



THE BRIDGE INDIA

FACILITATING SOCIAL PARTNERS

E-Magazine (Quarterly) | Volume 7 | Issue 1 | Jan - March 2025

The Power Within

W.O.M.E.N

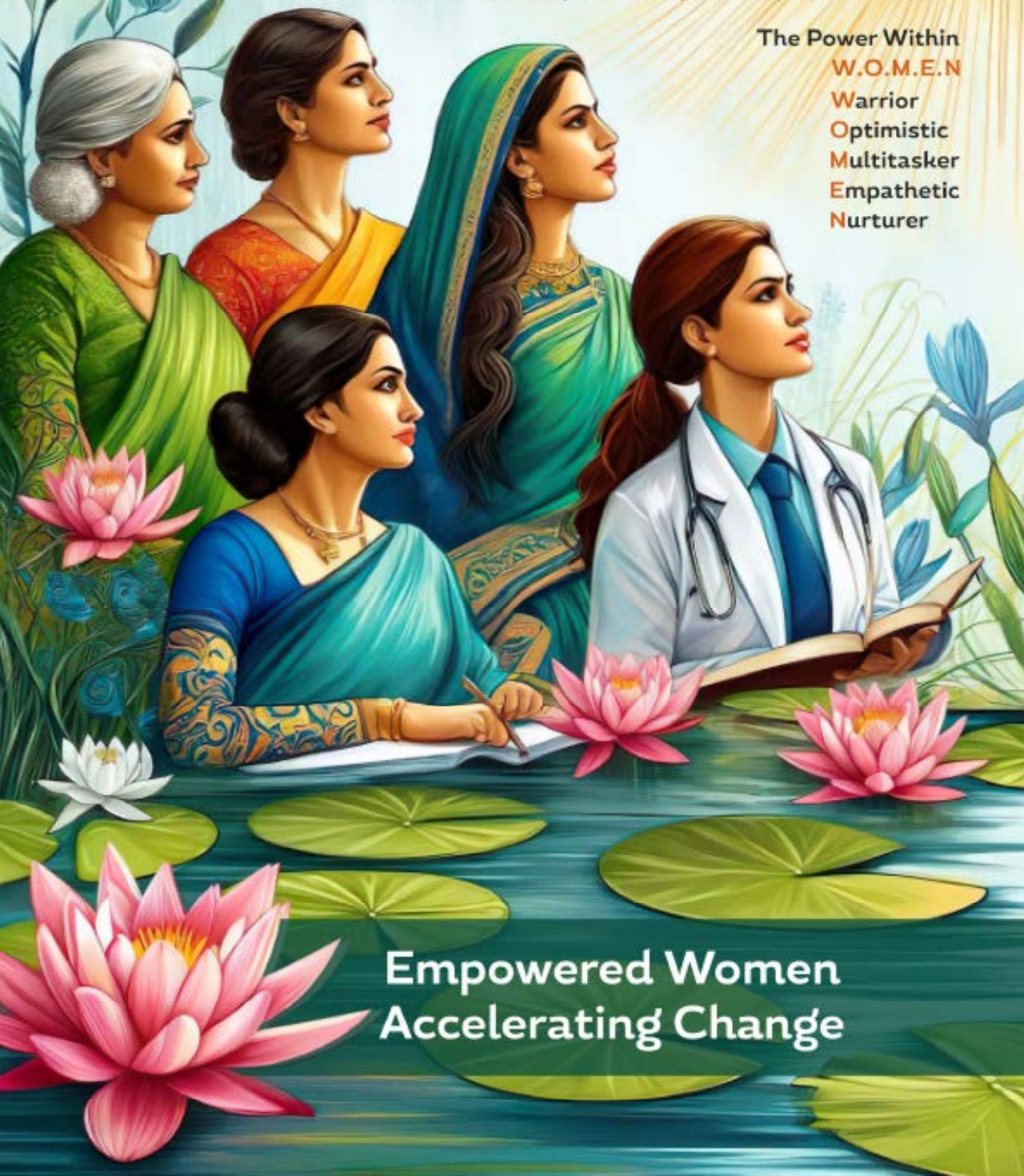
Warrior

Optimistic

Multitasker

Empathetic

Nurturer



**Empowered Women
Accelerating Change**

FIGHTING INEQUALITY AND STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S ROLE IN INDIA'S WORKFORCE

By Arvind Sen

Despite constituting nearly 48.4 per cent of India's population, women remain significantly underrepresented in the country's workforce, with female labour force participation hovering around just 20 per cent. Of those employed, a staggering 80 per cent are engaged in informal or unpaid sectors—often devoid of financial stability, social security, or access to healthcare. These vulnerabilities are compounded by systemic challenges including limited educational and healthcare access, restricted mobility, and heightened exposure to gender-based violence.

These interlinked barriers underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions that empower women economically and socially. As India aspires towards inclusive growth, the onus lies not just on governments, but on the private sector to drive tangible change. By investing in women—whether through skills training, entrepreneurship support, or inclusive workplace policies—corporates can play a pivotal role in dismantling barriers and unlocking the full potential of India's female workforce.

In this special edition on women empowerment, The Bridge focuses on the unique initiatives of three influential corporates operating in the country

Walmart Foundation: Strengthening Rural Economies Through Women Farmers

In India, The Walmart Foundation is championing gender equality



Women workers in action, developing artistic skills

in agriculture through its Market Access Program—an initiative that strengthens rural economies by enhancing market participation of women smallholder farmers. Operating across nine Indian states, the program has already reached over 800,000 farmers since 2018, with more than half being women.

Aiming to empower one million farmers by 2028—at least 50 per cent of whom will be women—the Foundation has invested over US\$ 39 million in building sustainable farmer networks via 500+ Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and Groups (FPGs).

Among the key projects is PROWFIT, implemented by PRADAN, which supports 60 women-led FPOs in Eastern India—engaging 120,000 women farmers from tribal and smallholder backgrounds. These efforts foster leadership, financial literacy, and collective

bargaining power.

Under Project UDAAN, ACCESS Development Services works with 20 FPOs, including six women-led collectives, to enhance inclusive value chains for over 12,000 farmers—more than half of whom are women.

Srijan's intervention in Madhya Pradesh further exemplifies sustainable empowerment. By organizing 12 FPOs and over 25,000 farmers—including 15,000 women—the project helps generate additional income through value addition. In a compelling example, 1,300 women from Amarkantak Horticulture Producer Company established a millet processing unit, raising their product value from ₹27/kg (raw) to ₹80/kg (processed).

Meanwhile, Mercy Corps is enhancing digital financial inclusion for 100,000 women farmers in Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and



Tata Power DDL-ABHAS

Telangana. The initiative integrates productivity tools, market access, and resilience-building services in partnership with private sector players.

"We are seeing women emerge as decision-makers and changemakers in their communities," remarks Julie Gehrki, Vice President, COO, Walmart Foundation. "Our partnerships with grassroots organizations are catalysing long-term, systemic change for rural women across India."

Tata Power-DDL: Lighting the Path to Empowerment

Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power-DDL), a leading name in India's power distribution sector, is redefining the contours of Corporate Social Responsibility by placing gender equality at the heart of its mission. With a strong emphasis on Sustainable Development Goal 5—Gender Equality—the company has embedded women's empowerment into the fabric of its operations.

"Women's empowerment is not merely a part of our CSR framework—it is a strategic imperative integral to sustainable development. We firmly believe that empowering

women uplifts entire communities," states Mr. Gajanan S. Kale, Chief Executive Officer of Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited.

One of the standout initiatives is ABHA, a community engagement program that has transformed nearly 1,000 women into grassroots ambassadors for change. These trained representatives promote the company's CSR initiatives across underserved communities, acting as catalysts for social transformation.

Under the Unnati vertical, Tata Power-DDL has operationalized 23 Vocational Training Centres (VTCs), offering women employable skills in domains such as Tally & GST, domestic data entry, tailoring, and beauty care. Over 2,500 women have been trained through this initiative, many of whom have transitioned into income-generating roles.

"Our women-centric programs are designed to instil not just skills, but also a sense of purpose and

self-worth," Mr. Kale explains. "We aim to enable women to see themselves not only as earners but as leaders and changemakers within their communities."

Further strengthening its outreach, the company supports over 250 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) through an Entrepreneurship Development Program that equips women with skills in handloom weaving, jute craft, chocolate-making, and more. A notable outcome is the establishment of a dedicated Handloom Unit in Shalimar Bagh, providing sustainable livelihood to 100 women artisans.

Through its Women Literacy Centres, the company has empowered over 1.5 lakh women with basic education, while its I Love Science campaign under the Club Enerji program promotes STEM learning among girls—a significant stride toward inclusivity in the energy sector.

A signatory to the UN Women's





Women workers in action, developing artistic skills

Empowerment Principles (WEPs), Tata Power-DDL actively utilizes tools like the WEPs GAP Analysis Tool to shape its strategies. Technological innovation is integrated with inclusivity, evidenced by the launch of three all-women Customer Care Centres in Delhi—entirely managed by skilled female professionals.

“For us, innovation is meaningful only when it is inclusive. Whether it’s through all-women customer care centres or community-based tech outreach, our use of technology is geared towards creating access and opportunities for all,” Mr. Kale notes.

Internally, the company nurtures an inclusive workplace culture with 13.3 per cent of leadership roles held by women. Initiatives like WILL (Women in Leadership League), and partnerships with ADB and USAID’s Engendering Utilities Program, underscore its commitment to nurturing female talent, especially in technical fields.

Forward-thinking policies, such as extended parental leaves, flexi-work options, and Single Parent support, further enhance its progressive outlook.

“True workplace equality requires us to acknowledge and address the unique challenges that women face,” affirms Mr. Kale. *“Our policies reflect this understanding, offering a supportive environment that enables our female workforce to thrive professionally and personally.”*

Tata Power-DDL’s transformative impact has earned it national recognition, including the Jury Choice Award for Vocational Training (ICC Social Impact Awards), the Platinum Award for Diversity and Inclusion (CII HR Circle 2024), and the Best Practice Award for Handloom (Tata Affirmative Action Conclave 2025).

“At Tata Power-DDL, we do more than power homes—we power aspirations,” Mr. Kale concludes. *“Our commitment to*

social responsibility is anchored in a future where every woman has the tools, the confidence, and the platform to realise her full potential.”

Pidilite Industries: Building Women-Led Enterprises from the Ground Up

Pidilite Industries is creating a robust ecosystem for rural women entrepreneurs through the establishment and strengthening of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). In FY 2023–24 alone, the company facilitated the formation of 304 new SHGs across Gujarat’s Bhavnagar and Amreli districts, onboarding over 3,200 new members. This brings their total to 1,052 SHGs with a combined membership of over 11,100 women.

These groups act as both a support system and a launchpad—providing financial credit, fostering micro-entrepreneurship, and enabling women to weather household economic uncertainties.

Pidilite’s commitment to capacity-

building is evident through its SHG Training and Quality Assessment Centre, which conducted 271 sessions in FY 2023–24, equipping over 2,500 women with managerial and technical skills essential for operating micro-businesses.

Today, these SHGs run 9 khakhra production units and a diverse array of other ventures—ranging from wooden toys and bakery products to aloe vera and jute goods, milk processing, and bio-pesticide production. A dedicated warehouse in Mahuva supports logistics, inventory, and sales, boosting the annual turnover of SHG-run businesses to ₹1.94 crore—a 59% increase over the previous year.

To mark International Women’s Day, Pidilite celebrated the achievements of its SHG entrepreneurs, felicitating 48 outstanding women in front of a crowd of over 1,800 participants.

Additionally, the company is ad-

vancing solar-powered textile units, modernizing spinning, weaving, and dyeing processes to improve profitability for rural fabric producers—thus merging traditional crafts with future-ready solutions.

A Collective Step Towards Gender Equity

India’s journey toward achieving gender equality, particularly in the labour force, remains complex and multifaceted. While statistics reflect a stark underrepresentation of women in formal employment and persistent structural barriers, they also underscore the critical need—and immense potential—for focused interventions.

Encouragingly, corporates such as the Walmart Foundation, Tata Power-DDL, and Pidilite Industries are stepping up as catalysts for change. Through innovative, community-based programs, these organizations are not only enabling

skill development and economic participation for women but are also transforming them into leaders and entrepreneurs within their own right.

From empowering smallholder farmers and grassroots entrepreneurs to establishing all-women technology hubs and advancing financial inclusion, these initiatives reflect a deep commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality. More importantly, they exemplify how the private sector can be a powerful force in creating inclusive, resilient, and empowered communities.

As India looks ahead, it is clear that bridging the gender divide will require collective approach—where corporations, communities, and policymakers work in tandem. By investing in women today, the country lays the foundation for a more equitable, prosperous, and sustainable tomorrow.

SOCIAL SECTOR MOVEMENT



Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed
CEO of One Billion Literates Foundation

Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed has been appointed as the new Chief Executive Officer of One Billion Literates Foundation (OBLF). A seasoned leader in the social impact space, Dr. Imtiaz brings with him over two decades of distinguished experience in driving large-scale strategy, systems design, and implementation across some of India’s most respected development organizations.

Trained as a physician and holding a postgraduate degree in Public Health from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, Dr. Imtiaz blends clinical expertise with deep sectoral insight—a combination that has powered transformative programs at national scale.

Prior to joining OBLF, he served as Mission Head at HelpAge India, where he led nationwide program design and execution for seven years. His leadership journey also includes impactful tenures at the LV Prasad Eye Institute and Sankara Eye Foundation, where he was instrumental in scaling access to healthcare for underserved communities.

Throughout his career, Dr. Imtiaz has worked closely with government bodies, public health institutions, and policy think tanks, advancing critical advocacy efforts and shaping public health discourse across India.

As CEO, Dr. Imtiaz brings a visionary approach, a commitment to equity, and a deep understanding of systemic change—qualities that will guide OBLF into its next phase of growth and impact.