

Concept Note

SIDE EVENT UNCSocD60 (2022)

Title: Women cooperative warriors combat COVID19 with sustainable gender and equity strategies: Iconic case of Working Women's Forum (India) and the Indian Cooperative Network for Women

Event Organizers: Working Women's Forum (India) and its Cooperative arm - Indian Cooperative Network for Women

Global cooperative stakeholders on women workers will highlight 'just recovery resilient strategies of UN agencies, Cooperative networks/alliances and women workers cooperatives alongwith Grassroots women cooperative leaders. The Working Women Forum(WWF-I) / Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW), convening this side event and their members faced multifarious challenges and were unable to travel restricted even to short distances during Covid 19 lockdown (neither pay/repay/receive loans/savings/fixed deposits). A financial inclusion strategy for the poor, marginalized women/girls for continuous credit access, employment was crucial for survival during pandemic. "Not to push back poor women" into poverty and withstand Covid-19. The **"Covid heroines - women micro entrepreneur pandemic warriors" program** symbolized unique pandemic strategies which ensured continuous employment/safety/security and combating gender based violence through cooperatives.

The UN CSocD60 side event, New York convened by the Working Women's Forum (India) on February 11, 2022 at 7.00p.m. (IST) is 75 minutes long. Global and Grassroots cooperative/women cooperative leaders, youth icons advocate pandemic leadership models for women cooperators (participants would include CSD60 UNDESA, UN agencies, I.L.O, World Farmers Organization, International Raiffeisen Union, International Cooperative Alliance (Asia Pacific) and so forth. Along with vegetable /fruit/fish/flower/fish vendors, weavers, artisans, lace makers, incense stick roller, members of WWF/ICNW; intellectuals, academicians social activists, media too.

The Covid-19 Pandemic – WWF/ICNW activities

As a response to COVID-19 and ensuring digital literacy/financial inclusion to informal sector poor women. A [Training of trainers](#) for 65 Ceo's, branch managers, women leaders of WWF-ICNW was held in September 2020 in partnership with the JCCU (Japanese Consumer

Cooperative Union) for training in digital literacy services. These women leaders are now well-capacitated to deliver training to poor women in cities/towns/villages of South India.

- A link to the 5 minute video on the TOT for Digital financial inclusion.
(URL: <https://youtu.be/J1cdrtF7zXU>)
- Video Link of the above Jaya Arunachalam award and process i.e., (The micro entrepreneur – Covid Warriors Award) is given below (7minutes):
(URL: <https://youtu.be/iDTpbM3STFc>)

The warrior spirit of poor women micro-entrepreneurs on the frontline battling COVID-19, was bestowed by WWF-ICNW (along with commercial banker) with the 'Jaya Arunachalam awards' (link given above). Out of 1500 members (who never ever defaulted even during Covid-19 in 10 – 37 years) those who transformed their lives from investing Rs.200 (3 US\$) to Rs.1,00,000 (1400 US\$) (educating children as Engineers, MBA's, nurses etc) in 10 – 37 year membership/loan cycles.

WWF/ICNW women members have ensured during the pandemic economic survival with loan repayment revamping and rescheduling due to limitations of cash flow. The cooperatives reached their doorstep (120000 poor women workers) without falling into debt/Covid -19 death through holistic strategies. Conducted digital literacy/financial inclusion training programme for women leaders delivering digital banking. (cities/towns/villages).

Earlier at UN Commission on Status for Women as at UN CSW65/2021, Working Women's Forum hosted our historic event entitled **Destitution to Global leadership: The Iconic Working Women's Forum (India)**. It was very successful with UNDESA inaugurating the event, (UN focal point for cooperatives), International Labour Organization (Cooperative Division) providing the keynote address: President WWF/ICNW globally acclaimed women's cooperative leader (Chair of ICA-AP Women's Committee, IRU Global Board Member), International Raiffeisen Union (IRU), Gender Equality Committee of ICA, Japanese Consumer Cooperative Union, (JCCU), World Farmers Organization (WFO), Grassroots leaders/office bearers of WWF/ICNW highlighted/discussed cooperative strategies for women workers.

Background

Women in the Informal sector face multiple disabilities, low growth/ investment, social/class oppression, access to productive inputs. The Working Women's Forum, India (WWF) and Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW) model, highlights the transformation of **atomized** powerless women workers mobilized into a mass platform, as co-operators, trade unionists. Beneficiary owned, driving social/economic change based "**counter culture**", shaping destinies by "**a holistic gender and equity model**". UN-SDG based, altered gender relations, challenging structural poverty, spearheading social integration; transforming labour into capital with retaining surplus for women. Demonstrating grassroots women's, leadership in cooperatives through social

protection, alternative financial inclusion, independent entrepreneurship, accessible credit and decent employment.

Working Women's Forum (India) (ECOSOC Status) ICNW have reached 6,00,000 poor informal sector women workers through cooperatives have financially included, countering gender violence, building an iconic platform of poor women's governance in 14 diverse cultural locations and being elected to senior Global Cooperative Unions/Alliances simultaneously (first time ever).

WWF has created inclusive space for bottom-up, participatory **cooperative** development models **"for poor women workers - entrepreneurs"** that could offset the dependency, welfare, charity and patronage approaches to poverty alleviation. (SDG 1).

The WWF – ICNW model is considered the best practice globally for 4 decades. A breakthrough model that facilitates underprivileged women's economic and social empowerment through its mass outreach of the beneficiaries and its innovative financial inclusion program is a long-term preventive program to counter gender based violence also. **Madam Hillary Clinton, as US Secretary of State** visited ICNW in 2011 to observe its operation and also interacted with the women entrepreneurs, admiring the unique new age cooperative **governed by grassroots women. World leaders and the inter-governmental process have been increasingly admiring WWF-ICNW's 'Gender and Equity Model of Empowerment'** as a holistic example for the UN SDG. A unique innovative 40 year iconic flag bearer, as one of the last powerful mass movements/cooperatives of poor women workers. In 17 years ICNW's ICT program since 2000 has transformed children of fisherwomen and wage labourers as software players digitalizing to enhance technology outreach in its operations for financial inclusion of the disadvantaged women.

WWF/ICNW works in four states (urban and rural branches) of India:

1. Tamil Nadu – Chennai (hawkers, vendors, producers, and manufacturers), Kancheepuram (silk weavers), Adiramapattinam (fisherwomen) etc.
2. Andhra Pradesh state - Godavari Districts (laceworkers)
3. Karnataka - Bellary, Bengaluru (incense stick)
4. Telangana – Hyderabad

It has promoted replication through training partners in Jharkhand and South Asia (Nepal, Srilanka etc.)

The current event of UNCSocD60 (2022) will discuss, debate, highlight (for solutions) the role of women workers cooperatives in sustainable development and "just recovery" during the pandemic.