



# CLEAN ENERGY

Women's Entrepreneurship  
in Clean Energy



## Context

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. The demand for clean energy technology and its products, solutions, and their adoption, continue to lag behind in rural India 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”.



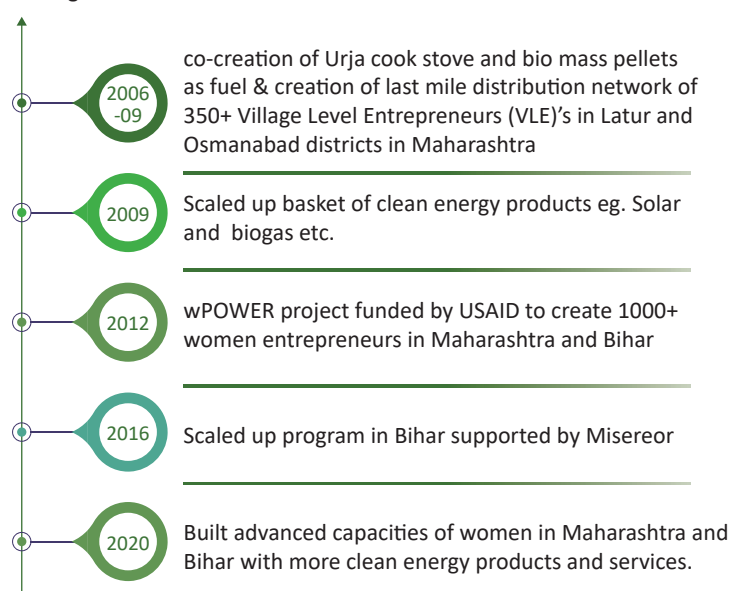
*Recognising the need for clean cooking and drudgery reducing options for rural women, SSP (initially) took up the opportunity to partner with a large company in 2005 to co-create a clean fuel cooking stove and grassroots business model that is built on the strength of the existing women's Self Help Group network. The next opportunity to scale up the women's network in clean energy was in 2012, when a Partnership on Women's Entrepreneurship in Clean Energy (wPOWER), a programme supported by the US State Department and USAID India, led to popularising clean energy to rural communities.”*

**- Prema Gopalan, Founder of SSP**

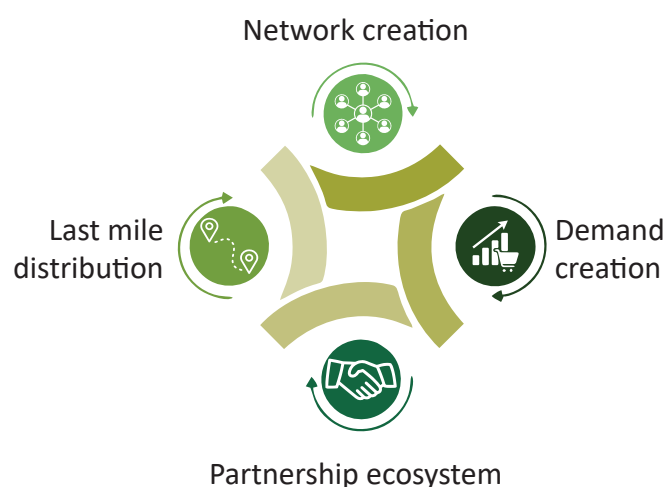


## Evolution of the Model

For more than a decade, SSP has collaborated with donor organizations and private sector partners to improve access to clean energy products among rural consumers.



### The wPower India model



## The Model

Women's Entrepreneurship in Clean Energy program of Swayam Shikshan Prayog, enables 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, the Clean Energy Program 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.



The network of women clean energy entrepreneurs known as Sakhis form the core of the program. The marketing and distribution infrastructure and the Sakhi network deliver solutions like advanced cookstoves, bio-digesters, solar lamps, solar water heaters and provide product servicing at the doorstep of rural households through:

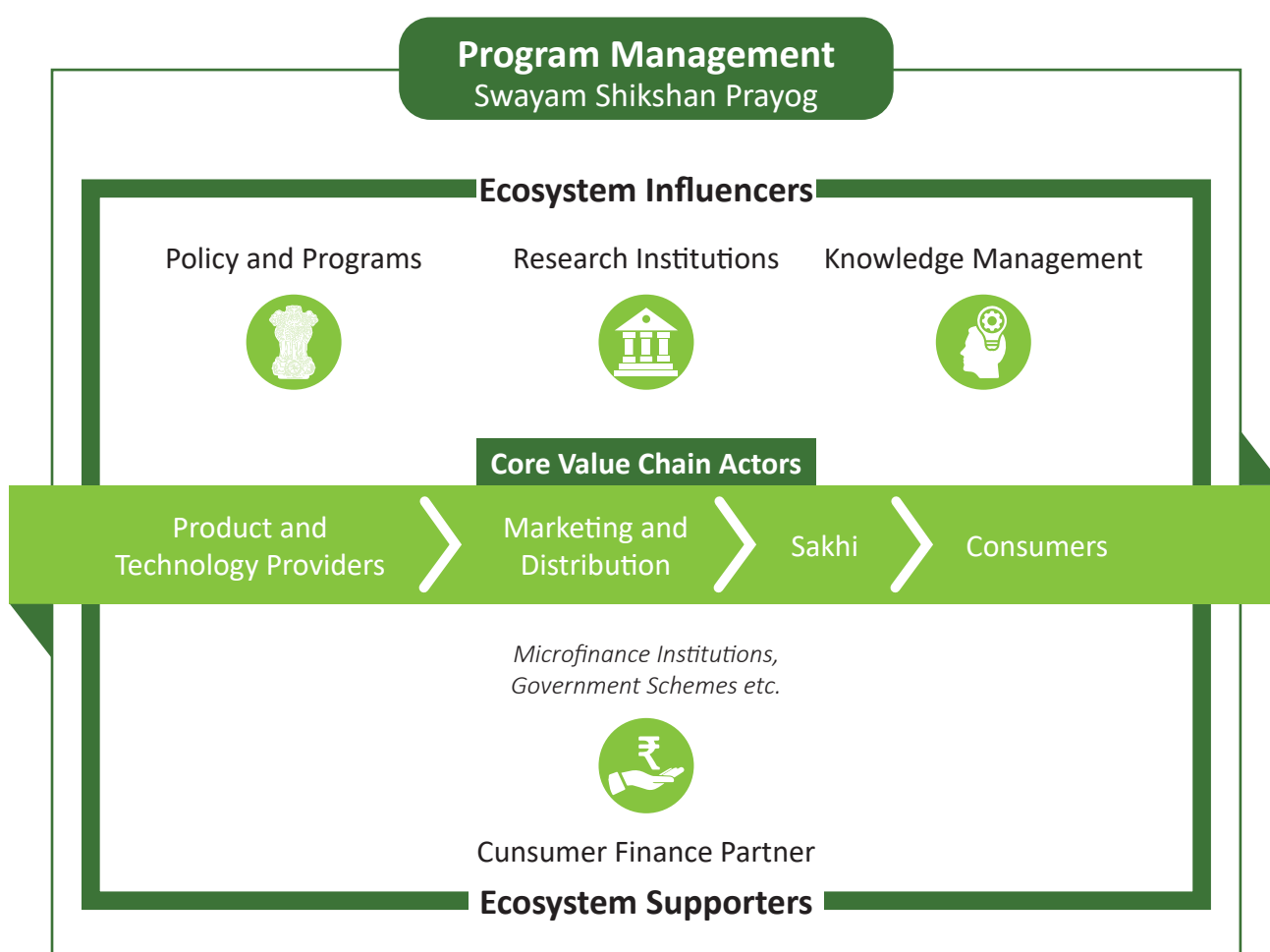
- Training and capacity building of rural women as Sakhis or women entrepreneurs on business management and clean energy technologies
- Promoting clean energy solutions through public awareness programs – community meetings, weekly market stalls and information campaigns. These solutions range from advanced cook stoves, bio pellets, biogas plants, solar lanterns, home lighting system and solar water heaters.
- Establishing clean energy hubs to serve as a platform for training, marketing and servicing of clean energy products. It also facilitates business linkages between women entrepreneur networks, technology providers, financial institutions and the government.
- Establishing public and private sector partnerships for product

design, development and marketing of clean energy products; and transferring best practices, business models and innovative clean energy solutions between India, Africa and other countries.

### **Women's Entrepreneurship in Clean Energy program's partnership ecosystem**

By directly connecting manufacturers with the network, the program makes access to clean energy solutions seamless and affordable for rural end-consumers. Diverse partners – private technology developers, banks, public energy agencies are enhancing access to products, technology and finance for Sakhis.

Sakhi Unique Rural Enterprise (SURE), the rural marketing and distribution entity promoted by SSP, delivers the vital last mile product inventory management, marketing, distribution and after sales support to the Sakhi network. 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 program's partnership ecosystem.



## **Impact**

- Over 1,250 women entrepreneurs outreached clean energy products and services to over one million households at the grassroots level in eight districts of Bihar and Bihar between 2013 and 2015.
- Grassroots women empowered as micro entrepreneurs and creates awareness and access to a range of cleaner energy and other locally appropriate products for the rural populations. Since 2015, the program has been able to develop 200+ women as local entrepreneurs called Sakhis to sensitize more than 400,000 people and market, distribute and sell socially beneficial products like LED bulbs, solar lamps, induction cookstoves, sanitary pads, biocompost, and a range of consumer products.
- The program has identified Digital Empowerment as the “next normal” for transforming rural women into micro-entrepreneurs. Sakhis were trained in using smartphones, communicating over WhatsApp, and joining online meetings using Zoom. The Gaavkhaj App, an innovative digital platform launched has helped rural Consumers, Sakhis and Super Sakhis order digitally.





## The Change

The program has improved awareness, affordability, and accessibility for a range of socially responsible products in the rural villages of Maharashtra and Bihar.

- The micro-businesses started by Sakhi's are contributing as an additional income stream and empowering them to be financially independent.
- Sakhis have garnered significant social recognition through last mile business engagements.
- Since lockdown in March 2020, SSP quickly adapted to a low physical and high remote mode of program delivery. SSP partnered with Gaavkhaj to launch an online platform that gives Sakhis and Consumers an opportunity to digitally order products. Digital Inclusion has been one of the key unintended impacts emerging out in the last two years of the program, and needs scaling up.



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