

**Business Enterprise Leadership Management Programme
February – August, 2019
Vikarabad and Karimnagar districts of Telangana &
Pune and Gondia districts of Maharashtra
A pilot micro MBA program for rural women by ALC India, DISHA-UNDP, and MANAGE**



Sai Sree and Saravanan Raj share their experiences of the Rural Women Entrepreneurship Programme – a pilot micro MBA program for rural women to build empowered communities and transform rural societies. This was an initiative of Access Livelihoods Consulting India Ltd. (ALC India), with support from DISHA-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with MANAGE as the evaluation partner.

CONTEXT

According to the Sixth Economic Census, GoI, 2016 released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, women constitute around 14% of the country's total entrepreneurship, i.e., 8.05 million out of a total of 58.5 million entrepreneurs. Of this, 2.76 million women – constituting 13.3% of women entrepreneurs – work in the agriculture sector whereas 5.29 million women, constituting more than 65%, work in the non-agriculture sector. The average employment in women-owned enterprises is a meagre 1.67%. Despite this disheartening statistic, many studies have also pointed out that woman entrepreneurs are an important source of economic growth. They create new jobs for themselves and others, and also provide society with diverse solutions to managerial, organisational, and business problems.



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The enterprises led by women can initiate high productivity without compromising on quality standards, and women can utilise the income generated from these enterprises in a better and more efficient manner. This is particularly true in the case of rural women in India, who constitute 77% of the female population. These women play a vital role in both farm and home systems – they share greatly in all responsibilities and perform a wide range of duties in running the family, maintaining household activities, and rearing, feeding and tending to domestic animals, and attending to farm labour. They also possess skills and indigenous knowledge. Though they contribute a lot to increasing their family assets, women are not treated as equal partners either inside or outside the four walls of their homes. In fact they are treated as weak and dependent on men. Characteristically Indian women occupy an unfavourable status in society.

Economic empowerment of rural women through entrepreneurship results in empowerment of women on various aspects, such as socio-economic opportunity, property rights, political representation, social equality, personal rights, family development, market development, community development, and thus nation development.

But empowering women in rural areas is a great challenge that has emerged as a critical issue today. In their endeavour to pursue entrepreneurship as a source of enhanced livelihood rural women are hindered by several roadblocks. There are many government organizations and NGOs working in the area of empowering rural women that will enable them to turn into business leaders and enterprise owners.

To build empowered communities and transform rural societies, Access Livelihoods Consulting India Ltd. (ALC India), with DISHA Foundation supported by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has initiated the Business Enterprise Leadership Management Programme. This Women Entrepreneurship Programme (WEP) mainly aims to catalyse the economic empowerment of rural women and equip them with the required entrepreneurial skills. This will pave the way to empowerment of rural women.

MANAGE, being the knowledge and evaluation partner, has participated in the programme and undertaken the assessment and certification of women once they successfully complete the training programme.

MICRO MBA PROGRAMME FOR RURAL WOMEN

The Business Enterprise Leadership Management Programme is a unique micro MBA aimed at enabling rural women by providing necessary leadership and managerial skills (combining entrepreneurial, intrapreneurial skills and competencies) so as to bring about an impact on their rural livelihoods.

The expected results from this programme mainly include:

1. Development of competencies among the women to start micro enterprises on their own or by mobilizing other women in the communities in which they live;
2. Creation of competent women leaders to steer Producer Companies (PC);
3. Internalisation of self-management processes that will help the women leaders to transform their communities gradually.

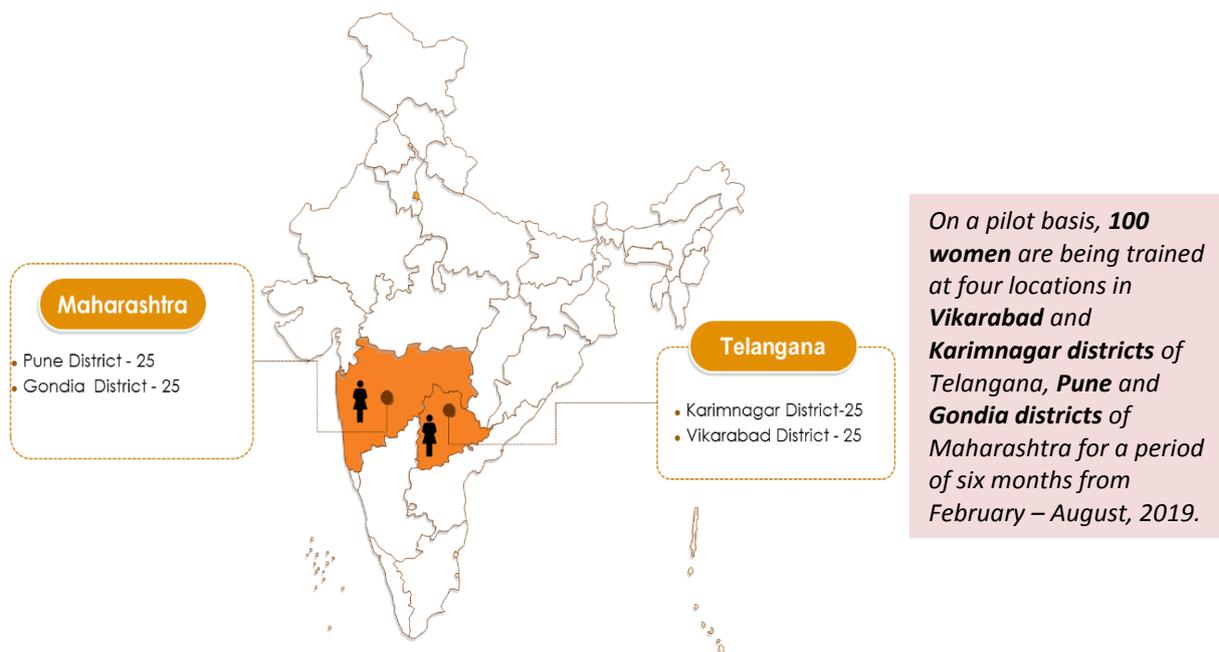
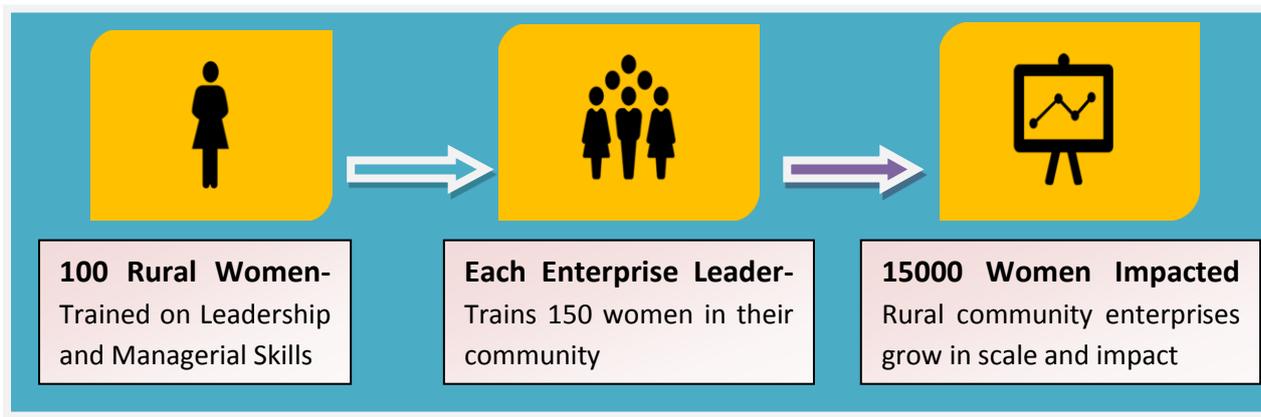


Figure 1: Women’s training locations and membership details from Maharashtra and Telangana

Vision of Women Entrepreneurship Programme



Curriculum Framework

As the participants in this training are mainly rural women efforts have been made in such a way that the women are directed towards their own learning based on their own past experiences. The curriculum is designed using the Adult Learning Principles (Andragogy) based on Self-Directed Experiential and Exploratory Learning. The curriculum is mainly structured around the following 4 pillars:

- 1) Self Transformation;
- 2) Enterprise Mind-set;
- 3) Enterprise Skills; and
- 4) Enterprise Excellence.

***Integrated learning activities through Community Leadership
Engagement day, Physical activities and Sharing circles***

Programme structure

The whole six-month (February - August, 2019) training programme structure was a judicious mix of facilitation workshops, practicums and travel workshops. MANAGE made an effort for continuous monitoring and evaluation during all these phases of the programme. ALC's efforts at training the women are appreciable, in terms of providing good training facilities, along with food and accommodation for all the women.

Travel workshop



(©ALC India)

First travel workshop with 100 rural women from the four locations

The training programme started with the **Travel Workshop**, which was a six-day Residential Programme, which was held in Hyderabad for the members from all the four locations. All the 100 women from the four regions were divided into two batches – one for the Marathis (including the women from Mavel and Gondia) and the other for the Telugus (including the women from Vikarabad and Karimnagar).



Learning by women during the Travel Workshop

All these six days started with an early morning yoga session for the physical health of the women, (later a few basic courses were taught), and the travel was scheduled for the afternoon. Participants visited various established enterprises, such as dairy, poultry, and vermicomposting units; SEED, IKEA, Anand Foods, nursery, etc. Totally, two travel workshops were included in the programme, one at the beginning of the programme and the second at the end of the training programme.

The second travel workshop was held at Warangal. Women closely observed and monitored the well-known and mature cooperative institutions: Mulkunoor Cooperative Rural Bank, Thrift Cooperatives, Cooperative Development Foundation, etc.

The Travel Workshop provided a platform for the rural women that exposed them to different enterprises in unique places and helped them to gain preliminary knowledge. In turn, the women stated that this Travel Workshop gave them an introduction to various enterprises and the ways in which they operate, and the services rendered by them. This, furthermore, helped them get a perspective on business opportunities.

On the first day of the second Travel Workshop, MANAGE evaluated a total of 100 women

Facilitation Workshops

Each Facilitation Workshop was for about six days; and totally there were four Facilitation Workshops held during the six-month training period. They were held in the respective four locations. In order to conduct its assessment, I (first author) attended at the Vikarabad location in Telangana, and I also had continuous feedback regarding the facilitation workshops at the other three locations. The sessions were delivered to the women in their local language, and the facilitators or local anchors of that particular location oriented the resource persons on the session/s to be delivered by them.

A total of about 26 women were trained at Vikarabad district of Telangana

The curriculum was designed with flexibility so that it can be changed according to the training needs of the women of that particular location. For example, the Kodangal women are more oriented towards Producer Companies (PC), how to run the PC collectively, etc., while the women of Mavel leaned more towards the dairy enterprise, its production, marketing, SWOT, etc.

The plans for the Facilitation Workshop session were scheduled in such a way that they could begin with a yoga class, which enhances both the physical and mental health of the trainees. The training materials provided required knowledge on the concepts of entrepreneurship and managerial skills (according to the pre-designed curriculum). Women learned through a participatory approach via group activities assigned to them. All the facilitation



workshops were interactive where the women learned from each other. This not only encourages the women to make their learning easy but also teaches them to work in teams, especially for completing their assigned tasks. Video-based learning is also helping a lot of women as this is impacting their analytical skills while broadening their thought process.

The Facilitation Workshop is conducted between two practicums so as to:

- build learning from the just concluded practicum;
- provide direction to the directly next practicum.

The facilitator's role in this training is to guide the participants to engage more in the process of learning. The learnings from travel, facilitation and practicum are integrated to the participants by the facilitator

The methodology of delivering these sessions included case studies, success stories and group learning



Group learning of women at Karimnagar during the Facilitation Workshop



Group presentations by Karimnagar women during the Facilitation Workshop



Group activities by Gondia women during the Facilitation Workshop



Group discussions by Vikarabad women



Mavel women's Orientation during the Facilitation Workshop

Sharing Circle

Each Facilitation Workshop concluded with a Sharing Circle which was led by a successful Community Leader. The Community Leaders share their experiences, learning, and challenges with the participants.

During sharing circles, the women open up themselves to express their experiences and the constraints they face in life. The idea behind the sharing circle is that the women understand that

they are not alone in facing challenges and difficulties, which lead them to come out of a victim mind-set. It also strengthens the bonding between the team, and the sharing circle provides a space where women can be vulnerable and explore ways in which they can overcome their fears, and go on to work on their strength and weaknesses. Thus, the sharing circle provides an emotionally empowering experience for participants.



Mavel women participating in the Sharing Circle Practicum

The tasks to be carried out by women during the practicum are planned beforehand. The major activities taken up by the women of Vikarabad were as follows:

- Orientation to WEP Leaders on 150 members' training based on the given session plans, for each woman to mobilize 150 women to reach the target of the programme to eventually reach out to 15,000 women.
- Orientation for WEP Leaders on fertilizer supply, one of the producer companies. Survey for the fertilizer demand has been done by participants.
- Orientation to WEP Leaders on cotton ginning and dairy units, on different steps of the cotton ginning mill and dairy processing unit. The monthly production target will be given to the women. They need to understand the procurement and quality needs of the project, and this include visiting a ginning mill and dairy processing unit, checking the account books, auditing, etc.
- Orientation given to members on financial services of the PC. Allocation of villages for each woman participant. Activities for the women participants in the villages allocated to them include: verifying loan documents, verification of account books, visiting the field and random discussions with the members.
- Most of the activities taken up by the PC Staff are practiced by the women participants as well. Along with this the women have also taken up group meetings in the villages during the mobilization of 150 women.

Similarly women at Maval, Gondia, and Karimnagar were given practicum activities relevant to their geography and the producer company's business portfolio. Maval women did the audits of Dairy Farmer's Affiliated Group, as well as the marketing events of Maval Dairy, and they also recorded financial transactions of family level expenses, etc. Gondia women were heavily engaged in the consumer survey of Rural Retail Chain, baseline surveys for producer companies, etc. Thus, practicums provided in-depth hands-on work experience to participants.

INSIGHTS ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

MANAGE has partnered with ALC and UNDP-DISHA as a knowledge partner and also for the assessment and certification of the programme. The roles taken up by MANAGE during these six months of the training programme were as follows:

- a) Function as the academic partner and collaborate with ALC India in the development of the Assessment Framework for the training programme;
- b) Coordinate with ALC India and conduct the assessment and certification for the 100 women business leaders.

This training is different from any other programme. Rather than making the participants learn by memorising or mugging up answers for specific questions, here women were using chart papers and sketch pens to make presentations. Many of them were emboldened to come and make their presentations inside a class full of strangers. All this growth and development deserves special mention and it was given to the participants by their trainers.

There were some topics with which the women were having, or facing, confusion/worry even after they thought it out several times. In view of this situation the resource persons and local anchors made keen efforts in identifying those topics and explaining them. These topics were creating doubt in the minds of these women, so they were repeated again and again briefly in order to help them recall and retain explanations.



Women did their learning in a participatory approach through group activities assigned to them. They discussed and shared each other's knowledge and opinions of the activity assigned to them. This not only made their learning easy but also taught them to work in teams while completing their assigned tasks. Video-based learning also helped them a lot as this was impacting their analytical skills and thus broadening their thought process.

As far as communication and negotiation skills of the women are concerned there is a lot of improvement in them compared to their initial stages of training. The women are now freely able to discuss their doubts among themselves. The sharing circles, planned as a part of the training, are helpful for the women to open up about themselves and express their experiences in life and the constraints they face in daily life.

The women got a complete view of what they were meant to become, what they ought to do after undergoing the training, and they were able to come up with ideas for establishing their own enterprises. They are also tackling the odds in their life with the courage they had gained through the training.

The women are also involved in the mobilization of 150 women each, so that the training benefits a total of 15,000 women.

This training is benefiting a lot of the women, but there are a few women who are not making use of the programme to some extent, and this is reflecting in their attendance. So the attendance criteria

was also included in the evaluation and women who do not meet the 60 percent attendance level are not considered for certification.

The specific outcomes of the training are assessed through the evaluation process designed and incorporated by MANAGE. The evaluation framework is discussed with the ALC team beforehand and is then executed. Timely updates and inputs shared by the ALC team have helped MANAGE get a clear-cut idea of how the training is going on at other places.

The women are awarded Certificates after the final assessment by MANAGE after successful completion of the six-month training programme

After the training, majority of the women will be absorbed into their local Producer Companies and the remaining women are supported to set up their own enterprises.



Awarding Certificates to women after successful completion of the training

CHALLENGES/HURDLES THAT RURAL WOMEN FACE

This unique attempt with a pilot group of 100 women who graduated from the micro MBA programme was offered by ALC in partnership with UNDP and MANAGE. This is different from the normal capacity building training given to educated sets of people. As the target was rural women, it involved a lot of obstacles such as:

- Rural women are less educated, with minimum exposure to what is going on outside the village, so introducing the concepts of entrepreneurship, providing broad understanding on them, and creating exposure needed considerable effort;
- Ensuring the physical presence of the women throughout the programme was a challenging task as they have dual responsibilities of managing both home and family fields;
- Gender discrimination and financial problems;
- Traditional thinking and mind-set;
- Uncooperative attitudes of the family (majority of the women participants had to face this problem);
- Discouragement by society (most of the women mentioned that they are often discouraged by their neighbours and relatives);
- Lack of confidence in their own ability to achieve what they want, and also become future leaders.

WAY FORWARD

- This training, to a great extent, was an answer to the above mentioned obstacles faced by women. The Business Enterprise Leadership Management Programme turned village women into leaders as a result of the training given to them. This training programme is of utmost importance in today's world as it encourages rural women to involve in entrepreneurship.
- This programme is useful to the rural women in creating confidence and incorporating various leadership, managerial, and income-generating skills.
- This can create a critical impact in society with this 100 rural women setting an example.
- Many such women entrepreneurship programmes are the need of the hour, to improve the social and economic status of rural women in India and also to raise the overall quality of their lives.
- This programme not only helped to enhance the personal capabilities of the women but also their social status in society as a whole by creating employment opportunities. After completion of their training, the women of Mavel are working in their dairy that has a capacity of 10,000 litres, which is run by Maval Dairy Farmers Producer Company (FPC) with 1500 small and marginal women dairy farmers in Maval, Maharashtra.
- The Kodangal women are in the process of collecting the share capital for establishing a dairy in their location, and majority of them are already taking up Producer Company (PC) operations.
- The programme has paved the way towards improving livelihoods along with the living standards of 100 women – leading to increased income and employment opportunities – and thus improving the wealth of the nation in general and of the family in particular.

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