

## **Social Entrepreneurship – As a Tool for Sustainable Development of Women in Rural India Leading to Economic Empowerment**

Dr. Sridevi Samineni<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Post-Doctoral Research Fellow-UGC 2016, Department of Business Management, Osmania University, Hyderabad, Telangana State, India,  
Corresponding Author: Dr Sridevi Samineni

**Abstract:** The empowerment journey of women is in its midway, it's an opportune context to look back and take the stock of the progress achieved so far. More importantly it is to look ahead to commit to the path for the future. Women need to progressively think to create an ecosystem collectively for empowering themselves economically and contribute to the nation building. This paper examines the social initiatives that are taken up at various levels by the community based organizations set up by the mutually aided groups to improve the livelihood opportunities for women in rural India. It also looks at the impact of these community based organizations for sustainable rural development. And dwells on understanding the economic status of women by livelihood enhancement through social entrepreneurship, by taking few examples where women are taking lead in the economic empowerment journey. This paper is based on ongoing research to highlight the 'Social Model' for building the social capital for sustainable development and increase the economic enhancement of rural women.

**Key words:** Ecosystem, Empowerment, Community based organizations, Social Model, Sustainable development

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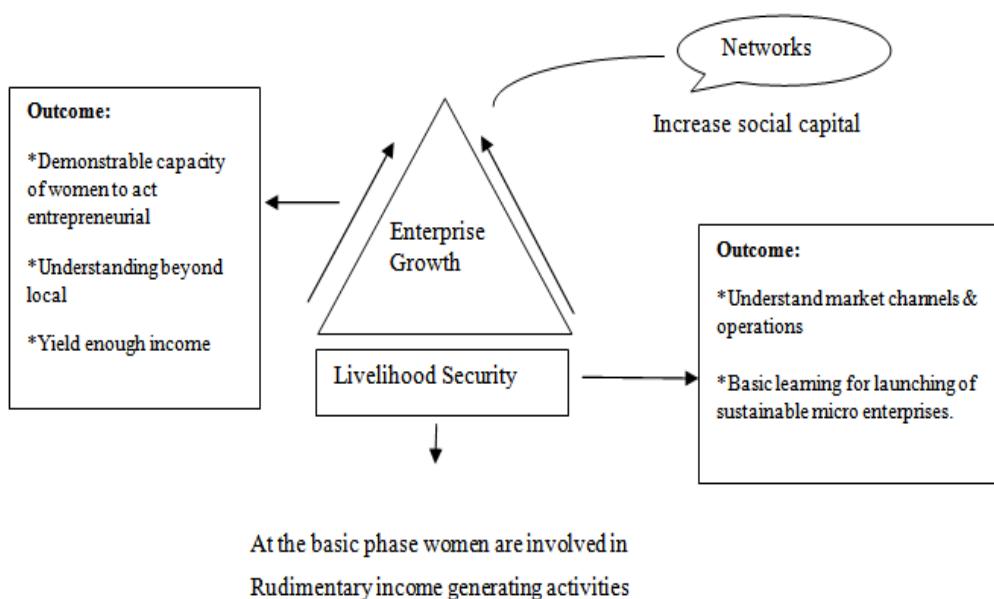
### **I. Introduction**

Economically empowered women are essential for the growth of the individual families as well as to the progress of the nation. The broader development goals of the nation such as equal prosperity, economic growth, health, education and welfare for all can only be achieved only if women are given equal opportunities who are half of the population. Empowering women will be a win-win situation to all the stakeholders. Realizing this fact governments are introducing many schemes for women to start their own activities. Women who are empowered contribute more to their families, societies and national economies also, so investing in their progress will lead to sustainable development. The specific factors for economic advancement of women may not be the same in all circumstances, they may be different in different contexts, regions and countries as well. Designing an economic framework of empowerment by understanding the wider opportunities that are available and the specific challenges that are faced by women. Choosing their own 'slice' for progress and put the right effort may lead to success. Resources and local conditions play a significant role in measuring the success of any effort. Ensuring that 'no one is left behind' is at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and is a fundamental guiding principle for its implementation. In India NITI Aayog has been entrusted with the role of coordinating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDGs are broadly classified into four focus areas (1) Human Development (2) Economic development (3) Environmental development (4) Good governance. In the above Human development & Economic development go hand in hand for sustainable growth. Provision of decent work, no poverty & accelerating economic growth tend to be important for any nations growth.

### **II. Social Entrepreneurship – A Tool for Sustainable Development**

An innovative mind, a service heart, an entrepreneurial spirit and a collaborative outlook these are the rules of the new game, of collaborative and fluid 'leadership' to succeed as social entrepreneurs. Picking up from the ancient Chinese proverb according to 'Philanthropy/Charity "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day..."' The NGO/Government Model "...teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime" But 'Social Entrepreneurship' is "Provide him access to capital to create a sustainable fishing business at a fair rate of return and change the world" the difference is only the denomination of returns and the scale of the business. This is the basis for social entrepreneurship. It is a business model for larger interest where the community comes together for the community development to fulfill a social mission. This can be a model to develop village enterprises by taking the local resources into consideration. Building on relations and by refining and re-refining to reach the grass

roots is the strategy. To make women part of the strategy they are been trained and motivated to become active both at the level of discovering strategies and implementing them by maintaining the language of equality and translate into practicable measures. As (Carter.S, 2007)argue, there is a local embeddedness in social entrepreneurship, often with an emphasis on identifying and meeting local social objectives. Amin (2009)(Amin.A, 2009) talks about two main routes that lead to becoming a social entrepreneur. One is about being nurtured with the social economy and using the skills and resources acquired within that setting. The other is to come from the public or private sector and apply skills. Evidence from the UK suggests however that very young individuals are not very well represented among social entrepreneurs (Ramsay and Danton, 2010). It is important to consider the effect of age as there may also be potential links with the type of social enterprise being set up: younger social entrepreneurs may work on transformational actions while older social entrepreneurs may tend to focus more on charitable organizations which are a good blend for sustainability and development. It might also be alternative forms of organizations that are adopted by younger social entrepreneurs which serve the needs of the society. Other studies focused on the development of social capital which is important in the creation and subsequent development of social enterprises (Leadbeater, 1997; Thompson, 2002). Research into the potential importance of social capital among social entrepreneurs shows some evidence that personal/family history of (social) entrepreneurship may have a positive influence on the creation of social ventures (e.g. Spear, 2006).Social entrepreneurs show drive, determination, ambition, charisma, leadership, the ability to communicate vision and inspire others and their maximum use of resources (Shaw and Carter, 2007:422). To do so, as Alvord et al. (2004) suggest, a characteristic associated with successful social entrepreneurs is that of a 'bridging capacity'. This capacity is shaped by a social entrepreneur's background and experience which in turn is shaped by societal relations. Many social enterprises are run by entrepreneurial teams, particularly those with a tradition from the cooperative sector. In terms of a gendered approach, it would be important to understand how men and women operate in social entrepreneurial teams (Dr Anne Laure Humbert,2012).Shaw and Carter (2007) stress the importance of opportunity recognition, economical and/or social need, with the latter of key importance for social entrepreneurs. Microcreditenables women to access financial capital, a critical factor in economic empowerment. However, it is just one of the resources she needs for economic success. Other factors include human capital (eg: education, skills, training)Physical capital (eg: Land, Machinery)Social capital (eg: Networks). From the figure:1 it is very clear that at the basic phase if women of community groups (probable Self-Help Groups in the local areas) are made involved in the income generating activities as a social mission aiming to increase their economic strength and helping to stand on their feet and aspiring their family to go to the next level by shouldering the financial burden. According to the Persian proverb '*a stone through at the right time is better than the gold given at the wrong time*', When people act collectively, they marshal their individual capabilities and choices to overcome threats and their combined resilience deepens, development progresses and makes it more sustainable



**Fig: 1**Capacity building for women especially for greater market Access & Control  
**Source:** Model developed from the understanding of the field study by the author

### **III. Social Entrepreneurs – Co-Operative Movement Foreconomic Empowerment**

When women band together in a co-operative structure, both their economic and social standing in the household improves. It is proved in the study in one rural community where the women have formed an organic farming co-operative, they have pooled their resources and are now able to extend loans to its members to buy seed and other farming inputs (Patrice Braun,2010). Creation of social capital plays a vital role in creating collective consciousness among less empowered women. Economic empowerment focuses on the higher access to credit and savings and other economic resources, such as business training, leads to a better economic position for women, leading further to a better bargaining position at home and in the community. Social capital plays a crucial role in the social empowerment of women, which can be viewed in terms of a higher level of concretization of women in enhancing awareness and knowledge, a higher level of interactive activities leading to higher mobility, higher collective action and better decision-making abilities, and better social position in the family and neighborhood (Poverty and Public Policy,2014).Hailing from Rajasthan, choosing to be a social worker and moulded herself to be a social entrepreneur, a commitment to empower has been her karma. She started her venture called Antar Educational Research and Development Foundation. She works with tribal women in creating Amla products that are marketable and are currently initiating operation in Bharatpur and Jaipur (Vineetha, Social Entrepreneur, TISS 2017).Archana's desire to work in agriculture further fueled the fire of working for farmers especially on their dignity as being on par with other sectors. She now works with tribal farmers in cultivation and preservation of indigenous crops. She is working towards promoting millets as the healthy alternatives to rice especially helpful for diabetic patients and women (Archana, Social Entrepreneur, TISS 2017), The Grameenmall Foundation is a Non-Profit Organization (NGO) that works with small and marginal women farmers in Telagana State. It supports work to expand opportunity and strengthen resilience to social, economic and environmental challenges. Initiating farmer collective on Millets at Godhamguda to build sustainable agriculture enterprise owned and managed by community. Grameenmall (GMF's) primary objective was to strengthen the livelihoods of small and marginal farmers in working villages particularly women. To make a significant impact on the food and nutritional security as well as the family income (Grameen Mall Foundation, Working with marginal farmers, A Social Enterprise).Social enterprises may be different to the conceptualization of the ‘heroic’ individual. For instance, Amin (2009:39) describes those leading organization's in his study as mainly directors answering to a board of trustees or management committee, and working with a small team of people responsible for specific tasks such as finance, operations, sales or human resources.

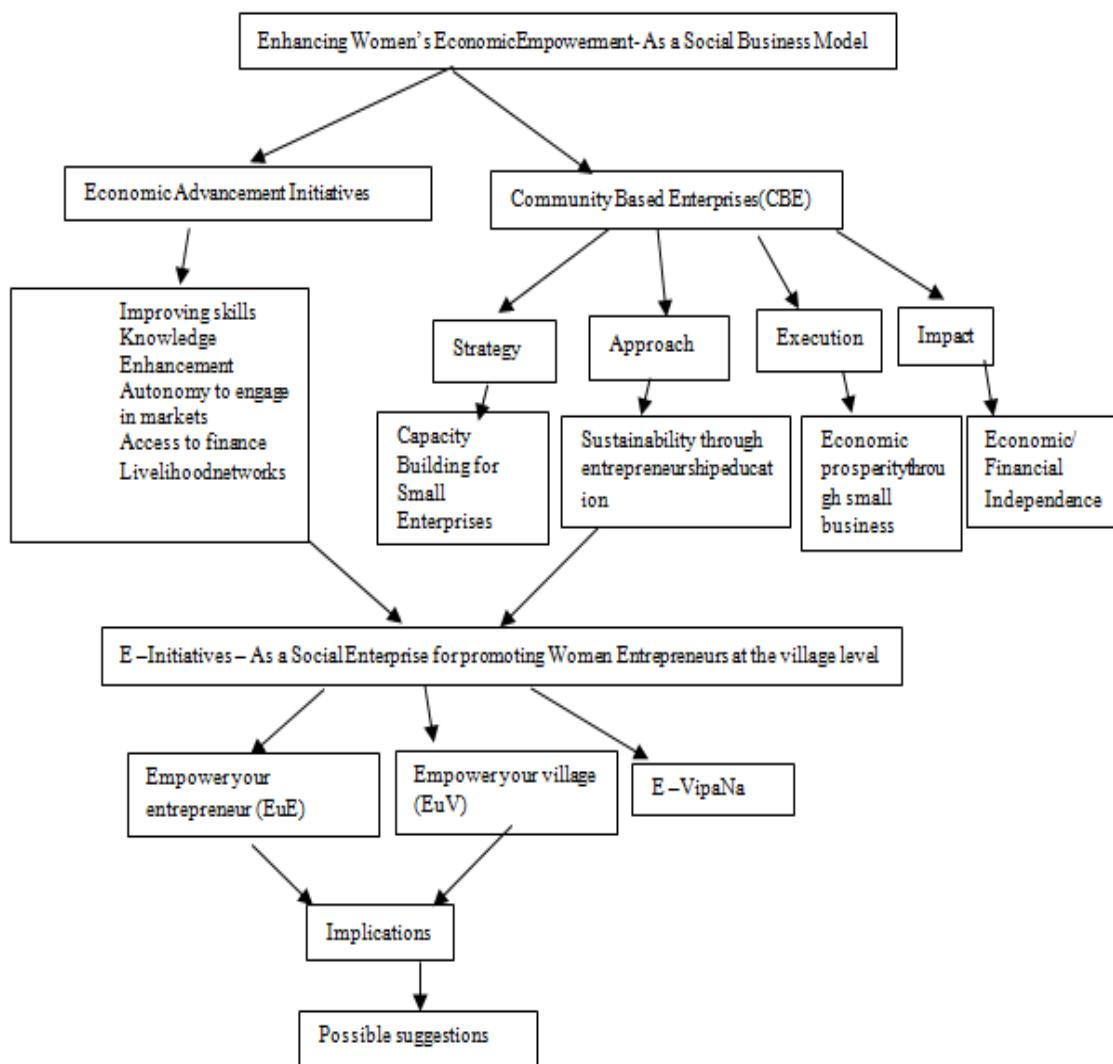
#### **Objectives of the study**

1. To study and understand the strategies for enhancing women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship-Social Entrepreneurship as a strategy.
2. To explore the condition under which community-based enterprises could be an alternative model of entrepreneurial activity to enhance rural livelihoods and promotesocio-economic development.

### **IV. Methodology**

Survey instruments include structured schedules for women who are working with the social enterprise, Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews. Information is being collected on the socio-economic profiles of the women such as agency & opportunity structure, sources of income, spending power, family status and education. Most of the information is from the ground where women are truly involved in the social enterprises. The data is not quantified but the perceptions of the women are understood and tried to depict their economic enhancement by understanding the standard of living. The journey of empowerment is explained in the current paper with four case-studies among them three are already in the growth phase whereas the fourth one is in the implementation stage with a proposal of making it as a social enterprise. In this the socio-economic conditions of the village in which the study has been carried out. Data on the functioning of CBOs (community based organizations), NGOs(non-government organizations), social movements, implementation of welfare and development schemes, status of women including barriers for participation will be elicited for the analysis.

**Research Design:**



**Fig:2** Implementation strategy through a social business model

**Source:** Developed from the understanding of the field study by the author

The study is based on focused group discussions (FGDs) and laid emphasis on the changes visualized/experienced in the quality of life, decision making at household level by the women members and facilitating/hindering factors for their enhancing economic empowerment. The research is being taken up at two levels, at the first level it tries to focus on economic advancement initiatives and focus on Improving skills, Knowledge Enhancement, Autonomy to engage in markets, Access to finance, Livelihood networks etc. In the second level focusing on building on community enterprises with co-operation of village women groups. The research design is explained in the diagrammatic form in the above fig:2.

## V. Social Entrepreneurship Leading To Women Empowerment

### (A) Case Study -1

**(i)The Deccan development Society:** The Deccan Development Society (DDS), is a two and half decade old grassroots organization working in about 75 villages with women's Sanghams (voluntary village level associations of the poor) in Medak District of Telangana State,India. The 5000 women members of the Society represent the poorest of the poor in their village communities. Most of them are dalits, the lowest group in the Indian social hierarchy. The Society has a vision of consolidating these village groups into vibrant economic groups by empowering them through organic farming. The vision seems to be a reality today, facilitating all the women action groups collectively progressing towards the economic empowerment through the SEED' journey. Initially it started off with the intention of ensuring the simple sustenance needs but the women have taken it the next level with their collective effort. It is a tool of empowerment for them today to address the larger issues of food security, natural resource enhancement, education, and health needs of the region. The conscious

integration of various activities the Society has helped to retrieve women's natural leadership positions in their communities, and to fight back one of the empowerment dimension i.e the lack of access and control over their own resources.

**(ii)Our Seeds – Our power:** As part of the mission these women have taken the responsibility of preserving the traditional crops by saving the seeds in the seed bank. These women believe and understand that seeds' hold special place in the journey of farming which leads to empowerment. These small grains are the basis for the future generations. They shape, at each life cycle, the type of food people eats, how it is grown, and who grows it. Every woman in the society has taken the oath to cultivate and conserve the traditional varieties of crops. They have special mechanism implemented at Deccan development society by borrowing and lending of seeds by individual farmers in the seed bank\*. From the seedbank if one sola' (the measurement used in Telugu states) is given as a loan from the seed bank she has to give back one more to the given amount of seeds. Which means repayment of the loan taken in the form of seeds are also given back again in the form of seeds as interest. This is how the seedbank is maintained. There is a unique mechanism of preserving the seeds from pests by coating the seeds with liquid neem, which is again prepared by the women themselves.

### **Impact & Outcome at DDS**

#### **(iii)Economic Enhancement Initiatives**

**Training:** The first level of initiatives is taken up by the Deccan Development Societies (DDS) by providing access information, knowledge & training facilities by dividing them into small groups called Sanghams\*\*.The 'Attalusangham' (Mother-in-laws group) who are the first members of the society who are been trained in all the methodologies right from the seed storing to processing the product (the entire value chain of the economic activity).The way forward to transfer the tacit knowledge to the next generation by starting the 'KodalluSangham'(Daughter-in-laws group). This was started three years back where the senior members 'Attalu' (Mother-in-laws) who are already in the sanghams for past many years pass on the experiences by making these 'kodallu'(Daughter-in-laws) work along with them and take them where ever they are moving and get the real-time experience of passing on the practices &knowledge of seed journey. This is a unique approach of training the illiterate women for taking forward the sustainable farming practices to the next generations.

#### **(iv)Community Based Enterprise(CBE)**

**Sangham Organics – The market for their product:**The Deccan Development Societies (DDS)Sangham\*\* Organics is country's first organic market run by women farmers at Jaheerabad, medak district of Telangana state, India. This farmer's market is another dimension of the Deccan Development Society's discourse on control. In the age of globalization, where market is open and sales can be done at anywhere in the world. Creating own markets for their produced product is the idea behind the establishment of Sanghams' by making them finished and semi-finished and ready to use products. Initially the market was limited to cater their own needs, in 2001 a mobile van was introduced the system to transport the products to the villages regularly to provide the easier access to their market. An extension of the farmer's market has been the formation of the Zaheerabad Consumers Action group to take the product to the urban market. This action group tries to act as a link between Consumer- Producer network. Slowly the urban consumers are created awareness of the organic foods and traditional foods. By establishing the Café Ethinic a restaurant at Jaheerabad, medak district, India for urban consumers by creating awareness for the forgotten foods like RaagiSankati, Ambali, kora payasametc are served. The women's market has been able to earn a unique identity for themselves.

**(v) Interpretation:** The journey of empowerment through seed at Deccan Development Society (DDS) made lot of impact in the lives of women. Their social and economic status has increased and their children are in advantageous position making a good living and getting educated and respect in the society. Women members of DDS are mentors for so many groups across the country travelling to many places and making difference in their lives. This is a social enterprise creating impact in the lives of women with a social mission of empowering them economically and helping them to have a sustainable impact in their lives.

### **(B) Case Study -2**

#### **(i)Karthumbi -Creating colorful canopies at Attappady – Palakkad district**

A 60 member collective of tribal women from Attappady,inPalakkad district of Kerala state in India by various settlements in the region launched their *Karthumbi*brand.The mission is to empower women economically and socially. These women want to unfurl their offerings in this seasonal market, with their own high-quality products in diverse colours and designs. *Thambu'* A voluntary tribal organization is supported by overseas Malayalis financially and several state departments as a social initiative supporting this collective group. The members are from tribal community who are illiterates and not having any livelihood. Most of the

women members who are involved in umbrella-making never owned any umbrellas now they can make their livelihood through it. This area is known for its poverty and malnutrition but today they are making 8 to 10 umbrellas a day and earn Rs 600 a daily wage. The time is to realize that paradigm shifts have occurred from seeing women as mere recipients of welfare benefits to mainstreaming gender concerns and engaging them in the development process of the country.

#### **Impact & Outcome at Thambu through Karthumbi**

##### **(ii) Interpretation**

This collective initiative promoted by *Thambu'* is bringing colours in the lives of many women. Collective effort and interest free loans helped them to have collective economic empowerment. There is a noticeable confidence among the members as they are making their livelihood through this economic activity. Their kids are going to school and family's economic standard improved. After selling the finished goods the members could repay the loans. The formation of common-interest groups consisting primarily of women had a substantial impact on their lives. The impact of collective group on women's empowerment and social security has been invariably an improvement from the status quo but there is a need for support in several areas. The status of women has generally improved as they have developed stronger confidence which has changed gender dynamics and their role in the household.

#### **(C) Case Study – 3**

##### **(i) Grameen Mall Foundation- Diversifying choices securing livelihoods**

The mission of the organization is building sustainable agriculture with local communities by their participation in the rural communities. The vision of the founders is to envision a thriving eco-system that inspires, nurtures and transforms innovation and enterprises to impact lives. Seed diversity, creating market linkage, seed conservation and production by the local people is the sustainable mechanism adopted by the foundation and this is the key for their success. Right from the inception the foundation is working towards promotion of Community Sustainable agriculture - which is a production system that sustains the health of soils, eco-system, food and nutritional security of rural people. the focus is on grass root levels to coordinating with women farmer groups to educate, train and assist them through all phases of organic farming till it connects with end user.

##### **(ii) Impact & Outcome at Grameen through Aahaaram**

Initiative to link Rural Agri Sector to main stream economy by creating market linkage and build sustainable agricultural enterprise managed and owned by community. The *Shakthi*'- an initiative for creating value creation by end products reaching the consumers. The impact created by linking with markets is very high as urban customers relate to rural farmers through these linkages. The mediators are completely avoided for the better price to the produce. The outcome created in few villages is remarkable and the goal to empower the farmer, create food & nutrition security for rural women and create farmer self-reliance at the grass roots is achieved.

#### **(D) Case Study-4**

##### **(i) AnthaPrarena- A Social Enterprise - Research model**

*Anthaprarena* believes in leveling the playing field by creating pro-women initiatives by enabling women to rise and fulfill their innate abilities and talents. The Vision of the organization is Creating Zeal for Entrepreneurship through Education & Training as a Social Mission with a mission is by Empowering through enterprise Training. The following are some of the economic advancement initiatives at *Anthaprarena*. *Improving Skills:* Opportunities are wide spread, provided the necessary skills and overall capacity development is done in the right direction. To create livelihood security women are to be involved in income generating activities by providing training and creating understanding in market dynamics. *Knowledge Enhancement:* Introducing modern technologies and creating awareness in using various new methodologies for effective managing, monitoring and marketability of the products. *Autonomy to engage in markets:* Creating interventions to engage with the markets and reducing the complex supply chain from producer to consumer. Identifying the huge corporate where the big players in the market can clearly approach the rural catchments with new and very unconventional strategies. Training women on pricing, market dynamics, feasibility, business planning, and systems development. *Access to finance:* Providing link between the social enterprise and financial institutions, government organizations and societal change agents by conducting awareness programmes. *Livelihood networks:* Women have been characterized variously as marginalized, powerless, exploited, ignorant, and unskilled, the reason for such characterization is basically their lack of education, exposure to the outer world, decision making power. Creating a social enterprise network between various women groups and encouraging them to increase returns from their income-generating activities, this not only helps to have more income for the family, but also women's economic role would get recognized in the larger platform.

**(ii)The Strategy:Capacity Building for Small Enterprises**

Capacity –Building @AnthaPrarena always intends to help women to make the transition from livelihood security to enterprise growth. Preparing women at the village level to establish and develop the enterprises. Capacity Building Program aims to educate & expand each beneficiary's social perspective and technical ability at the grass root level through an integral education that nurtures individual capacity for self-empowerment. Developing leadership strategies and Building on In-Service Trainings, Exposure & Educational Trips, organizing Cluster Meetings, Seminars & Workshops etc.

**(iii)Approach:Sustainability through Entrepreneurship Education**

AnthaPrrena believes in creating sustainability by protecting and supporting women in building on emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical health individually, so that they may best participate in their own self-empowerment and betterment of their community. It tries to focus on the following three parameters i.e Competencies, Resources & Authority. If women are being trained in these parameters then empowerment can be achieved in its true sense.

**(iv)Execution:Economic prosperity through small businesses**

Fostering Economic Prosperity through small and micro businesses at the grass root level by identifying Income generating opportunities in farm and non –farm sectors. Providing training for the incubated groups in technical & non-technical areas using ICT.

**(v)Impact: Economic /Financial independence**

The twin impact of this model is to empower women economically through small businesses and provide access to the safe, clean & healthy living in the rural communities. This increases the livelihood capacity and employability in the rural communities. And thus, decrease the rural urban divide.

## **VI. The Way Forward**

Social entrepreneurship with co-operative approach provide an entrance into business ownership for many people who would not likely to start or own a business by themselves. It is a self-help response of mutual co-operation to economic crisis to all the women who are participating aiming to lead sustainable development whether in the broader society or in each enterprise at the base village level. Co-operative incubation at the village level act as a driving force benefiting low income members. It also provided a large variety of benefits including better paying jobs, wealth and skill building, enhanced control over their lives & better bargaining power in the larger society. The few factors for ensuring successful worker participation in the social entrepreneurship are (i) Effective and long-term support (ii) On-going training & cultivation of co-operative culture (iii) Inducing continuous capital (iv) Building on strong network (v) Social awareness (vi) good governance. The core objective of social entrepreneurship is building capacity for women especially for greater access and control. Teaching Business Valuation from a “Triple Bottom Line” perspective i.e the equation 3 Ps + 1 People, Planet, Profit & .....Partnerships, realizing the vision of '*Equitable and sustainable society where people live in peace & dignity*'. Changes are coming slowly but surely a great deal of work is still required from all the stakeholders involved: The government, civil society, private sector, development organization etc. To succeed and have sustainable development women must become active both at the level of discovering strategies and implementing them by maintaining the language of equality and translating them into practicable measures is the way forward for realizing the dream ‘Economic Enhancement leading to Economic Empowerment’.

\*Seed bank is a place where the seeds are collected from each women farmer after the harvest.

\*\*Sanghams are small village level groups established by DDS.

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