

Lighthouse India on Women Economic Empowerment: Stock-take, Lessons and the Plan Ahead

Part A: Stock-take of Activities between FY 2017-2019

Under the Lighthouse India initiative, the knowledge sharing pillar on “Women Economic Empowerment” has completed two years. The main objective has been to systematically enhance knowledge flows and implementation know-how on women economic empowerment to inform development policy and help to scale up good practices and innovations across states in India and systematically institutionalize the process of knowledge sharing and sharing India’s experience with other countries in the region. In the last two years activities under Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) pillar of Lighthouse India has generated lot of interest among wide-ranging groups of stakeholders – government, multi-lateral, bi-lateral development agencies, think tanks, NGOs, and academic and research institutions- to collaborate for knowledge sharing and pushing the envelope for policy dialogue and advocacy. This initiative has been able to strengthen organisational learning on WEE and helped enhance World Bank’s role and commitment on the subject externally amongst diverse stakeholders.

Some of the key achievements have been:

1. Encouraging organisational learning on WEE: At the core of the Lighthouse initiative on WEE has been the enhancement of own learning of broad ecosystem of WEE.

1.1 Internal clarity and building on work of the gender platform: In order to initiate Lighthouse work, an important step was to have a round of internal brainstorming sessions to gather information on work that has already been undertaken within the Bank and how Lighthouse work will align with the work of the gender platform that works closely with GPs to strengthen gender integration. These discussions helped identify some relevant projects which provide important lessons such as the Tejaswini Project, NRLM and other rural livelihood projects, transport sector projects where efforts to mainstream gender have been made over the past few years and the disaster relief management sector projects wherein post disaster situations women are left as heads of households – many who have never participated in any form of formal or informal sectors and are in urgent need of economic empowerment and support.

1.2 Stock-taking on WEE Ecosystem: The Lighthouse work was kick-started with a comprehensive stock-take that helped identify key issues, range of diverse stakeholders and key challenges to knowledge exchange on WEE. This was an important step and formed the basis of all activities that followed over the two years. It also helped build internal clarity and preparedness for a more informed role in the WEE domain that was beyond program interventions.

1.3 Unpacking the broad canvass of Women Economic Empowerment to identifying key thematic priorities. A range of issues under the broad ecosystem of WEE have been identified and discussed. However, for more focused *work and interventions*, four key areas for policy focus have been identified:

- (i) Women’s workforce participation and workplace issues such as sexual harassment and GBV
- (ii) Women’s Land Rights
- (iii) Women’s Employment and Entrepreneurship and access to skill enhancement services and
- (iv) Women’s access to financial services.

2. Creating platforms for knowledge exchange and policy dialogues

Stakeholders Roundtable on Knowledge Exchange on Women Economic Empowerment

The first roundtable on May 18, 2018 on Knowledge Exchange on WEE acted as an excellent opportunity to interact with over 45 relevant stakeholders from the Government, multilateral organisations, bilateral organisations, civil society and the private sector who are engaged in WEE related work. Some of the key stakeholders included Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Labour, Niti Ayog from the Government and other multilateral and CSOs such as IFC, DFID, UNWOMEN, UNDP, FAO, GIZ and from INGOS/NGOs and Social Enterprises such as Landesa, Udyogini, Rangсутra and from the private sector stakeholder such as IKEA, Swasti Catalyst and Yes Bank. We were able to identify some promising models on WEE, but also learn about some critical challenges and gaps that need to be addressed if the impacts are to be enhanced and sustained. In particular, it was clear that these models are scattered, therefore limited in their impacts and not enough knowledge exists on such experiences.

The key takeaways from the Roundtable are: (i) importance of focusing on the unorganized sector where majority of women are engaged including domestic workers who work in most insecure conditions, (ii) More policy measures and support through resources required that enhance women's participation in formal sector, (ii) Inter-connectedness of issues of gender norms, violence and women's economic empowerment and workforce participation, (iv) Land rights of women are important and have an important bearing on their economic empowerment (v) Increasing women's employability is as much about enhancing their skills, as improved working condition, safety and equal pay, (vi) Interventions for with adolescent girls and young unmarried women are important as they suffer due to patriarchal norms and get married before they can entire the job market, (vii) There are gaps between skills enhancement interventions and actual translation into employability

Women Land Rights and Economic Empowerment: Policy and Practice:

Second roundtable held on May 8, 2019 with over 25 external experts and organisations to understand the existing norms, policy landscape and ongoing practices that impact Women's Land Rights in India. Some of the key stakeholders present at the roundtable are serving and retired bureaucrats such as Ms Karuna Akella, Special Commissioner, Land Administration, Government of Telangana, Ms Rita Sinha, Ex Secretary and experts with long experience of working with the Government such as Dr Tajamul Haque, Ex-Chairman, Land Cell, NITI Aayog, Government of India, Dr N.C Saxena, Ex-Member, Planning Commission, National Advisory Council, Government of India and international, national and local organizations with vast experience of working on issues of land rights for women and other vulnerable groups such as Landesa, *Working Group of Women's Land Ownership (WGWLO)*, Makaam, a network of women farmers, Pradan and the Ekta Parishad.

Some important takeaways are: (i) Women land rights (WLR) is a critical means to achieving economic and social empowerment of women (ii) Significant policy legislation gaps exist that need to be addressed to ensure women are able to enjoy rights to land. (iii) Compelling models on working with women around their land rights are being implemented which need to be supported for replication and scale up (iv) *Soft is hard and harder*: Land ownership in itself may not be enough if woman's agency, voice and choice is not ensured (v) While policy focus and commitment is critical, the role of CSOs in building demand and standing with women and vulnerable communities has been most critical. This is likely to put pressure on the government for greater accountability and, (vi) Clear pathways need to be evolved to combine both policy and legislation initiatives for greater impact and outcomes

3. Establishing a network of development partners. Through discussions with external stakeholders, a role emerged for the World Bank to bring together relevant players to act as a think tank and explore more effective solutions to WEE challenges and gaps. Under Lighthouse, World Bank convened a Consultative Group on Women Economic Empowerment in January 2019 comprising 25 organisations and the group has met twice since its formation. The members include ILO, IFC, UNDP, UNWOMEN,

DFID, Gates Foundation, GIZ, IFAD, CARE, Access Development Services, IKEA Foundation, Dastakar, CREA amongst others.

First Consultative Group Meeting, January 31, 2019: The first Consultative Group meeting was held on January 31, 2019 and it proved to be an important start to exploring newer and more collaborative ways of knowledge exchange. The CG group has agreed to some of its key responsibilities as being i) bringing in lessons and inputs on WEE from their organisations ii) co-hosting of policy dialogues and learning events at the state and national levels and iii) working on together for more strategic policy influencing efforts with government counterparts, especially with States.

Second Consultative Group Meeting, April 30, 2019: In the spirit of rotating responsibility of hosting CG meetings, the second meeting was hosted by UNDP. The theme for discussion focused on some of the work and studies supported by UNDP on workforce participation. This led to rich discussion and the idea of collaboration of joint policy briefs emerged. Some of the ideas for further research and preparation of policy briefs were:

- What impedes women's participation in skill training programmes? Is mobility a factor? Is there enough focus on mobilising women and girls for skill training programs?
- There is a need to understand the link of Education to Employment and how skill fits in. Do skill interventions fill gaps in the education system?
- Women's skills and workforce participation. Emerging opportunities, new type of jobs beyond gender stereo types. Are skill programs geared towards this?
- Understanding in other contexts, how did women come out and work? What models have helped especially supported by the Government.

Lessons Learned

The two years of implementation of WEE pillar offer us important lessons on how an initiative such as the Lighthouse can significantly contribute to organizational learning and offers an opportunity to enter into unique partnerships and collaborations with diverse stakeholders.

1. Institutional commitment is critical to promote knowledge sharing and organizational learning on the issue of Women Economic Empowerment. Lighthouse was provided strong support and guidance as well as room to innovate and learn by CMU. This immensely helped WEE pillar to innovate and explore opportunities for collaboration and partnerships going forward.
2. Working closely with sectors and initiatives internally such as the gender platform is critical as it allows for lessons from outside to influence and strengthen WEE dimensions in our own programs. The initiation of dialogue with the DRM, transport GPs are showing promise.
3. There is value in investing time to identify relevant stakeholders and partners to collaborate with, especially in an area such as WEE where a lot of experience exists and there are important lessons on what works and what does not. The constitution of a Consultative Group on WEE has helped in creating a platform to bring stakeholders on board with shared responsibility and interest to make more informed and strategic dents on barriers to WEE.
4. Lessons from stock-taking and stakeholder discussions have highlighted that while programs have tremendous potential to impact lives of women and promote their social and economic empowerment, policy influencing and advocacy is clearly emerging as the next big focus area for the government as well as multilateral and bilateral organizations and the civil society. Further, effective policy dialogue must involve continuous collaboration between governments and multiple stakeholders engaged in this area including sharing of knowledge and experience. This requires moving beyond organizational boundaries and limited roles.

Part B: Plan Ahead FY 2019-2020

A strong foundation for further deep dive into policies influencing women economic empowerment has been created. This has generated new ideas for collaboration, which need time, resources and organizational support. WEE pillar in the next year will aim to focus on a few key areas;

1. **Institutionalizing the WEE knowledge sharing platform** in partnership with the National Labour Institute (VVGNLI) as a sustainable model that informs the Government system and critical policies related to WEE. This would include but not limited to preparation of policy briefs on important issues for advocacy. The collaboration started through formation of the Consultative Group members can be continued for this and at least one policy brief on women's workforce participation can be aimed for.
2. **Entering into knowledge partnerships** with institutes like Tata Institute of Social Sciences to help curate knowledge on GBV and its link to women's workforce participation and ICRW to map the policy ecosystem on WEE and with ACCESS on exploring successful models for women's entrepreneurship and what is required to upscale these. There is also a need to identify and document compelling models on what works on WEE. A start has already been made by producing 4 knowledge notes and the team is keen to continue this by bringing in more lessons and models under Lighthouse as there is great demand for these lessons both internally and from external partners.
3. **Strategic engagement with States for improving policy environment on WEE** with select states such as Jharkhand which presents a tribal context and a state like Punjab that has high gender gaps in the social and economic spheres, in an overall context of a fragile economy. This engagement is envisaged to provide states with enhanced knowledge on both policy and programmatic models for improving the WEE ecosystem. **Internal partnerships with sectors** such as Water and Disaster Relief Management to strengthen WEE components by connecting them with lessons from outside can be one way of ensuring knowledge partnerships are able to improve program understanding and integration of women economic empowerment dimensions. This can include thematic roundtables and supporting exposure visits within the country and the region.
4. **Thematic knowledge exchange at the South Asia regional level** to carry forward the dialogue at the regional level and further strengthen knowledge exchange in this critical area of importance in the South Asia region. Through the gender platform, there is already interest being shown from countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.