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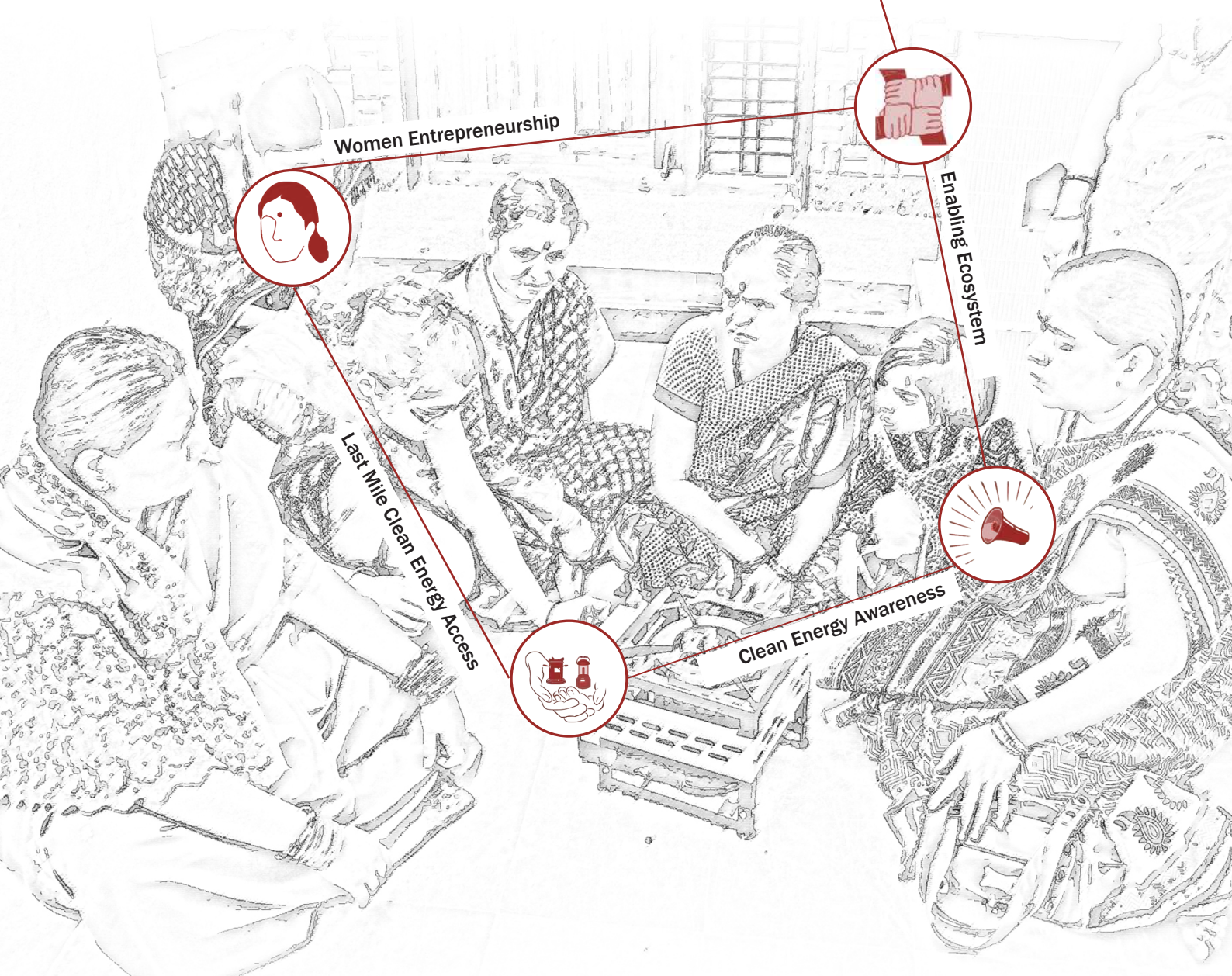


wPOWER: **DOTS**

Connecting the

Partnership on Women's Entrepreneurship in Clean Energy program (wPOWER India) – An innovative market-based partnership model, empowering rural women as clean energy entrepreneurs and energy leaders

A Resource Guide



Women Entrepreneurship

Last Mile Clean Energy Access

Clean Energy Awareness

Enabling Ecosystem

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Foreword

Energy access has improved dramatically over the last twenty years in India, with more than 75 percent of the population now having electricity. Yet, millions of households in India, particularly in rural areas still suffer from a chronic lack of access to modern energy services while they also face the brunt of the risks associated with climate change. It should not come as a surprise that, as the primary managers of energy, water and essential services within households, women are often at the heart of efforts to devise and deploy lasting solutions to adapt to a changing climate.

Clean energy technology and its products, have become more reliable, affordable, and diverse, with advanced solutions existing in the market today. The demand for these solutions, and their adoption, however, continue to lag behind because prospective clients are often unaware of them, or do not have easy access to them. Empowering and creating strong networks of women clean energy entrepreneurs can significantly enhance outreach, and enable access to clean energy information and solutions for the “last mile”. For such networks to achieve their potential and scale, a clear partnership strategy for enhanced access to technologies, finance and new markets, is essential.

The Partnership on Women’s Entrepreneurship in Clean Energy program (wPOWER India) has built and empowered a network of over 1,000 women-clean energy entrepreneurs, who work in rural underserved areas. They enable market-based solutions to work for rural communities that have a concrete need for modern energy solutions. This unique initiative of wPOWER connects all the vital dots including, women’s entrepreneurship, awareness of clean energy technologies, access to products and support over the last mile. By integrating women entrepreneurs with the clean energy technology supply chain, wPOWER India creates a scalable and replicable public-private partnership model. The partnership ecosystem strengthens women entrepreneurship networks by providing them with access to technology, finance and markets.

This Resource Guide outlines how wPOWER India adopts a market-based approach to help the entire clean energy value chain provide workable solutions for rural Indians who want clean, affordable, and reliable energy for lighting, communication and cooking. It aims to equip readers with an understanding of how a diverse ecosystem comprising of various stakeholders including donors, the private sector, government agencies and financial institutions can contribute towards scaling and replicating the wPOWER India model.

JOHN BEED
MISSION DIRECTOR
USAID/India



wPOWER India - enhancing energy access in a unique way



166 mn

Households relying primarily on solid fuels for cooking in India



400 million

People lacking access to electricity in India



360 mn

Women in India are exposed to Indoor Air Pollution (IAP)

Women are critical stakeholders in the rural energy ecosystem as they play a pivotal role in energy and health dynamics at the household as well as community level. Lack of reliable access to electricity, clean fuel, safe water and sanitation however, forces women to remain occupied with household chores like collecting firewood and water, cooking and cleaning, restricting them from engaging in productive and other activities.

Environmental sustainability needs women

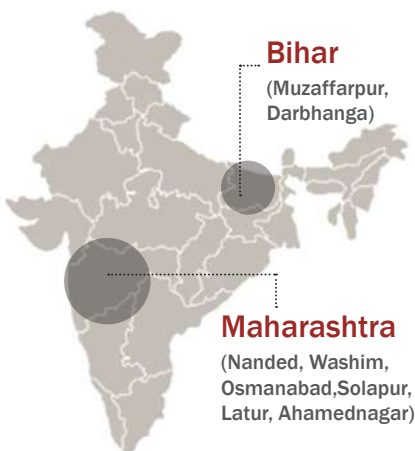
Women play a critical role in household energy dynamics and in ensuring health and wellbeing of their families and communities. They are part of organised self-help groups, possess strong community connect, environmental foresight and innate service orientation. Their experiences of helping communities contend with calamities like droughts and floods, makes them natural climate leaders. When recognised and resourced, empowered women's networks can lead from the front as change-makers, connecting communities and environment for ushering in sustainable development.

wPOWER India - connecting the dots

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) in partnership with USAID/India is implementing the Partnership on Women's Entrepreneurship in Clean Energy (wPOWER India) program. wPOWER India aims to empower rural women to launch clean energy businesses across underserved districts of Maharashtra and Bihar.

Mainstream interventions have attempted to address rural access to clean energy in the past. Majority of large scale efforts have focused on generating clean energy awareness or on providing access to clean energy solutions. Women's empowerment efforts have promoted entrepreneurship while wider development efforts have aimed to create supportive stakeholder ecosystems. Very few initiatives on scale, have however, attempted to connect all these dots at one go. wPOWER India, launched in October 2012, tries to do just that by:

- building a women's clean energy entrepreneurship network
- creating clean energy awareness
- creating last mile access to clean energy solutions
- creating an enabling clean energy partnership ecosystem



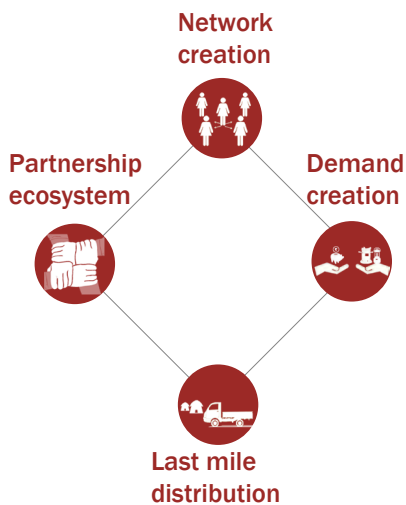
1,010

Sakis initiated into clean energy business

1,010,000

People reached through clean energy awareness initiatives

The wPOWER India model



The network of women clean energy entrepreneurs known as Sakhis forms the core of wPOWER India, aided by multi-sector partnerships that enhance access to technology, finance and markets. Key components of the model are Sakhi network creation, clean energy demand creation, last mile distribution, an enabling partnership ecosystem and Clean Energy Hub.

Network creation

The network of Sakhis or clean energy entrepreneurs and environment leaders created by wPOWER India, is positioned to reach rural communities at the doorstep with clean energy solutions. The networks, in turn, are linked with various public and private sector institutions.

Demand creation

Sakhis uncover the latent demand for clean energy solutions in villages, talukas and districts, using road shows, weekly market stalls and on the spot demonstrations. In addition, “try and buy” finance options are taken up by leading Sakhis to increase adoption of cooking and lighting solutions.

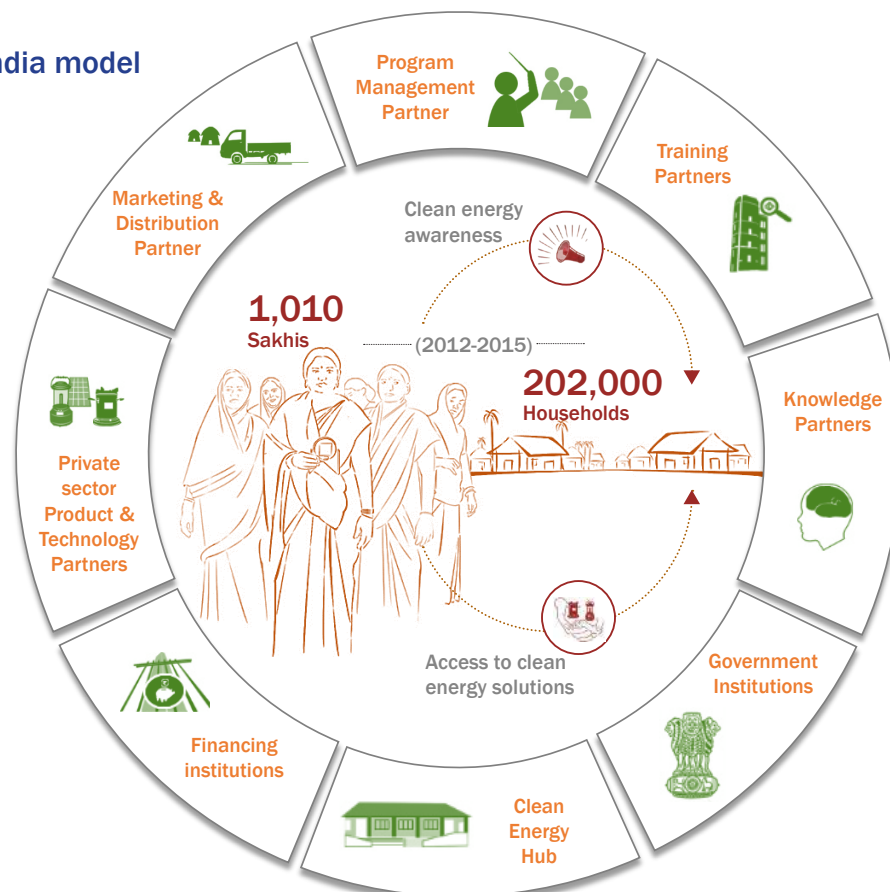
Last mile distribution

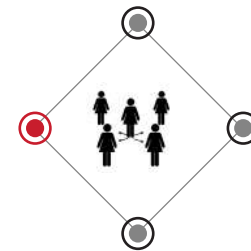
The marketing and distribution infrastructure and the Sakhi network deliver solutions like advanced cookstoves, solar lamps, solar water heaters and provide product servicing at the doorstep of rural households. By directly connecting manufacturers with the network, wPOWER India makes access to clean energy solutions seamless and affordable for rural end-consumers.

Partnership ecosystem and Clean Energy Hub

Diverse partners – private technology developers, banks, public energy agencies are enhancing access to products, technology and finance for Sakhis. The Clean Energy Hub, an innovative platform at the district level directly and meaningfully connects Sakhis and consumers with these partners.

The wPOWER India model





Building the women clean energy entrepreneurship network

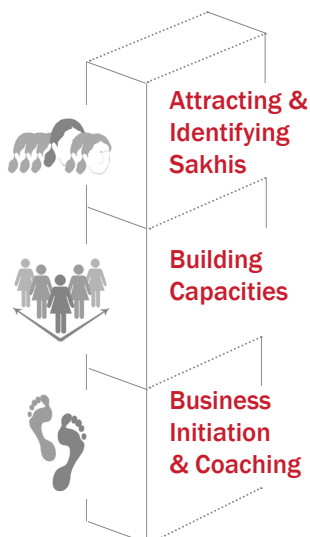
Pivotal role in household energy dynamics

Responsible for ensuring family health & wellbeing

Trustful relationships within communities

Natural service orientation

Environmental foresight



Engaging women as clean energy leaders and entrepreneurs makes good sense as they play a pivotal role in household energy usage dynamics and in ensuring health and wellbeing of their families. wPOWER India has put in place three crucial building blocks to create a strong network of women's clean energy entrepreneurs.

Why engaging with women in clean energy makes sense

Rural women are predominant end users of energy at the household level. They play a pivotal role in household decisions related to choice of fuel and technology, volume of fuel consumption and fuel purchase. They are therefore, in the best position to identify with the need for clean energy products.

Women shoulder primary responsibility of ensuring health and wellbeing of their families and education of their children. In this capacity they are more concerned about the harmful effects of conventional energy and better appreciate the health benefits of clean energy products.

Rural women enjoy sticky and trustful relationships within their communities which is important for creating and sustaining a new local clean energy market. As clean energy entrepreneurs women can readily and effectively connect with communities.

Women possess a natural orientation towards providing services. Being primary end users of energy, such an orientation urges them to service their communities' energy needs in the capacity of clean energy entrepreneurs.

Women better understand the potential impact of climate change and sustainable development on present and future generations. They are therefore, able to appreciate and articulate the connect between future energy needs of the community and environmental sustainability.

Core building blocks of the women's clean energy network

The women's clean energy entrepreneurship network has three important building blocks:

- **Attracting and identifying Sakhis** – All women who find the wPOWER India opportunity attractive may not become successful Sakhis. It is important to develop an approach for attracting and identifying women who have the greatest predisposition to success.
- **Building capacities** – Sakhis need to be provided training on clean energy technology, products, technical aspects of doing business and knowing their customers.
- **Business initiation and coaching** – Sakhis and their clean energy ventures need to be introduced to their communities. Following business initiation, they need to be provided tailored coaching support.



Perspectives of a Sakhi

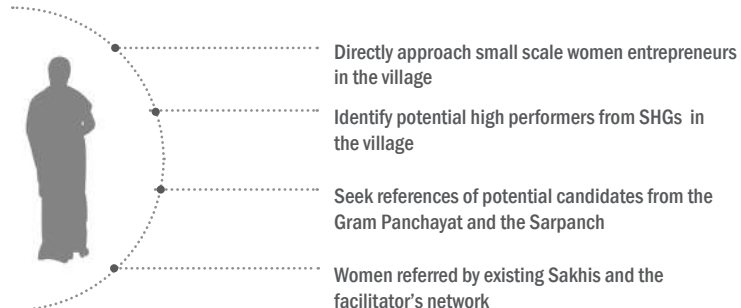
Sunita Shedole is an energetic Sakhi from Latur, Maharashtra. She was nominated by her self-help group as a potential entrepreneur. Her search for ways to serve her village community, led her to become an active SHG leader first and later an Anganwadi worker (government funded mother and child nutrition worker). Her dynamic, outgoing nature coupled with inherent commitment to business and social causes attracted her to wPOWER India.

Sunita has come a long way since the time she was identified as a wPOWER Sakhi in early 2013. She consistently features in the list of best performing Sakhis. The business mentoring and training she received under wPOWER opened a world of entrepreneurship opportunities for her. Earlier, she started with a mini-flour mill and a tailoring venture from her home. Over the past one year, she launched her own kirana/grocery shop where she stocks clean energy as well as a large number of grocery and stationery products. Suneeta has not only gained the trust of consumers through clean energy product sales in her village, but has also expanded her role as a supplier to smaller shops in neighbouring villages. Her shop supplies goods worth ₹20,000 (US\$ 330) every day to four kirana shops.

Attracting and identifying Sakhis

Where to find entrepreneurial talent

SSP focuses on identifying existing small scale women entrepreneurs for the role of Sakhis as it promises to radically increase chances of their success. SSP adopts a set of approaches for identifying entrepreneurial talent.



Attributes of an ideal Sakhi



Dynamic & outgoing

A Sakhi needs to be comfortable with interacting with people in her resident village as well as in catchment villages



Family/ Husband support

A Sakhi's success potential rises manifold if her business activities are approved and supported by her family



Shop location & design

A Sakhi should have a strategically located and well-designed shop for displaying clean energy products



Education level

Education influences business understanding and ability to communicate with and convince consumers



Social commitment

Profits should not be the sole motivator. A Sakhi must be committed to social objectives of wPOWER India



Willingness to invest

Willing to invest ensures that a Sakhi has a stake and interest in her clean energy business

Key Lessons Learnt

- Demonstration of clean energy products to prospective Sakhis and their families at the initial stage, enables them to make an informed decision to take up the entrepreneurial opportunity
- Women who enjoy family support and share a healthy balance of power position with their husbands, whereby husbands are motivated to partner them in their clean energy ventures, display greatest potential for success



Perspectives of a Facilitator

According to Raja Bhau, a highly experienced SSP facilitator, breaking down the curriculum into classroom sessions and on-field sessions has been catalytic in raising Sakhi interest and making the classroom sessions lively.

Raja Bhau also feels that the approach offers a greater number of touch points over an extended period for reviewing, discussing and resolving issues faced by Sakhis. Sakhis lay out plans at the end of a classroom session and discuss their experiences in context of the plans in the next session. The system serves as a monitoring and evaluation tool which is driven by Sakhis themselves.

He feels that heightened confidence in Sakhis due to training, is now evident from the way they freely interact with men and Gram Panchayats. SSP also encourages Sakhis to regularly visit rural households and conduct surveys which helps them gain better understanding of their energy needs.

Multiple touchpoints

Phased introduction to products

Less travel for Sakhis

Live content enrichment

Building capacities of Sakhis

The inside-outside approach





wPOWER recognizes two important dimensions of capacity building needs of Sakhis. Firstly, prevalent social structures and dynamics burden rural women with a deluge of household responsibilities, largely restricting their mobility, exposure and access to markets. On-field training can encourage them to overcome these barriers by building confidence and risk taking abilities. Secondly, they should also motivate women to change their outlook towards business through classroom training, peer support and business coaching.

SSP has evolved an effective 'inside-outside' capacity building approach that combines classroom sessions with on-field training sessions over an extended period of time, generally 3 to 4 months.



Testing on field what we learnt in class increased my confidence.

Sakhi Savita Putane

	 Energy	 Business	 Customers
 Knowledge & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for energy Conventional & renewable energy Benefits & applications of clean energy Clean energy product knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business planning Operations Marketing & promotion Financing Accounting & reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer segmentation Communication Monitoring & feedback After-sales servicing

Benefits of the approach

Sakhis receive step by step guidance and access to trainers over a longer period of time for clarifying their doubts

Allows phased introduction to clean energy products starting with simple products like solar lamps and then moving on to complex ones like cookstoves, solar water heaters etc.

On-field sessions held closer to Sakhis' homes cuts down on travel time, enabling them to attend regularly

Allows trainers to enrich training sessions with field experiences of Sakhis

Key Lessons Learnt

- Involving experienced Sakhis in conducting training sessions and sharing their experiences motivates Sakhis undergoing training, to apply them in marketing clean energy products
- Rolling out a Sakhi's clean energy business simultaneously with her capacity building gives her a live feel of the market while getting trained



Perspectives of a Facilitator

Devkanya is an experienced facilitator mentoring 25 Sakhis in Osmanabad district of Maharashtra. She motivates Sakhis to start, grow and sustain their clean energy businesses. For the business initiation events she urges Sakhis to create an enabling environment by inviting as many households as possible and also garner support from the Sarpanch and other opinion leaders.

Devkanya helps Sakhis initiate a survey of all households in their villages and understand how to use the information to identify needs, segment customers and evolve differentiated marketing pitches. She demonstrates to Sakhis the approaches for triggering consumer interest and scaling adoption by initially taking an active role during demonstrations. She also accompanies Sakhis to meet village opinion leaders. Gradually she takes a backseat prodding Sakhis to lead these activities, supporting them when they need help. After a few months Sakhis gain in confidence and become independent.

Sakhi business initiation and coaching

Setting up Sakhis for success

Clean energy being a niche and technical business line, it is important to schedule a planned introduction of the Sakhi through a business initiation event in her resident village. It formally announces her arrival as a clean energy torchbearer providing first of its kind access to clean energy solutions to the community.



From the day of my business launch event, I started getting a lot of enquires about my clean energy products.

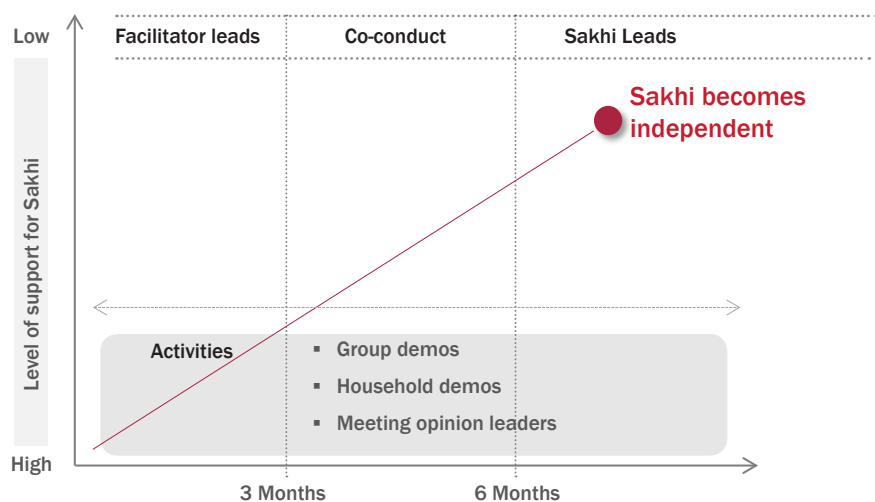
Sakhi Nita Tanwade

Business Initiation Event

Creates Visibility	The event establishes the Sakhi's physical presence by inaugurating her clean energy shop branded with wPOWER clean energy banner.
Establishes Credibility	The Sarpanch (village head) and other community opinion leaders inaugurate the event, expressing their support for the Sakhi.
Generates Confidence	An introduction by the SSP facilitator reassures the audience about support she enjoys from the organisation.
Triggers Interest	The first demonstrations of clean energy products and a lucky draw generate consumer interest.

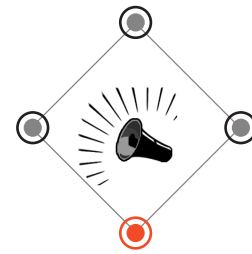
Coaching Sakhis to become independent

Post her business initiation, the Sakhi needs to be provided coaching support for about 3 months. For the next 3 months, she gains in confidence after which she begins to independently drive her clean energy business.



Key Lessons Learnt

- A well-publicized business initiation event goes a long way in establishing credibility of the Sakhi and providing necessary fillip to her clean energy marketing initiatives
- A skilled facilitator, who is aware of the rural ground realities and is empathetic towards individual coaching needs of Sakhis, is best geared to provide tailored handholding support



Creating clean energy awareness

Clean energy solutions are push products which rural BOP households are unfamiliar with. Raising awareness about ill effects of using conventional energy, benefits of convenience and potential savings associated with using clean energy solutions is vital for scaling up adoption. wPOWER India has enhanced clean energy awareness levels of over 1 million rural people via clean energy weekly market stalls, community group meetings, wall paintings and distribution of informative leaflets. Heightened awareness has encouraged a number of rural households to transition to clean energy usage.

Clean Energy Weekly Market Stalls

961 wPOWER Weekly Market Stalls

- SSP provides support in organising at least one clean energy stall at weekly markets for each Sakhi
- Product demos and information dissemination to about 400 people visiting the stall in one shot
- Introduces Sakhis to visitors and is effective for spreading word of mouth



“ We saw Oorja stove demo in a stall organized by the Sakhi. We instantly decided to purchase it.

Bimal Devi & Arvind, Customer
Muzaffarpur, Bihar

Community Group Meetings

3212 wPOWER Awareness Meetings

- A community group meeting is conducted with 25-30 women SHG members to demonstrate clean energy products and disseminate information
- 3 such meetings per Sakhi per year
- Helps Sakhis map the energy status and needs of their resident and catchment villages



“ We got introduced to clean energy through community meetings organized by the Sakhi in our village.

Asha Hamitamboli, Customer
Osmanabad, Maharashtra

Wall Paintings/Hoardings

547 wPOWER Wall Paintings

- Hoardings and wall paintings are designed to advertise clean energy in general and the Sakhi's clean energy business in particular.
- They are installed at prime locations in villages to create wide publicity amongst resident and floating populations

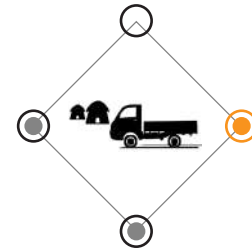


“ Our decision to buy a solar lamp was largely influenced by the clean energy wall painting near our house.

Sukumari Devi, Customer
Darbhanga, Bihar

Key Lessons Learnt

- Customers perceive products sold door-to-door to be of poor quality. During demonstrations, Sakhis should focus on information sharing instead of hard selling products and direct customers to their shops for making purchases
- Convenience of use, potential energy cost savings, warranties and seamless after-sales servicing are clean energy product benefits that appeal most to rural households. Awareness activities should consciously project these benefits.



Creating last mile clean energy access



“ Many rural households in Bihar still do not have access to 24 hour electricity and LPG in their houses.

Bindya Bindu, Customer
Muzaffarpur, Bihar



“ I first became aware about the concept of clean energy from the Sakhi of our village and instantly liked it.

Geetanjali Hedge, Customer
Osmanabad, Maharashtra





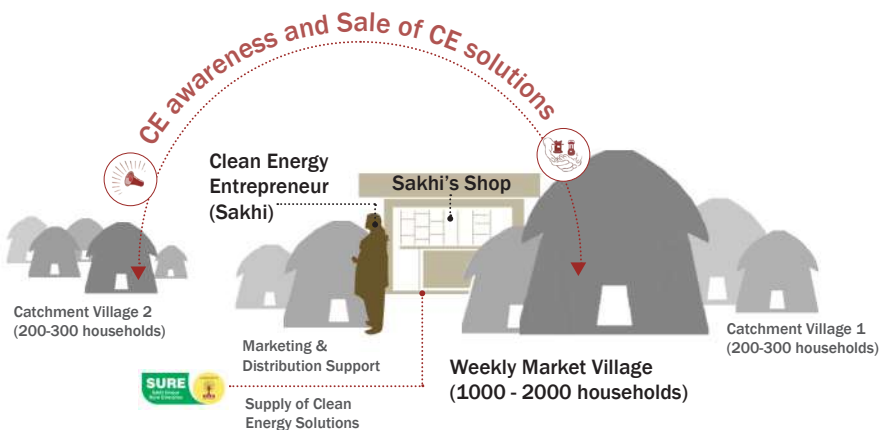
“ The manner in which the Sakhi has promoted clean energy in our village is worth appreciating.

Ratanmala Dangre, Customer
Osmanabad, Maharashtra

The energy scenario in wPOWER India target villages of Maharashtra and Bihar are characterized by unreliable grid electricity supply and regular power-cuts. This forces rural households to fall back on polluting energy sources like kerosene for lighting. Households primarily depend on solid fuels for cooking which exposes particularly women and children to harmful health effects of indoor air pollution. Of the two states, the situation is worse in Bihar where the interplay of economic, social and energy access conditions offer opportunities as well as challenges for driving clean energy adoption.

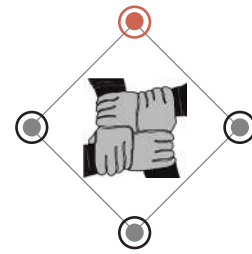
Energy access in wPOWER target districts

	Maharashtra 	Bihar 
Percentage of rural households without access to grid electricity	29%	87%
Percentage of rural households primarily depending on solid fuels for cooking	80%	90%



Key Lessons Learnt

- A Sakhi's shop establishes her physical presence near consumers. Customers feel reassured that they can access clean energy products and the Sakhi's services promptly whenever the need arises.
- Early adopters share their product usage experience with their community prompting others to adopt. Targeting early adopters is therefore, crucial for creating positive word of mouth which acts as the greatest driver for purchase in the rural setting.



Creating enabling partnership ecosystem

The network of clean energy entrepreneurs needs seamless access to products and technology, distribution support, finance, networking platforms and markets in order to flourish. wPOWER India has established such an enabling partnership ecosystem comprising of the private sector, government, financing institutions and other stakeholders closely interacting and engaging with the network.

Why a partnership ecosystem is crucial?

Clean Energy Hub as a span breaker for overcoming gaps in the ecosystem

A number of gaps exist in the rural clean energy ecosystem:

- Significant costs and complexity of managing last mile distribution of clean energy solutions have prevented the private sector from reaching out to the rural BOP in a sustainable and scalable way
- Rural BOP consumers have limited exposure to clean energy products and their benefits, calling for huge investment in raising awareness and trust
- Women clean energy entrepreneurs find it difficult to create awareness at the village level and to convert awareness to adoption. In this process they often feel isolated and demotivated
- Financial products for consumers and energy entrepreneurs are virtually non-existent

The Clean Energy Hub aims to bridge these existing gaps in the rural energy ecosystem by acting as a “span breaker”. It serves as a consumer experience zone and provides rural last mile access to the private sector and other stakeholders. It provides access to technology, finance and markets to the women’s clean energy network.

SSP launched the Clean Energy Hub in Latur district of Maharashtra. Exposure visits to the Hub have enabled Sakhis to enhance their understanding of various clean energy products and develop their business networks. With the idea of “catching them young”, SSP has also been promoting clean energy awareness among school children via exposure visits to the Hub.



Sakhis networking at the Clean Energy Hub

Sakhi Unique Rural Enterprise (SURE), SSP’s rural marketing and distribution associate, delivers the vital last mile product inventory management, marketing, distribution and after sales support to the Sakhi network.

Access to marketing and distribution support

It is essential to ensure that Sakhis have uninterrupted access to products. This implies that products must be sourced from product and technology developers, stored centrally and distributed seamlessly to Sakhis at their doorsteps.

PATH piloted its Healthy Home financing scheme which bundled consumer finance for clean energy and water & sanitation products. NABARD financed setting up of two micro-pelletisers and consumer loans for purchasing clean cook-stoves.

Access to finance

Clean energy products entail significant upfront investments from rural consumers. Appropriate financing support can substantially help scale adoption. Similarly, Sakhis also require working capital financing support to scale their clean energy ventures.

Sakhi Social Enterprise Network, SSP's training associate, prepared the Sakhi training curriculum, supported by the School of Energy Studies. Private sector product partners like First Energy, Eureka Forbes, BioLite and Godrej and financing partners like PATH contributed to capacity building of Sakhis.

Training and capacity building

An appropriate training curriculum combining classroom as well as on-field training needs to be designed to impart critical business and technical skills to Sakhis. Product manufacturers, training and research institutions and financing partners all have a role to play in supporting wPOWER India in building capacities of Sakhis.

Private sector companies including First Energy, d.light, Greenlight Planet, Greenway Grameen Infra, Kirloskar Green, Godrej, Boond and Laxmi Solar have partnered wPOWER India in providing access to innovative clean energy products and technologies to the rural last mile.

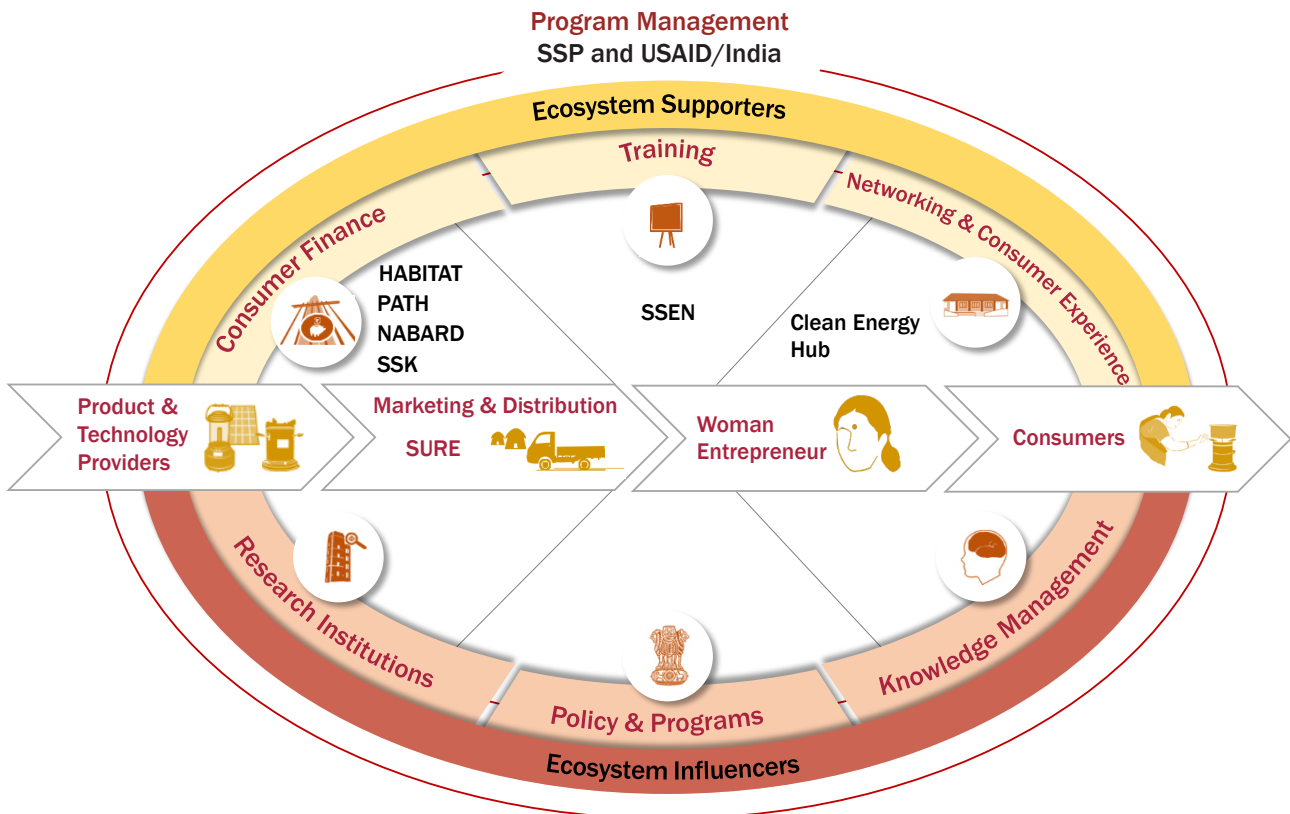
Access to product & technology

The clean energy portfolio should comprise of innovative and technologically advanced clean energy products catering to all the energy needs of rural BOP households.

wPOWER India partnership ecosystem

SURE sources clean energy products from private sector product manufacturers and supplies them to the network of Sakhis who in turn, distribute them to last mile rural consumers. This forms the core value chain within the wPOWER India partnership ecosystem. Beyond this, the ecosystem consists of various other stakeholders who can be broadly classified into ecosystem supporters who directly support the core value chain and ecosystem influencers who positively influence the ecosystem through their activities.

wPOWER India partnership ecosystem



Partner speak

wPOWER India has already signed Partnership MoUs with 15 organisations. The program has been working closely with these partners to deliver significant value. The partners, in turn, have been contributing towards empowering Sakhis and strengthening their network. Here are a few examples of rewarding wPOWER India partnerships and the partners' take on how their association with the program has benefited them.

New Product Development



wPOWER India supported First Energy's initiatives to develop and introduce two technologically improved versions of cookstoves namely, Oorja K3 and Oorja K3 Deluxe in the program's target districts. The network of Sakhis provided the ideal platform to obtain vital consumer feedback on desired features and their likes and dislikes. Via wPOWER India, the company also undertook efforts to localize the supply of stove inputs (pellets) by installing micro-pelletiser plants. The pelletiser plants, run by women clean energy entrepreneurs, source raw materials like agricultural waste locally from farmers. On its part, First Energy contributed to the capacity building of Sakhis by providing technical product knowledge.

“ Our association with wPOWER India helped us immensely in developing the Oorja K3 and K3 deluxe models. Working closely with consumers and the Sakhi network was crucial for refining the products through an iterative process to align them to the rural household budget. We also successfully tested the micro-pelletiser innovation with the objective of delivering localized consumer access to the fuel closer to their homes at an affordable price.

Mukund Deogaonkar, First Energy Private Limited

Access to Last Mile Markets



d.light partnered with wPOWER India for scaling adoption of a variety of popular solar lamps from its stable. The deep reach of the network of Sakhis enabled the company to take its products directly to rural end - consumers. This direct linkage with the last mile was absent in d.light's collaboration with its existing channel partners. d.light has sold over 8,000 units of solar lamps via Sakhis. Clean energy awareness generated under wPOWER India has led to effective advertisement of d.light's products, significantly reducing its potential marketing cost outlay. wPOWER India has also strengthened d.light's understanding of consumer and market needs in target districts.

“ We have not found the deep and direct reach to the rural last mile provided by the wPOWER India Sakhi network, anywhere else. Sakhis are the ones who have created the strong positive image of d.light products in the wPOWER India target districts. They have actually converted our products from push to pull products. The Sakhi network should be expanded within Maharashtra and also beyond. D.light will be very happy to support wPOWER India in achieving this.

Sunil Samarth, d.light Energy Private Limited

Piloting New Financing Schemes & Bundling Energy with Other Social Products



PATH collaborated with wPOWER India to pilot its innovative Healthy Home bundled financing scheme via the network of Sakhis. The pilot proved that a bundled finance approach combining basic necessities like water, sanitation and energy works well in the rural context. The network of Sakhis provided the much needed last mile connectivity. 259 rural households in Maharashtra received financing under the PATH pilot. PATH focused on building the capacities of Sakhis. Encouraging Sakhis to assume most of the responsibilities of operations, the pilot showed how cost of operations can be reduced to lower cost of finance for end consumers.

“ For PATH, partnering wPOWER India and the spirited Sakhi network has been an amazing learning experience. We are convinced that when it comes to marketing socially beneficial products to the rural last mile, it is best to adopt a direct selling approach via women entrepreneurs. Partnering wPOWER India gave us the opportunity to help build capacities of Sakhis and take the early steps towards proving the efficacy of the Sakhi network as an attractive channel for delivering last mile access to such products. We knew that finance plays a key role in making clean energy and sanitation accessible at the last mile. However, we learnt a lot about how women entrepreneurs complete the eco-system required for making rural consumer finance work.

Tanya Dargan, PATH

Transformed Sakhis

wPOWER India has strengthened and transformed the network of Sakhis by providing tailored capacity building support and encouraging the network to play a central role in driving awareness and access. As members of this network, Sakhis have experienced a holistic transformation in their lives. The powerful tales of Sakhi transformation have three dimensions –Entrepreneurial, Social and Economic.

Entrepreneurial Transformation



“ The training program has significantly enhanced my business acumen.

Imparting business skills



Sakhi Swati Kulkarni

Although SSP consciously identifies women possessing some prior entrepreneurial experience, they possess limited or no formal training or exposure to the diverse aspects of doing business. By imparting valuable business skills, wPOWER India has been enabling Sakhis to manage their clean energy ventures and existing businesses more effectively.

Providing technical knowledge

“ I have developed a clear understanding of a range of clean energy products & feel confident in communicating their benefits.



Sakhi Renu Kumari

Clean energy being a novel concept, wPOWER India has equipped Sakhis with comprehensive knowledge of clean energy products. By conducting practical product demonstrations and promoting self-use, wPOWER has equipped Sakhis to seamlessly communicate information about product features and benefits to end consumers.

Encouraging innovation

“ My SHG members have helped me sell INR 15,000 worth of CE products through their networks.



Sakhi Shobha Mule

wPOWER India has encouraged Sakhis to innovate. Successful Sakhis have been implementing a number of innovative strategies for generating awareness and marketing clean energy solutions. These include consciously targeting potential early adopters, demonstrating at Gram Sabhas, incentivising SHG members to generate leads etc.

Enhancing business reach

“ wPOWER has helped me to come out of my shell and reach out to households not only in my own village but also in neighbouring villages



Sakhi Maina Ghute

Previously Sakhis were used to waiting for customers at their shops or houses for providing their services and products. wPOWER India has encouraged them to reach out to rural households at their doorsteps, within their native villages as well as catchment villages. This has helped them expand their customer base.

Enhancing risk appetite

“ wPOWER India has truly brought out the entrepreneur in me. I now have a diversified portfolio of five businesses am earning about INR 22,000 every month.



Sakhi Sunita Shedole

Successful Sakhis are no longer looking at running a business venture merely to “utilize free time” or “feel independent”. They are now looking for opportunities of diversify and scale multiple businesses.

Social Transformation



“ I have not only become economically independent but also have a greater say in my family decisions now.



Sakhi Rekha Devi

Greater role in family decisions

wPOWER India has triggered a positive change in the family dynamics within Sakhis' households. With their contributions to household incomes rising, Sakhis are now increasingly being consulted by their husbands in arriving at family decisions.

Greater visibility within community

“ It is quite amazing to think that a couple of years back I feared venturing out my home and now I regularly attend Gram Shabha meetings and market my products to men and women alike.



Sakhi Uma Shitole

By establishing Sakhis as energy leaders, wPOWER India has enhanced their visibility within their communities. Even for existing entrepreneurs, the branding of their shops with wPOWER clean energy banners has triggered greater footfall and heightened awareness about their businesses.

Gaining community trust and acceptance

“ I would not have been able to sell any of the clean energy products if my community had not reposed faith in me. Thanks to wPOWER India the trust has strengthened.



Sakhi Rajabai Bansode

Community trust and acceptance is a critical driver for consumer decisions to buy clean energy products from Sakhis. By helping and encouraging Sakhis to demonstrate products and garner support from opinion leaders, wPOWER India has enabled them to establish credibility.

Social image and status uplift

“ Now, everyone in my village addresses me as Oorja (solar) ki Ma'am.



Sakhi Pooja Jagtap

wPOWER India has positioned Sakhis as climate change leaders and entrepreneurs providing last mile access to socially beneficial clean energy products. This has enhanced their social image and status.

Economic Transformation



“ My monthly business earnings have increased from zero to INR 5,000, thanks to wPOWER India.

Greater income and savings



Sakhi Shashikala Dongre

wPOWER India has enabled Sakhis to create an additional income stream. Income from clean energy product sales has enabled successful Sakhis to increase their monthly income by as much as 30% enabling them to make greater contribution to their household incomes and savings.

“ wPOWER India has made me financially disciplined. I regularly put money in the bank now. My bank seems more willing to give me a loan now.

Improved credit profile



Sakhi Varsha Pawar

Increased household incomes have led to improvement of credit profiles of successful Sakhis making it easier for them to access finance.

Transformation Stories:



Maina Ghute, Latur

Turning a new leaf

Earlier Sakhi Maina Ghute restricted her interactions only to women. Household expenditures would consume whatever she earned from her small tailoring venture. She longed to become financially independent, contribute to her family's savings and be of service to her community. The opportunity to become a wPOWER Sakhi came her way in February 2013 and she hasn't looked back since.

“wPOWER India has helped me come out of my shell and vent my entrepreneurial aspirations”, Maina exclaims. The skills she picked up during training helped her diversify into selling women's jewellery. She has been consciously trying to tap her existing customer base and business linkages to drive clean energy adoption. By her own admission, she “never thought of these aspects before”. “I now enjoy a high degree of trust and respect within my community.” Having been awarded as an Urja Sakhi by SSP has made Maina proud and she vows to make a lasting impact on the society. Maina's earnings have significantly increased since becoming a Sakhi. The additional earnings are helping her grow her ventures.



Uma Shitole, Osmanabad

Dreams taking wings

Over a year back, Sakhi Uma Shitole's life revolved around her family. Seldom venturing out, most of Uma's childhood dreams of serving the society and standing on her own feet, took a backseat. Like most women she had accepted that her everyday life would revolve around daily time consuming chores such as collecting drinking water and wood for cooking and managing the household. The only thing that differentiated her from others in her village was her dreams. Enrolling to be a Sakhi gave expression to Uma's dreams.

Being able to access mentorship and training has made Uma supremely confident. She has perfected the art of segmenting her potential customers and going around her village generating awareness and marketing her products to men and women alike. Her business risk appetite has increased manifold. Donning the Sakhi's avatar, Uma aims to “transform her village into a solar village within two years”. As a hallmark of her social transformation she exclaims “when the Prime Minister of India now stresses on the need for creating solar villages, I feel proud that this is something I have been already working on since becoming a Sakhi.”

wPOWER India Highlights



Sakhis initiated in clean energy business

1,010



People reached through clean energy awareness initiatives

1,010,000



Average increase in monthly incomes of Sakhis

30%



Leverage amount

US\$ 2 mn/ ₹120 mn



Number of partnership MOUs signed

15

wPOWER India – Africa exchange

The wPOWER program globally aims to train more than 7,000 women entrepreneurs, helping them to sell new technologies like clean cook stoves and solar lanterns in India and Nigeria, and throughout East Africa. wPOWER India has made an impression at a global scale through dissemination of knowledge around best practices and innovations with the Africa chapters of wPOWER Kenya and Nigeria.



Capacity Building



Innovation and Knowledge Transfer for Clean Energy Hub



Documentation of Best Practices



Acknowledgements

We are thankful to several individuals who contributed to the development of the Resource Guide. We thank Apurva Chaturvedi, Prema Gopalan and Upmanyu Patil for their valuable guidance and inputs.

We would like to specially thank the wPOWER women clean energy entrepreneurs or Sakhis and consumers in rural Maharashtra and Bihar for sharing their valuable thoughts and experiences. Without their inputs this Resource Guide would not have been possible. We thank Sakhis Sunita Shedole, Savita Putane, Nita Tanwade, Swati Kulkarni, Renu Kumari, Shobha Mule, Maina Ghute, Rekha Devi, Uma Shitole, Rajabai Bansode, Pooja Jagtap, Shashikala Dongre and Varsha Pawar. We also thank consumers Vimal Devi, Arvind, Asha Hamitamboli, Sukumari Devi, Bindya Bindu, Gitanjali Hedge and Ratnamala Dangre.

We thank Naseem Sheikh, Dilip Dhawan, Kaka Adsule, Raja Bhau, Devkanya, Prashant Dange, Arunima Dandawate and all the members of the wPOWER India team for providing critical program insights that enriched the Resource Guide.

We are grateful to Tanya Dargan (PATH), Mukund Deogaonkar (First Energy), Sunil Samarth (d.light) for sharing their experiences of partnering wPOWER India.



Swayam Shikshan Prayog

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) is a leading learning and development organization with over 19 years of experience in enabling community led sustainable development. Core to SSP's approach is the empowerment of grassroots women to take on new public roles as entrepreneurs, leaders and change makers through an eco-system of social enterprises—SURE: marketing and distribution, SSEN: skills and entrepreneurship, SSK: innovative finance and SAST: preventive health. This eco-system offers a formidable range of initiatives in clean energy, safe water and sanitation, climate resilient agriculture, food security and nutrition, by partnering with Sakhi women networks impacting over a million in low-income communities of India.



Re-emerging World

Re-emerging World (ReW) is a strategic advisory firm working with leading Multinational Corporations (MNCs), Businesses, Social Entrepreneurs and Institutions on their inclusive growth agenda in emerging markets. ReW is SSP's program and knowledge partner for the wPOWER India program. ReW has taken up the responsibility of documenting this Resource Guide.



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