

Promoting Women Entrepreneurship through Women Entrepreneurs Association of Tamil Nadu (WEAT) – An Innovative Value Addition of Entrepreneurship Academic Research to Society – A case Study in Tamil Nadu, India

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Abstract

There has been a transition in the economic context of developing countries which have taken up the neoliberal policies and open up the economy. India has a protectionist trade policy but now adapted to the policy of globalization, liberalization and privatization relaxing the rigid policies to the utmost flexibility since 1991. The National Policy of Empowerment of Women 2001 in India, based on the Beijing International Conference women, presented that the women who are the most neglected section to get the distribution of development benefits need to be encouraged to have equality in education, employment, participation in decision making including political participation. Entrepreneurship is one area where the women can directly be involved in decision making and able to realise the flexi hours which is the long waited demand for women in economic participation. Policies to promote women entrepreneurship has been many and several intervention by the State to motivate the women to start enterprises has yielded a very limited results. Women still face the problems of balancing home and career, failure of family support to start the enterprises, finance, access to formal credit, market, gender bias in socialization etc constrain them to be equally participate in the field of entrepreneurship. Lack of self confidence and poor information, lack of awareness about the opportunities and above all, lack of role models and lack of networking organizations to encourage the women, have failed to facilitate and motivate the aspiring women to become entrepreneurs. Those who started remained confined to self employment or micro scale businesses, not aiming high. With the research conducted on the pattern of entrepreneurship in the Indian Context, it was realised that there is a tremendous potential and cope for women to enter entrepreneurship but there is hardly any guidance to bring the women together to facilitate and guide them to start enterprises. Women Entrepreneurs Association of Tamil Nadu (WEAT) created based on an Academic Research has been helping the women to become their own boss in Tamil Nadu, India. This paper discusses in detail the origin, growth and performance of WEAT in creating women entrepreneurs in Tamil Nadu, India.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Gender, Networking, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. Social Barriers.

Introduction

Academic Research has often been influencing the development policy of the State. Given that every research should contribute to people and society, it is necessary that every academic research focus on the objective to transfer the findings to be implemented for the benefit of people. Majority of the scientific innovations have been taken from lab to land which has now given a scope for advancement of science and technology. It is equally true for social science and management research to contribute to community where the needs of the people will be assessed and conduct the research to facilitate them to avail the needs spelt out. There has been several such initiatives which have been working as grass root organizations to mobilise people and work collectively to reach their goal. Prof. Mohammed Yunus Academic Research end up in promoting collectivism among the grass root women as Self Help Group which have been widely applied in various other countries including India. The Self Help Group (SHG) has brought a silent revolution in making the women to come together, save, experience thrift and lend among themselves of the amount saved to meet their needs. The concept of micro credit has emerged and got institutionalized later giving rise to emergence of Micro Finance Institutions. The market entered into such silent movement of SHG women experiencing internal lending and the MFIs made the micro credit lending as commercial. So long as it serves the purpose of relieving the poor from the clutches of moneylenders, it is encouraged. But when it turns into another form of exploitation, it cannot be entertained. The point is any academic research must help the human to sustain a peaceful life rather than pushing them into trouble. The present paper brings out the case study of how the academic research conducted in Economics has contributed in an innovative way as a Value addition to the Society.

Any research in Social Science and Humanities in the University System often gets submitted to the concerned funding agencies, the results gets published and help the concerned faculty to get promotion. There is hardly any focus or commitment to apply the findings towards social contribution. Such perception does not exist nor focused. There is hardly any Institutional and social interaction which has been emphasised by the Accreditation Departments. It is high time that each research whether in Science or Social Science and Humanities or Management must contribute directly to the social and need to be application oriented. Theoretical research is also needed but every theory being formulated must have practical applications. It is this context, the research conducted in the Department of Economics, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu, India, by Prof. N.Manimekalai, on “Women Entrepreneurs in Micro Enterprises” has been applied to innovatively contribute to the value addition to the society.

Related studies on the field has showed different trends of women entrepreneurs. A study by Sabiha Fazalbhoj (2014) analysed the role of financial institutions and Self Help Groups through capacity building, the prospects of promoting entrepreneurship and arrived at a positive contribution of SHGs linked loans and advances paying in promoting grass root women entrepreneurship. Anitha and Sridharan(2014) have found that the women are not motivated like men to start business in the Tamil Nadu though the state is fast industrializing. The study has analysed the motivating factors and women entrepreneurial traits in association with their socio economic background. N.Panchanathan et.al (2014) study in Tamil nadu revealed that the successful women entrepreneurs are drawn from business background and communities who showed a difference in their success and sustenance.

Any economy to realise growth and development, entrepreneurship is a necessary condition. Innovation with entrepreneurship will add further enhance the growth potential. The scientific academic research has applications which get patented and commercialized; such focus is missing in the social sciences, humanities, management, languages etc. However there has been huge body of literature on various techniques of mobilizing people, to reduce poverty and inequalities, to optimally utilise the resources, to reduce unemployment, to generate new employment opportunities, to address the issues of drought and flood, to ensure food security etc. However, majority of the researches do not lead to policy research. There is a huge gap between what has been arrived at in the academic research as practicable recommendations, and the actual policy being implemented. The top down approached failed to trickle down to address the issues of poverty and development. It is possible for every individual social scientist to undertake research and implement the findings to the micro level, create a model to get replicated to the larger macro level. But the academic fraternity seldom work beyond the submission of research report and publish the results and academic research paper. It is high time that the role of academic research does not stop there but actually begins there in experimenting on a pilot basis how do the findings work. The current paper discusses the how does an academic research and its findings got implemented by the researcher herself by establishing an organization called Women Entrepreneurs Association of Tamil Nadu (WEAT). The initiation, the growth, the service and the kind of issues faced by WEAT etc are analysed and presented below.

Review of Literature

A study by Shikha Mahajan (2013) brought out the status of women entrepreneurs in India. She highlighted that the potentiality of women towards entrepreneurship has not been fully utilised in India. She did bring out the constrains and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, home and career conflict, the gender gap in education, the financial and infrastructural access etc. and recommended that such barriers must be eliminated to promote women entrepreneurs. The study also analysed the successful case study of a Women Entrepreneur whose success story remain as model for others.

Hina Shah (2013) conducted a Unescap study to analyse the scope and constraints for promoting women's entrepreneurship in India with the aim to present the factors which could contribute to provide an enabling environment for women, taking 63 women entrepreneurs across 12 States and presented the case studies of successful entrepreneurs. The study has analysed the characteristics of women entrepreneurs, the socio cultural environment affecting in starting the enterprise, the role of women owned MSMEs in contributing to livelihood, the issues and support systems, and the institutional interventions required to promote women entrepreneurship. The study found that socio-cultural factors, balancing work and family and dependence on informal sources of support etc often stay as barriers to women entrepreneurs. There are only a few women who could avail support from government schemes. It claims that the women entrepreneurship is still an untapped source to contribute towards economic growth. The study has recommended that a National Consultation is necessary to create an enabling environment to encourage and promote women entrepreneurs in India highlighting the role of Government, NGOs, Women's Organizations, Industrial association etc in addressing the issues of lack of access to finance, infrastructure, government schemes, market, technology, etc to

Vijyakumar, A and Jayachithra.S (2016) have analysed that in India women entrepreneurs face socio cultural barriers, and analysed as to how best the policies have helped to promote women entrepreneurship in India. The analysis showed that it is not only the government, but other stakeholders are to contribute to promote women entrepreneurs.

Bharti Kollan and Indira J. Parikh (2005) have analysed the historical context of women as emerging force from fifties to 21st century, the kind of achievements, participation in entrepreneurship, the social background from which women enter into entrepreneurship, the contributions, constraints and challenges faced in the competitive business environment. Lack of self confidence, lack of finance, lack of family support, lack of support from government, etc were highlighted as the barriers. The study suggested that the in the context of new order, women will break all the clutches and create a new role models and emerging as a strong force.

Candida G. Brush in a study interrogated as to why the research on women entrepreneurship is understudied despite the women being emerging as a fastest force in all fields? What has been learnt about women entrepreneurship in the past, what are the future research directions, etc. It has comparatively analysed the men and women entrepreneurs and suggested direction for future research focusing on prominent research to be undertaken to fill the gap in the existing research across the globe.

Justice E. Tinkler, Manwai. C.Ku and Kjersten Bunker Whittington and Andrea Rees Davies (1994) found that the male and female entrepreneurs were rated similarly and having technical degrees can level the playing field, female non-technical entrepreneurs received significantly lower ratings than men, non-technical degrees were detrimental to women, and suggested that for women entrepreneurs, network ties are significant for success and having strategic connections helped the women more than men, when it comes to venture capital decision making.

Irene Kamberidou (2013) analysed the basic issues and constraints of promoting female entrepreneurship with the questions including what is being done to support female entrepreneurship and in particular promote the ways in which information and communication technologies (ICTs) can encourage and facilitate it? Is today's business climate more inviting to women entrepreneurs? Are women equipped to thrive in this digital age?. It has highlighted as to how the European conference enabled to provide the opportunities for women in ICT areas and contributions of the Commission in dynamically promoting, supporting, and encouraging female entrepreneurship. The study by examining the need and actual status of female entrepreneurship, provide tips for successful women entrepreneurship promotion as how the women should use new technologies, social media, etc to excel their careers and able to balance personal and professional lives. It has analysed in the context of current research focusing on social women's new models of work, levels of engagement, and transformation leadership styles. It did expose that women manage the task in multiple ways and working online has been a financial windfall for home makers where they concentrate on what comes 'naturally' taking advantage of their natural and inherent strengths of managing everything as multitasker, listening, sharing, building relationships, and creating a culture of collaboration.

From the above review of literature, it is understood that the female entrepreneurship scope is expanding but its potential has not been tapped fully. It is found in almost all the studies that collaboration and networking are the major contributing factor for women entrepreneurs to be successful and sustain. It is in this background, WEAT has created a structure of

networking to facilitate the female entrepreneurship to grow. Accordingly this paper presents the contribution of WEAT taking a research findings from academic shelves to people and the emerging pattern of women entrepreneurship in Indian context.

Objectives:

- To present the history and genesis of the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Tamil Nadu (WEAT).
- To assess the contributions of the innovative attempt of implementing the findings of an academic research to the society.
- To provide a model for other academic research in social sciences to reach the society.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive and a qualitative analysis to show how it is possible for an individual research gets its findings institutionalized to serve the society. It sketches the history of emergence of WEAT, the issues emerged while taking up the study, the initial challenges, the activities, the growth, the reach, different type of enterprises created, strategies followed to sustain and further contribute to society and the challenges.

The study is a descriptive study of exposing and disseminating the contributions of WEAT , an outcome of academic research and hence only WEAT has been taken up for the study, as a Case Study without drawing any other sample institutions to compare. However, it has to be done, which may be taken for further research.

Materials and Methods

For the purpose of the study, records published by WEAT, the annual reports, and various activities, the women entrepreneurs created over the decade since 2006, the annual conference reports, the awardees of Role model Women entrepreneurs and the WEAT created successful entrepreneurs and their case studies, discussion with the office bearers of WEAT, the news items published by the news papers and magazines, etc have been utilised for the study.

WEAT – An outcome of an Academic Research - An Innovation of application of Social Science Research to Field and a People’s Organization

History and Genesis:

A research on the title “Women owned Enterprises” was conducted during 1999 2002 with the support of UGC, Government of India. The objective was to analyse the women entrepreneurs’ contributions and challenges. The proposal submitted got sanctioned and it was attempted to locate the data base of women entrepreneurs. The district Industries Centers, which is the nodal agency for entrepreneurship Promotion, the banks, which extend credit, the State Finance Corporation called Tamil Nadu Industries Investment Corporation, the Industrial Associations such as Confederation of Indian Industries, Tiruchirapalli Tiny and Small Industries Association (TITDISSIA), etc were contacted, but the result was negative. No organization had the data base of women entrepreneurs in 1999. It was a shock on the one hand but an understanding on the other that the status of women entrepreneurs is such that they do not even have a data base and highly get informalized. So all the four investigators who were appointed for the project were involved in collecting the

data base by physically stepping into each and every shops and industrial establishments to locate the units run by women entrepreneurs. Accordingly after a three months gap, around 550 units run by women could be identified. Among these, 143 units were chosen as sample for intensive study and analysis. The findings of the study were very revealing.

Women owned enterprise had unique features such as

- Micro scale of operation with an investment ranging from Rs. 5000 to Rs. 1,00,000
- Conventional areas such tailoring, food and food based units
- Engaging and finding comfortable with feminine and female friendly products
- No reach of formal credit from banks
- No network or association to collectively represent the needs of women owned enterprises.

The above five features are the universal characteristics of women entrepreneurs which may attributed to the social and cultural factors which determine the gender roles, gender division of labour at the private and public spaces for women and men. It is deep rooted in the patriarchal cultural context that women's priority is family and not business while for men the reverse. Women are engaged in both biological and social reproduction to enable the members of the household to regain energy and hence the productive time otherwise available to engage themselves to enhance their skills often goes in the air.. The household responsibilities often force the women not to enter into economic participation and enterprise development. In the way, for the sake of household duties the women often forgo their capabilities to contribute to nations development. The kind of development a particular household realizes which in aggregate lead to development has been at the cost of productive time that the every women forgone for her own capacity and skill building. Lack of sharing of household responsibilities and rigid social norms to expect the women to continue to engage fully on household responsibilities etc end up every woman to not to think of using their time to enterprise development. Even if they try to initiate enterprises or participate in the labour market, the society expects them to fulfil and balance the dual roles of home and business or career. There is lack of sensitivity among the members of the society irrespective of gender, as to how best the women contribute to the social development by providing an enabling environment to concentrate other than the household duties. Every individual in the family particularly the male members should realise and accommodate the women into the development process without excluding them anymore, so that entrepreneurial development among the women will be the reality. Thanks to the development of science and technology which has provided some relief for women in easing out the work to be delivered at the household with the time saving kitchen appliances. In Tamil Nadu, in India, the Government has introduced the scheme of distributing free mixie, grinder, fans, gas stove etc, which to certain extent relieved the women from spending considerable time with traditional stove and other utensils. With such a note, it is attempting to present as how the women who are willing to participate in enterprise development are constrained to participate, due to the demand of balancing personal and professional roles.

Time and again, the society expects the women to balance both the roles rather than relieving them at least partially to enable to concentrate on business. There has been an acceptance on the changing gender roles, such as women entering to education, employment, political participation, etc, but still the gender values have not changed where the women who equally partipate in public life, labour market etc are expected to deliver

fully on the traditionally expected gender roles at home. Hence what is needed is a society focusing on equality and not patriarchy in such a changing gender role context.

The features emerged from the study of women entrepreneurs say micro scale, conventional type of enterprises, non-reach of formal credit, feminine nature of enterprise preference and lack of networking etc made the researcher to initiate an organization to support the women to introduce into entrepreneurship breaking the above features. Accordingly the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Tamil Nadu (WEAT) was initiated with the support of women who were not really entrepreneurs but aspiring for entrepreneurship.

Origin of WEAT

Initiation of WEAT has its own history. There were around 550 women owned enterprises identified in the process of locating the women owned enterprises. The list was not exhaustive and cannot account fully for the universe. But still it was taken as universe and a sampling was made to conduct the study. In the survey, a question was asked as to whether they have any Women Entrepreneurs Association where the answer was negative. Further it was asked as to whether they are willing to become a member when an Association is initiated, the response was positive. It is with such a positive response, an innovative idea of creating an Association for Women to come together collectively was conceived, keeping the very features of the women owned enterprises emerged in the research, as objectives of the Association.

Objectives of WEAT

To enfold any aspiring women to become entrepreneurs to be provided with all support to become so, irrespective of class, caste, religion, creed, colour, region, race, age, education, etc.

- To guide the women, to initiate enterprises in small, medium and large scale from mere self employed and micro enterprises.
- To introduce the women to non-conventional areas and mainstream into all areas which were the domains of men.
- To offer training on both soft and hard skills required for the start up of enterprises and build their capacity to manage the business on their own.
- To sensitize the women to understand the social construction in the patriarchy based society and try to get their due share in the development process
- To handhold the women in their business to help them at the time of depression and poor performance if any
- To guide the women to choose the enterprise suiting to them, help in preparing the project proposals, and submit application for business loan
- To link them with subsidy based government schemes, bank credits and facilitate them to avail the formal credit

Above all to have a Networking established in the name of Women Entrepreneurs Association of Tamil Nadu (WEAT) to provide a space for any woman who aspires for enterprise development to have a platform to access and avail guidance and counselling to start the enterprises.

WEAT was initiated with the primary objective that women who are constrained with the household duties, can utilise their potential by taking up enterprise development which will promote them to enhance their skills, empower them to involve in decision making and contribute directly to the overall economic development of the nation. It is gross waste of human resource if the women's potential to contribute to development is not tapped and utilised proper. It is unfair that the skills and capability of one gender is not fully utilised but the other gender- the men's potential is over exploited. It ends up with conflict often, where the men are forced to be the breadwinner and primary provider of the family. Such socio cultural norms push the men to be stress to earn for the livelihood of the family rendering the women to be at the receiving end pushing them to sub-ordination. Entrepreneurship will certainly ensure the women to be boss on their own and able to provide employment to others. It would suit them better as flexi hours is possible to devote time to family and business. However, the support of the family is the utmost need for women to start and sustain in business.

WEAT – A People Based Innovative Movement:

WEAT had come to operate with the objective mentioned above and empower women which is still a dream across the globe. A unique feature of WEAT is that the people, the society, are the owners. The research findings revealed that women do not have any organization to collectively represent their needs. The sample women in the study were heavily relying on informal credit with money lenders charging exorbitant interest, taking away a huge share of their profit. So the first priority was to bring all the women together to get bank loans with minimum interest.

Startup Challenges in initiating WEAT:

The conception of initiating an Association was need based, emerged from the research. However it was not an easy task. The process of initiating an Association for women entrepreneurs is described to understand the nuances in such task.

WEAT – initiation – the process and prospects emerged:

The 550 women entrepreneurs identified in the study were communicated with the reply card after a three years of gap of conducting the study. To everyone's surprise, only 35 replies could be received saying a nod to initiate the Association. A meeting was called for, only two women turned that too, a group of women had brought new women other than the one, communicated and invited to come. A meeting was conducted to explain about the need and objective of an Association to be initiated for Women entrepreneurs. It was quite accepted and expressed their willingness to co-operate. It was told that a meeting will be convened every week to decide the office bearers and also take it for Registration under the Tamil Nadu Society's Act during June 2006. The subsequent week programme had only 10 members and the next week it had gone down to seven members. It was realised that with these seven members, the Association should get started. Accordingly it was initiated, approaching the Tiruchirapalli Tiny and Small Industries Association (TIDTISSIA), which

helped in framing by laws and offered guidance to start the Association and got registered as a registered body under the Tamil Nadu Societies Act.

TIDTISSIA had just received a Project from Department of Science and Technology Government of India, as “Science and Technology Entrepreneurship Development”(STED) where the project was need of candidates and WEAT was in need of project, which synchronized to the actual needs of the both the organizations. Department of Women’s Studies continuously worked to mobilize more and more women who aspire for entrepreneurship. Thanks to Media particularly print media which helped and are helping till date in publishing the WEAT news regularly, the press releases and the press note of weekly programmes. In the beginning it was a weekly seminar inviting resource persons from various industrial and entrepreneurial institutions which had attracted news group of women joining as Members of WEAT. A minimum of Rs 100 was fixed as membership fee. Every seminar was bringing at least a handful of new women participants. Such response really encouraged that the need for such Association and the need for reaching out the unreached. Accordingly these needs of the women were assessed and the type of training asked for were offered in collaboration with STED project, which actually focused on science and technology related entrepreneurs. It was a timely sanction of STED Project to TIDTISSIA that served the women in need and introduced them to new and modern areas. WEAT was involved in mobilizing the women and linked to get training and other handholding till the start up in collaboration with TIDTISSIA project, District Industries Centre, Banks etc.

Progress and Performance of WEAT in creating Women Entrepreneurs:

WEAT subsequently got established in one year or so, and became popular and visible among the people. It has gained credibility among the people. WEAT got recognised among the Entrepreneurship Promotional Agencies of the Government of India such as Micro Small and Medium Enterprises Development Institute (MSME-DI),Govtment of India, District Industries Centre, Tamil Nadu Industrial Industries Investment Corporation, National Bank for Rural Development, National Institute of Technology, Nationalised Banks, Tamil Nadu Small Industries Development Corporation, Academic Institutions, Bharath Heavy Electricals Limited, Govt of India, a Public Sector Enterprise, Industrial Associations, civil society organizations, Coir Board, National Jute Board, World bank Supported Projects at Tamil Nadu, NGOs, TIDTISSIA, BHELISA, CII, Entrepreneurial Training Institutes Media both print and visual medium, and above all the people particularly the women. It is with the collaboration with the above organizations, it has been possible for WEAT to reach this state to support any woman aspiring to become entrepreneurs as entrepreneurs as set in the preamble.

With a humble beginning with just seven members not WEAT has reached out to millions of women across the globe and trained nearly 1000 women in various trades over the past one decade since 2006.

Table 01: The Ten Years in Row Economically Empowering Women

Year	No. of Members	No. of Trainings both from WEAT and its partner Organizations	Members Benefited	No. of Successful Entrepreneurs
2006- 2007	35	-	-	-
2007- 2008	450	19	350	12
2008- 2009	490	29	432	56
2009-2010	567	28	332	82
2010 -2011	638	27	381	100
2011—2012	230	12	120	26
2012-2013	330	8	130	25
2013-2014	180	11	145	22
2014-2015	120	10	80	19
2015-2016	250	11	230	16

Source: WEAT Annual Reports

The above table indicates that there has been steady progress with WEAT performance but the number of successful entrepreneurs has been quite low which is on the decline. There has been a sluggish performance as there are several schemes with the captures the women at present. However WEAT has been continuously working with the same vigour and commitment.

The following section briefly explains the progress made by WEAT in creating women entrepreneurs, the strategies followed and the challenges faced etc

- Initiated during June 2006 with seven members now reached nearly 1000 members across Tamil Nadu
- Started to address the issues such as enhancing the women owned businesses and services from conventional to non-conventional, micro to small scale, feminine to non-feminine and mainstream products, from traditional money lender to the formal bank credit and above all have platform women entrepreneurs to represent their issues. All these could be realised in a decade.
- WEAT since its inception regularly organizes a fortnightly seminar inviting resource persons from various fields
- A two day State Level seminar inviting nearly 30 Resource persons to disseminate all possible information has been a regular phenomenon, where a souvenir is being released containing all relevant information related to starting of the enterprise, the government schemes, various training institutions, case studies of successful entrepreneurs, bank schemes, subsidy schemes, project report model and various related institutions to be contacted
- Successful women entrepreneurs are being recognised every year with an Award and citation
- Women who have got the training and started the enterprise subsequently are motivated and honoured at the annual conference.

- Trainers are being referred to Government schemes where a regular income is being given.
- Entrepreneurship Development Programmes and awareness programmes are being conducted in various colleges
- Skill training is offered to college students
- Internship for the MBA and other students are provided with WEAT
- WEAT has introduced women in both conventional and non conventional areas including Engineering and Fabrication by training women on welding, to taxi driving, auto rickshaw driving, call taxi driving, photography, gloves making, hair oil making etc, which are hence forth perceived as domains of men.
- WEAT has also introduced women in eco friendly products keeping the environment protection and sustained future demand for such products such as paper cup, areca nut plate, jute bags, non-woven bags, paper bags, vermi compost, coir pith based bio fertiliser, coir pith based bricks, organic farming, minor millets, value added products of minor millets, organic fertilisers and pest, Herbal and medicinal products, terrace gardening, etc.
- Women Entrepreneurs have also been got introduced in Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES), photo copy centre, Desk top publishing, cell phone serving, printing press, white board making, etc.
- In addition the women are also introduced in food and food based products, catering services, sweets and snacks, readymade chappathi and idiyappam making etc
- Another major area that women always have also been captured including ready-made garment making, tailoring, different types of artificial jewel making, soft toys, aari and embroidery, jardhoshi, interior decoration, glass painting, greeting card making, pickle, masala powder, home made chocolates vadhal vadagam, herbal based edible products, soap, detergent powder, phenoyl, soap oil, cleaning powder, sanitary napking etc.
- Women Entrepreneurs could be introduced to business, trade, manufacturing etc but still the women found comfortable in trading and servicing industries as it involves less risk. They include cloth merchants, fancy products, purse, bags,
- Manufacturing has been happening in traditional kind of enterprises such as ready made garments, sanitary napkin, diaper herbal products, food based products etc.
- Agriculture and allied related business primarily to localise the raw material available have also been figured out say banana fibre extraction, mushroom cultivation, short term vegetable cultivation, minor millets processing, packing and value addition, etc. which are being undertaken by some of the members of WEAT.
- Another major areas in which the women have been introduced is outsourcing and bringing exhibitions and sale in college and University campuses.
- The women particularly the micro women entrepreneurs, SHG women etc find it difficult to market their products and hence an innovative arrangement has been made

where the SHG women and micro women entrepreneurs will be arranged to display and sell their products in the college and University campuses and support to participate in Government exhibitions, etc two days in each colleges for the entire month which has helped the women to earn nearly Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 30000 per month. The forward effects of such earning has resulted in improving the economic and social status where the wards of these women are doing professional education. The women also feel empowered by visiting the colleges regularly and gaining contact.

- WEAT has now identified and approached for the mobilising women for various trainings, awareness programmes, seminars and conferences for which the participants could be identified among the WEAT members to participate to mutually support both the sides
- Another major development is that a pool of trainers could be generated in the past one decade. The trainers are introduced to Government Departments, colleges, etc. Skill training and awareness programmes are being conducted by the WEAT trained members on minor millet value added products, sanitary napkin production, areca nut plate,diapers, baby products, paper cup , kunthan jewels, bio manure, terrace gardening, vermi compost, artificial jewel making, ready made garment making, saree printing, sugar beads jewel making, jewelery from forest produces, etc.
- WEAT trainers earn more than running enterprises and hence some of the members are engaged as full time trainers and able to earn adequately to support the family.
- WEAT is the most sought after organization to provide training without any commercial motive and open the same for any women form the grass root.

WEAT has successfully completed its 10 years of its service, in extending voluntary service to the society. Similar organizations can be dreamt off in each academic institution to enable the informal sector women to be self employed.

WEAT has been sustaining its service only with the support of raised funds, It has created around 500 women entrepreneurs directly or indirectly and reached out more than lakh of women in offering guidance and counselling through visual medium

The Women entrepreneurs created have been performing well. The women who succeeded in identifying the line of businesses are able participate and sustain in business.

Some of the role model entrepreneurs have got the opportunity to visit abroad and able to share their experiences both to Sri Lanka and Nepal

WEAT has got its chapters established in ten districts including Chennai, the capital city, Namakkal, Madurai, Thanjavur, Salem, Pudukottai, Sivagangai, Tiruppur, Erode, and Dindigul. There are requirements to initiate in other districts in future years.

A subsequent research undertaken revealed that the sustenance of women owned enterprises is determined by the nature of enterprises and the integration into related fields and running more than one unit. A person running a printing press has gone to integrate with stationary shop, a sweet stall owned women has integrated with catering services, a sanitary napkin producer with adult diaper production, a herbal and medicinal products producer with minor

millet based products, a paper cup producer to areca nut products, a beautician in producing herbal based cosmetics, etc.

Recommendations:

From the above analysis of the origin, growth and the various type of enterprises being created by WEAT, the challenges and prospects of women entrepreneurship the following recommendations are being made.

- i. The social and gender barriers to promote women entrepreneurship need to be identified and efforts to eliminate them must be prioritized while framing policies to promote women entrepreneurship.
- ii. Family support and co-operation in all fields including building self confidence, providing encouragement, supportive finance, etc
- iii. Women in manufacturing sectors must maintain the quality and competitive price to sustain in the chosen field.
- iv. Proper guidance and motivation would make the women to enter into non-conventional areas and move from pickle and pappad making to electronics and Engineering.
- v. Presentation of complete data and thorough knowledge and competent presentation of the project proposal with the economic viability would get the women to get formal credit continuously.
- vi. The women need to doubly prove that they will be successful and able to pay back the credit borrowed by showing the past performance of the enterprises.
- vii. Academic institutions, civil society organizations, industrial associations, and individual entrepreneurs etc must work together to promote entrepreneurship among the women
- viii. Women need handholding support from start up to sustenance as most of the women are first generation entrepreneurs.
- ix. Women still are forced to balance home and career which remain as the barrier to fully concentrate on the enterprise development. Hence sharing of the responsibility at household is the need of hour.
- x. Gender Sensitization and awareness for the self and also members of the family must be done continuously to understand that the women can also contribute equally to economic development
- xi. Above all, collective representation through forming a network and Association for Women entrepreneurs will take a long way for promoting women entrepreneurs. Hence every district/province, may create an Association for Women Entrepreneurs irrespective of the country, so that every aspiring women will have a platform to present their needs and get guidance to become entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

With the initiation of WEAT, an innovation to link a research to community, has address moreover all the issues being identified in the study say introducing women to small scale, to non conventional enterprises, to non feminine products and above all link with formal credit with banks and State Finance Corporation, and also provides a platform for the Women to represent the issues collectively through WEAT. The fruits of encouragement and support from every official of the Banks, Various Industrialists, Consultants, Gender specialists and many more academicians and trainers only made the innovation to be a success in reaching out society. WEAT has succeeded in making housewife/homemakers into engineering fabrication production unit heads and producers of many eco-friendly products like the paper bags, cups, arecau nut plates, jute bags and sanitary napkins so many more products that touch day to day life and will have perennial market. WEAT's strategies and committed non-commercial focus alone has ensured to reach a steady progress. A separate office with two staff at head quarters are working ; the other chapters are governed by volunteers. The experience revealed that if there is a platform for women to handhold and offer services to guide them to initiate enterprise, if media supports to bring the press release free of cost, and if the needy women read news papers regularly it is quite possible to turn every aspiring women to become entrepreneurs. WEAT and its experience revealed that it is possible to take up academic research and based on the findings, one can take up action research implementing the findings. The WEAT entrepreneurs are well recognised and covered by media thoroughly. Women running call taxi, engineering and fabrication, men saloon, got recognised. The women got sanctions from National Institute of Technology, Bharathidasan University etc to have kiosks in their campuses. Similarly district administration has given canteen to WEAT members at collector's office, at State run Farmers daily Market, invite for the state exhibitions, resource persons for EDPs run by the government etc. It is all the collective effort of various collaborative organizations the progress could be possible. It can be replicated by others for which guidance is given by WEAT for any women from any region. WEAT extends invitation to approach for empowering the individuals and aspiring women to become entrepreneurs and thereby contribute to overall economic development. The recommendations spelt out in the study have been purely from the experiences of running an Association for WEAT. It has proved and evidenced that collaboration, networking and associating with other institutions alone will help the women to be successful though major contribution of success has been from the individual. So let the era of information, be with networking among women which should work as a people's movement for the cause of women.

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