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Empowering subsistence women entrepreneurs in India

Insights from Lijjat, Mulukanoor and MPWPCL

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Abstract

Purpose – Empowerment of women by social enterprises in emerging economies has received attention from researchers. This paper aims to study three social enterprises in India that aim to empower subsistence women entrepreneurs.

Design/methodology/approach – A comparative case analysis of three social enterprises is done to develop understanding of systems and processes adopted by them. Sources such as published journal and news articles, case studies, success stories and official websites are used for data collection.

Findings – The study found that all three organisations strive to increase the asset base of members by organizing disempowered subsistence producers lacking market power; extending services throughout the value chain, i.e. from raw material supply to marketing of products; ploughing back regular incomes and bonuses through mechanisms acceptable to all members; and empowering subsistence producers to gain market power and ability to choose. The interventions give market exposure and voice to the concerns of women producers. These organisations successfully leverage the strength of their relations with civil society and markets in sustaining the business. Women empowerment was found to be achieved through regular income, collective voice, ability to take decisions and creation of social value.

Research limitations/implications – This paper does not take into consideration enterprises promoted by government.

Practical implications – A conceptual framework is suggested in this paper along with insights for organisations interested in collectivising subsistence women for empowering them.

Originality/value – The conceptual framework provided in this paper enriches the understanding of social enterprises working with the objective of women empowerment.

Keywords Business model, Social enterprise, Women entrepreneurship, Subsistence

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Correcting the harm done by an unjust equilibrium is the motivating force for a social entrepreneur (Martin and Osberg, 2007). This is because economic development can be driven by entrepreneurship (Anokhin *et al.*, 2008, p. 117), as it acts as an engine of growth (Holcombe 1998, p. 60). Economic development can be possible with employment opportunities, promotion of innovation and welfare that can be enabled by



entrepreneurship (Acs *et al.*, 2008, p. 219). A social entrepreneur works with the goal of developing sustainable advantages and solutions with empowerment as a building block (Santos, 2012).

Social entrepreneurship is an innovation process unfolding in various institutional contexts. With value creation at its base, social entrepreneurship can be a befitting approach to address modern society's problems (Santos, 2012). It can also be seen as a process promoting various combinations of resources and their innovative usage with the aim to pursue opportunities that catalyse social change (Mair and Marti, 2006, p. 37). It enables new model creation which is aimed at serving the unsatisfied basic human needs by existing economic or social institutions. Thus, social enterprises focus on improving systems and creating solutions with new approaches to problems that were left untouched by others. The objective of social enterprise is social value creation, which may result in economic value creation as well. This view is taken, as customers of social enterprises cannot pay for products and services in spite of their willingness to do so (Seelos and Mair, 2005).

Poverty in rural areas and urban slums of India presents continuous challenges to people interested in implementing development interventions. While struggling with poverty, many poor people from rural or urban context take up menial entrepreneurial activities that come under the informal economy (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014). Women who constitute a significant half of this population continue to face the social prejudice in all these activities, and most importantly in production and market transactions. Because of this reason they get exploited more than the male members of their community and remain disempowered and poor. Social enterprises working for women empowerment strive to help these women to fight the exploitation, improve their returns from markets, increase their contribution to household and finally empower themselves. Studies have shown that subsistence entrepreneurs face challenges of a different order when compared to transformational entrepreneurs (Saripalli and Chawan, 2017). However, in the case of women subsistence entrepreneurs, the challenges would be of an even higher order as they lack voice both inside and outside their households.

Significant efforts are taken up by social enterprises in various parts of India to help women organise themselves under a viable business activity. To analyse the interventions of the three social enterprises working with women, we developed a conceptual framework drawn from the frameworks proposed by London *et al.* (2010) and Kabeer (1999). The paper first presents the possibilities of women empowerment through social enterprises sampled for the study. Data collected from the three organisations are presented next under organising for empowerment. Detailed analyses of the interventions of these organisations using the proposed conceptual framework follow in discussion section. Practical implications for social enterprises interested in working with women producers are discussed in next section followed by conclusion.

Literature review: empowering the oppressed

Empowerment is a process of change that refers to the ability to make choices. Choices can occur after understanding circumstances, accepting what is given, or individual's decision to conform. Whichever may be the reason, choice implies that alternatives are possible and individuals have the ability to choose otherwise. Most important pre-condition for empowerment or ability to choose is the fact that the individuals must be disempowered in the first place. Empowerment does not apply to those who have never been disempowered in their lives. Because of this complex nature of empowerment, it can be understood through three interrelated dimensions: resources/pre-conditions, agency/

processes and achievements/outcomes (Kabeer, 1999). Furthermore, women are constrained by the values, customs, beliefs and norms in their society which influence their ability to choose or their choice making process, or choices made (Kabeer, 2000). If a woman feels disempowered, she cannot be bestowed with empowerment by a third party, but she has to claim it for herself. The third party can only create conditions or ecosystems which will favour empowerment. Further, empowerment is not an absolute state one can arrive at but is relative to others and self with respect to a previous time. If an agency is focussing on women empowerment at a collective level, it has to understand the power relations between sexes in the context, how they are constructed and maintained (Mosedale, 2005).

Social enterprises that are operating with empowerment, not control and conceptualising business model with empowerment embedded in it (Mair and Schoen, 2007; Santos, 2009) are well placed to help women from oppressed communities.

Calás *et al.* (2009) indicate that rather than seeing social entrepreneurship as a driver of economic engine, it needs to be seen as an activity having the potential to create social impact and produce diverse outcomes that may or may not benefit women.

A business model should be able to address the production and transaction related constraints faced by the producers. This is because in any community the members face problem with either or both the constraints. Addressing these two constraints either one after the other or simultaneously depends on whether the communities were producing products demanded by markets or need to learn new skills to produce what is demanded by the market (London *et al.*, 2010). Because of their connectivity with grassroots and ability to understand and empathise with the individuals in oppressed communities, social enterprises are better placed to help them. The dimensions discussed here have enabled development of conceptual framework and analysis of efforts taken up by the three social enterprises working for the empowerment of subsistence women producers. They also helped in drawing implications for other social enterprises interested in working with oppressed communities.

Research context and methodology

Women entrepreneurs from subsistence context face a lot of oppression because of their gender, religion and caste. Connecting with markets and benefiting from them is a herculean task for these women. Because of this, they struggle in the informal economy and subsist with the meagre wages or revenues. To change this situation, they need support of an external agency which can help them in smoothening interactions with the market and earn regular income. Organisations working with women subsistence entrepreneurs have to first address the social prejudice before extending support for their economic activities. This necessitates well thought out systems and processes in the organisation as the aim is to improve the participation of women in market interactions. Sometimes, women in the subsistence context cannot accept freedom which is possible from beneficial market interactions. In this regard, a social enterprise needs to strive and first establish confidence among the women entrepreneurs, and then take them on the path of entrepreneurship.

Different social entrepreneurship models have been implemented in India with respect to women empowerment. Social enterprises are the institutions creating value in the society for those communities which have been neglected by both markets and governments (Santos, 2012). Our paper looks at three organisations working with the objective of women empowerment through business. The organisations chosen for the study differ in terms of:

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- geographic location, i.e. state in India;
- scope for scaling-up; and
- religion, caste and class of women.

This paper takes up a multiple case study design in which each organisation is considered as a unit of analysis. The view taken here is that conclusions gained from analysis of multiple cases is robust. Most importantly, with all the differences in these three organisations, it is possible to arrive at same conclusions improving the chances of generalisability of findings (Yin, 2003) and helping in reaching theoretical saturation.

Sample organisations

Three organisations working with women from subsistence context producing food products are chosen for the study. Typology of social enterprises provided by Dorado (2006) was used for selection. As per the typology, social enterprise can be:

- non-profit organisation venturing into a business;
- for-profit business with economic and social goals; and
- a cross-sector or hybrid venture.

Mulukanoor Women's Mutually Aided Milk Producers Cooperative Union Ltd (Mulukanoor) selected for the study falls in the first category and it produces milk and milk products. Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad (Lijjat) falls in the second category and it produces snacks, spice mixes and detergents. Madhya Pradesh Women Poultry Producers Company Pvt. Ltd. (MPWPCL) producing chicken falls under third category where a non-profit organisation established a for-profit producer company for addressing social issues. Though women living in tribal and rural areas can earn their living from agriculture, their location in drought prone areas of the state hinders it. In case of women living in urban areas, skills and distance of workplace reduces their chances of wage employment. Because of this reason, all the three social enterprises either use the existing skills of women or impart them skills, using which, they can earn a living. Details of the organisations studied are given in Table I.

Parameter	MPWPCL	Lijjat	Mulukanoor
State in India	Madhya Pradesh	Maharashtra	Telangana
Founding year	2001	1959	2002
Region of work	Tribal	Urban	Rural
Core business	Poultry – Chicken	Food products and Detergents	Dairy – Milk
Scope for members to earn better living	No – drought prone	No – live in small spaces	No – drought prone
Number of members	4050	43,000	20,000
Organisation spread	10 cooperatives	81 branches and 27 division	127 village cooperative societies

Table I.
Social enterprises
and their social and
economic
background

Source: Data compiled from websites of three organisations <http://mpwpcl.org/>, www.lijjat.com/, and www.mulukanoordairy.com/ (accessed 3 May 2017)

Conceptual framework

Social enterprises have also emerged to take up ventures helping women from oppressed communities. These ventures focussed on creating market access for products from women producers, where terms of exchange were not favourable or/and bring visibility to their work where it remained invisible. To achieve these objectives, social enterprises identify skills needed to produce products or services demanded by the market and ascertain if such skills are existing with target women. The social enterprises then set out to train the women to become skilful producers. If concerned social enterprise does not have the wherewithal to train the women members it will take the help of collaborating or facilitating agencies, which develop abilities and skills of women producers who may possess them in a crude form or altogether develop a skill that is in demand. Further, social enterprises focus on the existing economic, social and human resources available with individuals in the community. These resources may be acquired by individuals through relationships in society such as family, community and markets. Owing to their poverty and disempowered status, people from the oppressed communities find it difficult to generate economic, social or human resources to work individually and benefit from market interactions. They need to pool their resources at the community level. Such pooling is possible with the support of a social enterprise:

- that takes interest in collectivising individuals;
- organises support from other agencies if needed; and
- takes necessary steps to ensure sustenance of intervention.

Once resources are in place, the venture can focus on removing the production (i.e. value creation) constraints and transaction (i.e. value capture) constraints faced by producers. Social enterprises may look at whether the households are already producing marketable goods or they need to be trained to produce goods or services valued by customers. In terms of production constraints, the social enterprises work on providing “accessibility, availability and quality” of production inputs, investment, working capital & insurance, technology, equipment, business knowledge and storage. This helps people to produce best quality products which are valued by the final customers. Further the transaction or value capture constraints are addressed with:

- continued market support during fluctuations and cyclicity of demand;
- ensuring transparency in transactions, protection and enforcement of rights; and
- accessibility, affordability and quality of market knowledge, infrastructure and transport (London *et al.*, 2010).

In case of communities that are producing products already marketed in non-local markets, the organisation can focus on removing the transaction related constraints. With this, the returns earned by individuals improve, motivating them to invest in production activities, thereby removing the production constraints. Once this cycle is set in motion with a social enterprise as a custodian, its achievements can be sustained in the long run. If the venture focusses on developing a product or service which is not produced earlier by the communities, then it has to first remove the production constraints by training the individuals, produce the product or service and market it. Once the production constraints and transaction constraints are removed, simultaneously the community will be comfortable in interacting with the markets with a product produced as per customers’ requirements (London *et al.*, 2010).

These steps if implemented well instil confidence, improve ability to interact with customers and create steady income stream for producers. This will help them to come out of exploitative relationships in which they existed for so long. At least they can exercise the choice of using a self-help group or a bank for financial assistance, approach the customers directly to earn better returns, and interact with collaborating organisation to improve their production and marketing skills. This activity of giving confidence and regularity of income needs to be repeated year after year for the producer members. Then only they will remain out of exploitative relationships, come out of oppressed mindset and sustain their ability to choose, i.e. remain empowered. In absence of such sustained efforts over a long period, the producers may face the risk of falling back into the disempowered group losing confidence to interact with markets. Organising such producers again for market interactions may be a herculean task. Figure 1 depicts the empowerment process through social enterprise.

London *et al.* (2010) look into ways in which production and transaction constrained can be addressed to create and capture value by the subsistence producers. Kabeer (1999) looks into resources, agency and outcomes which are essential for women to interact with markets and learn to make choices on continuous basis. The proposed framework emphasises the role of value creation and capture in the empowerment process of women through involvement of a social enterprise. The proposed framework tries to integrate both London *et al.*'s (2010) and Kabeer's (1999) frameworks, as it is essential to visualise the role of agency in detail, i.e. the agency aggregating the resources, creating and capturing value, and finally leading its women members towards empowerment. We further categorise all the data collected into each of the value creation and value capture elements.

Organising for women empowerment

The social enterprises working for the empowerment of women need to focus on value creation and capture. The paper takes into consideration the components of the framework suggested by London *et al.* (2010) in terms of value creation done through accessibility, availability and quality of production inputs, investment, working capital and insurance and technology, equipment, business knowledge and storage. Further value capture constraints are addressed with:

- continued market support during fluctuations and cyclicity of demand;
- ensuring transparency in transactions, protection and enforcement of rights; and

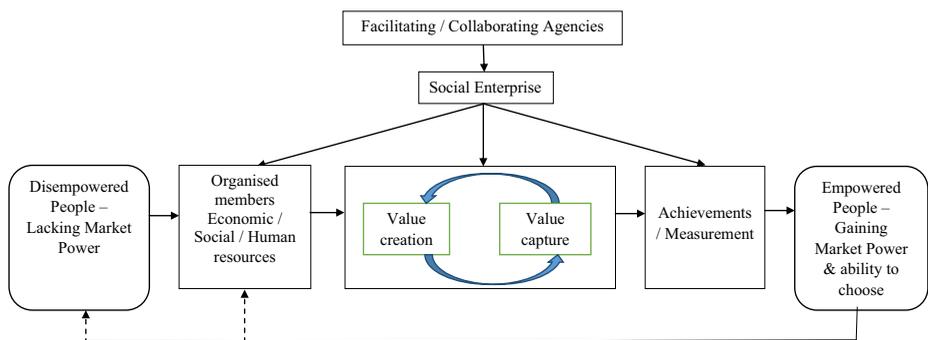


Figure 1.
Empowerment through social enterprise: a conceptual framework

Source: Conceptualised by authors using Kabeer (1999) and London *et al.* (2010)

- accessibility, affordability and quality of market knowledge, infrastructure and transport.

A detailed description of the activities taken up by the three organisations in terms of value creation and capture are given in the [Tables II](#) to [VII](#).

Value creation

Production inputs. [Table II](#) provides details of inputs supplied, services and training extended and alignment of skillset with business.

Product quality which is a concern in formal markets is addressed by ensuring input quality in the three organizations that we studied – standardisation is achieved through training routines as well as in input supply reducing the variability of the end product. Without standardisation efforts, it would have taken a long time to reach consensus on what the acceptable level of quality would be.

Another distinct manner in which these organizations add value is in terms of aligning skillset with business – admittedly, the limited skillset of the subsistence women entrepreneurs would imply that they would be confined to production and operation functions, at least initially; at a later date, however, some of these entrepreneurs learn other skills such as financial literacy and team building. This would not have been possible without these organizations in the mix.

Financing needs (investment, working capital and insurance). [Table III](#) presents data on meeting finance needs, sources of revenue and pricing method adopted.

While the financial needs may be met initially through grants, in keeping with their ethos and practice of social entrepreneurship, all the three organizations graduated to internal accruals.

Even as these practices suggest that the entrepreneurs have become operationally excellent, thanks to the three organizations, they find it difficult to enter the rarified realm of differentiation – this can be gleaned from the data on pricing, where we see that pricing is market determined; this is not completely surprising because none of these three organizations arguably have a good brand power despite having good quality.

Technology, equipment, business knowledge and storage. [Table IV](#) describes the dispersed production model adopted by the three organisations.

The ability to disperse the production on the part of the organizations is the most important facet of value creation. This is vital in the context of women subsistence entrepreneurs, as they lack voice both outside and inside their homes, at least initially; dispersed production enables the women to work from home, thus providing them the space required before integrating them into the formal economy. Another facet we observe here is that the technology is aimed at effectiveness, i.e. ensuring that the quality is good rather than on efficiency, i.e. focusing on a high quantity of production in per unit terms.

Value capture

Continued market support. [Table V](#) presents data on the products produced, their quality, leadership support, branding efforts, customer relations, employment and pricing support provided by the three organisations.

Even though we observe that the organizations were originally started and supported by male leaders, we also observe that the sustained leadership at a later date comes mostly from women. It can be argued that men were required to give the initial thrust, as most of the women

Table II.
Value creation:
production inputs

Parameter	MPWFCL	Lijjat	Mulukanoor
Input supply	Day old chicks, feed, litter material and medicines are provided as inputs to members. Shed construction costs are supported through banks and government (Deka and Kumar, 2012)	All inputs are supplied and women are trained to perfection in maintaining product quality	Cattle feed is provided at nominal price and the money is deducted from milk bills. Members are made aware of best practices of using feed and fodder to improve productivity (Mulukanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy, 2017a)
Veterinary Services	Extended for health and growth of birds. Production cards are given for good record keeping. Mortality, weight, feed conversion among birds are recorded. Impact of these variables on profits is discussed at the end of production cycle (Deka and Kumar, 2012)	Not Applicable	Over 110 veterinary medical assistants were trained and one helper was deployed in each village. Artificial insemination is provided. Livestock service centers are also launched to provide veterinary, nutrition and insemination services in 10 clusters. Member and the animal are protected with insurance plans (Mulukanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy, 2017a)
Transport Facility	Not Applicable	Production begins at 4:30 a.m. and members get transport facility to reach workplace for those who don't have space to work from home (Lijjat, 2017a)	Not Applicable
Training	Support is given on maintenance of shed and vaccine, management of chicks, major diseases, water and litter, measurement of feed to be fed, medicines to be given and preventive action, and record keeping (Deka and Kumar, 2012)	Women who are trained in the process are inducted by briefing them about the production standards	Exposure visits for potential members were organised in various milk unions in south India. This helped women to understand tasks in milk union, finding suitable personnel for them and overall management of union (Sahavikasa, 2017a, 2017b)
Aligning skillset with business	Women's skills in rearing birds are nurtured and are trained in best practices to ensure better productivity	Women knowing papad making are inducted and further trained to produce best quality papads. At Lijjat women believe in each other's commitment and ability to fuel progress. Understanding the family, time and social pressures faced by women the organisation turned them into advantage. All issues in the organisation are dealt as though in a family setting. For all the members and employees of the organisation, it is not just a place providing livelihood but it is a place of worship. The aim is to motivate members to devote their efforts not for their own benefit but also for the collective benefit (Myonineca, 2015)	As rural women are exposed to animal husbandry, their existing skills are tapped to produce and market milk. To ensure their continuance in the business, about five percent compulsory development deposit from every member's milk bill (Myonineca, 2015). This increases the regularity of members in pouring milk and sticking to best practices of milk production. Such behaviour from members enables Mulukanoor to maintain regular supplies to market

Parameter	MPWPCL	Lijjat	Mulukanoor
Meeting of financing needs	MPWPCL received government subsidy for shed construction, foundations such as REBO, FORD and Deewan extended soft loans for capital costs, to be paid back, PRADAN extended support and guidance on building community, resource persons, and training and development, and MP's DPIP gave seed money to set up the MPWPCL (Garg and Kumar, 2011)	Lijjat generates its working capital through internal accruals. It imbibed values such as business, family and devotion. It sells products of high quality. Never accepts charity, donations or grants from anyone (Lijjat, 2017b)	Mulukanoor dairy received INR. 3.31 crores investment needed from Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF) as fixed deposits. The agreement envisages repayment of loan along with interest over a period of ten year from inception i.e. 2002. However, leaders and members decided to increase their stakes in the union. With this objective the addition sum of INR. 1.85 crores which was taken from CDF as call deposits was repaid quickly. Most importantly INR. 2.9 crores of the loan amount of INR. 3.31 crores were repaid by March 2006. Union also took INR. 1.68 crores from 18 women's and 8 men's thrift cooperatives and paid back INR. 1.66 crores (Sahavikasa, 2017a, 2017b)
Pricing	Prices are fixed based on prices prevailing in Jabalpur market (Garg and Kumar, 2011)	Prices are same across India. Cost plus margin method is adopted for pricing	Market determined prices or follow other prominent milk cooperatives like Amul
Revenue sources	Sale of birds	Sale of culinary products and fast-moving consumer goods	Sale of dairy products

Table III.
Value creation:
financing needs
(investment, working
Capital and
insurance)

from the target segment lacked the voice and the skillset to start with. Continuing success and the resultant increase in confidence has led to more women getting into leadership positions in larger numbers. As the nature of the organizations involved was to facilitate entrepreneurship, they should ideally not be judged on their ability to generate direct employment. Yet, while these organizations helped in creation of self-employed entrepreneurs, they also helped create some employment, primarily at the coordinating levels and in supervisory roles.

Governance. Table VI provides the details of governance mechanisms established in the three organizations.

Organizations that have a social character need to invest in strong governance standards as trust reposed by women entrepreneurs in these organizations is the biggest asset they have. All the three organizations in our study have seemingly realized this as can be evidenced from the highly evolved and elaborate governance standards.

Beyond survival and subsistence, the primary challenges for women entrepreneurs are in the domains of scalability and sustainability. These can take root at a local level when the women entrepreneurs are provided a choice of entering into leadership roles even when they are under the protective shield of the larger organization. One key commonality across the

Parameter	MPWPCL	Lijjat	Mulukanoor
Dispersed production	It happens at the household level i.e. 300 to 500 birds per member in a village of one sq. km. This reduces the disease outbreak and its spread, reducing the risk for the poultry farmer. Commercial farms rear 5000 to 10,000 birds in 5500 to 11,000 sq. ft., increasing their risk (This means that roughly only five birds are reared in this intervention vis-à-vis close to 50,000 birds in commercial farms). Cooperative picks up chickens of 35-40 days on a designated date and supplies to traders and retailers. Supervisor passes on information about readiness of birds and problems if any (Garg and Kumar, 2011). Placement of chicks, calendar for induction of birds, matching demand with production and placement of birds in market is done by cooperative (Deka and Kumar, 2012)	Dispersed production and storage helps save lot of time and costs. Raw materials are purchased, processed and distributed from central office in Mumbai to all centers. Prices of the products remain same across India. Members can also work from home which reduces Lijjat's investment in infrastructure. Technology is discouraged as it would defeat the very purpose of women coming together to use their skill to create wealth (Myonlineca, 2015)	Members dispersed in the vicinity of 30KM radius are encouraged to pour milk. This helps reduce milk collection costs. Limited product line also ensures that resources are not dissipated (Mulukanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy, 2017b)

Table IV.
Value creation:
technology,
equipment, business
knowledge and
storage

organizations is that despite being highly evolved, the governance measures are also highly localized and decentralized, thus helping in a more participatory value capture mechanism.

Market knowledge and infrastructure. Table VII provides the efforts taken by the organisations in terms of standardisation and distribution network established to cater to the needs of consumers.

As market forces predominantly focus on the nature of the product rather than the nature of the source, all the three organizations focus on standardization as a way to meet market requirements. Unlike in the case of individual subsistence entrepreneurs, the presence of these organizations also helps in understanding systemic failures if any and redressing them on a war footing.

Even as the organizations help in value creation, it is important that they also help in value appropriation – if the middle men end up capturing most of the value, the purpose of organizing the women entrepreneurs is lost. We observe that these organizations try to reduce the bargaining power of the distributors either by reaching out to a larger set of distributors or by reducing the downside risk through upfront sales to the distributor. Admittedly, the second strategy is feasible only in the case of a well-established organization with a good brand equity – hence, we observe this more in the case of Lijjat rather than the other cases.

Parameter	MPWPCL	Lijjat	Mulukanoor
Products	Chicken	<i>Papad, Appalam, Atta, Masalas, Chapati</i> , detergent powder, detergent cake and liquid detergent	Milk, curd and value-added products
Product quality	Chickens raised in a small setting with limited resources get exposed to low levels of pollution. Lesser pathogenic load in a small shed with limited birds demands low usage of chemicals for treatment	Consistent good quality is the unique selling proposition of Lijjat. About 800gms of papad has to come from 1kg dough provided to the member, this is to account for loss of moisture. If these criteria are not adhered to then payment is cut for the concerned member. Everyday papads from all centers come to main branch for testing. If there is deviation in quality of any lot then it is destroyed completely (Myonlineca, 2015)	Members understood quality testing process of milk used for payments (Sahavikasa, 2017a, 2017b). The plant's milk processing capacity is 750,000 litres per day. It received ISO 9001-2008 certification. It started off with 67 village level cooperatives and reached to 110 (Mulukanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy, 2017c)
Leadership	PRADAN a prominent non-government organisation (NGO) was behind this initiative	Mr Purshottam Damodar Dattani and Mr Chhaganbapa mentored the organisation. From a humble beginning of seven women members the organisation has grown to 43,000 women members currently. It's the perseverance of the seven women which made the organisation what it is today (Lijjat, 2017c)	Promoting collective action and matchless service to members and clients is core. It led to increasing membership, repeat orders and loyal clients (Mulukanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy, 2017d). Mr A.K. Vishwanath Reddy was the leader behind Mulukanoor thrift society and Cooperative bank. The organisations have supported farmers in their production, marketing and finances. The ideals of Mr-Vishwanath Reddy continue to guide Mulukanoor dairy (Mulukanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy, 2017e)

(continued)

Women
entrepreneurs
in India

Table V.
Value capture:
continued market
support

Table V.

Parameter	MPWPCL	Lijjat	Mulukanoor
Brand	Sukhtava brand name is given to poultry sold. As chicken sells in limited geography. So the organisation needs to make more efforts to become a reputed brand (MPWPCL, 2017). Relations are built with Sukhtava brand through regular sale to customers. Commodity nature of chicken can be a constraint	Lijjat as a brand and an organisation is widely known for its role in empowering women with limited education and skills. The products are known for their quality. With customers it is one-time transaction. But over a period of time relationships are built as the brand stands for quality and a cause	Swakrushi is the brand established. Members receive surplus based on the total transactions they have with the cooperative. Regular payments help the cooperative keep good relations. Regular supply of milk helps build customer relations (Mulukanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy, 2017b)
Business to Customer Relations Markets	Customers get chicken from retailers and traders. Traders purchase from cooperative. Multiple segments are served Chicken is sold in Indore and Bhopal districts which are located in the same geographic region of the cooperative	Retailers make the products available to customers of all segments Products are sold in pan-India market. Exports are made to Australia, Holland, Hong Kong, Japan, Middle East, Thailand, Singapore, United Kingdom and United States (Lijjat, 2017a)	Customers are assured to get best quality of milk to all segments Products are sold in the two districts only from where the milk is procured, i.e. Warangal and Karimnagar (Deccan Chronicle 2015)
Employment	Local youth get supervisor jobs and jobs in cooperative	Decent earning is provided. Member should ingrain Lijjat's objective. Each branch is manned by a Sanchalika who looks after production (Lijjat, 2017a)	Locals received employment and it helped in reducing human resource costs compared to industry (Mulukanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy, 2017b)
Price support / Profit sharing	Birds are lifted from producers at pre-determined price and date (Deka and Kumar, 2012)	Each branch maintains separate account and its profit and loss is shared equally among its members. A 21-member committee decides the method of profit distribution. Gold coins of 5gms or 10gms are purchased based on profits. All members get the same incentive (Myonlimeca, 2015)	On an average 300 litres of milk is collected from each village cooperative in a day. Payment of about INR. 114,369 is done to every village cooperative in a fortnight, i.e. on an average INR. 25.4 is paid per litre to members (Mulukanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy, 2017c)

Parameter	MPWPCL	Lijjat	Mulukanoor
Addressing information asymmetries, transparency in transactions, protection and enforcement of rights through governance	Governance works at cooperative and producer company levels. At cooperative level, producer members and two experts make up the BoD. A member of BoD gets nominated from each village involved in production. CEO of each cooperative meets board and chairman regularly to appraise them about progress. Apart from taking decisions for collective, BoD also visit member's farms to understand ground reality and educate members about best practices to be followed. Quarterly meetings are held to discuss pressing issues and BoD take the decisions to their respective villages. Each cooperative has a CEO and their group has a president functioning at the producer company level (Garg and Kumar, 2011)	All sister members are owners of Lijjat and this is reflected in their decision-making activities. Though committee handles decision making, each member is encouraged to take initiative or decide for improvement. Consensus among members is needed for all decisions as each member has veto power. Men cannot become members and those associated with the organisation have no voting rights (Myonlimeca, 2015)	The milk union is divided into 12 clusters, each cluster covering seven to nine villages. One woman director is elected from each cluster to form a 12-member board. Among these directors one is selected as a president of the union (Mulukanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy, 2017f). The basic unit of a milk union is a primary cooperative. In Mulukanoor there is a board of 10 members and two full time employees handling milk collection (Mulukanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy, 2017g)

Women
entrepreneurs
in India

Table VI.
Value capture:
governance

Table VII.
Value capture:
market knowledge
and infrastructure

Parameter	MPWPCL	Lijjat	Mulukanoor
Standardisation to meet market requirements	Committee and village level workers ensure members comply with standards. Deviation is reported and addressed	Every member is trained and reminded repeatedly to make perfect quality products. Those unable to maintain quality are asked to choose a different work. Lack of concern for quality may cost the job (Myonineca, 2015)	All products are produced under necessary standards
Distribution Network	Local traders, warehouses in Bhopal city and retail outlets are the channels used (Deka and Kumar, 2012)	For selected areas distributors are invited through advertisement and are shortlisted if their godown facilities are approved by marketing department. Distributors pay cash to purchase Lijjat products. A deposit of INR. 1.5 lakhs are collected. Once the distributor takes possession of products Lijjat's job ends. Distributors are monitored regularly and in monthly meetings price, reach and quality issues faced by them are discussed. Based on demand a new branch is opened (Myonineca, 2015)	Done through retail outlets in two districts of Telangana state

Discussion

This section discusses the efforts taken by the three social enterprises to create assets and capabilities at individual and collective level. It then talks about:

- efforts to create assets and capabilities at individual and collective level;
- components of business model established by three organisations; and
- development outcomes achieved.

The three business models create value for both producers and consumers. Quality and standardisation are adhered to for ensuring delivery of best products to consumers. This has led to establishment of strong brand relations between consumers and the enterprise. Distributors and retailers are engaged for delivering the products to consumers. For producers, Lijjat and Mulukanoor mobilised internal resources, whereas MPWPCL took bank and government support for capital investment. The objective is to provide self-employment to women living under harsh conditions. They are given sufficient training to ensure desired level of productivity and adherence to quality standards. All necessary inputs and services are provided for enhancement of production, which is monitored on periodic basis. Revenue generated from sale of products is distributed among members in the mechanism acceptable to all.

Value is created for customers across segments. Institutional sales (i.e. B2B) in Mulukanoor and MPWPCL have not taken off because of the requirement of large volumes per transaction. Whereas Lijjat has volumes to offer, but it needs skills to enter the B2B market. Resistance to deviate from existing business practices stops Lijjat's entry into B2B. However, long presence of Lijjat brand enables exports. Mulukanoor and MPWPCL serve only local markets, as their quantities get absorbed in few districts. All the three organisations survive on periodic cash transactions with their channel partners. They maintain long-term relations with channel partners and customers, which help in future sales. As the transactions focus on win-win for all stakeholders, their relations remain strong.

By adopting dispersed production systems, the three social enterprises have reduced production risk at collective and individual level. Individually, the woman takes responsibility for production based on her capability, time availability, ability to invest and other resources at her disposal. Production loss at individual level does not affect other households in this system. At the collective level, there is no loss of production because of any epidemic as cost conscious investments are made in production facilities. Each of the three organisations reinvested their earnings; however, MPWPCL took government and bank loan for its activities. All the three organisations are women dominant, supported by men who are only employees without decision making power. Women's control over resources improves their stakes and their confidence in determining the future course of action. Most importantly, allowing women members to work from home increases their participation in the venture.

MPWPCL supplies chicken which are healthy, well-bred and less exposed to chemicals. Lijjat supplies wide range of food items and spice mixes which are homemade and of consistent quality. Mulukanoor provides quality milk adhering to standards. These organisations do not seek charity from government, market or customers, but heavily rely on their products to increase their sales revenue. All three have established brand names of which Lijjat is widely known because of its long presence and wider reach. All three organisations are cost leaders, as they try to reduce costs in all activities. Each organisation has received consistent leadership support from individuals interested in empowering women. Further, Mulukanoor and MPWPCL have also received support from NGOs which were interested in promoting livelihoods.

The three organisations generate money from sale of products. Some savings from the earnings are reinvested either by individuals (MPWPCL) or institutions (Mulukanoor and Lijjat) for expanding the business. All the three organisations help in generating regular income at the member level. The quantum of money generated may differ from organisation to organisation and from member to member. Members have freedom to take up more responsibility to improve their incomes in all the three businesses. Mulukanoor may not grow very fast, as it requires members in a limited geography and needs to look out for competition either from unorganised milk vendors or branded milk. MPWPCL can continue to expand its operations as the government continues to support the initial investment, which is further enhanced with member's efforts. Lijjat is growing organically depending on the demand from a region and also interest among the women of a particular place to join Lijjat for self-employment.

Value creation and capture at various levels

Individual level. All three organisations identified assets and skills which can be easily acquired and utilised by women resulting in individual income generation. Rearing birds, taking care of dairy animals and making papads are the three skills which subsistence women are either familiar with or can easily acquire. Because of this, the three organisations focussed on poultry, papad making and dairy respectively. Members are provided with inputs, training, exposure visits and interactions with better performers, to ingrain the importance of productivity, quality and standardisation. Finally, they are provided with market support to sell the products. As the women interact with others from similar backgrounds, their ability to interact and learn improves. Such aggregation of women also educates them about the leadership role they can play in their own life, in the organisation and society. Mulukanoor, MPWPCL and Lijjat are working on all these parameters.

One of the ways to understand women empowerment is to hear the stories given by women themselves in their own perspective (Pollard, 2006).

Mrs Kotte Laxmi of Mulukanoor. Kotte Laxmi (KL), a woman from subsistence context with limited education joined cooperative movement in 1990. She started with a group of 247 members who save about INR 10 per month. Currently, the group comprises 730 members with KL as president. One of the challenges faced by KL was handling the certification of accounts by an auditor. The auditor refused certification of accounts citing an infinitesimal difference (i.e. INR 0.04) in accounts. KL checked the books of account and identified the mistake in bank's interest payment details. This matter was resolved with the bank and auditor's certification was obtained. This diligence earned her good reputation in the community. As women from thrift cooperative joined the dairy intervention of Mulukanoor, KL too became part of it. She gained qualities such as social etiquette, confidence to answer questions and moving in villages to get things done, from her association with thrift cooperative. KL was able to arrange funds for her children's education. She gets invited as a guest for flag hoisting in her village school and has established good rapport with government officials (Sahavikasa, 2017a, 2017b).

Mrs Sukritbai Chautele of MPWPCL: Deserted by her husband, Sukritbai (SB) lives with her parents and has a 12-year-old son. SB took up making and selling of bamboo baskets after returning to parents' home. The earnings from bamboo basket making were not enough to meet cash requirements of self and family. To improve her chances of income earning, in 2006 she joined common interest group initiated by PRADAN for the purpose of poultry intervention. She received training on maintaining chicken and further got financial

assistance of INR 30,000 from MP state's district poverty initiatives programme (DPIP). She has become the board member of her cooperative. She personally checks the records of her producer company on the transactions before collecting the remuneration. She was also instrumental in bird rearers adhering to the ground rules. The rules are:

- One rearer is not allowed in others' poultry sheds.
- Dogs and cats are not allowed in sheds.
- Children are prohibited from entry for safety reasons.
- After working in shed, producers must use disinfectant to wash their feet and hands.

SB is able to make INR 2,000 to 2,200 a month. This regularity of income has changed the mindset of SB's husband who is willing to relocate himself to get back with his wife ([Deka and Chautele, 2014](#)).

Collective level. The three initiatives have collectivised women under a formal organisation. This gives an identity to the individual as well as collective as they are now seen as contributing members of the society. The organisation can also bring in unity among the members which helps them to stand together in times of need. The three organisations are able to provide regular incomes to the members with their interventions. This results in a member's ability to contribute more to the family income, thereby increasing her stakes in decision making. Collective member contributions in the organisation provides them with a voice to represent their issues and problems within the organisation or outside of it. Such representation builds confidence of subsistence women who are interacting with markets through a formal mechanism.

All three organisations treat their members equitably by providing services and distribution of profits. Members are not discriminated based on their social or economic background. This is leading to enhanced production, regular growth and equitable access to markets for all members. It is observed that except Lijjat, the other two organisations have strong civil society relations. This is largely because of deliberate attempt by MPWPCL and Mulukanoor to remain in the civil society network and benefit from it. Lijjat chose to remain on its own, as it relies on internal resources for growth and the ideology of not accepting charity from anyone in society; further, its market coverage is pan-India, as well as exports, thus not necessitating strong linkages with local civil society. These organisations continue to create wealth at individual and community level, thereby creating a sense of self-worth among its members.

Practical implications

Understand the exploitative interlocking relations

Before conceptualising the business organisation for the producers of oppressed community, the social enterprise must understand thoroughly the exploitative interlocking relations in which the producers exist.

End to end solutions

Being in poverty and with competing desperate needs, the subsistence producers will be forced to choose between meeting the household needs or the production needs. This adversely affects their investments in the production systems because of which they may not be able to produce products acceptable to final consumers. Because of these issues, the social enterprise should extend handholding from skill development and sourcing of raw material to that of marketing the product and ploughing back the returns to producers. The

social enterprise should work simultaneously on addressing production as well as transaction constraints.

Skills and infrastructure

Existing skills of women must be carefully analysed and nurtured before aligning them with the business. This will save time and effort in training them. It eases the pressure on women to visualise the changing needs of customers and moulding themselves accordingly. The three social enterprises are connecting women with a business they are familiar with. Investments in infrastructure are made with the objective of aligning skillset of women with the necessary physical facilities to run the business successfully.

Technology

Technology enabling the role of women in business needs to be encouraged, whereas technology which necessitates large scale concentrated production may be discouraged. Lijjat uses manual accounting in all its branches and production is done manually. MPWPCL encourages dispersed production because it enables women to take charge of their work rather than becoming employees of a large-scale poultry farm. Mulukanoor also encourages dispersed production, whereas it uses technology in the processing plant to ensure quality of its milk and milk products.

Income and finance

Ensuring regularity of income and loan support for production or business enhancement activities is vital to keep interest of women members in the business. Regular income helps women to gain control over the resource usage at the household level, thereby giving them a chance to influence economic decisions. Loan support would help them in maintaining and expanding production, which in turn will lead to improvement of income. Reduction of financial dependence either on family members or on money lender would enable women to take charge of their lives. The three organisations ensure regular payments to their women members apart from arranging loans to enhance their production.

Decision-making

Women should remain centre of decision-making at all levels in the organisation. This is because it will give them sense of self-worth, confidence to take risks, face their household problems especially arising from male domination and raise concerns for betterment of their subsistence context. This was found to be a source of success of these three organisations. Men are employed in the organisations where needed but are not given any decision-making roles or voting rights.

Networking

Regular interactions through meetings that provide scope for discussing business problems and challenges is essential. Such interactions mediated through organisations would enable women to think about organisational development on continuous basis. In this process, they also develop ability to put forward their views and fight for their rights. The governance structures adopted by the three organisations enable such enriching interactions among women.

Market access

Market access should be provided to women with the objective of creating stable income. This helps women in contributing or managing their household finances without becoming too dependent on money lenders or external sources of finance. All the three organisations market the products on behalf of women, thereby reducing their personal risk of engaging with and getting exploited by markets. The regularity of income from the interventions is helping the women to take care of their household, pay for their children's education and also support the husband's agriculture or other occupations.

Establish a countervailing force

The subsistence producers can benefit from getting organised and the institutional support received, only when their organisation becomes a countervailing force for the existing market mechanisms which may be exploitative. Once the producers' organisation gains significant patronage from the members, it would create an eco-system, which gives bargaining power to producers. Unless the producers in the oppressed community reach this stage, they may not be really empowered.

Role of men in women's organisation

It is generally found that interventions succeed in creating a regular flow of income but fail to ensure that they are also used for the benefit of girl child and women. To begin with, the social enterprise can take the services of male producers but keep only women producers in the decision-making roles. This, along with continuous training to manage the household expenses, would give voice to women to fight for their due share in the income. This income can then be used by women for their own welfare and the welfare of the girl child. These measures create a countervailing power in the household that results in bringing balance to household expenses for everyone's welfare.

Systems and processes to sustain empowerment

If empowerment is seen as "ability to make choices", then the social enterprise must not rest once it has created regular income stream in the community. It has to strive towards establishing systems and processes using which producers will be able to continuously make the choices as per their needs (rather than accepting what is forced on them) (Figure 1). This process once set in motion will unlock the potential of the community to improve its social standing and fight for its due place in the society.

Conclusions

Social enterprises identify the problems existing in society that can be addressed with the creation of social and economic value. These organisations emerge as a response to government failure in supporting people from subsistence context who face social and economic challenges because of institutional voids. Social enterprises may make use of business models and marketing to help support members with their economic activities. However, the overall objective is creation of social value, which may be bigger than economic value and may be useful to members. In India, some social enterprises have been working with women to help them with their market transactions. A package of services and inputs are provided to the women members to ensure productivity enhancement and income increment as a result. These organisations make use of existing skill base of women, use technology to the extent needed, support members with loans and regular incomes,

provide market access, give scope to take decisions and enable networking so that women take charge of their lives.

For an intervention to leave a lasting impact, the intervening agency should try to understand the context in which oppressed communities live. Later the business should be conceptualised with end to end solutions, which are supported by significant organisations. The efforts should also be directed towards creating visibility for the artisans who remained invisible for ages. Most importantly, the mechanisms of the intervention should enable creation of a countervailing force that would help oppressed communities to exercise bargaining power with their oppressors. Also, the intervention should devise suitable roles for men involved as the gender relations need to be carefully crafted if women are to be empowered. Thus, it was found that skill enhancement, access to remunerative markets, steady income and continuous handholding would lead to confidence among women members of oppressed community, thereby creating in them the ability to choose. Most importantly, mechanisms must be established using which the women and men of the oppressed community should be able to “make choices” of their own without coercion.

This paper highlighted beneficial effects of three social enterprises which were involved in empowering women through their interventions. It contributes to the literature of social enterprises by highlighting their role in women empowerment. It also discusses and analyses the work done by the three social enterprises using a conceptual framework developed in the paper. Further, it tries to narrow the gap existing between development practitioners and the theoreticians of social entrepreneurship in terms of approach to be used for creation of social value.

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