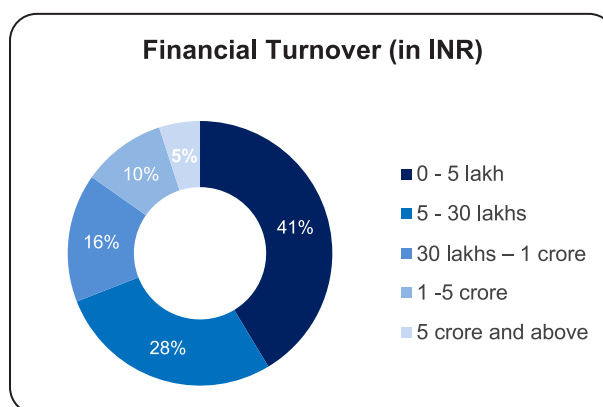
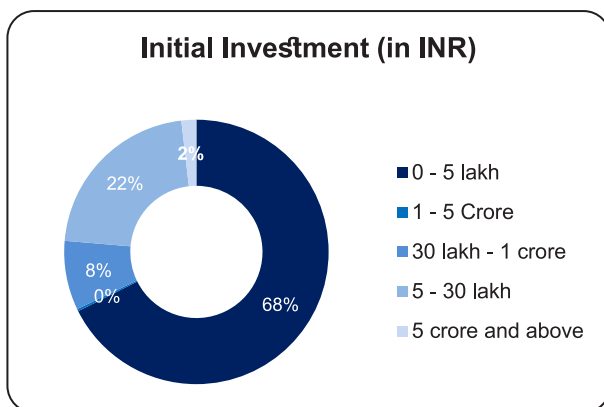


The age-wise segregation of the user base shows that less than 2% of the registered women entrepreneurs are over 60 years of age whereas the 50 – 60 years age bracket constitutes 6.6% of the user base and the 40-49 bracket takes up 24.8%. The 30-39 bracket is the largest demographic with over 40% users falling in this category whereas the 20-29 years bracket stands at a healthy 26.6%. Larger participation can be seen from the 28-35 years bracket which allows for curating learning content and allowing a long-term vision for the knowledge bank in the portal, both in terms of retaining existing users as well as seeing reaching out to a new user base.



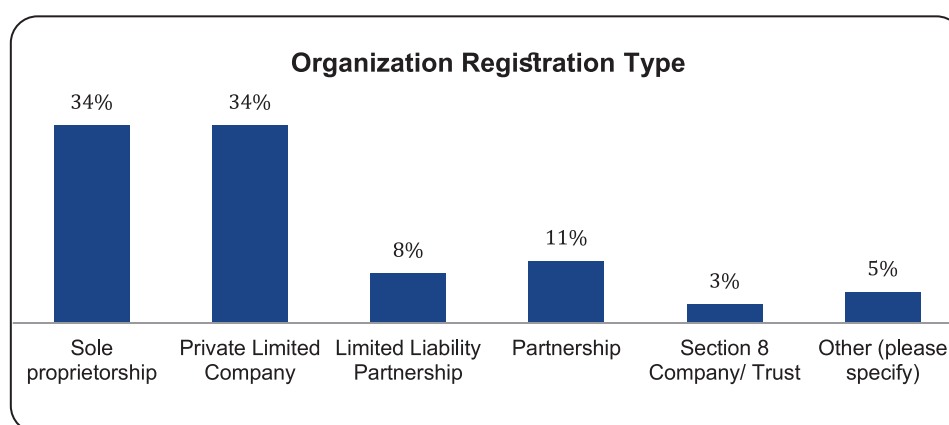
This graph shows the urban vs suburban vs rural demographic that takes an interest in WEP services. 68% of WEP users reside in metro cities, 26% reside in tier 2 cities and the remaining reside in tier 3 locations. This builds the case to introduce the service of city chapters to propagate offline engagement networks and the simultaneous need to invest in improved digital literacy in the rural context.

The enterprise landscaping exercise helps WEP understand the scale of WEP user-owned enterprises and illustrates the mushrooming



MSME sector. Customized services for these enterprises can be offered on the WEP portal through relevant partnerships. From these data points, it can be seen that >65% of women start their businesses with less than 5 lakhs of investment; and ~40% of organizations have a turnover of less than 5 lakhs. Finding investors for a unit of this size can be a challenge and WEP can attempt to facilitate such connections through capacity building and networking events. The investment landscape of enterprises owned by WEP users, illustrates the exact nature of funding opportunities and resources that need to be designed through, partnerships. It can also provide insights on how future WEP partner sessions on pitching and investing can be designed.

A majority of WEP users, *i.e.* 68% have enterprises registered as sole proprietorships or private limited companies. Very few women entrepreneurs availing WEP services run other types of entities with 11% running partnership ventures, 8% running limited liability partnerships and around 3% running section 8 companies. However, it is also pertinent to note that only 43% of WEP user run businesses are registered enterprises. These data points help the WEP team identify the requirement to drive registration of businesses through helpful toolkits and other mentoring resources as well as customize their partnerships to cater to the different entities availing WEP services.



4.1 User Requirement Surveys

WEP leverages data obtained through different surveys to understand its user requirements. As mentioned in the portal development section, the first user survey was conducted in November 2018 and saw participation from 759 WEP users, ~50% of which were social enterprises. In addition to understanding the scope for portal design improvement, the survey gave an insight into the challenges²⁴ faced by women entrepreneurs. Since then, the WEP team has made it a regular practice to leverage user insights and data to incorporate modifications in the overall WEP strategy as well as specific elements, partnerships and programs.

²⁴ Lack of knowledge of schemes and compliance - 18%, Lack of knowledge on financial assistance and funding avenues - 42%, Lack of marketing assistance - 19%

WEP conducted another survey in February 2020 to update its information on its expanding user base, which had grown almost 5 times since. The objectives of the survey to understand the following user requirements:

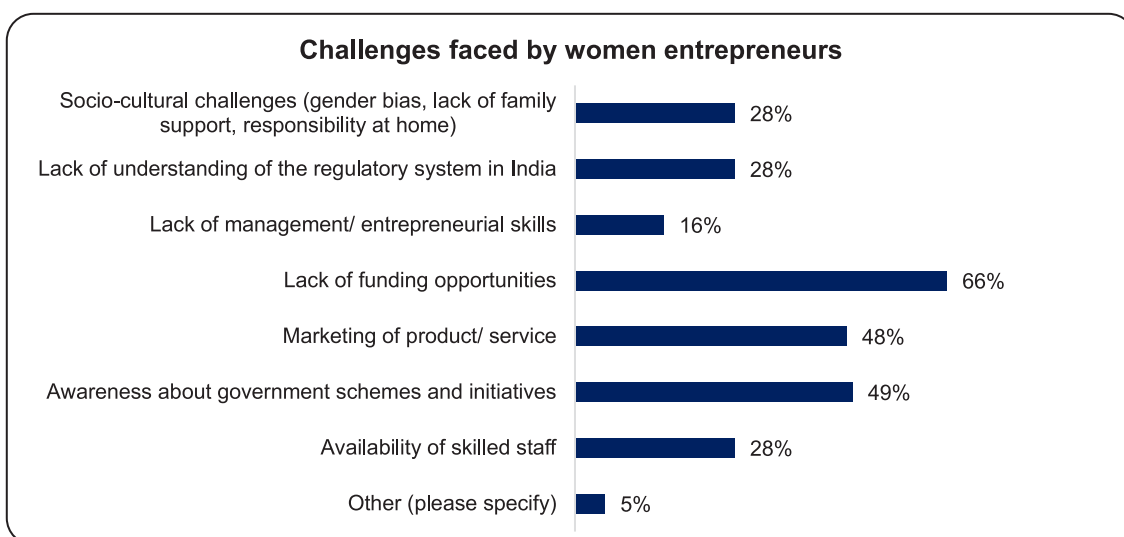
- Key support areas for women entrepreneurs
- Challenges under each area of support
- Sector-wise distribution of women-led businesses
- Location-wise distribution of women-led businesses
- Preferred format of consumption of information

Methodology

The survey was designed in-house, based on the insights obtained from an exhaustive literature review of reports, policy briefs and research papers on women entrepreneurship in India. Post design, the survey was shared with existing users of the WEP platform and within the networks of women entrepreneurs supported by ecosystem partners. Finally, the survey results were supplemented with qualitative interviews of the Top 30 women entrepreneurs of WTI Awards, 2019.

4.2 Insights from WEP User Data and Surveys:

Challenges faced



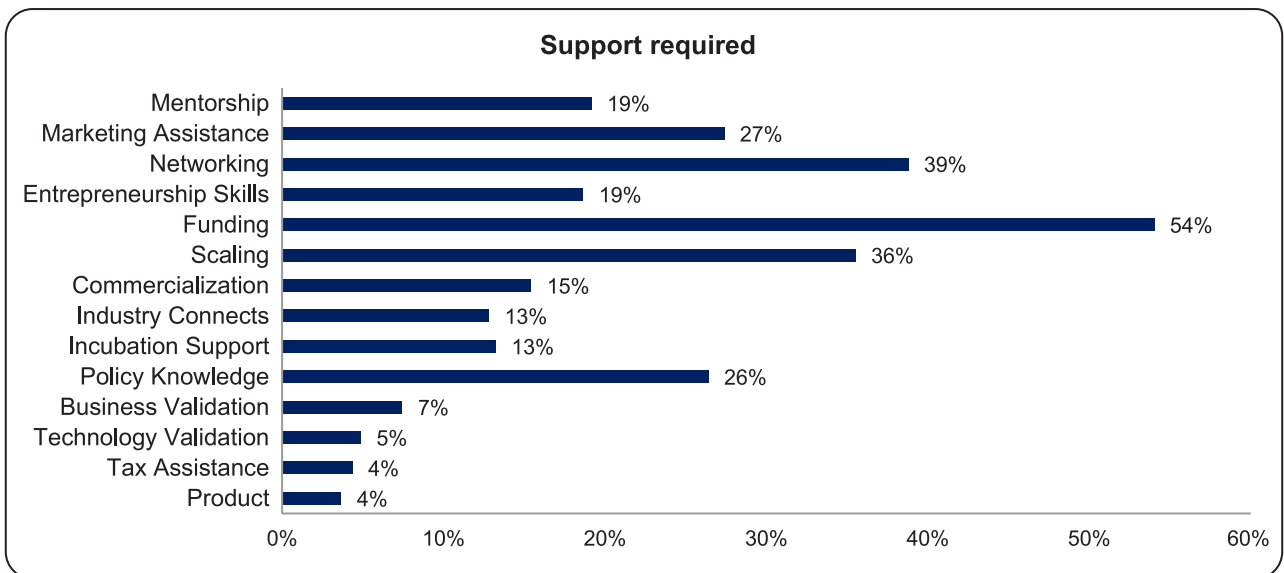
About 66% of the women feel that a lack of funding opportunities is a challenge they face in their entrepreneurial journey and around 49% feel the same about the lack of information about government schemes. Inputs provided by these users indicate that the challenges faced by them overlap with established research on constraints to female entrepreneurship²⁵: funding support, networking, information about government schemes and programs, mentorship, and marketing. The validation of these challenges has fed into partner mapping exercises that allow for the collaborations for initiatives that tackle each of the barriers. While WEP will actively work to bridge these systemic changes, socio-cultural challenges and gender bias are the most prominent social challenges that also need to go hand-in-hand with this development.

25. An Analysis of Women Entrepreneurship in India. (2019). Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/30fQdfT>

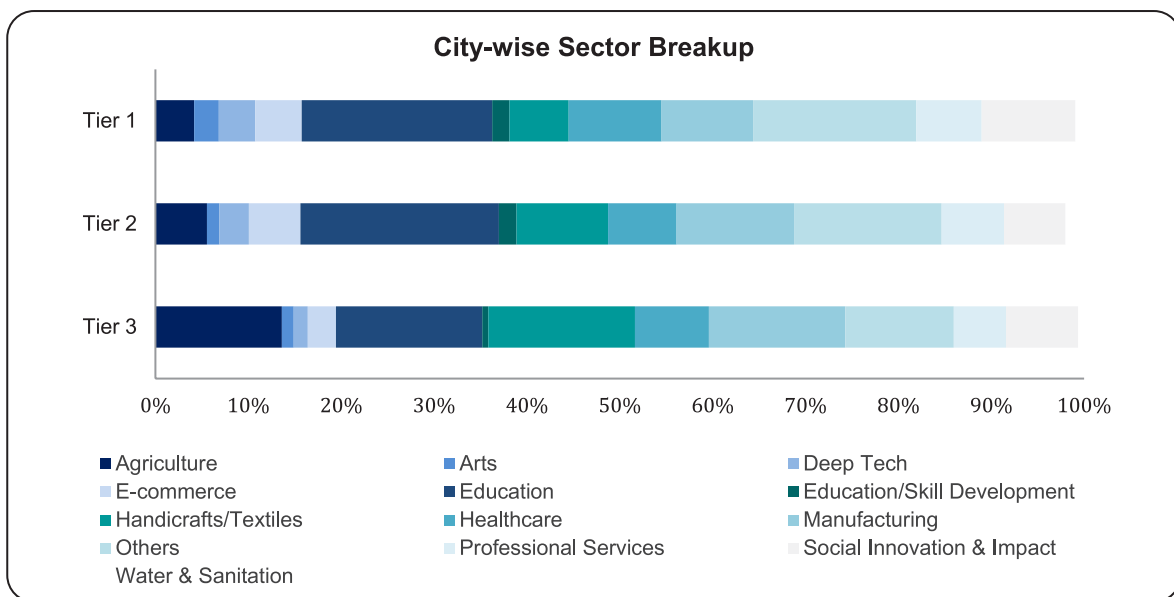
* Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMGEP), Stand-Up India, Entrepreneurship Skill Development Programme (ESDP) and Mahila-E-Haat

** Self-reported data was available for 7,000 users of the WEP portal

*** Information collected from the 3,000 WEP users who registered for the Women Transforming India Awards, 2019



Funding, networking and scaling are the top 3 reported support areas to aid women entrepreneurship with a frequency of 54%, 39% and 36% respectively. This can be explained by the nature of WEP user owned enterprises that are often under 3 years old (growth stage). Followed by these support areas are marketing, policy knowledge, mentorship and skilling which forms the basis for many of the interventions that WEP drives.



The graph depicting the city-wise sector breakup of data shows 2,140 applicants to the ‘Women Transforming India’ awards 2019 who can be used as a representative of WEP users as all WTI Applicants are required to register on the portal. Approximately 20% of the applicants were from Tier 1 cities, 46% were from Tier 2 cities, 35% were from Tier 3 cities. The maximum number of WTI applicants hailed from Tier 2 cities. Education, Manufacturing, Handicrafts, Healthcare are the most prominent sectors in Tier 2 & 3 cities. The agriculture and handicrafts sectors have maximum presence in Tier 3 cities.

WEP: HIGHLIGHT OF INITIATIVES



5

WEP: HIGHLIGHT OF INITIATIVES

Based on the assessments and analysis of the data from the surveys and feedback from the Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem, key areas of support were identified. These have been developed into 6 verticals of support or parallel work streams.

For the identified verticals of support, the WEP team undertook a partner mapping exercise to bring on board relevant knowledge and service providers. The platform collaborates with different organizations to develop customized content and resources for women entrepreneurs. These programs are curated in a manner so that the larger objectives of the WEP, namely facilitate collaboration in the ecosystem, address the information asymmetry, facilitate capacity building programs and create role models for the larger ecosystem.

Our Partners



Partner Snapshot

5.1 Key Verticals of Support

To cater to the diverse needs of its user base, WEP partners with key industry players to curate content and services. Organizations interested in collaborating with the platform, have to submit an expression of interest, post which their proposed service is vetted and rolled out to the users. Currently, the platform hosts more than 30 partner organizations on its portal, offering services to users across its six verticals:

-  1. Funding and Financial Assistance: Providing information on sources of funding, financial management for launch and expansion of enterprises
-  2. Incubation & Acceleration: Connecting women to incubation and acceleration programs for speeding up the growth of startups and early stage companies
-  3. Entrepreneur Skilling & Mentorship: Imparting essential entrepreneurial and management skills to stimulate innovation and sustainability
-  4. Compliance & Tax Assistance: Leveraging knowledge partners for resources around taxation, audit, business licensing and regulations
-  5. Marketing Assistance: Providing guidance to help women-led businesses improve their online and offline market presence
-  6. Community & Networking: The ultimate goal of WEP is to build a robust network of women entrepreneurs to enable an ecosystem of support, learning, collaboration and mentorship

By enabling key partnerships, WEP helps entrepreneurs realize their aspirations, scale-up innovation and chalk-out sustainable, long-term strategies for their enterprises. Over the course of the last two years, WEP has collaborated with a diverse range of partners under its six verticals to advance its mission of building an enabling environment and robust support system for women entrepreneurs.

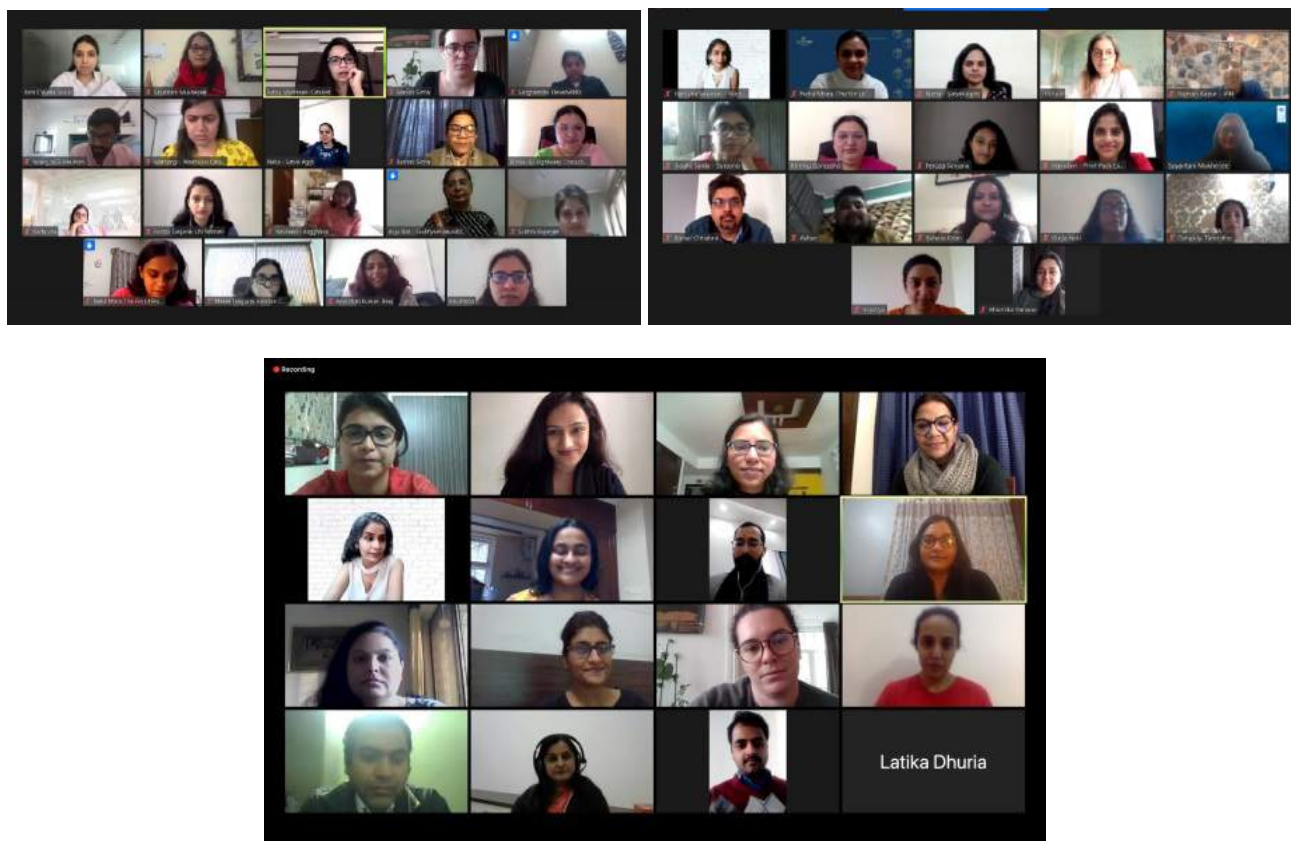
5.1.1 Funding and Financial Assistance

United Nations Investor Consortium

The United Nations is a key partner for the Women Entrepreneurship Platform and has assisted WEP in a multitude of endeavors. To accelerate opportunities for investing in women's entrepreneurship, the United Nations in India (led by UNDP, and UN-Women) have partnered with WEP to establish the UN India-NITI Aayog Investor Consortium (IC) for Women Entrepreneurs. The platform brings together key ecosystem partners who are committed to support women entrepreneurs through mentorship and possible funding opportunities and advocates for the reduction in gender disparities in startup investments.

Currently, the Consortium has membership from several leading Impact Investors including: Aavishkaar; Omidyar Network; Trust Group; Stanford Angels; SeedFund; Ankur Capital; SIDBI; WeHub (non-investor member) Members of the Investor Consortium also support capacity building efforts of WEP by conducting structured masterclasses.

The interventions under IC 2020 aimed at building onto the momentum created in 2019. A Virtual Entrepreneurship Development Programme was launched to support a cohort of 35 promising women entrepreneurs from across sectors and regions. The selected entrepreneurs were provided support with managing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and fostering growth through a structured programme which offered 1:1 mentorship; expert sessions and critical investor connects for fundraising.



6 senior experts from the ecosystem were on-boarded to work with the entrepreneurs for over 3 months to support them with specific functional/ sectoral needs. Based on emergent needs, the sector experts provided strategic guidance to the enterprises in terms of re-orienting growth, preparing them for investments, navigating partnerships, negotiation, allocation of capital, people management and so on. To complement the 1:1 engagement with the mentors, 3 structured webinar sessions were organized for the cohort of women entrepreneurs, namely the “Art of Effective Communication and Storytelling”, “Effective Go-To-Market Strategies for Start-ups” and “Simplifying Fundraising for Start-ups”. To keep the sessions interactive, mock pitches were conducted based on which the entrepreneurs received feedback.

At the end of the programme, Investor Pitching sessions were organized over the course of two days where women entrepreneurs pitched their ideas to panels of esteemed venture capital firms, angel investors and impact investors, helping provide them with access to financing and fueling an enabling environment for women leaders and entrepreneurs. The IC is presently focused on facilitating the connections between the entrepreneurs and interested investors and will also continue with post programmatic support to the top entrepreneurs, who have been identified by the investors.

5.1.2 Incubation and Acceleration

Indigram Labs Foundation

Indigram Labs conducted an incubation and mentoring program for a cohort of 15 women entrepreneurs in the Agri-tech, Clean-tech and Food-tech space. The program featured a two-week long bootcamp which helped entrepreneurs to generate market insights, streamline their business value propositions, creating partnerships and raising funds. The bootcamp was followed by one-on-one mentoring sessions through which entrepreneurs were able to revamp their business models, create go to market strategies and craft their funding decks. The program culminated into a Demo Day on 26th June 2020 where the entrepreneurs pitched their businesses to investors.



5.1.3 Entrepreneur Skilling & Mentorship

Masterclasses & Inspirational Video Series



As the premier knowledge hub for women entrepreneurs, WEP has also been hosting a series of video casts delivered by established leaders who share their experience and expertise on how to navigate the world of business and enterprise. One such initiative, the Friday Morning Masterclass covers topics like incubation support, current government schemes for entrepreneurs, microfinancing, and angel investing among others.

To highlight inspirational women serving as role models, WEP launched a Monday Morning Motivation series called 'SheCan YouCan', supported by upGrad, to capture the heartening journeys of successful women entrepreneurs across India.

WEP collaborated with the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) to conduct a workshop exclusively for WEP users on leveraging the GeM portal as a sales channel and walked them through the registration and tendering processes.

166 users from WEP attended the two-hour walk-through session which had live interaction with the training team from GeM who answered questions and guided the users on the different components of the portal.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp and WEP have collaborated and launched the StepUp to ScaleUp initiative, through which WhatsApp supports WEP's capacity building and mentorship programs. Most recently, it sponsored the first batch of WEP-ALEAP training fellowship that provided virtual entrepreneurial upskilling to 40 women entrepreneurs across India.



Association of Lady Entrepreneurs in India (ALEAP)

A 15-day virtual entrepreneurship development program was designed to upskill 40 aspiring women entrepreneurs in essential entrepreneurial and management skills.



The Sedibus

Mentorship and Networking support was provided to 10 early stage women-led B2B startups in the technology space over the course of 3-6 months (March 2020 to September 2020).



FICCI-Flo

WEP and FICCI Ladies Organization (FLO) have launched a partnership on the Greater 50% initiative. FICCI and FICCI Ladies Organization (FLO) have initiated a mega campaign titled 'FICCI-FLO Empowering the Greater 50%' with an aim to impact the lives of 1,00,000 women over the next three years. The objective of the program is to support women entrepreneurs by enhancing their entrepreneurial & decision-making skills through engagements such as mentorship programs, access to finance, business accelerators, training women to get into boards, workplace inclusion,



special guidance to marginalised women on a business framework and financial models among others. Through this program, it is envisaged that a mentorship community will be created to support WEP users

5.1.4 Compliance and Tax Assistance

CAXpert: CAXpert is WEP's resident taxation and accounting advisory partner. They develop easy to consume content for WEP demystifying and simplifying complex taxation and accounting issues. They have conducted learning sessions on topics such as setting up your business, accounting hacks for startups, financial metrics to track, taking your business online and a three-part series focussed on social enterprises. Their sessions have benefitted over 2000 women so far. They have also set up an exclusive helpline through which they provide resolutions for compliance and taxation related issues over one-on-one calls.



deAsra Foundation: deAsra Foundation is WEP's knowledge partner and provides critical insights on business management and planning to small and micro businesses, in the fashion, food and beauty sectors. DeAsra regularly updates relevant resources and tools for evaluation, business-assessment, compliance, business management on WEP's knowledge bank. It also provides one-on-one support on digital marketing related queries through the WEP portal's community module and will be hosting online capacity building workshops for the small business owners in the WEP userbase.



5.1.5 Marketing Assistance

CRISIL

The partnership between CRISIL and WEP led to the incorporation of an exclusive WE-CHECK feature on the portal. WE-Check is an instant and independent verification of the organization's presence in the market, by profiling various aspects of its business. This helps organizations position themselves as reliable business partners, and builds a better market identity to attract global customers.



5.1.6 Community and Networking

In addition to the platform, WEP regularly engages with its users through its social media channels on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to promote partner initiatives, programs and events. As an aggregator platform, WEP also shares relevant information about programs and events being conducted by organizations in the entrepreneurial ecosystem with its cumulative follower base of ~18,000 users.

A newsletter is shared with the user base to inform them about the ongoing and upcoming activities in the ecosystem and share updates about WEP's partnerships and initiatives.

Finally, WEP has partnered with Flipkart and revamped the community module to ensure a seamless user experience which makes it easier for entrepreneurs to engage with each other on the website.

WEP has also been ensuring that women entrepreneurs do not miss out on learning opportunities, by collating information on various webinars being conducted by other partner agencies and disseminating it to the larger network of women entrepreneurs.

5.1.7 Other General Initiatives

In addition to the core focus verticals, there were other initiatives undertaken through the platform. Health and well-being is critical to the success of entrepreneurs. There was a program series "WEP Cares" which focused on the health and the general wellness of women entrepreneurs. In addition,

the platform also sought to showcase women leaders and achievers and present their stories to the wider WEP audience.

Dr. Rajesh Malhotra
 Professor & Head of Department of Orthopaedics
 Chief, J P N Apex Trauma Centre
 All India Institute of Medical Sciences

WEP CARES

HEALTHY BONES

4th June 2020 | Thursday | 4:00 PM

#Health4Her

NETFLIX

A NETFLIX FILM
 THE TRUE STORY OF
GUNJAN SAXENA
 (TV MA, 15)

9TH AUGUST 2020 | 5 PM ONWARDS

Panel Discussion on **"Inspiring Women Change Makers: The Power of Communication, Storytelling & Advocacy"**

Speakers

- Amitabh Kant** (CEO, NITI Aayog)
- Debjani Ghosh** (President, NASSCOM)
- Gunjan Saxena** (Retired Flight Lieutenant)
- Mira Kulkarni** (Chairperson & MD, Mountain Valley Springs)
- Revathi Roy** (MD & CEO, May DeeDee)
- Sharan Sharma** (Director, Gunjan Saxena)

#WomenTransformingIndia

Testimonials

#	Program & Partnerships	Testimonial
1.	N/Core Workshop	"The speakers did an excellent job of making sure that relevant topics were covered in great detail. Much appreciation for the work of Nudge and Intellihealth. We would gladly have sat for a couple of hours more. Possibly one of the best webinars I have attended in these days of excessive webinars! Thank you, Team WEP."- Sujata Sahu
2.	Indigram	"Everything was very good; the content was very easy to understand. It will definitely help me to redesign and craft different strategies for my business."

3.	ALEAP	“Thanks a lot, ALEAP team. Always felt like an ALIEN trying to be a woman entrepreneur, being part of this fellowship gave me an ecosystem. Watching all your journey really pumps me up to more n more. Looking forward to stay in touch with you all over regular virtual meetups”
4.	Sedibus	“This program has helped me brainstorm on and chart out solutions to several critical aspects of Presolv360. The practical quotient of this program is its highlight. It goes beyond academics and helps solving real world challenges.” - Ms Namita Shah, Co-Founder, Presolv 360
5.	CAXpert	“All the business concepts were briefed in an integrated way like financial, logistics and supply chain, digital marketing and customer value for the session on Financial Metrics to Track”

5.2 Creating Role Models: The Women Transforming India Awards

The Women Transforming India Awards

While the lack of access to resources and mentorship is being actively addressed through WEP’s multivariate service offerings, the need to create more role models for women to look up to and to be inspired by, has also been identified. The Women Transforming India (WTI) Awards addresses this need by celebrating stories of Indian women from both commercial and social sectors who are breaking the glass ceiling.

Launched in 2016, the WTI Awards mark NITI Aayog’s annual endeavour to recognize exceptional women changemakers in the country. Since 2018, the WTI Awards have been hosted under the aegis of WEP with a special focus on entrepreneurship. These awards have become a core activity for WEP to highlight the commendable and ground-breaking work of India’s most innovative and hardworking entrepreneurs. The Fourth Edition of the Awards, launched in August 2019, focused on the theme “Women and Entrepreneurship” and received more than 2,300 entries.

The awards felicitated 15 women entrepreneurs leading enterprises in healthcare, education and food-tech among other fields. The process for selection of these top 15 women entrepreneurs was an elaborate task that saw the coming together of WEP’s community of partners and mentors. For the first round of evaluations, the WEP team undertook a rigorous appraisal of all applications to shortlist this year’s Top 130 women entrepreneurs with the assistance of PwC – WEP’s evaluation partners.



In the second round, the Top 130 were invited to present their journeys to a panel of WEP’s Jury members on the 6th of December, 2019. The Jury comprised of thought leaders and industry experts across various fields who evaluated the presentations of the shortlisted 130. After a day of meticulous assessments, the Jury whittled the list down to the Top 30 women entrepreneurs from the applicants.

The selection of the 15 winners called for a final day of deliberations on the impact created by these women's remarkable initiatives as well as their personal stories and struggles.

In the last stage of evaluation, these 30 entrepreneurs were invited to NITI Aayog on the 15th of December, 2019, where a Super Jury comprised of industry leaders were called upon to determine the winners for this edition of the WTI Awards. The official ceremony for the Fourth Edition of the Awards was held on the 8th of March, 2020 with the Defence Minister, Sh. Rajnath Singh as the chief guest of the event. He felicitated the top 15 women entrepreneurs leading enterprises in healthcare, education and food-tech amongst other fields and also launched the WTI Coffee Table Book at the event.

Post the WTI Awards, Tech Mahindra partnered with WEP to offer customized mentorship and business support to select WTI winners to help scale their solutions to other markets.



WTI Awards, Top 30 with Sh. Rajnath Singh and NITI Leadership



Launch of the WTI Coffee Table Book showcasing stories of grit from the Top 30 candidates



Winners of WTI Awards, 2019

5.3 WEP's COVID Response

The pandemic caused by the global outbreak of COVID-19 has had a staggering impact on public health and welfare around the world. The economies around the globe are facing an unprecedented slump, with a record level of job losses and business shutdowns. With the world's biggest economies struggling to stay afloat, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) had issued warnings of stagnating or negative economic growth and a worldwide recession.²⁶

Overwhelming empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests that the socio-economic fallout from this pandemic is impacting women in a more crippling manner. Past experiences with pandemics, such as Ebola and SARS, as well as emerging evidence around COVID-19 suggest drastic consequences for women's labour force participation and socio-economic welfare.²⁷

In these somber times, WEP has been at the forefront of leading initiatives that can help create a robust support system for women entrepreneurs across India. After assessing the limited and diminishing earning opportunities for women in the informal economy during the pandemic, WEP learnt about the alternate work they were taking up to support their families during the lockdown. WEP designed and rolled out a nationwide campaign to support home-based workers in mask production activities.

#MaskingItUpWithWEP



26. Global economy will suffer for years to come, says OECD. (2020, March 20). Retrieved from BBC News: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-52000219>

27. The Impact of COVID-19 on Women. (2020, April). Retrieved from UN Women Publications: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>

COVID-19 had impacted businesses and jobs across the country significantly and amongst them women home-based workers have been struggling to make ends meet in this uncertain climate. WEP launched the *'Masking it Up with WEP'* campaign to promote women entrepreneurs who had started making reusable cloth masks.

WEP leveraged its aggregator status to initiate a nationwide campaign and bring together organizations with the capacity to supply and procure raw materials and manufacture and distribute cloth masks in India. Through this initiative, WEP played the role of a facilitator by connecting:

- **Home-based workers:** Women workers from grassroots organizations, not-for-profit and women-led small businesses who are making reusable cloth masks.
- **Potential Buyers and Funders:** Organizations/Individuals who need masks for their employees or personal use or would like to support these workers by funding.
- **Raw Material Suppliers:** Traders/businesses who could supply raw material to the home-based workers during the initial lockdown when curfew passes were required for transportation.

Under the initiative, more than 2,00,000 masks have been produced and sold till date, engaging approximately 215 home-based women workers. As per the impact report prepared by our partners, SEWA Bharat and SEWA Federation, the initiative ensured a minimum income of Rs. 4500 for each home-based worker through the orders received from the campaign.

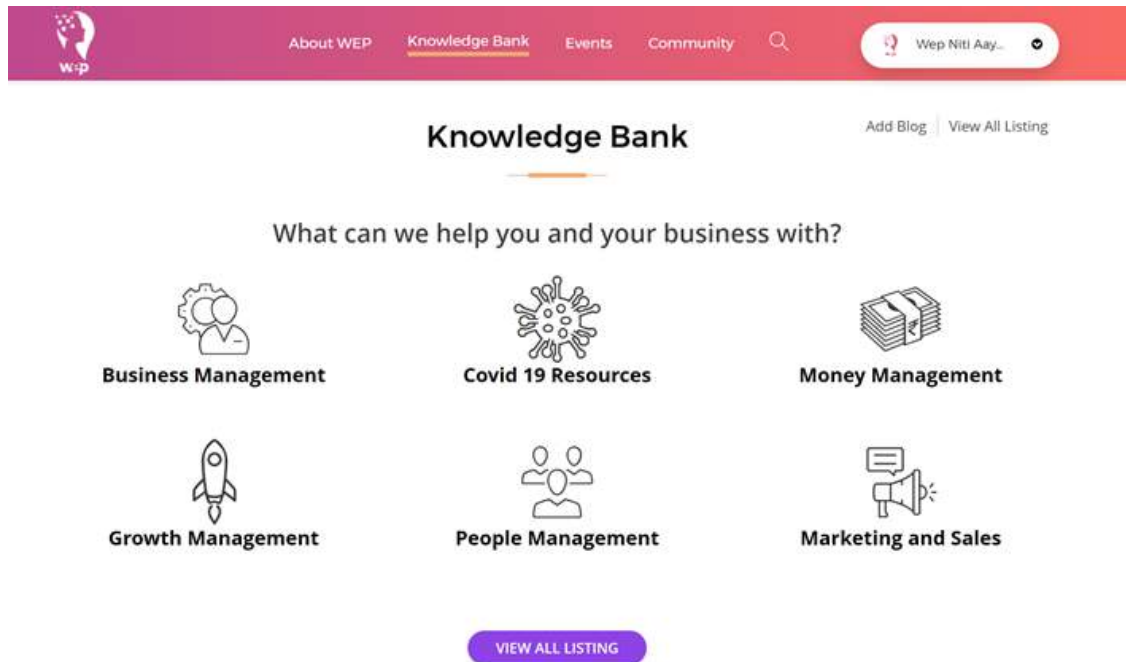
Business in the Times of COVID-19

WEP also conducted an exclusive webinar series titled 'Business in the time of COVID-19', to share the perspectives of subject experts with women entrepreneurs on how they can tackle the market turmoil in the pandemic and plan for the times ahead. Key industry leaders were invited as panelists on these webinars to provide nuanced perspectives and guidance through live interaction with WEP's users. These webinars covered a range of topics from leveraging technology for enterprise expansion to the impact of the COVID-19 on women led businesses and the government relief measures offered to abate the economic distress.



Knowledge Bank – COVID-19 Resources

A special section in the WEP Knowledge Bank was curated to present Knowledge resources relevant for entrepreneurs facing challenges during the pandemic. These resources include textual resources and video content on relief schemes launched by the government and financial institutions as well as third party content to support entrepreneurs during the coronavirus outbreak.



WAY FORWARD: ENHANCING REACH & IMPACT



6

WAY FORWARD: ENHANCING REACH & IMPACT

The WEP has evolved and grown since its inception, with now there being more than 18,000 users. The platform presently plays a critical role, catalyzing the entrepreneurial ecosystem, bringing together all stakeholders and delivering impact through the partner offerings and services. Given the gaps in women's participation in the labor force and women's ownership of MSMEs, and the information asymmetry, the role of WEP has never been more relevant. In order to deliver impactful programs and to scale the platform's reach, it is now more important than ever to enhance the support and the offerings of the platform. For the platform, 68% of WEP users reside in Tier-1 cities while, 26% and 6% respectively reside in Tier-2 and Tier-3 locations. This highlights a clear need to expand the presence of the platform in Tier-2 and 3 locations. Expanding the reach in sub-urban and rural areas can have a significant impact on the entrepreneurial ecosystem. It is envisaged that in order to reach this larger audience, the accessibility and ease-of use of the platform would have to augment.

To achieve the desired expansion and reach, there would have to be increased interactions with women entrepreneurs to better understand their needs and requirements. The platform provides a medium for developing existing partnerships and building new collaborations. These goals can be achieved through:

- **Better Knowledge Resources:** Improved Resources and knowledge products will be available. The emphasis of the platform will on quality of content instead of quantity. Content will especially be curated and developed to serve the needs of Women Entrepreneurs. In addition to the knowledge bank resources, there will be collaborative studies undertaken, to better assess the existing gaps and the challenges that are faced by women entrepreneurs. These inputs will be key as WEP can serve to coalesce thought leadership around women entrepreneurship.
- **Improved Technology Stack:** Strengthening the underlying technology in the portal to allow for automatic matchmaking and a streamlined user interface, making it easier for women entrepreneurs to connect with the partners that provide the support or services which are specially curated for users. Regional language support is a key aspect that can enhance accessibility, especially in rural areas. The community module of the platform is already available in 8 regional languages. This would have to be expanded to cover all the other modules on the platform. A mobile application will be developed and improved data analytics would be introduced to better capture the functioning and the needs of women entrepreneurs. The technology behind the platform has also been constantly evolving and improving. The improvement roadmap is presently under preparation for implementing these

improvements that will enhance the matchmaking aspect, simplify the ease of access and helping match entrepreneurs with appropriate partner offerings. There will be a dedicated team which will look after the technology and development aspects of the platform.

- **Expanded Marketing:** The social media and outreach aspects of the platform will be carefully examined and a robust plan will be developed. There will be a dedicated marketing team which will be looking at expanding the digital reach and establish better means of delivery for partner content. There will be a combination of online as well as off-line events for the platform which will be executed by the dedicated marketing team.
- **New Partnership Framework:** Partnerships are the foundation for the WEP and the strength of the partner offerings directly relate to the strength and quality of offerings made accessible through the WEP. Being a partnership driven endeavor, the WEP team is presently developing a new partnership engagement and monitoring framework which will streamline the engagement and performance monitoring of on boarded partners. The platform is also constantly looking to expand these partnerships to reach and serve more women entrepreneurs. The development of a self-sustaining tech-based framework for onboarding newly identified partners and deepening the engagement with the existing Partner Ecosystem is going to be a very important undertaking. A dedicated team would be leading the partnership engagement process. A dedicated partner engagement team will be deployed.

The proposed improvements and enhancements will be informed by consultations which are going to be used to develop detailed implementation plans. The needs of the users/women entrepreneurs continue to define WEP's roadmap to achieving its vision and building an enabling environment for India's women entrepreneurs. The documented information will inform the design of the programs under the 6 WEP support verticals.

The six focus verticals will also be undergoing programmatic strengthening in order to expand the reach of the platform to serve more women entrepreneurs. For 2021-22, WEP is looking to develop programs to support women entrepreneurs in tier-2 and tier-3 cities and also cater to the needs of women engaged in rural entrepreneurial activities and Self-Help Groups. The expanded reach is crucial for creating the impact that is necessary for moving the needle on Women Entrepreneurship. The platform has a transformative impact on the lives of Women Entrepreneurs in India, empowering them and giving them agency.



सत्यमेव जयते

NITI Aayog