



3ie's Swashakt evidence programme

Enabling women's economic empowerment through collective enterprises in rural India

According to World Bank estimates, only one in five women in India were participating in or entering the workforce in 2019. The country's female labour force participation rate (20.3%) is below that of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. As women constitute less than half of the nation's economically active population, nurturing their livelihoods and enabling them to leverage economic opportunities could significantly boost India's overall economic growth and welfare.

In response to this potential, the Indian government has adopted various policy measures to promote women's economic integration and self-employment. The flagship [National Rural Livelihoods Mission](#) and the recently launched World Bank-supported [National Rural Economic Transformation Project](#) support women's collectivisation and collective-based enterprises. However, despite growing interest in leveraging collective enterprise models to advance women's socio-economic empowerment, the evidence base on their potential, as well as their impacts, is limited. 3ie's Swashakt programme is a US\$7.3 million initiative that focuses on addressing this evidence gap and unlocking benefits for women in both farm and non-farm sectors.

Highlights

- Swashakt, a US\$7.3 million programme, supports the implementation and evaluation of nine projects to set up and strengthen enterprises of women's empowerment collectives (WECs) in ten Indian states.
- These include four 1-year pilot projects, and five 3-year projects across farm and non-farm sectors such as agro- and non-timber forest produce processing, rural retail, handloom and crafts.
- Evidence from this programme, including cost evidence, will facilitate replicability and scalability of successful WEC support models in the government and private sector.

Scope of the Swashakt programme

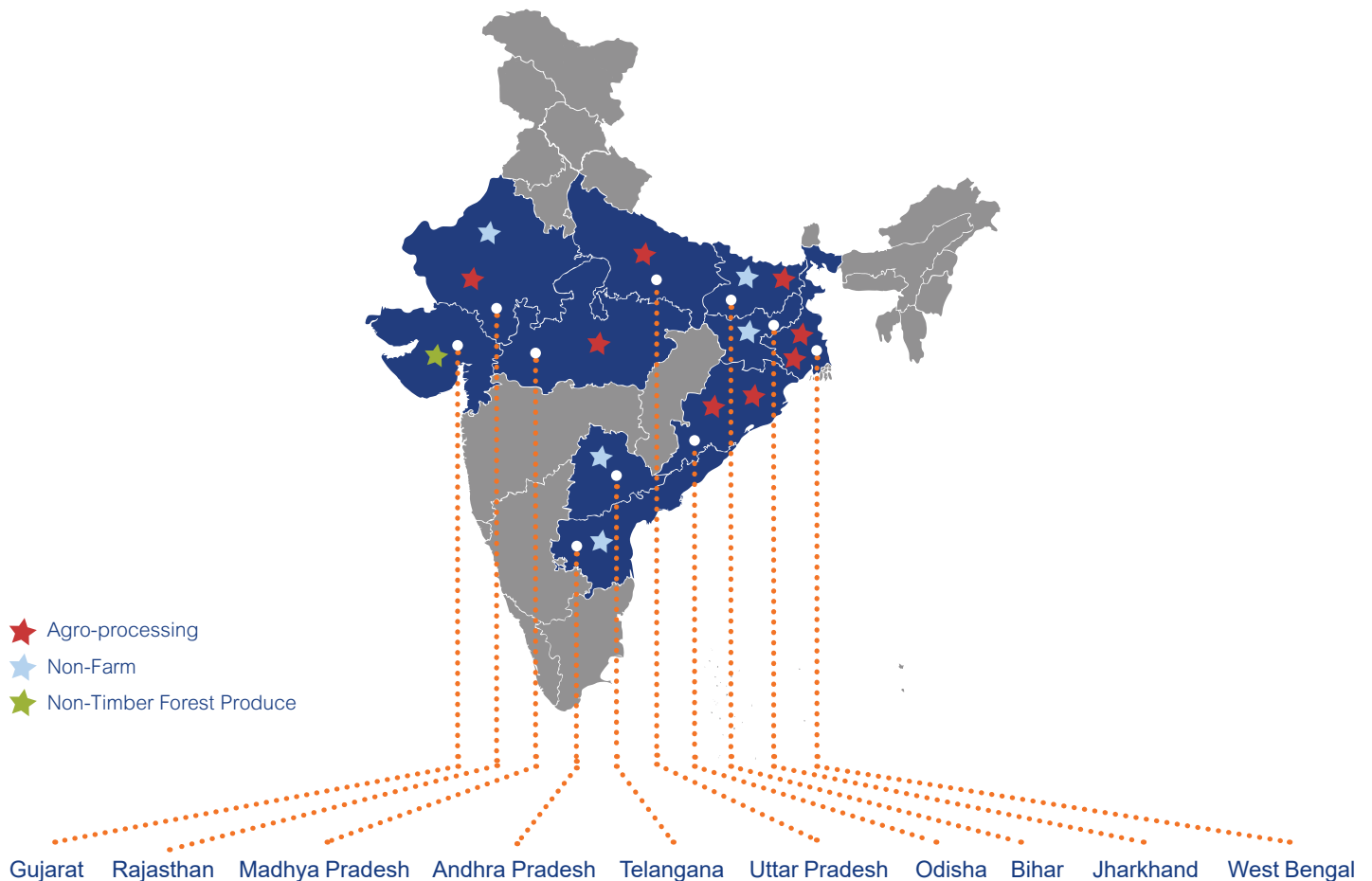
Launched in 2020, the programme supports the implementation and evaluation of 9 projects – 4 pilot and 5 at-scale – that aim to establish and strengthen WECs in 10 states.

Through this programme, 3ie and our management partner LEAD at

Krea University will generate learning about transformative models to improve scale and returns for WECs and contribute to women's empowerment. Four formative and process studies will assess the appropriateness, acceptability and

feasibility of the one-year pilot projects promoting and supporting WECs. Mixed methods impact evaluations will examine the impacts on returns, scale and sustainability of enterprises supported by five three-year projects.

Figure 1: Locations and sectors



Pathways to empowering women and strengthening collective enterprises

The programme supports the implementation and evaluation of innovative business models and interventions to take existing models to scale. The individual projects aim to generate returns and enhance scale and sustainability for WEC enterprises across agro-processing, rural retail, handloom, crafts and non-timber forest produce sectors.

The one-year pilot projects test the feasibility of WEC models by helping newly formed WECs to establish formal structures and to build infrastructure and capacity through investment, training and advisory

services. The pilot projects will also link the new enterprises with financial assistance and local markets.

Unlike the pilots, the three-year projects are expanding the reach and scope of WEC models that have generated gainful women's employment and profitability on a small scale or in a different context. They implement activities aimed at generating higher incomes for women and strengthening enterprise sustainability.

Such activities include: providing gender-sensitive training for WEC

enterprise managers to upgrade their skills; improving the range and quality of products and services; strengthening productivity; and facilitating access to markets, technology solutions and finance. Improvement in the quality and quantity of WEC production – alongside greater skills and social capital gained through women's participation in collective entrepreneurial activities – is expected to help establish strong and sustainable WECs that promote women's socio-economic empowerment.

Figure 2: Intervention activities

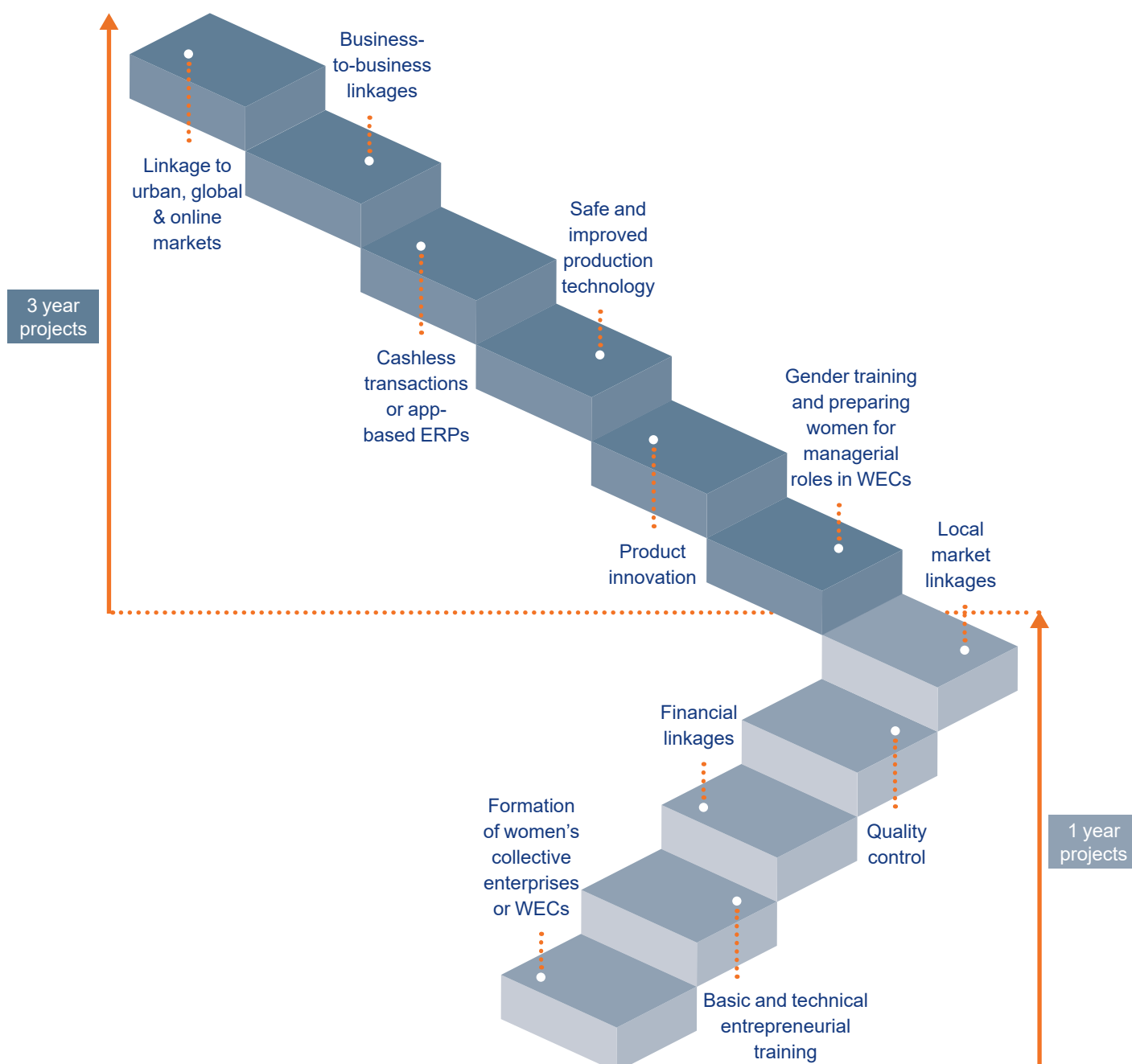
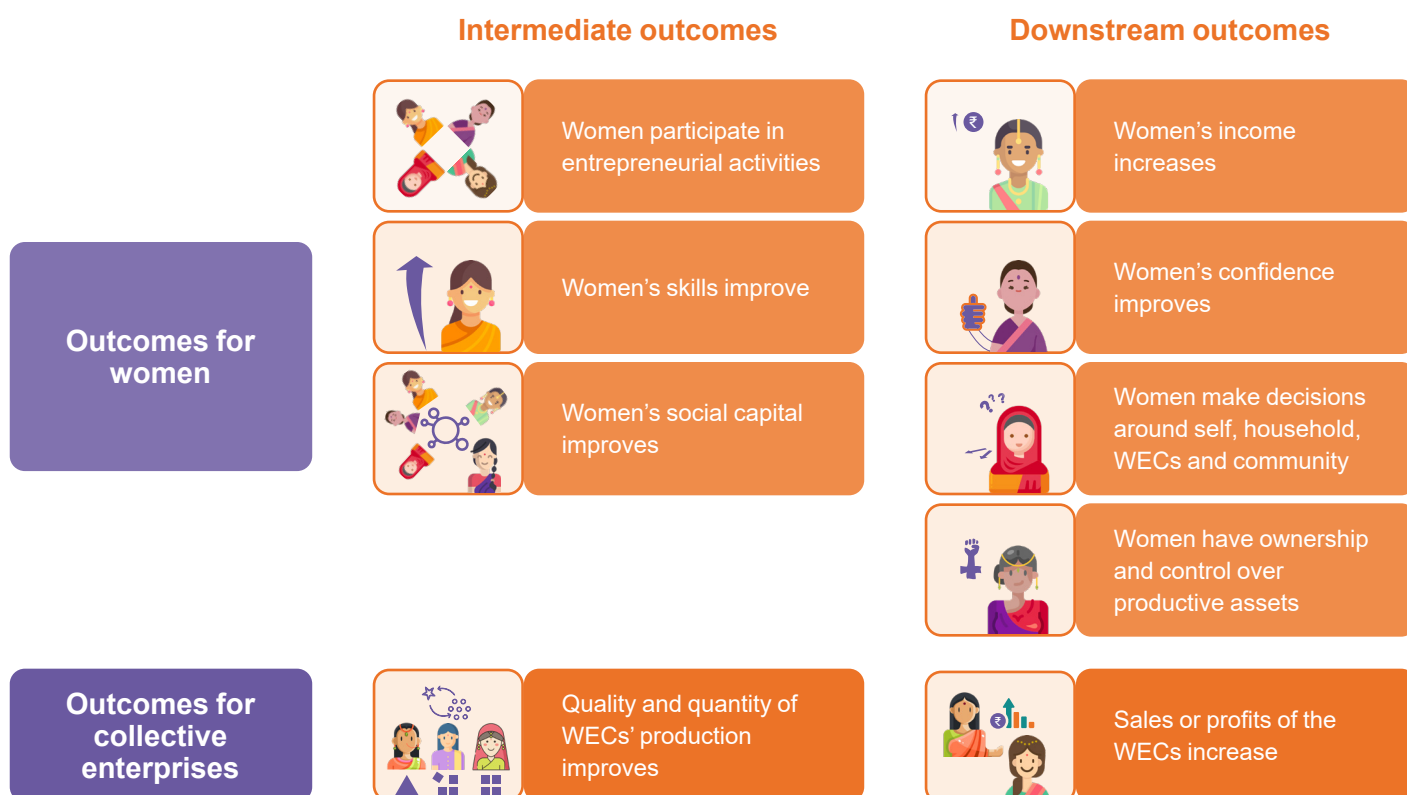


Table 1: Swashakt collective enterprise models

Project	Partners	Product (sector)	Project duration	State	Components
Collectively run agro-processing enterprises in the Eastern Gangetic Plains	University of Birmingham with Sakhi Bihar and Centre for Development of Human Initiatives (CDHI)	Foxnuts or <i>Makhana</i> , Vermicompost (Agro-processing)	1 year	Bihar, West Bengal	Processing training, connecting to local markets
Strengthening women's farmer producer organisation in tribal communities of Gujarat, India	Area Networking and Development Initiatives (ANANDI) and Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Ahmedabad (GIDR) (evaluation)	Mahua, Tamarind and others (Non-timber forest produce processing)	1 year	Gujarat	Product and infrastructure development, processing and enterprise management training, connecting to local markets
Swashakt: Empowering women through collective-based approaches in Bihar, India	Institute of Livelihood Research and Training (ILRT)	Rural retail shops (Non-farm)	1 year	Bihar	Collective storage and transportation, enterprise management training, app-based ERP, connecting to local markets
Women entrepreneurs' collectives	Network for Enterprise Enhancement and Development Support (NEEDS)	Bamboo crafts (Non-farm)	1 year	Jharkhand	Enterprise management training, quality control, connecting to local markets and with government schemes
Scaling up RUDI, a SEWA women's collective enterprise model from Gujarat through NRLM SHGs	IMAGO Global Grassroots and IDinsight (evaluation)	Local produce (Agro processing)	3 year	Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh	Enterprise management training, connecting to local markets
Creating agency of women in weaving value-chain in India	Chitrika Foundation	Cotton handloom (Non-farm)	3 year	Andhra Pradesh, Telangana	Product and infrastructure development, technology, and enterprise management training, connecting to finance, businesses and consumers in urban and global markets
Crafts incubation hub, Rajasthan	URMUL Rural Health and Research Development Trust	Handloom and handicraft (Non-farm)	3 year	Rajasthan	Product and infrastructure development, technology and enterprise management training, connecting to finance, businesses and consumers in urban and global markets
Economic and empowerment impacts of millet processing and value addition enterprises of women SHGs in tribal areas of Odisha	Watershed Support Service and Activities Network (WASSAN) and Natural Resources Institute, Greenwich (evaluation)	Millets (Agro-processing)	3 year	Odisha	Product and infrastructure development, processing, enterprise management and gender training, connecting to finance, businesses and buyers in government, local and urban markets
Gramyashakti: developing rural women's spice processing enterprises in three Indian states	ACCESS Development Services	Chilli, Coriander, Turmeric, Pickles (Agro-processing)	3 year	Rajasthan, Odisha, West Bengal	Infrastructure and brand development, processing, enterprise management and gender training, connecting to finance, businesses and buyers in local and global markets

Figure 3: Intended project outcomes



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Learning and impact agenda

The Swashakt programme will generate and synthesise quantitative and qualitative evidence around the nine projects to facilitate replicability and scalability of successful models. Programme evidence – including formative and process evaluations, impact evaluations and cost-benefit analyses – will be shared

with key stakeholders in the government, the private sector and academia as a means of contributing to:

- Knowledge of enablers and barriers faced in establishing, scaling and sustaining women's collective businesses
- Proofs of concept for innovative and cost-effective collective enterprise models in diverse sectors and contexts
- Understanding of the links between women's engagement in enterprises and their socio-economic empowerment
- Advancement of evidence-informed decision-making around WECs and women's economic empowerment in government and the private sector

About the Swashakt programme

The Swashakt programme is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; its grant management partner is LEAD at Krea University. The programme is part of 3ie's

livelihoods portfolio, which includes work with India's Ministry of Rural Development on a large-scale impact evaluation of the National Rural Livelihoods Project.

If you would like to learn more about the Swashakt projects, visit <https://www.3ieimpact.org/our-work/livelihoods/swashakt-empowering-indian-womens-collectives>



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The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) promotes evidence-informed, equitable, inclusive and sustainable development. We support the generation and effective use of high-quality evidence to inform decision-making and improve the lives of people living in poverty in low- and middle-income countries. We provide guidance and support to produce, synthesise and quality assure evidence of what works, for whom, how, why and at what cost.

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