

Case Note 1

Industree Foundation: Weaving Dreams into the Fabric of Empowerment



The enchanting story of Industree Foundation begins and dreams are intricately woven into the fabric of empowerment where every stitch tells a story of endurance, compassion and cathartic change. Industree is not just an organization but under the leadership of Neelam Chhiber, it weaves a symphony of hope through the tapestry of social entrepreneurship. This trailblazing foundation facilitates inclusive economic transformation for India's most marginalized women, enabling them to establish and scale up self-owned collective enterprises. The focus on sustainable natural fiber and regenerative agriculture value chains by Industree that include banana, bamboo, non-timber forest produce encourages women to imbibe green business practices¹. Through skill-building programmes, the organisation connects such women with markets for natural and biodegradable products, creating a symphony of empowerment and environmental stewardship.

Founder's Journey



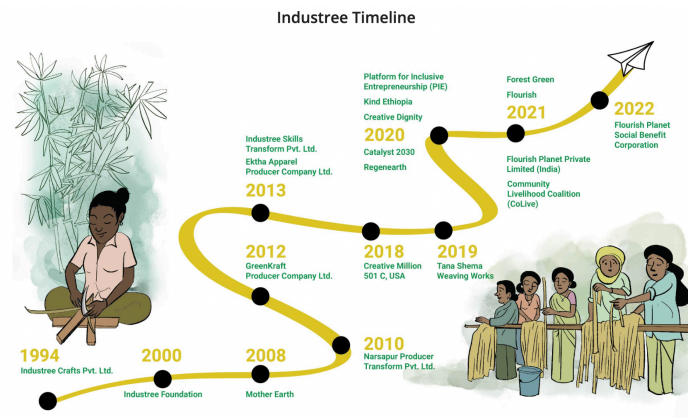
Neelam Chhiber's story² started at the National Institute of Design in Bastar during her student days, where she became an expert in Dhokra. This marked the beginning of her vision of helping artisans who were unable to compete with mass-produced items. It was while working here that she identified a major gap in the market and dreamed of how local skills could be globally recognized and valued. And with this vision evolved the Industree Foundation as a crucial link

¹ <https://www.industree.org.in/about-us>

² <https://yourstory.com/herstory/2021/10/social-entrepreneur-empowering-artisans>

between creative producers and modern supply chains, navigating the complicated balance between traditional non-profit models and the rapid pace of market-led growth. In this way Neelam strategically reinvented herself, transforming creative producers into business owners and community leaders.

Organisation's Journey



In the dynamism of Industree's journey, in 2000 Industrue Foundation came into existence. By 2013, Industree had moved past its disadvantaged economic status and was concentrating on women collectives and producer organizations. Again, by 2016-17³ a game changer had emerged as Mission Creative Million⁴ was launched leaving an indelible touch on one million producers' lives. Mindtree, Vrutti⁵ and partnership with Tata Trusts and UNDP are some examples of such collaborations that have propelled forward Industree's mission. From the launch of Mother Earth in 2008 to the establishment of Flourish Planet Social Benefit Corporation⁶ in 2022; each milestone speaks about empowerment and sustainability at work for Industree.

Core Issue Being Addressed

³ <https://www.industree.org.in/about-us/>

⁴ <https://creative-million.org/>

⁵ <https://vruttiimpactcatalysts.org/>

⁶ <https://flourishplanet.com/>



The Industree Foundation deals with poverty and underemployment in India's rural areas and semi-urban landscapes especially affecting women who mostly operate outside the formal economy under exploitative conditions⁷. At the heart of Industree's mission is the pivotal issue of providing sustainable livelihoods for these women entangled in the web of exploitation. Enduring modest wages, relentless hours, and challenging conditions, these resilient women have their spirits tested but never broken. The foundation confronts head on the shadows of poverty and underemployment that cast a tense presence over these women, striving to bring about positive change.

Mission And Vision of the Organisation



Industree's vision, a beam of hope – "Industree believes that when vulnerable women have access to an enabling ecosystem to build sustainable livelihoods focused on ownership in climate-positive value chains, they can pursue their futures with dignity, empowered at home and

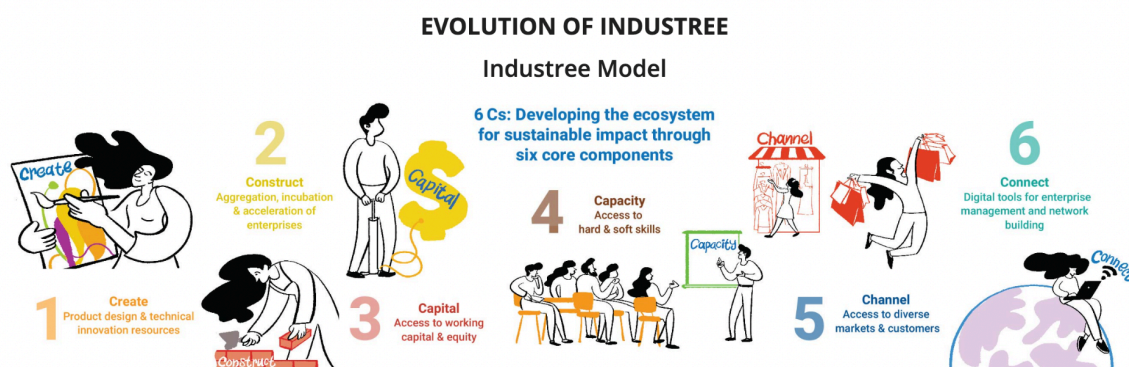
⁷ <https://www.industree.org.in/>

in the community" ("About Us – Industree")⁸. This is the vision of Industree that emerged from these adversities: a wonderful world where several producers especially women, are freed from poverty to establish sustainable livelihoods within the space of creative manufacturing. This vision transcends mere aspirations; it is about empowerment itself. The foundation aspires for a future where producers can attain financial independence, reclaim their dignity thus building lives filled with purpose and prosperity.

Their mission is focused on building lasting livelihoods within the creative manufacturing sector, with a commitment to acquire and sustain consistent and substantial incomes for underemployed women⁹. It functions to provide not only financial stability but also human working conditions and the determination needed to navigate life's challenges.

Business Model

Their business model revolves around empowering marginalised producers, with a particular emphasis on women, in the farm and creative manufacturing sectors¹⁰. The foundation addresses the core problem by fostering self-owned enterprises. This model provides a choice for producers, especially women, to work in conditions that offer stable and fair wages, ensuring both economic and social empowerment.



The model includes incubating and accelerating these producer-owned enterprises by improving access to markets, working capital, design, and other professional services. They have done so by developing an ecosystem for sustainable impact through 6 core elements- Create, Construct, Capital, Capacity, Channel Connect¹¹. Industree's strategic approach aims to elevate producers' incomes, creating a sustainable ecosystem for livelihoods, and fostering a cycle of empowerment for future generations. By channelling efforts into self-owned ventures, Industree aims to break the chains of exploitation, offering a path towards economic prosperity and dignified work conditions.

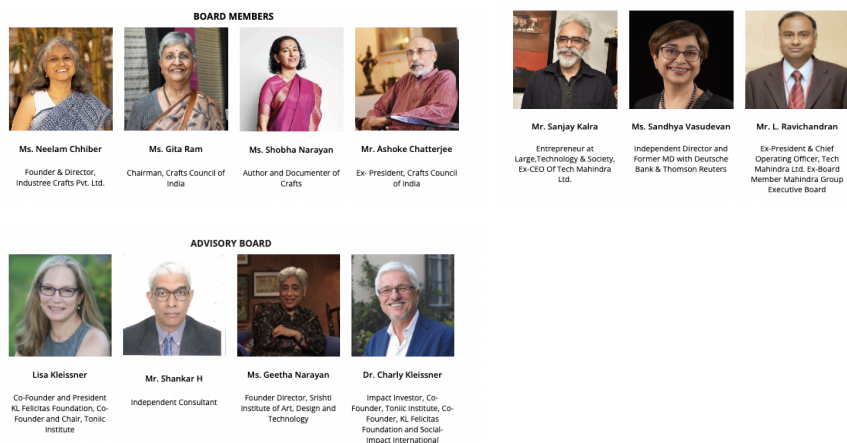
⁸ <https://www.industree.org.in/about-us/>

⁹ <https://www.industree.org.in/about-us/>

¹⁰ <http://www.industree.org.in/sites/default/files/CULTURAL%20CREATIVE%20MANUFACTURING%20INDUSTRY.PDF>

¹¹ <https://www.industree.org.in/about-us/>

Organisational Structure



Organisational structure of the Industree Foundation is a carefully designed mechanism that enables it to achieve its mission towards empowering rural artisans and promoting sustainable livelihoods. Those at the top are the Founding Trustees, namely Neelam Chhiber, Gita Ram and Nivedita Ram with their vision and leadership pointing the direction where this body should move¹². Supporting them is an array of the Board of Trustees representing different areas and occupations in society like Arathi Laxman, Ashoke Chatterjee, Gayathri Vasudevan, NV Ramana, Sobha Narayan who bring on board expertise ranging from social entrepreneurship to corporate governance¹³. On top of that, there is an Advisory Board with members such as Geetha Narayanan, Sankar Datta, Shankar Hariharan and Sejho Singh among others who give strategic direction¹⁴ to progress Industree's goals. The Foundation prioritises the welfare of its employees and artisans, ensuring fair compensation, skill development, and access to essential services like banking facilities. The foundation's commitment to artisans' well-being is reflected in a comprehensive compensation and support system, boasting a substantial 77% average salary increase and a focus on holistic employee welfare. Even more so financial sustenance comes by way of partnerships with NBFCs like Milaap¹⁵ or NABFINS. Some other collaborations that exist between Mindtree, Sonata Software and various NBFC have also made Industree capable of creating a strong autonomous framework for its beneficiaries in its bid to achieve a future that is brighter than the present for Indian creative producers

Key Internal Challenges

The foundation is also confronted by various internal challenges in advancing creative producers and bridging the gap between grassroots artisans and the private sector. The organization grapples with such expanding division caused by technological advancements and stringent

¹² <https://www.industree.org.in/about-us/>

¹³ <https://www.industree.org.in/about-us/>

¹⁴ <https://www.industree.org.in/about-us/>

¹⁵ <https://milaap.org/field-partners/industree-mutually-beneficial-trust>

compliance standards, which hinder its ability to establish sustainable market linkages¹⁶. Furthermore, a competitive market environment as well as risk aversion among private sector entities are other obstacles towards integration of young or less-experienced producer companies. Industree appreciates the significance of social enterprise model that aligns social returns and financial gains, thereby encouraging cooperation among private sector players, NGOs, and government partners. Amidst this pursuit for Mission Creative Million, the foundation's complex task is to build a digital platform for economic and social empowerment¹⁷. Overcoming system abuses in unorganized sectors as well as enabling access to professional management and markets for self-owned enterprises are major challenges that require sustained resilience and strategic innovation from Industree.

Lastly,

The journey of Industree Foundation is an illuminating example that will inspire generations of the future. They have a testimony for the transformational power of dreams intricately interwoven into the fabric of empowerment. This balance between purpose and profit lies at the heart of its success. Through promoting social entrepreneurship, it integrates women into mainstream value chains, hence ensuring economic security as well as advancing environmental sustainability through development of natural and biodegradable products. However, this approach stands out not only because it provides much needed economic empowerment to women but also signals a new era where every decision and partnership seeks to reconciliation between profit seeking goals with broader societal objectives.



¹⁶<https://www.industree.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Industree-Foundation-Case-Study-%E2%80%93-Skoll-Foundation.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://creative-million.org/>

Industree tackles organizational challenges by forging strategic alliances¹⁸ and inclusive decision-making processes translating its entrepreneurial model into scalable ventures of lasting effect. By 2030, Industree Foundation has set a lofty target to reach three million women; thus addressing social concerns through entrepreneurial means becomes a driver for broader societal and environmental targets. Industree's success underscores the transformative potential of an organisation dedicated to the delicate dance between purpose and profit—a dance that, when executed with precision and commitment, results in a harmonious symphony of positive impact on both people's lives and the planet.

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¹⁸ <https://www.colive.org.in/>
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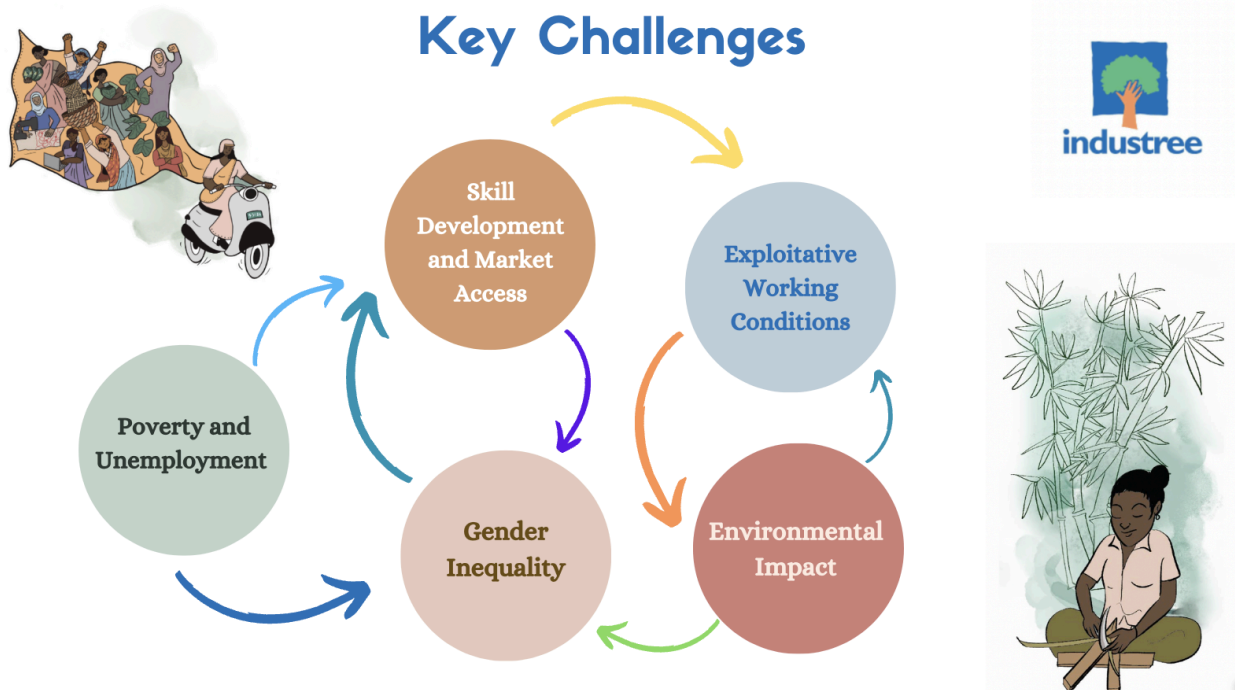
Case Note 2

Issues that the Organistaion is trying to solve and its complexities

The Industree Foundation is staged on the leading edge of a tectonic shift in social enterprise, confronting the daunting triad of problems of rural and semi-urban poverty, underemployment, and the exploitation of women in rural and semi-urban India. These issues are deeply ingrained in the socioeconomic tapestry of the country but are also interwoven with dysfunctional global forces, making up a labyrinth of cause-and-effect that Industree seeks to disrupt with a creative touch. Industree Foundation's primary target demographics are marginalized women who've been "forced outside of the opportunities for decent work in the formal and informal sector". The foundation weaves its way to empower women through sustainable livelihoods in the creative manufacturing sector.

Delving further into the intricacies of the issues that Industree is striving to address, there are 5 key issues:

1. Poverty and Unemployment
2. Exploitative Working Conditions
3. Skill Development and Market Access
4. Gender Inequality
5. Environmental Impact



Poverty and Unemployment

At the heart of Industree's challenge is the wide prevalence of poverty and underemployment faced by women in rural and semi-urban regions. This issue is the essence for the cycle of economic and social marginalization¹⁹, which Industree aims to confront. The fact that stable, fair-wage employment discourses remain elusive keeps women caught in perennial poverty, the ultimate proxy and cause of most of the other challenges. More than half of women in the developing world currently lack equivalent stable and fair-wage employment opportunities, obliging them into poverty. Poverty invades their lives in several dimensions, ranging from their own well-being to that of their dependents and societies²⁰. Additionally, the lack of economic opportunities translates into underemployment, meaning that women are disproportionately active in informal sectors with irregular income generation models²¹. Even if they launch businesses, they lack the opportunity to expand due to limited market access and capability to deploy skills. Finally, gender inequality percolates to all other challenges, since women are often offered limited chances to acquire education and secure meaningful employment, thereby experiencing high poverty and underemployment levels.

Exploitative Working Conditions

Exploitative working conditions are symptomatic of the broader issue of underemployment, as the available work in informal sectors provides insufficient incomes and job insecurity for workers, plunging them even more deeply into poverty. Thus, Industree's work seeks to provide women with a way out of these working conditions and offer an alternative that is not only justly remunerated but also dignified²². Informal women workers are subject to exploitative working conditions, including long hours, limited breaks, and low pay. These conditions not only affect their physical and mental health but also make them economically precarious and socially excluded. Furthermore, it is a vicious cycle caused by poverty, underemployment, and gender inequality because women have no choice but to accept such conditions due to a lack of economic activities. In addition, if the traditional industries are characterized by unsustainable practices causing environmental damage²³, this would create a situation where working conditions would be exploitative because women workers would be exposed to hazardous environments.

Skill Development and Market Access

Since it is recognized that the poverty and exploitative conditions are caused by the lack of access to development of skills and markets, Industree conducts training and skill-building programs²⁴. Putting this into practice, such initiatives ensure that women have the necessary knowledge and capability to produce products that can be of interest for the market. Industree

¹⁹ <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/marginalization-explained>

²⁰ <https://www.industree.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Annual-Report-2016-17-MR.pdf>

²¹ https://www.industree.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Artisan_interviews.pdf

²² <https://www.industree.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Annual-Report-2018-19.pdf>

²³ <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781003572.00010>

²⁴ <https://www.industree.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Industree-Foundation-Case-Study-%E2%80%93-Skoll-Foundation.pdf>

establishes an essential link between the traditional skills and the contemporary market needs. Consequently, it addresses the economic root of gender inequality and offers alternatives for economic independence and decision-making for women. The limited access to opportunities for the development of skills and to modern markets imposes economic underdevelopment on women who are forced to work in traditional industry and activities. The insufficient training and modern market access prevent women from prospering economically and deprive women of economic development²⁵. Since the training is limited, women are barred from accessing new technology and markets which is directly tied to the poverty, underemployment, and, eventually, gender inequality.

Gender Inequality

Gender norms and stereotypes²⁶ that limit women's economic opportunities and economic decision-making are key barriers to women's economic empowerment. Industree's model of promoting women's self-owned enterprises is ground-breaking in this respect. It does not only create economic opportunities for women but also positions her as their leader, disrupting the norm and gradually reshaping the social norm that restricts women from fully participating in the economy. Social norms and gender stereotypes limit women's economic opportunities, control, and decision-making power. Women still face prejudice in hiring, promotion, and access to income-earning resources, resulting in lower pay and fewer promotional prospects²⁷. It contributes to the vicious cycle of poverty and underemployment because women are less likely to gain access to education, skills, training, and job opportunities. This creates exploitative arrangements where women are forced to accept low-wage informal employment with limited autonomy, agency, or income²⁸.

Environmental Impact

The foundation's commitment to promote sustainable practices and entrepreneurship that are also friendly to the environment offers an additional, almost always unattended perspective to the social and financial empowerment discourse²⁹. By following this approach, Industree ensures not only the long-term sustainability of its supported enterprises but also promotes the overall shift in the community's attitudes towards nature. Traditional industries are known to practice highly environmentally degenerative practices with deforestation, water pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions being some of the most visible examples. Eventually, a deteriorated environment makes a direct impact not only on ecosystems and soil, leading to the depletion of natural

²⁵ <https://www.industree.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Industree-Deck-2023.pdf>.

²⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/gender-stereotyping>

²⁷ https://www.industree.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Artisan_interviews.pdf

²⁸ <https://industreefoundation.wordpress.com/2023/11/28/gender-based-violence-awareness-a-crucial-investment-towards-well-being-and-safety/>

²⁹ <https://industreefoundation.wordpress.com/2023/07/21/power-bridging-the-market-gap-for-sustainable-impact/>

resources³⁰ and land confronted by poverty but also on the people, causing health issues culpable for the expansion of disease and hunger. Topping that, proving that the environmental issue is economically rooted, a lack of market access and the necessity to sell goods below the cost of production are considered to be factors making some industries non-sustainable for their practitioners . Overall, women in traditional industries may be simply unaware or devoid of resources to utilize more sustainable practices.

Solution

Industree's reaction to this complexity is marked by a multi-pronged approach that addresses the phenomenological root while promoting empowerment and longevity. Within this framework, Industree sparks women's skill-building programs to provide the required knowledge and competencies to engage in sustainable enterprises. Similarly, by offering market access and entrepreneurship, Industree allows women to become self-owning entrepreneurs³¹, significantly disrupting the underpaid and impoverished employment cycle. Finally, these efforts are further compounded by collaborative links and relationships with organizations like Mindtree, Vrutti, Tata Trusts, and UNDP that enable Industree to exponentially increase its influence. Thus, partnership and teamwork exhibit the necessity of collective actions and collaboration in addressing complex social issues.



Concluding,

³⁰<https://archive.unesewa.org/environmental-degradation#:~:text=Definition%20English%3A,and%20the%20extinction%20of%20wildlife.>

³¹ <https://www.industree.org.in/portfolio/ektha/>

However, Industree’s mission is not just about empowering women economically. Instead, it is about giving women their dignity and self-direction back: the opportunity to prosper, individually and collectively, with a sense of mission. Indeed, the programs like Mission Creative Million illustrate Industree’s desire to have a profound impact on these women’s lives: one million producers to become better off. Even the company’s solutions – such as self-owned enterprises, blended finance models, and technology³² – show that the organization has a forward-looking approach to modern business conditions. This inventive strategy, combined with a holistic approach to empowerment, points the way to a brighter and fairer future for women in India’s creative manufacturing sector³³. At this point in its evolution, Industree is both a harbinger of change and a leader – a catalyst allowing women to create a better future and ensuring that livelihoods are sustainable and promising.



Innovative Solutions

**Self-Owned
Enterprises**

**Blended
Finance**

**Mission Creative
Million**



³²<https://industreefoundation.wordpress.com/2023/05/15/transforming-rural-womens-lives-through-technology/>

³³ <https://industreefoundation.wordpress.com/2022/10/05/in-the-spirit-of-sdgs/>

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Case Note 3

How is the organisation in the larger picture?

Introduction

When considering the broader socio-economic picture, it is crucial to consider the following: what makes organizations such as InduTree Foundation so vital in addressing systemic issues facing women in India? Widespread poverty compels female workers in developing countries to accept low-wage employment under dreadful working conditions. Furthermore, they have little and no access to affordable education and training opportunities. These factors contribute to significant gender inequalities and economic hardships (International Labour Organization, 2018). The purpose of analyzing these systemic barriers is to examine how they contribute to the cycle of poverty and limit women's economic opportunities. Understanding the issues proves to be important to evaluate the effectiveness of social enterprises in women's empowerment as they provide them with skills and possibilities to enhance their life quality and disrupt the existing inequalities. Through this approach, we aim to explore the vital role these organizations play in the larger context of promoting gender equity and economic inclusivity.

Patriarchal Economic Structures and Gender Disparities

Maria Mies' analysis in the "Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale" shows us how we can understand economic structures take shape under fundamentally patriarchal power dynamics (Mies 1986) and India as a developing economy is particularly evident here. These structures are deeply entrenched manifestations of societal norms that inherently undervalue women's roles, setting up a cycle of societal undervaluation and low remuneration. For instance, in India, labor markets are impacted by patriarchal economic structures which divert women into undervalued sectors such as textiles, handicraft, and agriculture which impact women labor market outcomes. This divergence reflects societal norms, where women are limited in their economic prospects and their pay. As reported by the International Labour Organization, around 81% of all employed people in India have an informal arrangement of employment. This is highly detrimental to women's rights and status, as many of them have silent work contracts that come with low wages, poor working conditions, lack of job and employment security and high risk of physical and sexual harassment (International Labour Organization, 2018). This situation also signals multiple problems with work autonomy, relative career progression opportunities that women have, and the lack of adequate oversight and regulation.

Low Wages and Poor Working Conditions

The informal sector employing the overwhelming majority of women in India operates completely out of the labor laws, which results in significant wage discrepancies and the absence of normal working conditions. The World Economic Forum claims that the wage gap among

genders in India is not only significant but one of the highest in the world at 34%, meaning that women earn 34% less on average for the same job (World Economic Forum, 2020). Another reason for this gap is the absence of a formal labor contract which for most women means that they have very little power to demand better pay or improved working circumstances. This is also true of health and safety conditions, as most informal firms fail to comply with even the most basic health and safety standards and women who work there are exposed to increased risks. This is not only a matter of non-enforcement of current laws, but also an indication that women's labor is persistently undervalued by the prevailing economic pattern.

Limited Access to Education and Vocational Training

In India, women's educational opportunities are severely restricted by a combination of socio-cultural barriers and poverty. Despite significant steps to increase female literacy, the latter accounts for only 65.8 percent, whereas male literacy reaches 82.1 percent (UNESCO, 2019). As a result, women are often unable to secure well-paying or stable jobs, further trapping them in the low-paid and unregulated sectors of the economy. In addition, few vocational training programs are available to Indian women, denying them access to alternatives that could offer higher-pay or require specialized skills. Ultimately, the pervasive educational inequalities not only constrain women's earning potential but also drive them into a vicious circle of poverty and reliance.

Gender Stereotypes and Labor Segregation

Labor segregation and subsequent stereotypes often relegates large groups of women into sectors where they cannot fully utilize their potential. In many societies around the world, including India, textile, handicraft production, and domestic services are seen as appropriate areas available for women. In addition to the low salaries, these sectors are usually not very regulated, offering limited opportunities for professional development. However, this characteristic can be both a cause and a consequence of labor segregation. As a shorthand on the economy, it legitimizes the undervalued character of women's work in society in general. The participation of women in the labor force in India was especially low. According to the World Bank, in 2019, it was 20.3%, compared to the male participation that was 78.4% (The World Bank, 2020). This relegation of economic activity for women not only diminishes their opportunities in the labor market, limiting their economic potential. Furthermore, it reinforces the anti patriarchal idea that a woman's primary role is domestic. Thus, it supports gendered beliefs and practices, promoting the system of a gendered distribution of labor, which is disadvantageous for women.

Implications and Consequences

Economic Impact

The economic consequences of gender inequality in India's workforce are massive and diverse. According to the McKinsey Global Institute, the country could annually increase its GDP by up

to 27% if women participated in economic activities to the same extent as men (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018). This staggering potential uplift demonstrates that gender inequality is an economic waste. In addition to the loss of productivity and innovation resulting from women's insufficient engagement in the economy, half of the potential human capital remains undervalued. The latter is particularly crucial for a country like India, where accelerating economic growth is needed to address the living standards of a vast and growing population. Besides, women are proven to invest more of their earnings back into families compared to men, which tends to enhance the health, education, and living standards of the society's future generation. As a result, empowering women economically is not only about social justice; it is also a sustainable and inclusive economic development path.

Social Impact

The implications of the economic gap in India are far more reaching than just the metrics of finance; the divide is destroying the social fabric and the coherence of local communities. A lack of economic opportunity has impaired the position that women have in their families and society, shifting their capacity to play an active role in decision-making and enabling the cycle of gender discrimination. As women lack financial security, they are engaged in fewer community affairs and public activities, further reinforcing the social norms of gender responsibility and feeding the discrimination between generations. At the same time, economic disempowerment makes women more vulnerable to domestic violence and abuse, as financial security is the alternative to living in an abusive household and an essential instrument for advocating rights to safety. By eliminating these economic obstacles, the work of the Industree Foundation ensures the increased safety of individuals while contributing to the culture that genuinely promotes mutual gender equality, alters the norm, and guarantees social parity.

Conclusion

Considering women's challenges in India's labor market, it is evident that socio-economic ones are inherent in societal systems. Drawing on my findings, social enterprises, such as Industree Foundation are indeed critical: it not only cures the symptoms of gender disparity but in actively dismantling the structures that perpetuate these inequalities. Industree's model, a point-to-point model based on women's skill development and unification in the cooperative, is highly effective in addressing the immediate and pressing needs, developing the muscles needed to tackle the root causes of the problem. This compiles the characteristic of social entrepreneurship approach to maximize social impact, search for sustainable solutions, and utilize local resources to address local problems. Hence, it seems like an optimal choice to tackle social inequality.

Moreover, understanding the depth of these issues has only further strengthened my conviction in the role of social entrepreneurship in economic growth and the empowerment of women. The projected boost to India's GDP that full economic participation of women can offer shows gender equity is in the economic interest of even the most conservative governments. The efforts

to support and scale this type of initiatives, such as the ones we have studied in Industree Foundation, can also offer a real roadmap for any regions or countries with similar challenges.

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