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WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

through Drudgery Reducing
Implements



A Learning Document developed under
Women's Leadership in Small and Medium Enterprises Programme

WLSME

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Introduction

Women's work in the agricultural sector has been largely confined to farming and certain specific operations like transplanting, weeding, sowing and storage. These are manual activities that entail longer hours of work and require postures that adversely affect women's reproductive health. In addition to these activities in the public sphere, women are also responsible for relentless chores inside the home. Taking care of the domestic livestock, bringing up their children, catering to the needs of the men in the home and other household work, adds to the seemingly endless list of tasks being done by women. It has also been noted that a lot of the work done by women both within the home and on the farm, is unpaid or grossly underpaid and mostly unrecognized. The scenario of extra workload on women is also present in non-agricultural business including small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Women's economic participation is not only a means to earn a living, but it is also an opportunity to challenge many gender stereotypes and discrimination, strive for an equitable society and improved voice and participation in political, social, economic spheres. Women's entrepreneurship should also be viewed as an opportunity to achieve all of the above, through promoting and creating women as leaders of change. Women entrepreneurs have a unique opportunity to break barriers and the elusive 'glass ceiling', by coming together for income generation, savings, women are also redistributing gender roles and becoming organized as a group to promote leadership and empowerment. That the need for more women entrepreneurs is stark, is evident by the fact that for almost the same kind and amount of work, women are paid vastly lower wages than men.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization, women farmers account for more than a quarter of the world's population. Yet, in India, only 12.8% of the total agricultural holders are women and 0% women are land owners even though around 43% percent of the agricultural work force in developing countries consists of women agriculturists.

Women are bearing the brunt for longer hours of work and over time, women's involvement with more drudgery inducing, time consuming activities have led to gender role stereotyping of such tasks, which further subjects women to longer work hours with lesser output and more misery. We may call this as "**feminization of drudgery**". There is a wide sex based wage discrimination between men and women. While men were paid 70 per cent higher wages than women for ploughing work at the end of 2004-05, the difference rose to 80.4 per cent in end-March 2012 and stood at 93.6 per cent at the start of 2013-14¹. Decisions on asset acquisition, financial matters, market forces etc. which affect women and men both, are also often taken by men. For instance, decisions concerning use of pesticides, the timing and volume of loans to be taken, the rate at which the product should be sold, whether to purchase machines, are almost exclusively taken by men. Since the market exposure is limited for women and dominated by men, it takes away the control over many aspects of business and household activities from women. Patel² sees this as inclusive of granting to women effectual decision making power/authority and the power to influence others' decisions along with civil, economic and social freedom and most importantly, an increase in women's ability to exercise power. Whatever schemes and policies may be introduced for the benefit of women, should be compounded by initiatives to affect change at home. To demand a greater share in the decision-making process at work should be accompanied by making women equal partners in the process within their homes and families as well³.

As an effective means to securing entrepreneurship opportunities for women, CARE has been implementing the Women's Leadership in Small and Medium Enterprises (WLSME) Program at Panruti in Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu in the cashew industry. Having identified 210 cashew processing SMEs for this purpose, the WLSME program attempts to contribute to research and learnings on the women's role in the SMEs sector. The key objective of the program is to promote women's leadership and sustainable growth of 210 women owned and managed cashew processing SMEs.

¹<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/in-rural-india-gender-equality-in-wages-is-still-a-distant-dream/article4915110.ece>

²Ibid.

³Shirahatti, SS., Badiger, MS and Prakash KV, "Agricultural Engineering Interventions to Increase the Productivity of Women in Agriculture: Some Studies from India," Paper presented at the 10th International Agricultural Engineering Conference, Bangkok (2009) p. 22.

The project aimed at addressing the following:

1. Fostering knowledge about how to prepare a business plan and use the plan as efficient means of decision making
2. Encouraging fruitful interactions between the women and market players, thereby improving women's business negotiating skills
3. Increasing women's confidence in their own work that can reflect in their dealings with the wider network of stakeholders and within their own families and community
4. Encouraging more positive reception of women's work among men in the families and community
5. Addressing women's financial management related needs and training them to be able to suitably address them on their own
6. Helping women be more aware of pricing on the procurement and marketing end
7. Improving women's perceptions of and dealings with loans
8. Ensuring women's greater participation in the decision-making processes so that they are recognized as informed, important members of the SME, their expertise crucial for all investment decisions
9. The above aspirations of WLSME are geared towards increased participation, voice and decision making by women, leading to more empowerment and enhanced leadership among them. There is also a realization among the women and the project implementing teams, that cashew processing has a lot of drudgery involved at various steps, and most often these are done by women, due to the stereotyping of certain tasks within cashew processing

One of the various interventions undertaken in this project was aimed at reducing drudgery among women cashew workers and entrepreneurs from SMEs.

Why are we looking at drudgery as an impediment to women's empowerment?

Women employed in the cashew industry work long and tedious hours and face the imminent threat of severe arthritis, back ache and knee, joint and cervical pain. They also risk respiratory problems due to inhaling ash from heating raw cashews. These factors have a serious and long lasting impact on women's health and overall well-being. These are also reasons that curtail women's participation in social gatherings and events. Together, these factors become a strain of extreme drudgery upon women, leaving them with no time for leisure, recreation, political participation and community ownership roles. This lack of time and increased hardship also reduces women's participation and suppresses their voice in key family and community level decisions and hampers their representation and engagement with community based groups, collectives and Panchayati Raj institutions.



Understanding Drudgery

Drudgery can be defined as physical and mental strain, agony, monotony and hardship experienced by human beings. Women tend to bear the brunt of drudgery since they continue to be most affected by illiteracy, malnutrition and unemployment⁴. Women usually perform their economic tasks with tradi-

⁴Nag, PK and Nag, A, "Drudgery, Accidents and Injuries in Indian Agriculture," *Industrial Health* 42(2) (2004): 149-162.

tional tools, which were designed mainly for men keeping in mind their physical features (height, weight bearing etc.). Women friendly and gender appropriate tools are either unavailable or insufficient in number or unused due to lack of awareness. Such tools, coupled with often hazardous, unhealthy work conditions and long work hours create and accelerate many health problems for women farmers⁵. Women having to invest a lot in both agricultural and household work with dismal returns is supposed to be a source of extreme drudgery on them⁶. The migration of men has also led to a massive increase in the number of households headed by women in the villages. These now, on an average, form around 20-25 percent of all rural households in developing countries. The rural woman's drudgery has, thus, increased manifold as they are now the primary providers of the households as well, shouldering both their own and their husbands' responsibilities⁷.

A recent study⁸ investigates awareness towards improved farm tools and implements by the women farmers and farm workers in Vadodara, Kheda, Godhara, Dahov and Dahod districts of Gujarat. Data was gathered from 150 women farmers through a structured questionnaire, focused group discussion, and personal interview. The main objective of the study was to assess the awareness regarding drudgery reducing tools and implements and preparedness of the community to accept the intervention regarding improved tools. The study concluded that 93% of the women used traditional tools and implements for their agricultural activities. The most tedious and drudgery inducing activities were also done manually by local traditional tools like hand hoe, sickles etc. The study also states though that the respondents, women farmers in this case, were very open and welcoming to the idea of newer machinery and technological innovations. Lack of awareness and accessibility and easy availability of cash and credit were the factors hindering this change. Some of the common physical problems cited by respondents in using traditional tools were the pain in joints, waist, forearms, shoulder, knee and feet, back or neck pain, swelling or inflammation, numbness in hands.

The ICAR in Bhubaneswar has been engaged in developing innovative methods to chart the gendered implications of farming tools and technologies and further developing technologies that women's farming work easier and more rewarding and fair. Reducing drudgery of women involved with agricultural work through use of improved tools and techniques such as improved weeders, winnowers, threshers, paddy transplanters etc. is one of the most important objectives of the organization.

Other risk factors were static posture, forceful exertion, repetitive movement, extreme range of motion, awkward posture etc. The study also interestingly discovers that 86% of all farmers and farm workers, men and women both, received their information about farming tools and technologies and new innovations in the field from other farmers and 82% of them from TV and radio⁹. This shows access to and interest in receiving information from the media yet the lack of advertising drudgery reducing tools through these media could be a major obstacle for farmers not having access to and information on these. While the study doesn't cover this, it would be interesting to do a gendered tabulation of what percentage of men and women get their farming and agriculture related information from the media. In a rural set up, men have most control over TV and radio and hence, while women make a sizeable part of the workforce, the information about drudgery reducing tools could be effectively out of their reach unless systemic changes occur within their homes. Most studies often ignore this reality. It is also an aspect that CARE stands to understand better through their sessions and discussions with the men and women in the cashew industry. It should be noted though that the study also lamented that in all of their focus group discussions aimed at advertising and propagating the use of innovative drudgery reducing tools, women were the only ones participating¹⁰. The complete absence of men from these sessions does not bode well for the future since we know that the change first needs to seep through the families and the homes and then only would it successfully spill over into the farms and agricultural work.

With reference to a UNICEF project that trained women as skilled masons, their new skills made them

⁵Ibid.

⁶Verma, SK and Sinha, BP, "Inter Gender Sharing of Drudgery in Cultivation of Major Crops," Indian Journal of Extension Education 27 (1&2) (1991): 18-23.

⁷Singh, KM, "Gender Issues in Agriculture," Gender Perspective in Integrated Farming System: A Training Manual, Manual no.- TM-2/PAT-2/2013 (2012-2013): 1-248.

⁸Bhushan, KB, Misra, Kinkini, Tirkey, Ujjwala., Jain, Gaurav and Goswami AK, "Awareness about Drudgery Reducing Farm Tools and Implements by Women Farm Workers in Gujarat, India," Indian Research Journal of Extension Education 16 (3) (2016): 89-92.

⁹Ibid. p. 91

¹⁰Ibid. p. 91

so confident and passionate about their work that the women successfully won a bidding contest for the construction of a public building. The skills acquired helped them in doubling their income and enhanced their prestige and position in the families by making them equal contributors.

Drudgery in the Cashew Industry

Cashew generates employment in the processing and agrarian sector of India employing over 3 lakh persons with more than 95 percent of them being women¹¹. In a study¹² conducted on the cashew industry flourishing in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the researchers noted that the women working in the industry were older and more skilled and experienced as compared to other global supply chains like textiles and garments. Cashew processing continues to be dominated by scheduled caste and other marginalized communities, particularly in shelling, while other sections are a little more mixed. Almost a quarter of the workers belonged to Nairs and scheduled caste workers were never found in grading and packing, which led the researchers to conclude that activities within cashew processing were also subject to caste based hierarchies. Women surveyed stated that they all wanted an 'Attendance Card' that ensured relatively secure employment with other wage and non-wage benefits. Access to assistance through the Cashew Workers' Welfare Fund was also easier for those holding such a card. However, women workers were of the view that it was increasingly difficult to get an attendance card, which could be construed as indicative of severe informalization of the working conditions. Informal- casual, temporary and contract workers, are not protected by labour legislations which is a cause for grave concern. Women particularly, move between factories for more work and better earnings and work conditions. They often end up accepting lower wages than men and have insecure earnings, as a result of both the limiting choices they face in the public sphere of their work but also the gender stereotyping and oppression they face within their families and communities.

To address the problem of drudgery amongst women in the cashew industry, the WLSME initiative introduced by CARE has had significant impact. CARE India conducted a study with 210 cashew units in Panruti, to understand knowledge, attitude and practice related to various aspects of WLSME project as mentioned in the objectives section. The team conducted personal interviews with the men and women. They also identified certain men as role models within the community and used this as an example to encourage more men to involve women in the decision-making process. The economic background of all the participants, men and women, was similar, while their literacy level was low. The program focused more on qualitative research and regularly maintained elaborate field observation reports to record their experiences.

Inputs to Reduce Drudgery in Cashew Processing SMEs (WLSME Project)

- The program has focused on creating awareness around drudgery and has prepared many IEC materials in Tamil for this purpose. The materials will introduce the workers and entrepreneurs to different and more innovative techniques and machinery.
- Almost all cashew units in Panruti use semi-automated machines. Using fully automated machines

In the study, an overwhelming proportion of the women working in factories report they were members of a trade union (96 out of 100 women), 45% of these felt that the unions were not working well.

the workers belonged to Nairs and scheduled caste based hierarchies. Women

In Uganda, animal traction implements are available to only about 8% of farmers and tractors available to only about 2%. In some areas where a few women were using animal traction, there was a growing interest among women at large in the area to demand better access and training for its use. A study conducted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, JAPAN-Official Development Assistance and Food and Agricultural Organization in 1998 concluded that women perceived hoes and axes as lighter tools though the women did want the tools could be made still lighter. The study noted a need for training local village blacksmiths better so that they could make customized tools for women and better the quality of tools already available.

¹¹Yadav, Shalini, "Economics of Cashew in India," Occasional Paper, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2010.

¹²Harilal, KN., Kanji, Nazneen., Jeyaranjan, J., Eapen, Mridul and Swaminathan Padmini, "Power in Global Value Chains: Implications for Employment and Livelihoods in the Cashew Nut Industry in India," Summary Report, International Institute for Environment and Development, 1996.

does not seem feasible because it would drastically reduce the demand for workers and since these machines are more expensive, small cashew units cannot afford them. CARE found out that semi-automated machines, with some modifications could work much better for the women. CARE has suggested adding a stool and a tray table as modifications to the semi-automated machines to reduce drudgery among women workers.

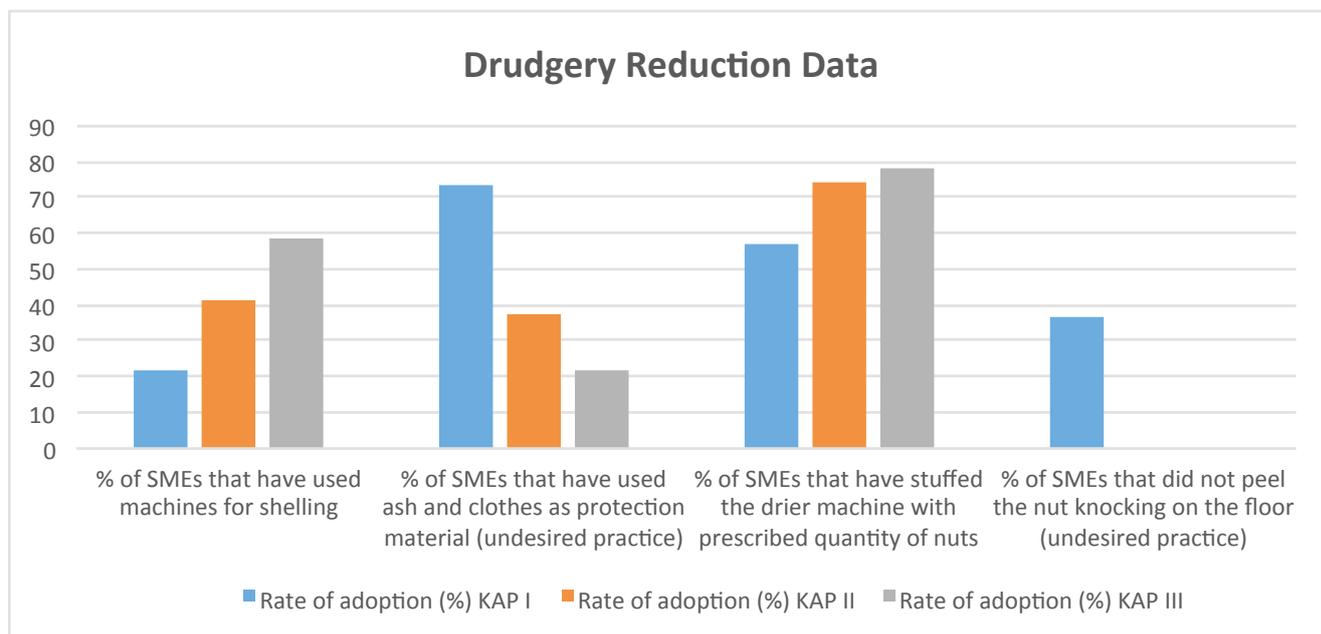
- Most of the SMEs in Panruti are home based so, through their awareness creating IEC materials, CARE has suggested low cost material to the entrepreneurs that can help them make work sheds with arrangements for better sunlight and avoiding rain.
- While mini boilers are available, traditionally only men have been involved with their transportation and usage. CARE engaged with both women and men about the benefits of using mini boilers in the SMEs so women can use them too.
- While the program has repeatedly tried to emphasize upon the fact that men and women are equal partners in the cashew industry, some gender stereotypes have been harder to challenge, especially around marketing related decisions and asset creation. CARE has facilitated discussions among couples and women and men's group to discuss equal participation of women in decision making and investments.
- CARE collaborated with many stakeholders including banks, local electricity board, warehouse officials, District Industry Centre, commercial tax department, auditors and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India. Some of the ways in which these parties extended their support included attending sessions on sensitization, interface meetings, and attending meetings facilitated by CARE with the units to build self confidence among the women workers.
- The program identified the hesitation of men to speak up in meetings attended by both male and female members of the community. Engaging in conversations around gender in the presence of both men and women, was also particularly challenging for the men. The discussions also focused around drudgery suffered by women and gender role stereotyping of drudgery related tasks.
- Women's work in the cashew units was also largely unnoticed and underappreciated. But with the implementation of the WLSME program, it has been observed that in almost 80% of the units, men have understood the impact of drudgery on women's well-being and so they have also started to get involved with cutting and deshelling, with the help of the new deshelling machine available in the market. They also work alongside women in processing activities like grading. There has been a significant change in men's roles and contributions within the households and breaking of gender role stereotypes.
- The program has noticed a significant reduction in drudgery amongst women. The new hand operated de shelling machines are now also being used by men and in 60%-70% of the units, both men and women use these machines for cutting, something that was previously only done by women, and men were not involved with this work at all.



In Burkina Faso, the Ministry of Agriculture has invested extensively in the areas of motor powered mechanization and animal traction but it has overlooked the severe constraints that exist for its expansion in the poorer regions due to physical, economic and credit conditions. Only one organization in the country, the National Centre for Agricultural Equipment (CNEA) has attempted to innovate with manually operated equipment.

We can see a comparative account of CARE's interventions in all the cohorts and their impact as follows:

Findings from Knowledge, Attitude, Practice (KAP Study- KAP I Baseline, KAP II and KAP III)



The data above indicates an increase in positive practices and a decline in undesired practices used in the cashew units. Drudgery reduction is one of the many aspects which is needed for women's empowerment. The following data shows some of the other parameters on which we looked at women's empowerment. This is a combined effect of various interventions in the project.

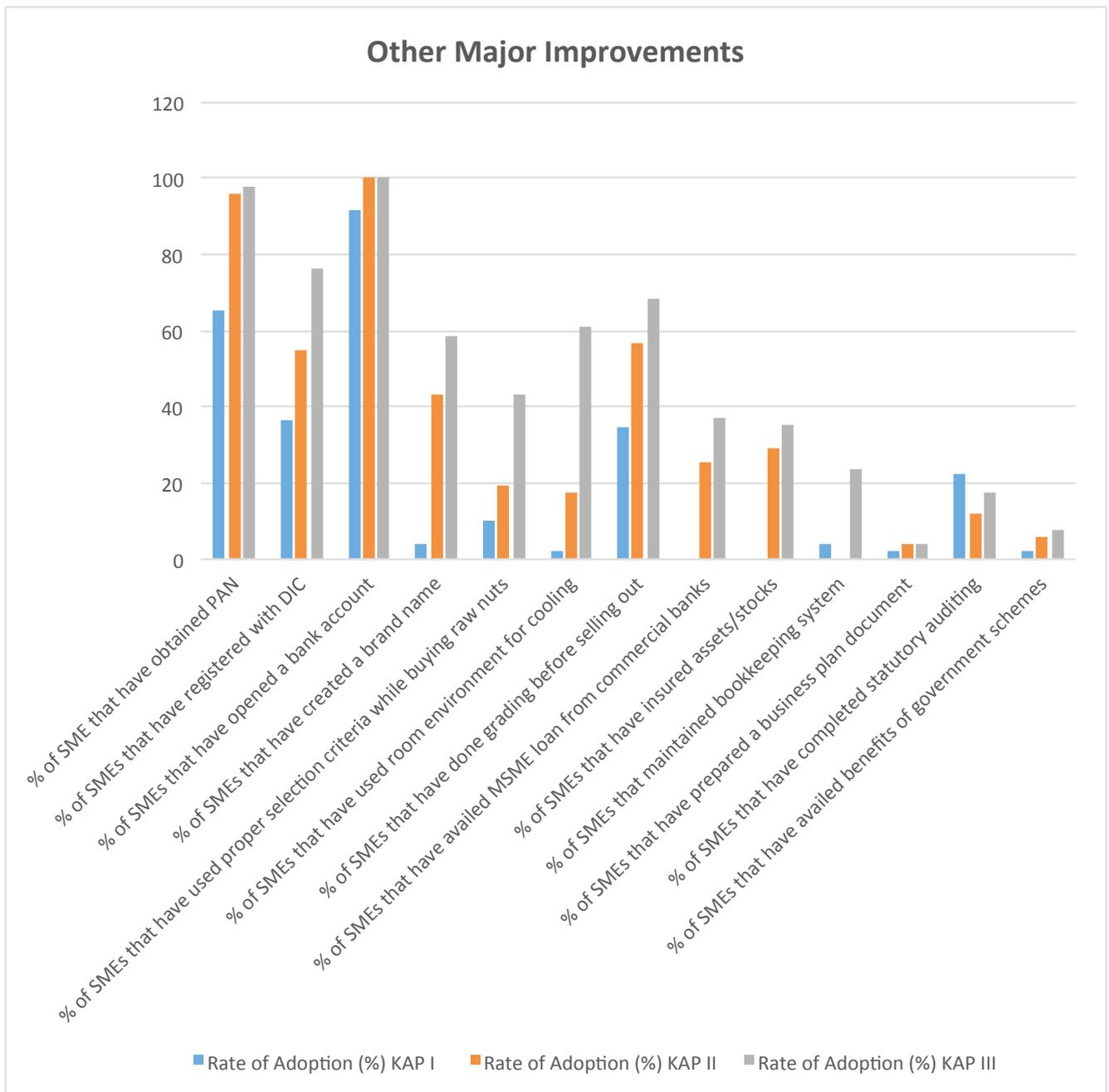
As the data illustrates, the project has led to a marked decrease in drudgery affecting women and has also resulted in significant changes in other practices.

For women employed in the cashew sector, the following positive outcomes have been noted:

- More possibilities for access to time and opportunity to indulge in social activities.
- Heightened sense of self-worth and confidence
- Increased participation in decision making both within the family and in the business sphere.
- Increased participation in political, health and educational spheres (collectives, PRI, VHSND, PTA)
- Increased participation in attaining new skills through bridge courses, financial literacy, market exposure, leading to enhanced leadership.

Recommendations for reducing drudgery for women in cashew units

- While there is a need to promote the use of more innovative techniques and machineries, one also had to be mindful of the fact that an overemphasis on introducing machines to reduce drudgery among women could adversely impact the demand for labour. Hence, in this situation, the program felt that semi-automated machines were the most feasible option since they reduced drudgery thereby increasing productivity, were more affordable than fully automated machines and kept the demand for women workers high thus, not taking away their livelihoods.
- There has been a positive change in promotion of desired practices due to the project interventions in all the cohorts with varied degrees of significance. It is also understood that combination of all the three strategies- building agency, strengthening structures and promoting positive relations has produced better results as compared to exclusive implementation. Continuing engagement with



men and other stakeholders in the community, to create an enabling environment to support women's empowerment is something that needs to be continued.

- Exploring collaboration with livelihoods missions of governments like Pudhu Vazhvu, TNSRLM and EDI (Entrepreneur Development Institute) for continued professional support and financial assistance of the project interventions. Support CWEN in mobilizing funds from schemes like Farmer Producers' Organizations (FPO) of NABARD.
- Encouraging more investment in developing Research and Development (R&D) innovations for drudgery reducing implements that are more conducive for women's health, are easily accessible and available on loan to women led SMEs/collectives.

Key Components for Change

Agency - Knowledge and Skill, Personal Aspirations, Self Esteem, Leadership Skills, Decision Making

Structure - Laws, Policies, Social Norms, Institutional Practices

Relations - Power Dynamics, Support within Family and from Intimate Partner/ Spouse, Support from Peers/ Women's Collectives

- Local resource providers who are placed in all the cohorts may be given additional training to continue their services to the SMEs on income earning basis. This may help ensure sustainability of interventions and practices.

Key Learnings from the Project

- When women have more time to themselves, without affecting the productivity of the SMEs, they are more likely to participate in activities of women collectives and SHGs.
- Introducing semi-automated machines has a significant impact on reducing drudgery
- Women must be trained in the repair and maintenance of the implements to ensure more lasting and sustainable benefits to their lives and reducing dependence.
- The infrastructure available to women in the form of local stakeholders and resource providers must be strengthened.
- Long lasting impact of the programme interventions can be ensured with the equal participation of men, as partners, support systems and equal stakeholders. The introduction of semi-automated machines saw men engaging in work that was earlier deemed as suitable only for women. These steps go a long way in impacting the discriminatory power dynamics within families and the community, paving the way for more equitable partnerships between men and women.
- Ease of access to implements and technologies should become a seamless process to help men and women in the cashew units with future purchases and repairs

Conclusion

The learnings around drudgery lead us to conclude that there must be a recognition of the harmful effects of prolonged hard labour on women's physical and mental health and well-being. It is evident that CARE's interventions are encouraging positive outcomes on the targeted issues. The grievances discussed here further point to the fact that an increase in female participation in the sector particularly through decision making and managerial roles as entrepreneurs would foster a better work culture and a better grievance redressal for the female employees. Feminization of drudgery is not a new issue, but it is not talked about as much as other aspects. Drudgery takes away much of productive time and energy from people (especially women, due to feminization of drudgery), thereby inhibiting their holistic participation, inclusion, leadership and empowerment.



Suggested Best Practices

- *During procurement, trolleys can be introduced to carry and load huge quantity of nuts*
- *For drying, the floor should be even, and wooden or steel plate with handle can be used to collect it in one place easily*
- *For boiling, instead of outsourcing the big boiling units, they can have mini boilers, which are more easily handled by women. These have been successful in states like Maharashtra.*
- *For cutting, fully automated machine could be used and for deshelling, a table can be attached in the existing de shelling machine it was practiced in other state like Kerala.*
- *Using cooking soda or rice or wheat flour for the hands to avoid wound and scarring the hand*
- *Previously, peeling was carried manually but now peeling machines are being used due to shortage of labour and these are also being operated and used by men.*
- *For aiding women using and operating peeling machines, stepladder has been introduced and is being used by many units.*
- *A table with adequate height and sufficient light is very helpful to women while grading.*



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