

EMPOWERING FISHERWOMEN THROUGH ICT: BRIDGING DIGITAL GAPS IN POST-HARVEST FISHERIES



Fish for All Research and Training Centre
M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation

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FOREWORD

As we navigate the complexities of our rapidly evolving world, technology has emerged as a powerful catalyst for progress. It has transformed economies, societies, and lives, offering unprecedented opportunities for growth and development. However, for this progress to be truly inclusive, we must bridge the digital divide, ensuring that no individual or community is left behind.

For women, especially those from rural and coastal communities, access to technology is not merely about connectivity – it is about access to opportunity, independence, and dignity. The M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has been at the forefront of empowering underserved communities,

recognizing that sustainable development cannot be achieved without gender equity and digital inclusion.

The WomenConnect Challenge India round 2 initiative of Reliance Foundation has been a game changer in supporting this endeavour. This initiative has enabled us to reach out to thousands of women in coastal and rural communities, providing them with digital literacy skills, entrepreneurship training, and access to innovative technologies. Their commitment to empowering women and promoting digital inclusion has been a perfect alignment with our mission. The support has helped us create a sustainable and replicable model that can be scaled up to reach more



Dr. Soumya Swaminathan,
Chairperson, MSSRF

women. As a result, these women are now agents of change, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps.

As you read these stories, I invite you to witness the extraordinary transformation of these women, whose journeys exemplify the strength of human will and the power of technology to bridge gaps. I hope this collection inspires us to collectively reimagine a future where digital inclusion is not a privilege, but a fundamental right for all.

This booklet is more than a compilation of success stories – it is a blueprint for a world where every woman, regardless of her background, has the tools, confidence, and opportunity to thrive. Let us continue to work together to realize a future where equity and empowerment are not just ideals but lived realities, ensuring that technology becomes a bridge of opportunity, not a barrier.

I congratulate Dr. Velvizhi and her team for their tireless efforts in conceptualizing and implementing this groundbreaking initiative. This achievement is a testament to MSSRF unwavering commitment, expertise, and passion for creating positive change among the fisherwomen.

Together, we can build a world where progress is inclusive, sustainable, and leaves no one behind.

This initiative has enabled us to reach out to thousands of women in coastal and rural communities, providing them with digital literacy skills, entrepreneurship training, and access to innovative technologies. Their commitment to empowering women and promoting digital inclusion has been a perfect alignment with our mission.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This booklet is a testament to the remarkable journey of fisherwomen who have courageously embraced the digital age. Their stories of resilience and determination are a true celebration of the transformative power of technology.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to our esteemed Chairperson, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, for her exemplary leadership, inspiration, and unwavering support in spearheading this program. Her vision and guidance have been instrumental in shaping the program's success.

I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to our Trustee, Dr. Nithya Rao, for her invaluable insights, expert guidance, and unwavering support during the formative stages of the program.

Her contributions were instrumental in shaping the program's foundation and laying the groundwork for its success.

Furthermore, I extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Rengalakshmi, Executive Director, Area Operations for her leadership, and efforts in driving the program's effective implementation.

We are deeply grateful to Reliance Foundation Team Dr. Vanita Sharma, Deepthi Nukalapati, Nitasha Jose and Anupama Mishra for their unwavering support and timely feedback throughout our journey. Their dedication to empowering women through technology has been truly inspiring.

I would like to express my sincere



Dr. S. Velvizhi,
Area Director, Coastal Resources and
Fisheries

appreciation to our Fish for All team involved in the WomenConnect Challenge India round 2 program for their tireless efforts and dedication. Special recognition goes to Ms. Sathyajothi, Ms. Kaviyarasi, Ms. Hema, Ms. Anbuvahini, Mr. Salam, Mr. Lourdhu, Mr. Selvarasu, Ms. Sangeetha and Ms. Nivedhita for their invaluable contributions to the implementation of programme at various stages. Ms. Shwetha Tony deserve special mention for her efforts in supporting compiling and coordinating the success stories featured in this booklet.

partner organizations, local leaders, and trainers for their collaboration and support. Together, we can continue to bridge the gender gaps in fisheries, foster equity, and create a future where women lead with confidence, dignity, and innovation.

To the fisherwomen themselves, I extend my deepest respect and admiration. Your willingness to adapt, learn, and innovate is truly inspiring. By embracing digital tools and modern practices, you have not only elevated your livelihoods but also become role models for your communities.

Finally, I would like to thank our

Empowering Fisherwomen through ICT: Bridging Digital Gaps in Post-Harvest Fisheries








INTRODUCTION

In the world of fisheries, women are the often-overlooked architects of resilience and innovation. In coastal communities, women are the backbone of the small-scale fisheries value chain, leading activities such as preparatory work for fishing, shore seine operation and post-harvest activities such as sorting, salting, drying, packaging, and vending. Despite their tireless contributions, fisherwomen's voices are frequently silenced or ignored in decision-making spaces. Their roles are diverse and indispensable, spanning from pre-harvest preparations to post-harvest processing and marketing. Despite their extensive contributions, fisherwomen face numerous challenges. Traditional methods dominate their work, leading to inefficiencies and limited earning potential. Inadequate access to hygienic drying facilities, storage units, and reliable transportation



restricts their market reach, forcing them to settle for lower incomes. The absence of digital tools and resources further exacerbates these difficulties, leaving fisherwomen at a disadvantage in scaling their businesses or accessing broader markets. Their traditional knowledge and skills are immense assets, but without technological integration, their potential remains untapped. By harnessing the power of technology, we can empower them to overcome the challenges they face and unlock their full potential.

In today's digital age, the self-reliance of fisherwomen can be significantly enhanced through familiarization with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), capacity building, and knowledge acquisition. Digital platforms, mobile phones, and digital financial services empower fisherwomen by providing access to knowledge, skills, markets, and increased income opportunities. Initiatives focused on ICT-based

capacity building not only promote digitization but also the economic and social empowerment of fisherwomen. Access to ICTs provides economic independence, enabling fisherwomen to transcend traditional male-dominated market structures and expand their marketing and economic opportunities. ICTs empower fisherwomen to participate in and contribute to society, driving social change. A well-informed knowledge society has access to timely information, creating opportunities for fisherwomen to bring about change.

The Fish for All Research and Training Centre of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation under its WomenConnect Challenge India round 2 Program supported by Reliance Foundation has developed a range of ICT technologies. This initiative addresses the challenges faced by fisherwomen in post-harvest fisheries, aiming to reduce digital gender gaps and enhance

their knowledge, skills, mobility, and enterprise development.

This inspiring collection of case studies showcases the remarkable journeys of women who have harnessed digital technology to transform their lives. These stories capture the essence of resilience and determination as women step into the digital age. Each journey is a powerful reminder that when women are equipped with the right tools and knowledge, they become unstoppable forces of change. This collection of inspiring narratives celebrates the impact of digital literacy, where challenges are turned into opportunities, and aspirations become reality.

Empowering Fisherwomen through Digital Transformation

In today's technology-driven world, fisherwomen stand at the threshold of a transformative revolution. Digital

tools and platforms have evolved from luxuries to essential lifelines, bridging the gap between traditional practices and modern market demands. Smartphones, mobile applications, and digital payment systems have opened up new avenues for fisherwomen to enhance efficiency, expand market reach, and exert greater control over their businesses. Digital empowerment addresses the challenges fisherwomen face, providing access to tools like WhatsApp, social media, and digital payment systems.

These digital solutions enable fisherwomen to promote products directly to consumers, bypassing exploitative middlemen. Digital payment systems like GPay ensure secure transactions, reducing financial risks. GPS tools enhance safety in aquaculture, while solar drying technologies ensure hygienic fish processing, improving product quality and shelf life. Training programs integrating digital



literacy with practical skills are vital. By equipping fisherwomen with knowledge and access to digital tools, they can transition from laborers to entrepreneurs in a tech-enabled world. Digital inclusion enhances economic independence, empowering fisherwomen to lead change within their communities. The path forward is clear; empowering fisherwomen with technology is crucial for ensuring equity, sustainability, and a future where their potential is fully realized.



Digital Inclusion in Post-Harvest Fisheries

M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation's (MSSRF) Fish for All Centre has been instrumental in empowering fisherwomen in post-harvest fisheries, integrating traditional knowledge with digital tools to foster socio-economic growth. MSSRF's interventions address immediate livelihood concerns and long-term sustainability, providing technical training on post-harvest technologies and value-added fish products, infrastructure support, including solar dryers and pre-processing platforms, and digital literacy programs for real-time market connectivity and financial transactions

Comprehensive digital literacy programs have transformed fisherwomen's businesses, enabling them to use mobile applications for market linkages and financial





transactions, promote products directly to consumers through WhatsApp and conduct safe, quick, and traceable financial transactions via GPay. The integration of traditional knowledge, technical training, and digital tools has been a game-changer, empowering fisherwomen to break barriers and access broader markets, build sustainable, resilient businesses and redefine their roles as leaders in their families and communities. MSSRF's approach underscores that digital inclusion is the backbone of empowerment and transformation. By combining traditional knowledge

with digital tools, fisherwomen are navigating the digital economy with confidence, improving their livelihoods and redefining their roles in society.

WomenConnect Challenge: Bridging the Digital Divide in Coastal Communities

The WomenConnect Challenge India round 2 supported by Reliance Foundation, is revolutionizing the lives of over 6,000 fisherwomen in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry

by combining digital literacy with practical solutions to enhance livelihoods, foster independence, and create lasting impact. The WCC initiative offers a comprehensive approach to empowerment, providing fisherwomen with digital pathways to master digital tools, including smartphones, mobile apps, and online payments, enabling them to thrive in today's digital economy. An audio advisory helpline, Smart Advisory for Smarter Decisions, provides curated updates on post-harvest practices, market trends, and weather, making vital information easily accessible to fisherwomen.




The Fisherwomen Connect Mobile App is a one-stop digital platform that empowers women with learning modules, market insights, weather updates, transportation details, and helpline services, enabling them to make informed decisions about their businesses and livelihoods. Through the project, fisherwomen have been empowered to develop innovative skills, producing high-quality dry fish and value-added products, accessing credit linkages and purchase equipment that elevates productivity and profitability, and leveraging digital tools for independent market navigation and smoother transactions.

Behind every statistic lies a story of transformation, where fisherwomen are turning smartphones into business hubs, leveraging technology to manage their businesses efficiently, and utilizing solar dryers to produce premium fish products, enhancing their livelihoods and economic stability. Women are

building resilient futures, redefining their roles in the fisheries sector, and paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable industry.

The WomenConnect Challenge India round 2 is more than a project - it's a movement that is reshaping lives and livelihoods by bridging the gender digital divide. By providing women with access to digital tools and training, project is empowering them to embrace their potential, redefine their roles in the fisheries sector, lead change with digital tools and determination, thrive as tech-enabled entrepreneurs, and navigate the digital economy with confidence. The success stories emerging from these efforts reflect a profound shift in the lives of fisherwomen, who are transitioning from traditional practices to tech-enabled entrepreneurship, leveraging digital tools to enhance their businesses and livelihoods. Fisherwomen are leading change, redefining their roles in families and communities, and






paving the way for a more equitable and inclusive society.

Hooked on Progress: How Digital Access is Reshaping Livelihoods

The WomenConnect Challenge India round 2 has sparked a wave of transformation, ushering fisherwomen into the digital era with newfound confidence and skills. No longer bound by traditional market constraints, these women have embraced technology as a tool for empowerment, reshaping their livelihoods and financial independence. Over 6,037 fisherwomen have undergone training in digital tools, mobile applications, and financial literacy, giving them real-time access to fisheries and market information. With more than 200 immersive training sessions, they have mastered Android phone usage, digital security, e-commerce, and online

financial transactions, ensuring they stay ahead in an increasingly digital economy. A remarkable 47% of women have acquired essential digital skills, enabling them to confidently navigate online platforms, access critical information, and perform digital tasks with ease. Notably, 45% have gained proficiency in mobile phone usage, bridging the digital divide and enhancing both personal and business communication. The adoption of UPI payment systems by 30% of women marks a significant step toward financial inclusion, reducing reliance on cash transactions and fostering economic independence. Additionally, social media engagement has surged, with 25% of women actively leveraging these platforms to network, share experiences, promote their businesses, and stay informed—further solidifying their digital literacy and market presence. In a sector where fair pricing is often a struggle, direct linkages with traders have



opened new sales avenues, enabling fisherwomen to negotiate better deals and secure a stable income. Digital literacy has also enhanced communication and business operations, with 982 women creating and managing their own email IDs, simplifying transactions and strengthening connectivity with

6,037

Fisherwomen have undergone training in digital tools

200+

Immersive training sessions

17

Learning modules

buyers and suppliers.

The economic shift is tangible. 65 percent of trained fisherwomen now apply digital skills in post-harvest fisheries, leading to a 41% reduction in fish spoilage, directly translating to higher profitability and less waste. In parallel, 51% of those engaged in quality fish processing have reported increased sales and earnings, proving that digital inclusion is not just about adaptation—it's about economic evolution. The movement has gained momentum through 100 Self-Help Groups (SHGs), with 989 members integrating digital tools to streamline financial management and enhance business efficiency. These digitally empowered SHGs leveraged forward and backward linkages to secure credit access and essential infrastructure support, including solar dryers, ice boxes, grading trays, and net baskets, further strengthening and expanding their businesses. The digital revolution has not only

opened doors to new opportunities but has also redefined the role of fisherwomen in their communities. No longer confined to traditional methods, they now command their financial futures, connect with wider markets, and leverage technology to sustain and grow their businesses. This journey of progress is a testament to the boundless possibilities that emerge when women are equipped with the right tools, knowledge, and digital access. From the fishing docks to the digital marketplace, these women are no longer just navigating the tides—they are setting the course for a more empowered and prosperous future.

Breaking Barriers: Inspiring Stories of Women in the WomenConnect Challenge

The WomenConnect Challenge India round 2 has been a catalyst for transformative change in the lives of women from coastal and rural communities. Through MSSRF's WCC training programs, these women have embarked on journeys of digital literacy, innovation, and entrepreneurship, transitioning from traditional practices to more sustainable and profitable ventures. The case studies presented offer a unique glimpse into the transformative power of innovation, showcasing real-life stories of women who are rewriting their destinies by fusing tradition with technology. What sets these case studies apart is their ability to capture the essence of empowered trailblazers, who have stepped out of the shadows of tradition to become leaders,



entrepreneurs, and role models for their communities.

These women have achieved a seamless fusion of old and new, combining age-old practices with digital tools like mobile apps, solar dryers, and WhatsApp to preserve their heritage while unlocking modern opportunities. The impact of this fusion is tangible, with every narrative demonstrating measurable progress, including better product quality, increased incomes, and newfound confidence. The success stories of women enrolled in the project are a testament to the power of empowerment, showcasing how digital literacy, modern techniques, and leadership training can unlock new opportunities and improve livelihoods. Whether it's enhancing dry fish production, expanding market reach through digital tools, or assuming leadership roles, each individual has gained valuable skills that have not only empowered them but also inspired others.

The detailed case studies presented offer a deeper dive into the transformative journeys of these women, highlighting the challenges they faced, the strategies they employed, and the successes they achieved. These stories demonstrate that with the right support, training, and resources, women can overcome obstacles, seize new opportunities, and create a brighter future for themselves and their communities. The stories of Vanitha, Sharmila, Anushiya, Valarmathi, Thenkala and Sathya, among others, are a celebration of resilience and proof that empowerment isn't just an outcome – it's a movement. By sharing these stories, we hope to inspire others to join this movement, fostering a community of empowered women who can drive positive change and create a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

These stories are not just anecdotes; they are blueprints for scalable

success, offering a roadmap for other women to follow in their footsteps. Moreover, the transformation doesn't stop at the individual; these empowered women inspire their peers, improve their families' lives, and catalyze change across entire communities.

The following table provides a glimpse into the diverse success stories of women who have benefited from the program:



| Name | Fishing villages | Initial Activity | Outcome | Skills Acquired |
|--------------|------------------------------|------------------------|---|--|
| Thenkala | Poompuhar, Mayiladuthurai | Dry fish processing | Better quality, expanded market reach, established Thenmathi Unavagam | Solar drying, digital marketing |
| Anushiya | Mudasalodai, Cuddalore | Dry fish production | Expanded market, improved hygiene | Solar drying, digital marketing |
| Sharmiladevi | Vanagiri, Mayiladuthurai | Fish procuring | FFPO chair, led digitization | Financial tools, digital management |
| Stella | Poompuhar, Mayiladuthurai | Food stall operator | Increased sales via digital payments | QR codes, online transactions |
| Renuga | Vanagiri, Mayiladuthurai | Dry fish seller | Wider market, streamlined payments | Digital marketing, solar drying |



| Name | Fishing villages | Initial Activity | Outcome | Skills Acquired |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Kaviarasi | Thangachimadam, Ramanathapuram | Homemaker, YouTuber | Expanded content, audience growth | Video editing, YouTube tools |
| Sathya | Mudasalodai, Cuddalore | Dry fish seller | Secured supermarket contracts | Solar drying, GPay transactions |
| Usha | Keelamokarai Mayiladuthurai | YouTube content creation | Expanded audience, improved engagement, recognized as a fisheries educator | Video editing, content creation, social media engagement |
| Ananthavalli | Nayakkarkuppam, Mayiladuthurai | Traditional fish trade | Gained leadership, improved efficiency | Hygienic processing, leadership skills |
| Vijayakala | Vanagiri, Mayiladuthurai | Post-harvest fisheries | Improved quality, market expansion | Digital networking, packaging |



| Name | Fishing villages | Initial Activity | Outcome | Skills Acquired |
|------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|---|---|
| Bhavani | Vanagiri, Mayiladuthurai | Homemaker | Established value-added fish products | Solar drying, packaging skills |
| Merita | Anthonyarpuram, Ramanathapuram | Community leader | Efficient issue resolution, inspired community | WhatsApp groups, digital payments |
| Gunavathi | Karaikalmedu, Karaikal | Squid auctioning | Improved transactions, better stability | Digital payments, WhatsApp usage |
| Valarmathi | Mudasalodai, Cuddalore | Dry fish production | Gained FSSAI certification, better income | Hygienic drying, business registration |
| Arulmozhi | Keelamovarkarai, Mayiladuthurai | Community leader | Business transformation, broader markets | Digital literacy, modern processing |



| Name | Fishing villages | Initial Activity | Outcome | Skills Acquired |
|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|---|--|
| Manjula | Kalaingar nagar, Cuddalore | Fishing | Safer navigation, timely healthcare | Smartphones, GPS tools |
| Rajalakshmi | Vanagiri, Mayiladuthurai | Dry fish business | Expanded fish market, improved transactions | GPay, hygienic fish drying |
| Santhanamathi | Vanagiri | Homemaker | Established masala dry fish business | Hygienic practices, pricing, packaging |
| Princy | Anthoiyarpuram, Ramanathapuram | Homemaker | Improved household income | Smartphone usage, Whatsapp |
| Sagaya Yamuna | Thangachimadam, Ramanathapuram | Homemaker | Strengthened community learning hub | Online transactions, computer skills |



| Name | Fishing villages | Initial Activity | Outcome | Skills Acquired |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|------------------|--|--|
| Smiley | Thangachimadam, Ramanathapuram | Tailor | Instagram shop success, financial independence | Social media, online payments |
| Malarkodi | Nayakkarkuppam, Mayiladuthurai | Homemaker | Improved household finances, supported education | Google Translate, GPay |
| Sathya | Panithittu, Pondicherry | Tailor | Expanded services, higher customer base | Internet navigation, YouTube skills |
| Sharmila | Kalaingar Nagar, Cuddalore | Tuition center | Doubled attendance, increased income | Digital tools, multimedia teaching |

EVOLUTION OF THENKALA



Thenkala, a resilient entrepreneur from Poompuhar of Mayiladuthurai district, relied on traditional methods to process and sell dry fish. Her knowledge was passed down through generations, and while it sustained her family's livelihood, it came with limitations. The lack of modern techniques restricted her product quality and market reach. Her sales were primarily local, and she faced challenges in maintaining hygiene and extending the shelf life of fish products.

Thenkala had aspirations to grow her business, but the absence of exposure to advanced practices and digital tools kept her from achieving full potential.

Training in Digital Literacy and Post-Harvest Techniques

Recognizing her potential, Thenkala actively participated in a series of

training programs offered by MSSRF, each designed to enhance her skills and transform her business. Through Digital Literacy Training, she gained the confidence to navigate smartphones, use apps like WhatsApp and Facebook for business communication, and efficiently manage online orders, reducing dependency on intermediaries. Post-Harvest Training introduced her to hygienic fish processing methods, including the use of solar dryers, ensuring better product quality and extended shelf life. Additionally, Thematic Video Conferencing Sessions provided valuable insights into proper packaging and marketing strategies, helping her enhance product appeal and attract more customers.



Thenkala knowledge was passed down through generations, and while it sustained her family's livelihood, it came with limitations. The lack of modern techniques restricted her product quality and market reach.

Transformation

The training and knowledge acquired through MSSRF's initiatives completely transformed her business, elevating it from a small-scale operation to a thriving enterprise. By replacing traditional drying methods with a solar dryer, she ensured superior hygiene, eliminated contamination risks, and produced dry fish with enhanced texture and flavor. This shift not only improved the quality of her products but also inspired her to diversify into value-added fish products, tapping into new markets and expanding her business potential.

Encouraged by this transformation, Thenkala took a bold step forward and established Thenmathi Unavagam, where she now sells a variety of fish products from Poompuhar to other locations. Leveraging Facebook and WhatsApp for marketing, she has successfully expanded her customer base and

also facilitates payments through digital transactions, making her business more efficient and far-reaching.

Thematic video conferencing sessions followed by hands on training proved to be a game-changer, introducing her to the significance of professional packaging. By adopting high-quality, modern packaging materials, she extended the shelf life of her products and enhanced their market appeal. No longer just a local vendor, she began presenting her products as premium-quality goods, setting them apart from conventional dry fish available in the market.

Empowered by digital literacy training, Thenkala mastered the art of online promotion. She leveraged social media platforms like Facebook, taking visually appealing pictures of her products and posting them to attract customers. The response was phenomenal—her



“I never thought people from faraway places would see my dry fish on Facebook and place orders. Now, every time I post, I get new customers messaging me. It feels like my small business is reaching the whole world,”



business gained massive visibility, generating thousands of views, likes, and shares. “I never thought people from faraway places would see my dry fish on Facebook and place orders. Now, every time I post, I get new customers messaging me. It feels like my small business is reaching the whole world,” she says with excitement.

With improved product quality, professional packaging, and a growing online presence, Thenkala’s business witnessed unprecedented expansion. Managing orders through WhatsApp and other online platforms streamlined communication and reduced her reliance on middlemen, allowing her to reach customers beyond her local community. Demand surged, with customers from neighboring districts and even other states placing orders for her products. This remarkable growth not only boosted her income but also established her as a leading dry fish producer

in her region. Today, Thenkala stands as an inspiration, proving that the right training, technology, and determination can turn a small enterprise into a thriving business.

Aspirations

Despite her remarkable success, Thenkala continues to navigate challenges such as the seasonal availability of fish and competition from larger producers. However, her determination remains unwavering. To overcome these hurdles, she is diversifying her offerings by exploring value-added fish products like fish pickles and powders, ensuring a steady income throughout the year.

Thenkala’s story underscores the crucial role of MSSRF’s initiatives in empowering small-scale entrepreneurs, fostering economic growth. Her success is not just her own—it is a beacon of hope for many, proving that with the right

knowledge, tools, and perseverance, transformation is possible.

ANUSHIYA'S TALE



For over ten years, Anushiya, a 35-year-old entrepreneur from Mudasalodai, dedicated herself to the dry fish business. Using traditional methods passed down through generations, she worked tirelessly to sustain her family and livelihood. However, despite her commitment, the limitations of conventional drying techniques, lack of hygienic practices, and minimal market exposure hindered her business growth.

Training in Hygienic Practices and Digital Skills

Recognizing the challenges, she faced, she joined a post-harvest training program conducted by the MSSRF. This training introduced her to hygienic fish drying techniques, particularly the use of solar dryers, which not only improved product quality but also ensured compliance with health and safety standards. Additionally, she learned the

significance of tailored packaging to cater to diverse customer preferences.

Her next leap forward came when she enrolled in the Digital Literacy Training Program. Initially unfamiliar with modern technology and limited to using a basic button phone, she acquired essential digital skills that significantly enhanced her business operations. She learned to operate a Business WhatsApp account, enabling her to showcase her products professionally and engage directly with customers, fostering stronger relationships. She also mastered the use of GPay for transactions, ensuring seamless and secure financial dealings that simplified her payment processes.

To support her journey, MSSRF provided her with a tablet and hands-on training, empowering her to embrace technology confidently.



Initially unfamiliar with modern technology and limited to using a basic button phone, she acquired essential digital skills that significantly enhanced her business operations.



Bridging Tradition and Technology

With her newfound digital skills and modern tools, Anushiya revolutionized her dry fish business, blending traditional expertise with innovative techniques. She prioritized enhanced product quality by adopting solar dryers and hygienic drying methods, ensuring her products had superior texture, flavor, and an extended shelf life. This competitive edge set her apart in the market including supermarkets and customers from other states. "Earlier, I relied only on word of mouth, but now, with a single message or picture on WhatsApp, I get orders from places I never imagined," she shares with excitement.

This not only improved her business efficiency but also built customer trust, as buyers found it convenient to make digital payments. The integration of these modern

strategies transformed her business from a small local operation to national appeal.

Her customer base expanded rapidly, attracting buyers from districts across Tamil Nadu, including Thanjavur and Tiruppur, as well as neighboring states like Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Orders began pouring in through digital platforms, making her products accessible beyond geographical boundaries. "Now, I don't just sell in my village—I sell across states. This digital shift has changed everything for me," she says proudly.

With increased earnings, she was able to reinvest in her enterprise, further strengthening her business.

Personal Growth and Community Impact

Anushiya's transformation highlights the empowering potential of



She expanded her market reach by promoting her products on digital platforms, leveraging community WhatsApp groups and other online channels to connect with a wider audience and boost her sales.

digital literacy. What started as a traditional dry fish business evolved into a thriving enterprise, blending innovation with cultural practices. She reflects on her journey with gratitude and pride:

“Initially, I only had a basic button phone and wasn’t familiar with technology. Thanks to MSSRF’s training, I learned to use digital tools like GPay and WhatsApp. Digital literacy has truly changed my life.” Her success story has inspired others in Mudasalodai to explore similar opportunities, fostering a culture of learning and innovation within the community.

Anushiya’s journey underscores the transformative power of combining traditional expertise with modern technology. By embracing hygienic practices and leveraging digital platforms, she expanded her market reach, improved product quality, and achieved financial stability. Her story is a testament

to the immense potential of digital literacy in empowering small-scale entrepreneurs to adapt, innovate, and thrive in today’s digital economy. It serves as a shining example of how initiatives can drive sustainable growth and inspire lasting change.



“Initially, I only had a basic button phone and wasn’t familiar with technology. Thanks to MSSRF’s training, I learned to use digital tools like GPay and WhatsApp. Today, my business is not just local—it’s national. Digital literacy has truly changed my life.”

SHARMILA'S JOURNEY: FROM FISHERWOMAN TO LEADER



Sharmiladevi, a 37-year-old social worker from Vanagiri in the Mayiladuthurai district, exemplifies dedication and perseverance. Born into a modest household, she studied up to the 12th standard. While fulfilling her family responsibilities, she occasionally assisted in fishery-related tasks at the local seashore fish landing centre. Her role included procuring, sorting, grading, and icing fish, as well as managing logistics for the markets in Karuvi and Mayiladuthurai. Her keen sense of responsibility extended beyond her family, as she gradually became involved in her community's welfare.

A Social Work Enthusiast

Sharmiladevi's interest in social work found an outlet through Urorganized Workers Welfare Schemes, where she began assisting women and villagers with essential administrative tasks. She helped them secure widow pensions, access marriage

and education loans, and handle other formalities. Her dedication earned her respect and recognition, eventually leading her to become the leader of a women's cooperative society.

Transformation Through Digital Literacy

Recognizing her potential and passion for community development, Sharmiladevi enrolled in a digital literacy. The comprehensive program introduced her to basic computer skills, equipped her with proficiency in Microsoft Excel for financial management and costing, and taught her how to navigate online platforms for communication and commerce. This training marked a transformative phase in Sharmiladevi's life. Armed with her new skills, she enhanced her leadership by efficiently managing financial records for the women's cooperative society using Excel.



Her dedication earned her respect and recognition, eventually leading her to become the leader of a women's cooperative society.



Additionally, she deepened her community engagement by leveraging online platforms to help villagers access government schemes and benefits, making her an invaluable resource in her community.

Rise to Grassroot Leadership in Fisheries

Her newfound digital literacy paved the way for Sharmiladevi's nomination as the Chairperson of a Fish Farmer Producer Organization (FFPO). In this leadership role, she revolutionized operations by integrating digital tools to ensure seamless management and improved efficiency. She utilized online platforms to market dry fish and value-added fish products, securing substantial orders and significantly expanding the FFPO's market reach. Moreover, Sharmiladevi leveraged her Excel skills to optimize costing and

pricing strategies, using data-driven insights to boost the organization's profitability and create a sustainable growth model.

These advancements not only enhanced the efficiency of FFPO operations but also established Sharmiladevi as a visionary leader capable of navigating a modern, digital business environment.

Continued Learning and Innovation

Sharmiladevi actively participated in all the thematic video conferencing sessions on post-harvest technology, gaining valuable insights and expertise. These sessions provided her with in-depth knowledge of hygienic and advanced fish processing techniques, as well as practical solutions to challenges in fish preservation and value addition. Additionally, they offered her opportunities to network with experts



In this leadership role, she revolutionized operations by integrating digital tools to ensure seamless management and improved efficiency.



and peers in the fisheries sector, fostering collaboration and learning. Empowered by this experience, Sharmiladevi implemented innovative techniques, significantly enhancing the quality and market demand for her FFPO's products.

Impact and Inspiration

Sharmiladevi's journey from a housewife and occasional helper to an influential leader and FFPO chairperson is a testament to the power of opportunity and resilience. "I once managed only my home, but today, I help shape the future of my entire community," she says with pride. Under her leadership, the FFPO has expanded its market beyond district borders and has even begun receiving and delivering orders to other states like Andhra Pradesh by leveraging ICT platforms such as WhatsApp Business groups. "We never imagined selling beyond our village, but now, our products

are reaching far and wide," she adds. Through dedicated training and thematic video conferencing, women in the FFPO have also gained critical knowledge, securing FSSAI certificate—a milestone that once seemed out of reach. "Before, we didn't even know what FSSAI was, but now, we are certified entrepreneurs" she proudly shares.

Beyond her success, Sharmiladevi has embraced a new role—a mentor and trainer, passing on her knowledge to other women and creating a ripple effect of empowerment. By equipping others with the skills and confidence to step into leadership roles, she is ensuring that the wave of transformation does not stop with her. "When one woman rises, she lifts an entire community with her," she affirms, proving that



"Before, we didn't even know what FSSAI was, but now, we are certified entrepreneurs"

"When one woman rises, she lifts an entire community with her," she affirms, proving that empowerment is not just personal –it is a force for lasting change.



empowerment is not just personal—it is a force for lasting change.

Gratitude and Vision for the Future

With heartfelt gratitude for the training and support received, she reflects on how these resources have transformed not only her work but also her role within the community. Looking ahead, she envisions a future where more women break barriers and step into leadership.

Recognizing the importance of innovation, she advocates for the widespread adoption of post-harvest technology to enhance product quality. With bold aspirations, she also aims to expand the FFPO's reach beyond national borders, tapping into international markets. Her journey underscores the transformative power of technology in fostering empowerment and innovation, proving that with the

right tools and determination, one can overcome barriers and achieve extraordinary success.



Looking ahead, she envisions a future where more women break barriers and step into leadership.



STELLA'S JOURNEY



Stella, an enterprising woman from Poompuhar, leads a group of women running a popular food stall specializing in fish delicacies such as fish fry, fish curry, and other traditional dishes. While their delicious offerings had earned them a loyal customer base, their reliance on cash-only payments created barriers. Customers often found it inconvenient, and the group faced challenges in managing and tracking daily transactions effectively.

Digital Awakening

Recognizing the need to modernize their operations, Stella and her group took a bold step forward by attending a digital literacy facilitated by MSSRF. The program introduced them to the fundamentals of digital payments, equipping them with skills to use mobile apps like GPay and seamlessly integrate QR codes for faster, hassle-free transactions.

Through hands-on training, they

gained confidence in navigating digital platforms, understanding the security, convenience, and efficiency of cashless payments. More than just a technical upgrade, these skills transformed their business operations, allowing them to offer seamless transactions, enhance customer trust, and expand their market reach.

By embracing digital tools, Stella and her group streamlined their payment processes, reducing their reliance on cash while creating a more professional and customer-friendly experience—a crucial step in adapting to today's evolving marketplace.

Transformation to Business Growth

Motivated by the training, Stella and her group fully embraced the shift to digital payments. They acquired their own QR code for their stall and began encouraging



By embracing digital tools, Stella and her group streamlined their payment processes, reducing their reliance on cash while creating a more professional and customer-friendly experience



customers to use GPay and other digital platforms for seamless transactions. What initially seemed like a challenge turned out to be a smooth transition, with a significant portion of their transactions shifting online. This change not only reduced their dependence on cash but also minimized errors in tracking sales, ensuring a more organized financial system.

As word spread, their customer base expanded, attracting not only locals but also tourists from outside the community who relied on digital payments. The convenience of cashless transactions encouraged repeat customers, leading to higher daily sales. With clear digital records, they could better manage their income and plan for future investments, bringing financial stability and growth to their small business.

"We never imagined that a simple QR code could make such a big

difference. Now, our stall is busier, our work is easier, and we feel more confident handling money," said by her, highlighting the profound impact of digital inclusion.

Empowerment Through Digital Transformation

The transition to digital payments for Stella and her group was not just about convenience—it was a leap toward empowerment. Learning to use GPay and QR codes gave them a newfound sense of confidence and pride in their ability to adapt to digital business practices.

However, the journey was not without challenges. Ensuring consistent internet connectivity and navigating occasional technical glitches remain hurdles that they continue to tackle. Despite these setbacks, Stella remains determined to further modernize their stall by exploring online pre-orders and integrating



"We never imagined that a simple QR code could make such a big difference. Now, our stall is busier, our work is easier, and we feel more confident handling money,"



delivery services. By expanding their reach, they aim to attract more customers and enhance business efficiency.

Reflecting on this transformative journey, "We never imagined that something as simple as using a QR code could change our business so much," she shared. "Now, our customers find it easier to pay, and we feel more confident managing transactions digitally."

Her journey from relying solely on cash transactions to seamlessly adopting digital payments exemplifies the transformative power of digital literacy. By embracing technology, Stella and her group improved operational efficiency, met evolving customer preferences, and secured a stronger foothold in the marketplace. Their success underscores the broader potential of MSSRF's digital literacy initiatives in empowering rural businesses to adapt, grow, and lead in today's

digital age.



"We never imagined that something as simple as using a QR code could change our business so much," she shared. "Now, our customers find it easier to pay, and we feel more confident managing transactions digitally."



THE TRANSFORMATION OF RENUGA



Renuga, a 36-year-old resident of Mayiladuthurai district, made her livelihood selling dry fish in the local market. While she was skilled and hardworking, her traditional methods of production and sales limited her business's reach. These challenges, coupled with inconsistent payments from customers and dependency on middlemen, made her dry fish venture difficult.

Renuga aspired for growth but needed the right tools and knowledge to break free from the constraints.

Transformation Through Digital Literacy and Post-harvest Training

Renuga's journey of change began when she participated in a Digital Literacy offered by MSSRF. Alongside digital literacy, she also gained knowledge on post-harvest training through video conferencing, mobile

app and also advanced techniques for hygienic dry fish making its quality control through the online platforms.

A Journey Toward Empowerment

The combination of digital literacy and post-harvest techniques completely transformed Renuga's dry fish sales, "Now, I decide my prices and reach my customers directly. I no longer have to depend on middlemen," she proudly shares. With improved hygiene and quality, her dried fish products quickly gained a competitive edge, attracting more customers and ensuring repeat orders.

Before receiving digital literacy, Renuga struggled with financial transactions. She was unfamiliar with digital payment platforms like WhatsApp Pay and Google Pay (GPay) and often faced difficulties at



"Now, I decide my prices and reach my customers directly. I no longer have to depend on middlemen,"



food stalls where customers preferred cashless payments. Many potential buyers did not carry cash, leading to missed sales opportunities. Providing exact change was another challenge, frequently leaving her at a disadvantage. Despite offering high-quality products, the lack of digital transaction methods restricted her business growth. "I used to panic whenever a customer asked if I accepted online payments. I had no idea how to use them, and I lost so many sales just because of that," she recalls.

Her turning point came, where she learned to use digital payment platforms, WhatsApp Business, and online marketing tools. The impact was immediate—sales at food stalls increased as transactions became smoother and faster. Customers who once hesitated due to payment issues now found it easier to buy from her. WhatsApp Business helped her connect directly with customers, share product details, receive bulk

orders, and provide better customer service. With technology in her hands, her dry fish sales finally started expanding beyond her local community.

Encouraged by this progress, Renuga took a bold step forward. "I wanted to do something bigger, not just for myself but for other fisherwomen like me. That's when I became the promoter of Vetripaavai Fisherwomen Producer Company Limited, a venture focused on enhancing the livelihoods of fisherwomen through value-added seafood products," she says with determination.

Her expertise and growing confidence opened new doors, leading her to participate in some of the country's most prestigious food festivals and exhibitions like Delhi's World Food India 2024, the Namakkal Food Festival. These platforms brought her business into the spotlight, introducing her



Her turning point came, where she learned to use digital payment platforms, WhatsApp Business, and online marketing tools.



products to a much wider market.

A Role Model for Change

Renuga's journey from a local vendor to a digital entrepreneur has ignited a wave of change in her community. "If I can do it, so can you," she tells fellow women, encouraging them to see technology not as a challenge but as an opportunity. Inspired by her success, many have started adopting dry fish hygienic production techniques, using digital tools to reach more customers, and embracing mobile payment systems for secure and hassle-free transactions.



"I wanted to do something bigger, not just for myself but for other fisherwomen like me. That's when I became the promoter of Vetripaavai Fisherwomen Producer Company Limited, a venture focused on enhancing the livelihoods of fisherwomen through value-added seafood products,"



KAVIARASI'S DIGITAL SUCCESS



Kaviarasi, a 32-year-old homemaker from Ramanathapuram district, represents the resilience and curiosity of women who balance family responsibilities with aspirations for self-improvement. Married at a young age, Kaviarasi's formal education came to an abrupt halt as she prioritized managing her household. Her husband, a fisherman, supported their family through fishing and running a YouTube channel featuring their daily life and fishing activities.

Although she lacked exposure to digital tools, Kaviarasi was intrigued by the idea of contributing to their channel and expanding its scope. This interest, combined with her natural curiosity, set the stage for her transformative journey.

The Turning Point

Kaviarasi's journey toward transformation began when she

learned about a digital literacy through her self-help group (SHG). Encouraged by her peers and supported by a volunteer, she enrolled in the program on January 2024, eager to explore the possibilities that digital skills could offer.

She learned to use smartphone features effectively, including accessing the Google Play Store to download useful applications. She also mastered managing WhatsApp groups, enabling her to stay connected, share updates, and coordinate more efficiently.

Recognizing Kaviarasi's keen interest in YouTube, the MSSRF trainer provided her with personalized guidance on video creation and uploading techniques. With consistent practice and dedication, she quickly mastered the process, marking what she describes as a defining moment in her digital journey. This newly acquired skill not



she was introduced to the world of online transactions, helping her conduct secure digital payments—an essential step toward financial independence.



only boosted her confidence but also opened doors to new opportunities, reinforcing her belief that technology could be a powerful tool for growth and empowerment.

Taking Charge of a Digital Future

With her newfound digital skills, Kaviarasi stepped up to manage her family's YouTube channel, a task that had previously been handled by her husband. She took full ownership of uploading videos, curating content, and engaging with the audience, transforming what was once a simple platform showcasing fishing practices and daily routines into a creative and purposeful endeavor. The ability to shape and enhance the channel's content gave her a sense of fulfillment and confidence, reinforcing the power of digital tools in her life.

"I never imagined I would be the one

managing a YouTube channel. At first, I was nervous, but as I uploaded more videos, I realized I could do so much more. Now, I feel empowered to share our traditions with the world."

Exploring New Avenues: Value-Added Products

Eager to make the channel more engaging and meaningful, Kaviarasi identified an exciting niche: value-added fish products through app learning modules. Drawing inspiration from her community's rich culinary traditions, she envisioned showcasing the preparation of items like fish pickles, dry fish snacks, and preserved seafood products. Her vision was driven by two key goals—expanding the channel's reach by introducing unique content and promoting traditional practices while exploring new income opportunities.

By featuring step-by-step recipes and



"I never imagined I would be the one managing a YouTube channel. At first, I was nervous, but as I uploaded more videos, I realized I could do so much more. Now, I feel empowered to share our traditions with the world."



preservation techniques from the post harvest learning modules, she aimed to educate and inspire others. "When people started commenting and asking for more recipes, I realized the potential of what I was doing. This is not just about food; it's about keeping our traditions alive while creating a livelihood."

Impact and Personal Growth

Reflecting on her transformation, she says:

"I've transformed from a digital novice to an active contributor. Thanks to the training, I can now shape our family's YouTube content."

Her ability to merge tradition with technology highlights the potential of rural women to lead change when provided with the right opportunities and support.



"When people started commenting and asking for more recipes, I realized the potential of what I was doing. This is not just about food; it's about keeping our traditions alive while creating a livelihood."



JOURNEY OF SATHYA



Sathya from Cuddalore, a dedicated and passionate dry fish seller, has spent years working diligently to sustain her business. While she possessed unmatched dedication, her growth was hindered by a lack of technological knowledge. Though she owned an Android phone for three years, her usage was limited to basic calls. Sathya aspired to harness technology to expand her business and improve her livelihood but needed guidance to navigate the digital world.

Her story exemplifies the possibilities unlocked when determination meets opportunity.

Transformation Through Training

Sathya's turning point came when she enrolled in the Digital Literacy Training Program offered by the MSSRF, which empowered her to integrate digital tools into her

business operations effectively. The training covered digital payments with GPay, enabling her to conduct seamless transactions, check transaction details, track payments, and manage her finances confidently. She also mastered WhatsApp Business account management, creating and actively managing her account to promote products, interact with customers, and handle orders efficiently. Reflecting on her experience, she shared, "Before this training, I didn't know how to use my phone beyond making calls. Now, I feel confident using GPay and WhatsApp to grow my business. My phone has become my biggest helper."

In addition to digital skills, Sathya attended a Post-Harvest Training Program that emphasized hygienic dry fish production. By adopting solar dryers, she significantly enhanced the quality and shelf life of her products, positioning her business for sustained growth and



"Before this training, I didn't know how to use my phone beyond making calls. Now, I feel confident using GPay and WhatsApp to grow my business. My phone has become my biggest helper."



success.

Growth in Business and Income

Sathya's newfound skills sparked a transformative shift in her business. By adopting solar drying techniques, she ensured hygienic production that preserved the nutritional value of the fish while extending its shelf life. This not only made her products more appealing to customers but also positioned her as a trusted seller of high-quality dry fish.

She secured contracts with multiple supermarkets, taking her business beyond local boundaries and establishing a steady flow of income. Today, her products are available at Nisha Mart and Sumaya Super Market in Parangipettai, Apple Super Market in Neyveli, JD Mart in Ooty, Rabbaniya Super Market, and Sri Annam Super Market in Mutlur. Her supermarket sales alone generate ₹10,000 monthly, ensuring financial stability and independence. "Before, I struggled to sell my

products beyond my village. Now, my dry fish is in supermarkets miles away, and customers call me directly for orders. This was once unimaginable," Sathya shares with joy.

"I used to feel embarrassed while carrying my dry fish on the bus, but now, with my improved packaging, I travel without hesitation. People no longer complain, and I can sell my products anywhere," she says proudly.

By leveraging eco-friendly technology, Sathya laid the foundation for long-term business success, creating a resilient model that adapts to changing market dynamics and consumer preferences.

Today, she stands as a role model for aspiring women entrepreneurs, proving that with the right tools and training, businesses can flourish beyond expectations. An Inspiration to Her Community



"Before, I struggled to sell my products beyond my village. Now, my dry fish is in supermarkets miles away, and customers call me directly for orders. This was once unimaginable,"



Empowerment through technology is at the heart of her story, illustrating how access to simple digital tools can revolutionize traditional businesses and streamline operations. Through her adoption of sustainable practices, such as hygienic, eco-friendly production methods, she demonstrated the importance of sustainability in business, ensuring long-term viability. Her success also highlighted the path to financial independence, showing how innovation, coupled with hard work, can lead to consistent income growth and a more secure future.

Her success illustrates how embracing technology and sustainable practices can lead to financial stability, community growth, and a brighter future. Through her journey, Sathya has paved the way for others to harness the power of digital literacy, proving that with the right tools and determination, anything is possible.



Her success illustrates how embracing technology and sustainable practices can lead to financial stability, community growth, and a brighter future.



THE JOURNEY OF USHA



Usha, a resident of Keelamokarai, embarked on her digital journey by starting a YouTube channel to share content. However, her initial engagement with the platform was limited; she uploaded videos infrequently and struggled to reach a wider audience. Her channel had not yet realized its full potential in terms of audience reach and content impact.

Usha's path took a transformative turn when she attended a digital literacy training program provided by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF). The program aimed to empower women by enhancing their understanding of digital tools and platforms, focusing on content creation, online engagement, and effective use of social media. In addition to this, Usha also participated in post-harvest training, which equipped her with valuable knowledge and skills in fisheries management.

Usha's Digital Evolution: From Learner to Influencer

The digital literacy training opened new doors for Usha, sparking her interest in actively growing her YouTube channel. With newly gained skills and a better grasp of content creation, she became more confident in filming, editing, and sharing videos. The post-harvest training further enriched her journey by providing her with valuable knowledge on fish processing and preservation, which she began documenting through short reels and educational videos. This not only improved her channel's engagement but also allowed her to showcase modern fishery techniques to a wider audience.

"Before this training, I didn't know how to make my videos look professional. Now, I can edit, add captions, and even track how many people watch them. It feels like I'm



Before this training, I didn't know how to make my videos look professional. Now, I can edit, add captions, and even track how many people watch them. It feels like I'm finally being heard."



finally being heard,” she shared enthusiastically.

As she applied these newfound digital skills, her audience grew steadily, and her channel became a trusted space for learning about fisheries and post-harvest techniques. She found joy in educating others, using her platform to bridge traditional wisdom with digital outreach. Her consistency and dedication turned her passion into a profession, gaining recognition beyond her village.

“People from outside my village now reach out to me, asking about fish drying and preservation methods. It makes me proud to know that my videos are making a difference,” she shared, reflecting on the impact of her work.

Usha’s story is a testament to how digital literacy can empower women to explore new opportunities and build independent careers. By combining technology, traditional

skills, and a passion for sharing knowledge, she has redefined her role in the fisheries sector, proving that the right training and determination can turn small beginnings into powerful transformations.

Personal Growth and Digital Engagement

Usha’s journey from a passive content creator to an active and engaged YouTuber showcases her personal growth and the empowerment achieved through digital literacy. Her increased online presence allowed her to reach a wider audience, share her knowledge, and connect with like-minded individuals. This transformation underscores the power of digital literacy in enabling individuals to effectively use



“People from outside my village now reach out to me, asking about fish drying and preservation methods. It makes me proud to know that my videos are making a difference,”



technology to enhance both their personal and professional lives.

Gratitude and Community Impact

Usha expressed deep gratitude for the digital literacy training provided by MSSRF. She acknowledged that the skills and encouragement she received have transformed her approach to content creation and online engagement. Her success story now serves as an inspiration to others in her community, demonstrating how digital tools can be leveraged to share knowledge and build an online presence.

Usha's story highlights the significant impact of digital literacy programs on online engagement and content creation. By equipping women with essential digital skills, these programs enable them to actively participate in the digital world, share valuable knowledge, and

grow their online platforms. Usha's transformation from an infrequent content creator to an active YouTuber underscores the importance of MSSRF initiatives in fostering digital empowerment, education, and community development.



Her success story now serves as an inspiration to others in her community, demonstrating how digital tools can be leveraged to share knowledge and build an online presence.



SHAPING ANANTHAVALLI'S FUTURE



Ananthavalli, a resident of Nayakkarkuppam village, spent years assisting in the traditional fish trade. Her involvement was often limited to secondary tasks, and she had never taken on a leadership role or explored innovative techniques for fish processing. Despite her dedication, she lacked the tools and confidence to elevate her role in the industry.

Digital Literacy and Thematic Video Conferencing

The turning point in Ananthavalli's journey came when she joined a digital literacy training program offered by MSSRF. Through this training, she gained valuable knowledge on effectively using smartphones for communication and market research, which helped her stay informed about market trends and pricing. Additionally, she learned to leverage digital tools

like WhatsApp for networking and order management, allowing her to connect with buyers, streamline transactions, and ensure better coordination in her business.

Building on this strong foundation, she further enhanced her expertise by attending series of thematic video conferencing sessions focused on post-harvest technologies. These sessions provided insights into methods of fish processing and preservation, equipping her with innovative techniques to extend the shelf life of her products. She also learned about the importance of hygienic dry fish production, which significantly improved the quality of her products and made them more appealing to customers. By adopting these best practices, she was able to offer superior products, increase demand, and expand her customer base.

With these digital tools and advanced knowledge at her disposal,



By adopting these best practices, she was able to offer superior products, increase demand, and expand her customer base.



Ananthavalli transformed her approach to fish processing and marketing, proving that access to the right information and technology can empower small-scale entrepreneurs to enhance their livelihoods and grow their businesses.

From Learner to Leader

Equipped with her newly acquired digital skills and knowledge from thematic video conferencing sessions, Ananthavalli took the initiative to lead her group of fisherwomen toward more structured and efficient dry fish production. She introduced crucial improvements, ensuring that hygiene was maintained throughout the salting and drying processes, significantly enhancing the quality of their products. By implementing modern preservation techniques, the group was able to extend the shelf life of their dry fish, making it more marketable and reducing financial losses due to spoilage. As productivity increased, so did their

income, strengthening their position in the competitive marketplace. Sharing her experience, Ananthavalli expressed, "I never imagined that technology and new knowledge could bring such a transformation to our work. Today, we are not just selling dry fish—we are producing high-quality products that fetch better prices and give us financial stability." Her evolution from a passive participant to an inspiring leader showcases the transformative power of combining digital literacy with hands-on training.

Overcoming Challenges and Paving the Way Forward

While Ananthavalli's journey has been transformative, she remains focused on future growth and new opportunities. One of her key aspirations is to scale up the group's fish processing operations to meet the increasing market



"I never imagined that technology and new knowledge could bring such a transformation to our work. Today, we are not just selling dry fish—we are producing high-quality products that fetch better prices and give us financial stability."



demand. By expanding production capacity, she hopes to create more employment opportunities for women in her community, strengthening their economic independence. Additionally, she is keen on diversifying their offerings by exploring value-added fish products such as fish pickles and dried fish powders, which would open doors to higher profitability and a wider customer base.

"When I first started, I never imagined I could make such a difference. Now, I want to see more women rise, take control of their futures, and bring prosperity to their families," she says with determination.

Her story highlights the immense potential of training and empowerment in shaping women leaders in the fisheries sector. By blending traditional wisdom with modern digital tools and improved post-harvest practices, she has not

only elevated her own economic standing but has also set a precedent for others to follow.



"When I first started, I never imagined I could make such a difference. Now, I want to see more women rise, take control of their futures, and bring prosperity to their families"



VIJAYAKALA'S DIGITAL LEAP: LEARNING THROUGH YOUTUBE





Vijayakala, a 27-year-old woman from a coastal village of Mayiladuthurai, spent most of her days immersed in post-harvest fisheries work. Skilled in traditional methods, her expertise was undeniable, but her opportunities for growth were limited by a lack of digital tools and technological knowledge. Relying solely on a basic feature phone, she had minimal access to online resources, broader markets, or innovative techniques. Vijayakala's life began to transform when she was introduced to a Digital Literacy.

Learning the Basics of Technology

Vijayakala was introduced to smartphones and tablets, marking her first step into the digital world. The training equipped her with practical skills, including using WhatsApp for professional networking and maintaining

seamless communication with customers. She also learned to navigate YouTube, unlocking a treasure trove of tutorials and industry insights that enriched her knowledge. Additionally, the program taught her to manage her tablet effectively for productivity and record-keeping, transforming her approach to work and organization. For someone who had never used these tools, Vijayakala displayed remarkable adaptability. The tablet she received as part of the program became her gateway to knowledge and innovation.

Connecting with a Broader Community

Through WhatsApp, Vijayakala became an active member of professional groups focused on post-harvest fisheries. These platforms provided her with opportunities to share and receive valuable advice on improving fish preservation



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techniques, enabling her to enhance the quality and shelf life of her products. She also connected with experienced professionals in her field, gaining insights and learning best practices. Additionally, the groups facilitated collaboration with peers on innovative marketing strategies and helped her explore potential markets, significantly boosting her confidence and business prospects.

Her participation in these groups was transformative. She began exchanging ideas and learning about advanced practices that were otherwise inaccessible in her village.

Learning Through YouTube

Vijayakala discovered a wealth of knowledge on YouTube, which became her virtual mentor. The platform offered her access to tutorials on hygienic fish drying

methods and innovative packaging techniques, enabling her to enhance the quality of her products. She also learned creative ways to add value to fish-based products, broadening her range of offerings.

Talking about YouTube's impact, she shared, "I learned step-by-step how to improve my drying and packaging methods. It's like having a teacher right in my hands." By staying informed about the latest trends in fisheries management and customer preferences, Vijayakala was able to adapt her practices to meet market demands. This newfound knowledge directly impacted her work, as she introduced improved fish drying and packaging methods that significantly boosted the appeal and shelf life of her products.

Empowerment and Personal Growth
The impact of digital literacy extended beyond professional benefits. Vijayakala experienced a renewed sense of confidence and



"I learned step-by-step how to improve my drying and packaging methods. It's like having a teacher right in my hands."



independence. She began actively participating in discussions and initiatives related to fisheries, both online and offline.

Vijayakala's digital learning journey brought remarkable transformations to her work and personal growth. By adopting efficient fish processing and packaging techniques, she achieved increased productivity, ensuring higher quality and reduced wastage.

Vision for the Future

With her newfound skills, Vijayakala envisions a promising future filled with growth and empowerment. She aspires to scale her operations by integrating advanced technologies into her production processes, enhancing efficiency and product quality. Committed to giving back, she aims to mentor other women in her community, inspiring them to embrace digital tools to improve their livelihoods. Additionally, Vijayakala plans to venture into

entrepreneurship by developing branded, high-quality fish products tailored for niche markets, further solidifying her position as a leader in the industry.

Vijayakala's journey exemplifies how digital literacy can serve as a catalyst for change. From a feature phone user with limited market exposure to a confident professional leveraging digital platforms, her transformation reflects the profound impact of empowering women through technology.



Vijayakala plans to venture into entrepreneurship by developing branded, high-quality fish products tailored for niche markets, further solidifying her position as a leader in the industry.



BHAVANI'S STORY



Bhavani, a resident of Vanagiri village in the Mayiladuthurai district, led a life dedicated to managing her household and caring for her family. Despite her responsibilities, she always believed she could contribute more to her family's income and her community if given the opportunity. This latent desire for growth and self-improvement laid the foundation for a transformative journey.

Intervention: Digital Literacy and Post-Harvest Technology Training

Bhavani's life took a transformative turn when she learned about a training program offered by MSSRF, combining digital literacy and post-harvest technology. Driven by curiosity and ambition, she eagerly enrolled, hoping to acquire new skills that could open doors to better opportunities. The training introduced her to basic digital tools, helping her navigate

smartphones and applications like WhatsApp and Google for communication and information access. Alongside this, she learned post-harvest technology techniques to enhance fish processing and preservation, equipping her with methods to improve product quality and longevity. A crucial aspect of the training focused on sustainable practices, including the use of solar dryers for fish drying, which not only reduced spoilage but also ensured hygienic and eco-friendly processing. These sessions broadened her understanding of the fishing trade while sparking a deep interest in fish processing and value addition, inspiring her to explore new possibilities in her livelihood.

"I never imagined that learning to use a smartphone and a solar dryer could change my business so much. Now, I can check market prices, connect with customers, and sell my products with confidence," she said, reflecting on her journey.



A crucial aspect of the training focused on sustainable practices, including the use of solar dryers for fish drying, which not only reduced spoilage but also ensured hygienic and eco-friendly processing.



Entrepreneurial Journey

Motivated by the training, Bhavani took a bold step into entrepreneurship, venturing into the production of value-added fish products, a natural extension of her community's traditional livelihood. With the support of sustainable solar dryers, she began processing dry fish in a more hygienic and eco-friendly manner, ensuring better quality and longer shelf life. This transition transformed her business, leading to improved product quality, increased market value, and greater environmental sustainability. "Earlier, I struggled to sell my fish at a good price, and spoilage was a constant worry. Now, my fish stays fresh for longer, and customers appreciate the cleanliness and taste," she shared, reflecting on her progress.

The shift from a homemaker to an entrepreneur gave her a newfound sense of empowerment, financial independence, and recognition

within her community. No longer just a participant in the fishing trade, she became a leader and innovator, setting an example for other women. Her entrepreneurial journey did not stop at dry fish production. She actively took part in local food festivals and market stalls, proudly showcasing her products to a wider audience. With her growing confidence, she began networking with customers and vendors, leveraging digital tools to connect, explore market trends, and expand her business beyond Vanagiri. "I never imagined that I could sell my products outside my village. Now, I receive calls from new customers, and people recognize my name. This journey has changed my life," she said with pride.

By embracing modern methods and digital literacy, Bhavani not only improved her business but also inspired other women in her community. Her story stands as a testament to how access



"Earlier, I struggled to sell my fish at a good price, and spoilage was a constant worry. Now, my fish stays fresh for longer, and customers appreciate the cleanliness and taste,"



to knowledge, technology, and determination can transform lives, empowering fisherwomen to dream bigger and achieve greater financial stability.

Overcoming Challenges and Inspiring Change

Despite her remarkable progress, Bhavani continues to navigate challenges such as fluctuating fish supply and competition from larger producers. However, she remains determined to overcome these obstacles by expanding her business and diversifying her range of value-added fish products. With a vision for the future, she hopes to enhance her processing techniques, reach new markets, and build a more resilient enterprise. Bhavani credits MSSRF's training and support for equipping her with the skills and confidence to transform her livelihood. The knowledge she gained has not only helped her

build a sustainable and profitable venture but also strengthened her resolve to uplift other women in her community. She actively encourages her peers to embrace digital tools and modern techniques, showing them that determination and the right resources can lead to financial independence.

"If I can do it, so can other women in my village. We just need the right support and the willingness to learn," she said with conviction.

Bhavani's journey is a powerful testament to the impact of digital literacy and post-harvest technology training. By blending modern innovations with traditional wisdom, she has not only improved her livelihood but also contributed to her local economy. Her success stands as a beacon of inspiration, proving that education and empowerment can break barriers and create new opportunities for women in coastal communities.




"If I can do it, so can other women in my village. We just need the right support and the willingness to learn,"



STORY OF MERITA





Merita, a 50-year-old woman from Anthonyarpuram, has always been driven by a passion for community service. With an education up to the 10th standard, she married and devoted her life to supporting her family and community. Her journey into community service began with her role in the Childline team in Rameshwaram, helping children from vulnerable households. Later, she took on greater responsibilities as a ward member in Anthonyarpuram, working tirelessly to address the needs of her community.

Despite her dedication, Merita relied on traditional methods for communication and problem-solving. These methods often resulted in delays in addressing critical ward issues, limiting the impact she could make as a leader.

Challenge

As a ward member, she was committed to serving her community but faced persistent challenges in efficiently communicating with both replace people and authorities. The traditional methods she relied on, such as in-person meetings and paper-based communication, were often slow and cumbersome. This made it difficult to quickly disseminate critical information or respond promptly to the needs of the community. With the increasing pace of change and the need for more effective governance, Merita realized that these outdated methods were limiting her ability to address ward-related concerns and manage her responsibilities in a timely manner.

The Turning Point

Merita's journey took a transformative turn when she was introduced to a digital literacy



Her journey into community service began with her role in the Childline team in Rameshwaram, helping vulnerable children.



organized by the Village Resource Centre (VRC).

On November, 2023, she attended the training, eager to bridge the gaps in her digital skills and explore how technology could help her streamline her responsibilities.

Transformation Through Digital Literacy

The digital literacy marked a significant turning point for Merita, equipping her with essential skills that transformed her role as a ward member and enhanced her capacity to serve her community. One of the key skills she gained was the ability to effectively communicate through WhatsApp. She quickly learned to create and manage WhatsApp groups, allowing her to disseminate community updates, circulate important news, and even report issues using photos and videos. This digital shift dramatically reduced the

time it took to resolve issues, as she could now engage directly with her community and authorities in real time.

“Before, I would have to wait for the next meeting to discuss important matters, but now, I can communicate instantly with everyone,” Merita says. She quickly mastered paying current bills and other expenses through digital channels, streamlining her responsibilities and reducing the burden.

Moreover, the digital literacy opened her eyes to the wide array of tools available on her smartphone. Learning to use Google Maps, Google Search, and the Play Store enabled her to navigate her daily tasks more efficiently.

Merita’s digital transformation has not only made her role more efficient but also inspired others in her community to embrace technology. By demonstrating that digital skills



She quickly learned to create and manage WhatsApp groups, allowing her to disseminate community updates, circulate important news, and even report issues using photos and videos.



are accessible to all, regardless of age or background, she has become a powerful advocate for digital literacy. As she reflects, "Digital tools have revolutionized the way I address ward issues, making the process more efficient and responsive."



"Digital tools have revolutionized the way I address ward issues, making the process more efficient and responsive."



GUNAVATHI'S STORY



Gunavathi, a 36-year-old resident of Karaikalmedu village in Karaikkal, has faced significant challenges in her life. Five years ago, she lost her husband, leaving her as the sole provider for her three children—two boys and one girl. Despite these hardships, Gunavathi has persevered and found a livelihood in the auctioning of squids, which she buys from the harbor and exports to companies in Kanyakumari and Thuthukudi. Her story is one of resilience and transformation, particularly through her participation in the Digital Literacy organized by the MSSRF.

Before participating in the digital literacy training, Gunavathi's business operations were limited by her lack of knowledge in utilizing digital tools. Her methods of communication with buyers and auction organizers were inefficient, often resulting in missed opportunities and delayed payments. Additionally, she faced difficulties with cash transactions, sometimes

being cheated by buyers who promised to pay later but never did. These challenges made it difficult for her to secure a stable income and manage her household expenses.

Intervention: Digital Literacy Training

Understanding the growing role of digital tools in expanding business opportunities, Gunavathi took a proactive step by enrolling in the Digital Literacy. With a keen interest in modernizing her business, she saw this as an opportunity to bridge the gap between traditional practices and the digital era.

The training provided her with hands-on experience in using social media platforms to promote her products, enabling her to reach a wider customer base beyond her local market. She also gained practical knowledge of UPI payment applications, allowing her to shift



Her story is one of resilience and transformation, particularly through her participation in the Digital Literacy organized by the MSSRF.



from cash transactions to secure and instant digital payments, increasing customer convenience. Additionally, the program introduced her to other essential digital tools, equipping her with the skills necessary to streamline operations, track sales, and enhance overall business efficiency. By embracing these new technologies, Gunavathi positioned herself as a forward-thinking entrepreneur, ready to leverage digital advancements to strengthen her business and improve financial security.

Transformation

The digital literacy training marked a turning point in Gunavathi's business journey, equipping her with essential skills to navigate the modern marketplace. She quickly mastered WhatsApp, which she now uses to receive real-time updates on auction places and dates. This newfound efficiency has helped her coordinate with buyers seamlessly, ensuring

timely transactions and reducing uncertainties in her business operations.

One of the most transformative skills she acquired was the use of GPay for UPI transactions. Previously, she relied entirely on cash payments, which often left her vulnerable to delayed or incomplete transactions. "Earlier, I had to wait for days to receive my payments, and at times, I was even shortchanged. Now, with GPay, I receive my money instantly and securely," she shares with a sense of relief. This shift has protected her income, minimized financial risks, and given her greater control over her earnings.

The impact of digital adoption is evident in her financial growth. Today, Gunavathi earns a steady monthly profit of ₹8,000, a significant increase from her previous earnings. By integrating digital tools into her daily business operations, she has not only expanded her



"Earlier, I had to wait for days to receive my payments, and at times, I was even shortchanged. Now, with GPay, I receive my money instantly and securely,"



market reach but has also enhanced her confidence as an independent entrepreneur, proving that the right skills can empower women to build sustainable and profitable livelihoods.

Empowerment Beyond Business: Personal and Community Transformation

Gunavathi's journey did not stop at improving her own business—she became a driving force for economic empowerment in her community. After attending a thematic video conference organized by MSSRF, where she gained valuable insights into credit facilities, she took the initiative to share this knowledge with her neighbours and friends. By guiding others on how to access and utilize financial support, she played a crucial role in expanding the benefits of the digital literacy program beyond herself, helping more women

step toward financial independence. Her transformation from a struggling single mother to a successful businesswoman is a testament to her resilience and adaptability. Through digital literacy, she has ensured a stable income for her family, providing her children with better opportunities and securing their future. "I never thought I would be the one teaching others. But now, when I see my friends benefiting from the same knowledge that changed my life, I feel proud and motivated to keep learning and sharing," she says, reflecting on her journey.

Filled with gratitude for the training and support provided by MSSRF, Gunavathi acknowledges that these resources empowered her to overcome financial struggles and build a more secure life. Looking ahead, she aspires to expand her business further and enhance her digital skills to explore new market opportunities. Her story is



"I never thought I would be the one teaching others. But now, when I see my friends benefiting from the same knowledge that changed my life, I feel proud and motivated to keep learning and sharing,"



a powerful example of how digital literacy programs can transform lives, equipping women with the confidence, skills, and knowledge to achieve financial stability and uplift their communities. From a vulnerable widow to a leader and mentor, Gunavathi's journey underscores the impact of MSSRF initiatives in fostering empowerment, economic independence, and resilience.



From a vulnerable widow to a leader and mentor, Gunavathi's journey underscores the impact of MSSRF initiatives in fostering empowerment, economic independence, and resilience.



VALARMATHI'S DIGITAL LEAP



Valarmathi, a determined entrepreneur from Mudasalodai village in Cuddalore District, dedicated herself producing dry fish using traditional methods. These age-old practices, though deeply rooted in her community's heritage, restricted her ability to scale her business and reach broader markets. She yearned for growth but lacked the tools and knowledge to break free from these limitations.

Her story took a transformative turn when she embraced digital literacy to redefine her approach to fish business.

Learning Modern Practices Through Training

She participated in a comprehensive digital literacy and post-harvest training program offered by the MSSRF. T

She also gained knowledge in

business management, including the importance of formalizing operations and adhering to regulatory compliance, which helped streamline her processes. Additionally, the program focused on digital literacy, teaching her to use digital tools for marketing and financial transactions effectively. As a result, Valarmathi not only improved the quality of her products but also discovered innovative ways to expand her market reach and grow her business.

Transformation: From Producer to Entrepreneur

Empowered by newfound knowledge and confidence, Valarmathi completely transformed her business and her identity. Earlier, she was a woman confined to her home, making dry fish and selling it in nearby local areas. But today, she has stepped into the spotlight, taking her business to renowned platforms and expanding her reach like never



As a result, Valarmathi not only improved the quality of her products but also discovered innovative ways to expand her market reach and grow her business.



before.

She successfully presented her dry fish products at prestigious events, government and other academic institutions. These platforms not only gave her exposure but also validated the quality and uniqueness of her products.

"I never thought I would step beyond my home, let alone showcase my products at big events. But now, I stand before crowds, proudly talking about my business.

Understanding the power of digital marketing, she utilized WhatsApp and other online tools to showcase her products, reach new customers beyond her village, and significantly expand her market.

With MSSRF's guidance, she took a crucial step toward formalizing her business. She obtained an FSSAI certification and registered for GST, ensuring compliance with

government regulations. This move elevated her business's credibility and professional standing, allowing her to tap into larger markets with confidence.

"Now, when I sell my products, I don't feel like a small vendor—I feel like a businesswoman. People trust my brand because I have the right certifications. It has changed everything for me," she says, reflecting on her journey.

Impact: A New Horizon of Opportunities

The transformation in Valarmathi's business brought about remarkable and tangible results. Beyond financial success, she emerged as an empowered entrepreneur, with newfound confidence and resilience driving her to continue innovating and scaling her business, inspiring others in her community to follow suit. Today, Valarmathi is not just



"I never thought I would step beyond my home, let alone showcase my products at big events. But now, I stand before crowds, proudly talking about my business"



a dry fish producer—she is an entrepreneur, a role model, and an inspiration for other women in her community.

Gratitude

Reflecting on her journey, expressed her heartfelt appreciation for MSSRF support:

“The training transformed not just my business but my outlook on life. Today, I proudly call myself a digital entrepreneur. I am grateful for the opportunities that helped me achieve this milestone.”



“The training transformed not just my business but my outlook on life. Today, I proudly call myself a modern entrepreneur. I am grateful for the opportunities that helped me achieve this milestone.”



ARULMOZHI'S JOURNEY



In the coastal village of Keelamokarai of Mayiladuthurai district lived Arulmozhi, a dynamic and community-oriented woman. Known for her willingness to take charge, she often coordinated activities for the women in her village, striving to bring them together for collective initiatives.

However, like many in her community, Arulmozhi had limited exposure to digital tools and modern techniques that could enhance their livelihoods. When MSSRF proposed a digital literacy training program, she immediately recognized its potential and encouraged her fellow women to participate.

Intervention: Digital Literacy and Post-Harvest Training

Arulmozhi had never owned an Android phone, nor had she imagined navigating the vast digital

world. Yet, when the opportunity arose, she and her group eagerly stepped into the digital literacy training sessions, determined to break barriers and embrace technology.

With hands-on practice using a tablet, Arulmozhi learned to communicate effectively via WhatsApp, access information through Google, and find locations using Google Maps. What once seemed intimidating gradually became second nature. The newfound digital confidence empowered her group to stay informed, connect with buyers, and explore market trends—an essential shift in today's evolving landscape.

Alongside her digital transformation, Arulmozhi took part in post-harvest technology training, gaining crucial insights into modern fish processing and preservation techniques. She mastered methods to enhance product quality and was introduced



The newfound digital confidence empowered her group to stay informed, connect with buyers, and explore market trends—an essential shift in today's evolving landscape.

to value-added fish products, enabling her group to diversify their offerings. With these skills, they not only reduced waste but also unlocked new income opportunities, strengthening their resilience in the fishing trade.

Transformation

For Arulmozhi, the tablet was more than just a device—it was a gateway to innovation. With determination, she mastered digital platforms, using them to enhance her group's business operations. By researching market trends, connecting with buyers, and learning advanced packaging techniques online, she led a transformation in their approach to fish processing and marketing.

"At first, we hesitated—technology felt distant from our world. But as we explored, we realized its power. Now, we can find better prices, reach more buyers, and improve our products," she added.

With this newfound knowledge, Arulmozhi and her group transitioned to producing high-quality dry fish and value-added fish products, adopting hygienic practices and modern packaging that appealed to a broader market.

Business Growth and Personal Growth

Armed with digital skills and confidence, Arulmozhi stepped into a leadership role, guiding her group toward more structured and efficient operations. They began leveraging WhatsApp for order management and customer outreach, significantly expanding their customer base beyond their village, reaching buyers in different regions.

"Before, we relied on word of mouth and middlemen. Now, we manage orders ourselves, set fair prices, and even send product photos to customers instantly," says another



"At first, we hesitated—technology felt distant from our world. But as we explored, we realized its power. Now, we can find better prices, reach more buyers, and improve our products,"



fisherwoman in the group.

As a leader, Arulmozhi inspired her team to embrace modern tools and techniques, ensuring their business became more productive and sustainable. Her success also encouraged other women in the community to explore digital and entrepreneurial opportunities, proving that change was within their reach.

From a traditional fisherwoman to a digital-savvy entrepreneur, Arulmozhi's journey showcases resilience, adaptability, and determination. Her willingness to learn and lead by example created a ripple effect within her community. "We never thought we could use technology to sell our fish. Now, we are confident, independent, and growing our business together," says a fellow fisherwoman, reflecting on the transformation.

Overcoming Challenges and Building a Vision for the Future

While Arulmozhi and her group have made remarkable strides, they continue to face challenges such as limited access to raw materials and navigating competitive markets. Despite these hurdles, she remains determined to expand their reach, explore online marketplaces, and support more women in her community by sharing the knowledge she has gained through training programs.

With deep gratitude to MSSRF, Arulmozhi acknowledges the transformative impact of the training and resources that have shaped her journey. Her vision extends beyond personal success—she is committed to uplifting other women, ensuring that they too can leverage digital tools and modern techniques to improve their livelihoods.



"We never thought we could use technology to sell our fish. Now, we are confident, independent, and growing our business together,"



Her story exemplifies how digital literacy, technical training, and leadership can empower individuals to drive sustainable change within their communities. The women who once hesitated to embrace digital tools now use them confidently to elevate their livelihoods. By merging traditional fishing knowledge with modern practices, Arulmozhi and her group have redefined what is possible for fisherwomen in their community



JOURNEY OF MANJULA



Manjula, a 26-year-old resident of Kalaingar nagar, lived a life deeply rooted in her community's traditions and challenges. Married to a fisherman, she and her husband depended on brackish water fishing for their livelihood. However, her lack of familiarity with technology posed significant challenges in both her personal and professional life.

Living in an era where access to digital tools was increasingly shaping opportunities, Manjula found herself at a disadvantage. She had never used an Android phone, limiting her ability to communicate effectively, navigate safely, or explore new avenues for enhancing her livelihood.

The Turning Point: Digital Literacy Training

Recognizing the transformative power of digital literacy, to equip rural women with essential

technological skills. Among the many participants was Manjula, who, encouraged by her Self-Help Group (SHG), eagerly joined the initiative, hoping to enhance her knowledge and improve her daily life. The training began with foundational smartphone skills, ensuring that every participant, regardless of prior experience, could confidently operate their devices. Manjula learned the basics of using a smartphone, including turning it on and off, adjusting settings, and navigating through different applications. With these fundamental skills in place, she gradually moved on to more advanced features that would help her stay connected and informed.

One of the most impactful aspects of the program was learning communication tools like WhatsApp, which enabled her to send messages, share updates, and stay connected with her SHG members and family. This newfound ability was particularly beneficial



The training began with foundational smartphone skills, ensuring that every participant, regardless of prior experience, could confidently operate their devices.



for coordinating group activities, receiving market information, and accessing real-time updates on government schemes and financial opportunities. Another crucial component was understanding location services, which significantly enhanced mobility and safety. By learning how to use Google Maps and location-sharing features, Manjula gained the confidence to travel independently without fear of getting lost. This skill was particularly valuable when visiting unfamiliar places, attending SHG meetings in different villages, or seeking medical services in nearby towns.

To further support rural women in accessing information and resources, the training also introduced them to helpline services. Manjula and her fellow participants were guided on how to contact helplines for timely advice, emergency assistance, and information related to government welfare programs. This knowledge empowered them to seek solutions

proactively and remain well-informed about their rights and entitlements. Additionally, in a significant step toward ensuring continued learning and digital engagement, Manjula's SHG was provided with a tablet, offering them a shared digital resource that extended beyond individual smartphones. The tablet became a valuable tool for collective learning, allowing group members to watch instructional videos, access online resources, and explore new opportunities together. Through this structured digital literacy initiative, Manjula not only gained confidence in using technology but also discovered its potential to enhance her personal and financial independence.

Harnessing Technology for Everyday Challenges

Manjula's introduction to digital literacy was a turning point in her life. Initially unfamiliar with



By learning how to use Google Maps and location-sharing features, Manjula gained the confidence to travel independently without fear of getting lost.



smartphones, she hesitated to use one, fearing she might press the wrong buttons. However, with encouragement from her Self-Help Group (SHG) and the hands-on training provided by MSSRF, she gradually built her confidence. "At first, I was afraid to even touch a smartphone, but now, I use it for so many things I never thought possible," she said proudly.

One of the most valuable skills she acquired was using Google Maps and location services. In the past, fishing trips often turned stressful, as she sometimes struggled to find her way back home, especially during bad weather or low visibility. After training, she mastered the art of navigation, ensuring safer and quicker returns. Her newfound knowledge didn't just benefit her; she took it upon herself to teach others in her village how to use these tools, making travel safer for many in the fishing community.

Beyond navigation, digital literacy helped Manjula in unforeseen ways. A turning point came when her husband suffered a severe fish sting injury while fishing. In earlier times, they would have resorted to traditional remedies, often delaying proper medical attention. This time, she immediately used the emergency helpline she had learned about during training. "Before, we would have waited for someone to guide us, but now, I know where to get the right help at the right time," she shared. This proactive approach ensured her husband received timely medical care, reinforcing the importance of digital access in emergencies.

Her success with technology quickly made her an inspiration to others. Seeing her confidently use a smartphone for navigation, communication, and problem-solving, other women in her village started showing interest in digital learning.



"Before, we would have waited for someone to guide us, but now, I know where to get the right help at the right time,"



Gratitude and Aspirations

Manjula expressed profound gratitude for the digital literacy training, crediting it with transforming her daily life and empowering her to manage challenges more effectively. She acknowledged the support of MSSRF and her SHG in making this possible. Looking ahead, Manjula hopes to further enhance her digital skills and explore innovative ways to support her family's fishing activities. Her aspirations include using technology to market their catch, improve safety measures during fishing, and educate her community on the benefits of digital tools.

Manjula's journey from a complete novice in technology to a confident and capable digital user exemplifies the transformative power of digital literacy programs. By bridging the gap between traditional practices and modern tools, such initiatives empower individuals to enhance

their livelihoods, safety, and overall quality of life.



Her aspirations include using technology to market their catch, improve safety measures during fishing, and educate her community on the benefits of digital tools.



DIGITAL EXCELLENCE OF RAJALAKSHMI



Rajalakshmi, a 35-year-old resident of Vanagiri village in Mayiladuthurai district, has been involved in the dry fish business for over a decade. Her primary markets included Pudukkottai, Erode, and Salem, where she relied on traditional drying techniques and cash transactions to conduct her business. Despite her experience, these traditional practices limited her ability to expand and modernize her operations.

Intervention: Digital Literacy and Post-Harvest Training

Rajalakshmi's journey toward business transformation began with her participation in a digital literacy training program facilitated by MSSRF. This training introduced her to the world of digital payments, where she quickly learned to navigate platforms like GPay for secure and instant transactions. Embracing this technology not only

streamlined her financial transactions but also eliminated the risks and inconveniences associated with cash handling. Additionally, the training opened her eyes to the potential of online marketing, enabling her to explore digital platforms to reach a wider customer base and enhance the visibility of her products.

Building upon this foundation, Rajalakshmi also attended a post-harvest training program that focused on modernizing traditional fish processing methods. The training emphasized hygienic practices in dry fish preparation, ensuring that her products met higher quality standards. She learned advanced techniques to preserve fish effectively, improving both the shelf life and market appeal of her products. "Earlier, we followed age-old methods without realizing how small changes in technique could make a big difference in quality. Now, my products fetch better prices because of the improved hygiene and



"Earlier, we followed age-old methods without realizing how small changes in technique could make a big difference in quality. Now, my products fetch better prices because of the improved hygiene and preparation methods,"



preparation methods," she reflects proudly.

These interventions played a crucial role in equipping Rajalakshmi with the necessary skills and knowledge to modernize her business practices. By integrating digital tools with enhanced post-harvest techniques, she has not only improved efficiency and profitability but has also positioned herself as a forward-thinking entrepreneur in her community.

Transformation: Adopting Digital Tools and Hygienic Practices

Following her training, Rajalakshmi made a significant shift in her business operations by embracing digital payment systems. Moving away from cash-only transactions, she began accepting payments through GPay and bank transfers, making financial transactions

more seamless and secure. This transition not only reduced the risks associated with cash handling but also improved efficiency in her day-to-day sales. Customers appreciated the convenience of digital payments, allowing for quicker transactions and an overall smoother purchasing experience. "Earlier, I had to wait for customers to bring exact change or make multiple trips to the bank. Now, with just a tap on my phone, payments are settled instantly," she shares enthusiastically.

In addition to modernizing her financial practices, Rajalakshmi also integrated hygienic drying and packaging techniques into her dry fish business. The training helped her understand the importance of cleanliness and proper handling, resulting in higher-quality products that were more appealing to customers. By implementing improved drying methods and using better packaging materials, she enhanced the shelf life and



Earlier, I had to wait for customers to bring exact change or make multiple trips to the bank. Now, with just a tap on my phone, payments are settled instantly,



marketability of her fish products. These advancements not only elevated her reputation but also allowed her to attract new customers and strengthen her presence in her established markets. "People now trust my products more because they see the difference in quality. The training has changed the way I work and helped me build a better business," she reflects with pride.

Personal Growth and Community Impact

Rajalakshmi's shift from traditional methods to embracing modern technology demonstrates her adaptability and determination to improve her livelihood. Her success has inspired other women in her community, encouraging them to explore digital literacy and modern business practices. By sharing her experiences, she has fostered a culture of innovation and collaboration among local women

entrepreneurs.

Rajalakshmi's journey exemplifies the transformative power of digital literacy and post-harvest training in empowering rural women entrepreneurs. By integrating modern payment methods and improving product hygiene, she has streamlined her business operations, expanded her customer base, and achieved financial independence. With her unwavering determination and forward-thinking approach, Rajalakshmi continues to set a powerful example for women in her community, showcasing the potential for innovation and resilience in traditional industries.



"People now trust my products more because they see the difference in quality. The training has changed the way I work and helped me build a better business,"



SANTHANAMATHI RISE



Background

In the village of Vanagiri, nestled in Tamil Nadu's Mayiladuthurai district, 34-year-old Santhanamathi lived a life centered around her home and family. Though she diligently fulfilled her household responsibilities, a desire to contribute financially and create something of her own always lingered in her heart. However, with limited exposure to business opportunities and no formal training, her aspirations remained just that—distant aspirations. The path to entrepreneurship seemed out of reach until a turning point arrived, opening doors she had never imagined possible.

The Turning Point: Training that Changed Everything

Santhanamathi's life took a significant turn when she attended the Digital Literacy Training and

Post-Harvest Technology Training programs. These sessions became the foundation of her entrepreneurial journey, equipping her with the knowledge and confidence to transform her small-scale production into a structured business.

Through the digital literacy training, she learned to use her smartphone as a business tool, transitioning from simple communication to effectively managing operations. The ability to connect with customers, market her products, and handle transactions digitally opened up a world of opportunities that had once seemed out of reach. The post-harvest technology training introduced her to the potential of value-added fish products, particularly masala dry fish, which enjoys significant demand in both local and national markets. She gained crucial insights into hygienic production, ensuring that her products met high-quality standards. Learning proper pricing strategies allowed her to balance



She ability to connect with customers, market her products, and handle transactions digitally opened up a world of opportunities that had once seemed out of reach.



affordability with profitability, making her products competitive while sustaining her business. Moreover, mastering advanced packaging techniques enabled her to extend the shelf life of her dry fish and attract a wider customer base.

The knowledge she gained through these training sessions was not just theoretical—it was life-changing. Each new skill she acquired translated into tangible improvements in her business, empowering her to take charge of her future. What once seemed impossible had now become a reality, and with every order she fulfilled, Santhanamathi reaffirmed that the right training and determination could turn dreams into success.

From Passion to Business: Building Her Venture

Armed with her newly acquired

skills, Santhanamathi launched her own masala dry fish production unit, which became an instant hit. Her attention to quality and taste set her products apart, garnering recognition among a niche market of local and national level. By presenting a sample of her masala dry fish to the women FFPO, she secured a significant breakthrough. The FFPO members were highly impressed by the unique taste, hygienic preparation, and high quality of her product, leading them to place an order for 20 kg of masala dry fish. This was a defining moment for her business, as it was her first bulk order at an organized level.

For each order, she earned ₹8,000–₹9,000, a substantial amount compared to her earlier individual sales. What made this even more rewarding was the mode of payment—for the first time, she received the amount through online transactions. Until then, she had



Each new skill she acquired translated into tangible improvements in her business, empowering her to take charge of her future.



always dealt in cash, which often led to challenges such as delayed payments or difficulty in providing exact change. Receiving payments digitally gave her a sense of security and financial independence, reinforcing her confidence in handling business transactions efficiently.

"I never thought I'd run my own business and receive payments online. The training changed everything. Now, I don't just make masala dry fish—I sell it with confidence," she shares with excitement.

Beyond sales, the training also played a crucial role in refining her production process. She learned how to prepare masala dry fish in a hygienic manner, ensuring better shelf life and quality. Additionally, she adopted proper packaging techniques, making her product more appealing and suitable for bulk orders. Santhanamathi's products

cater to customers who appreciate the convenience and authenticity of her masala dry fish. With minimal preparation required, it is a favorite among busy households, working professionals, and food enthusiasts looking for traditional flavors.

Overcoming Challenges and Inspiring Change

Santhanamathi's journey toward entrepreneurship was filled with both triumphs and obstacles. As her business flourished, new challenges emerged that tested her resilience and adaptability.

One of the biggest hurdles was limited production capacity—the soaring demand for her masala dry fish often exceeded her ability to supply. Scaling up became a primary challenge, as she struggled to meet the increasing number of orders while maintaining the same level of quality. Additionally,



"I never thought I'd run my own business and receive payments online. The training changed everything. Now, I don't just make masala dry fish—I sell it with confidence,"



access to resources remained a constant concern. Procuring essential tools, such as solar dryers, and ensuring a steady supply of raw materials were ongoing struggles that required careful planning and resourcefulness.

Despite these challenges, the impact of her journey has been profound. The income from her growing business has brought financial stability, enabling her to contribute significantly to her family's needs and improve their quality of life. "Today, I no longer worry about household expenses the way I used to. This business has given me a sense of security and confidence," she says.

Beyond financial gains, the transformation in Santhanamathi herself has been remarkable. From being a reserved homemaker, she has evolved into a confident entrepreneur, making strategic decisions about production, pricing, and marketing. The training she

received not only sharpened her business acumen but also empowered her to take control of her own future.

Her journey has also had a ripple effect within her community. She has become a source of inspiration for other women, proving that with the right skills and knowledge, they too can venture into entrepreneurship. Actively sharing her experiences, she encourages others to explore new opportunities, offering guidance and motivation to those hesitant to step forward.



"Today, I no longer worry about household expenses the way I used to. This business has given me a sense of security and confidence,"



PRINCY'S JOURNEY



Princy, a 50-year-old homemaker from Thangachimadam, a village near Rameshwaram, represents a generation of women who prioritized family responsibilities over personal aspirations. Having studied up to the 11th grade, her educational journey was cut short by marriage. She dedicated her life to taking care of her family and supporting her husband's wedding decoration business.

Like many women of her generation, Princy had limited exposure to technology and the internet. She didn't own an Android phone and relied on traditional methods of communication and business management. Despite this, her desire to stay connected with her children, who live in different cities, motivated her to embrace change.

The Turning Point

Princy's journey into the digital world

began on November 14, 2023, when she attended a digital literacy training program with the support of a volunteer. The program was designed to bridge generational and technological gaps, equipping individuals like her with essential digital skills.

For someone who had never owned a smartphone, the training was a revelation. She learned to navigate an Android phone with ease, use WhatsApp for messaging, photo sharing, and video calls, and explore Google Maps, Google Search, and YouTube to access information and stay connected. Understanding the basics of internet usage further boosted her confidence, showing her how technology could simplify daily tasks and open new opportunities. Inspired by this newfound knowledge, Princy took a bold step—she invested in her first Android phone, marking the beginning of her digital transformation. From being hesitant about technology to



Understanding the basics of internet usage further boosted her confidence, showing her how technology could simplify daily tasks and open new opportunities.

Inspired by this newfound knowledge, Princy took a bold step—she invested in her first Android phone, marking the beginning of her digital transformation.



confidently using digital tools in her everyday life, her journey reflects the power of learning and adaptation in an increasingly digital world.

Connecting with Family Across Distances

The most profound impact of Princy's digital literacy journey was on her family life. Equipped with her newfound skills, she began using WhatsApp and video calls to stay in touch with her children, who lived in different cities. What once felt like a distant relationship became more personal and fulfilling, as she could now see their faces, share moments, and be part of their lives despite the physical distance.

She expresses her joy, saying, "Digital literacy has brought my family closer. Now, I don't just hear my children's voices—I see their smiles, their emotions. It feels like they are right here with me."

This newfound ability to bridge the communication gap transformed her sense of connection and emotional well-being, strengthening her bond with her family.

Transforming the Family Business
Beyond her personal life, Princy's digital skills also brought a remarkable transformation to her family's wedding decoration business. Previously, managing customer interactions was a slow and cumbersome process. Clients would visit in person to discuss their requirements, and any changes or clarifications had to be handled through multiple visits or phone calls, often leading to delays and miscommunication. However, with her newfound digital knowledge, she began integrating technology into their business operations, making them more efficient and customer-friendly.

With WhatsApp, she could now respond to customer inquiries



"Digital literacy has brought my family closer. Now, I don't just hear my children's voices—I see their smiles, their emotions. It feels like they are right here with me."



instantly, eliminating long wait times and misunderstandings. Instead of relying on verbal explanations, she started sharing high-quality photos and videos of decoration samples, allowing customers to visualize different options and make quicker, more informed decisions. This not only improved customer satisfaction but also saved valuable time and effort. She also used Google Search and YouTube to explore new decoration trends and techniques, ensuring that their designs remained innovative and appealing to modern preferences.

The biggest breakthrough came when she started receiving orders and approvals entirely through digital platforms. Instead of requiring customers to visit their shop multiple times, she streamlined the process by sending them decoration plans, finalizing selections, and confirming bookings—all through WhatsApp. Payments, which were once a hassle, also became smoother as she

gradually encouraged customers to use online transactions.

With these simple yet impactful changes, their small business gained a competitive edge, attracting more clients not just from their local area but also from neighboring towns. What once relied solely on word-of-mouth now flourished through digital connectivity. Reflecting on this transformation, Princy proudly says, “I never imagined that learning to use a phone would help me improve my business. Now, I can handle everything—customer inquiries, bookings, and payments—all from my phone. It has given me confidence and independence like never before.”

Overcoming Challenges and Embracing Growth

Princy’s journey into the digital world was not without its challenges. Initially, she was hesitant and unsure



“I never imagined that learning to use a phone would help me improve my business. Now, I can handle everything—customer inquiries, bookings, and payments—all from my phone. It has given me confidence and independence like never before.”



if she could grasp technology at her age. The idea of navigating a smartphone, using apps, and handling digital transactions felt overwhelming. However, the supportive environment of the training program and the constant encouragement from the volunteer played a crucial role in helping her overcome these fears. With each session, her confidence grew, and she started seeing the practical benefits of what she was learning.

Her strong desire to stay connected with her children and enhance her family business kept her motivated throughout the process. Every small milestone, from sending her first WhatsApp message to successfully handling a customer inquiry online, reinforced her determination to adapt and evolve.

What began as a simple effort to reconnect with her children blossomed into a journey of personal and professional empowerment.

Today, Princy stands as a role model in her community, proving that age is never a barrier to learning and growth. Her ability to seamlessly integrate digital tools into her everyday life has not only improved her quality of life but also inspired many others in her village to explore the opportunities that digital literacy can bring. She proudly shares, "I never thought I would be able to do all this on my own. Now, I feel independent, confident, and capable of handling things I once thought were beyond me."



Princy stands as a role model in her community, proving that age is never a barrier to learning and growth.



SAGAYA YAMUNA'S STORY



Sagaya Yamuna, a 42-year-old homemaker from Thangachimadam village in Rameswaram. Married at the age of 17, she had to leave her education incomplete. For years, her life revolved around household chores and raising her two children, while her husband worked as a fisherman. As her children grew older and moved away for higher education, she found herself with time and a desire to rediscover her potential.

This moment of self-reflection led her to the Village Resource Centre (VRC) in Thangachimadam, where her transformation began. Introduced by a friend, the VRC became a gateway for Sagaya Yamuna to explore new opportunities and skills.

The Journey of Transformation

In 2022, Sagaya Yamuna embarked on a transformative journey when

she enrolled in her first digital literacy program at the VRC. With no prior experience using computer, she initially found the digital world intimidating and unfamiliar. However, with dedicated guidance from VRC trainers, she quickly adapted, mastering essential computer skills, including Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. "The first time I placed my hands on a keyboard, I was nervous. But with each lesson, I felt a sense of accomplishment. Learning these skills gave me confidence I never knew I had."

As her proficiency grew, so did her enthusiasm for sharing knowledge. Recognizing the importance of digital literacy in her community, she took the initiative to teach neighborhood children the basics of computers, encouraging them to embrace technology. Soon, her street transformed into a hub of learning, where eager young minds gathered to explore the digital world under



"The first time I placed my hands on a keyboard, I was nervous. But with each lesson, I felt a sense of accomplishment. Learning these skills gave me confidence I never knew I had."



her guidance. Her commitment to spreading digital literacy not only empowered her community but also reinforced her own belief in the power of technology as a tool for education, opportunity, and progress

Expanding Her Digital Skills

In November 2023, Sagaya Yamuna took her digital journey to the next level by enrolling in an advanced digital literacy. This course equipped her with the skills to navigate essential smartphone applications like Google Maps for navigation and WhatsApp for effective communication. Platforms such as Google Pay and Beam became instrumental in simplifying her financial transactions, allowing her to manage shopping, bill payments, and finances with ease.

"I never imagined I could handle everything online—pay bills, buy

groceries, and even talk to my children through video calls. It's like a whole new world opened up for me."

These digital tools didn't just simplify her personal life; they also allowed Sagaya Yamuna to stay more connected with her children, who live in different cities. Through video calls and online chats, she has strengthened her relationships, making distance feel less significant. The ease of staying in touch has brought her closer to her children, reinforcing her sense of family. Empowered by her newfound digital skills, Sagaya Yamuna extended her knowledge to her neighbors, teaching them how to navigate online transactions.

Sagaya Yamuna has become a role model for others, inspiring more women in Thangachimadam to join the VRC and embrace digital literacy. Her journey not only reflects personal growth but also sparks a collective



"I never imagined I could handle everything online—pay bills, buy groceries, and even talk to my children through video calls. It's like a whole new world opened up for me."



movement toward empowerment and progress within her community.

Future Aspirations

Sagaya Yamuna is not content to stop at her current achievements. She aspires to master advanced tools like Tally and Photoshop, believing that these skills will unlock new opportunities for personal and professional growth. Her goal is to eventually start a small business or support others in the village with her expertise.

In Her Words - "Digital literacy opened doors to knowledge I thought were closed forever."



"Digital literacy opened doors to knowledge I thought were closed forever."



SMILEY'S DIGITAL AWAKENING



Smiley, a 32-year-old resident of Thangachimadam, a village in Rameshwaram, is a shining example of resilience and determination. Married at the age of 18, her academic aspirations were cut short despite having completed her 12th grade. She had planned to pursue a B.Com degree but had to set aside her ambitions due to family responsibilities.

Although her formal education was interrupted, Smiley's thirst for knowledge never faded. Active in her local self-help group, she longed for opportunities to enhance her skills and explore new horizons. Her moment came when a volunteer informed her about a digital literacy training program organized by the Village Resource Centre (VRC). On January 10, 2024, Smiley eagerly enrolled in the program, determined to make the most of this opportunity.

The Digital Literacy Journey

For Smiley, stepping into the digital world was once an intimidating thought. However, through the training program, she not only gained essential digital skills but also discovered new opportunities to enhance her daily life and livelihood. One of the most impactful lessons was mastering online transactions using the Beam app, which enabled her to send and receive money securely without depending on others. This newfound financial independence boosted her confidence and allowed her to manage household expenses with ease. The training also introduced her to social media as a powerful tool for creativity and engagement. Learning to use Instagram transformed the way she connected with the world—she began



One of the most impactful lessons was mastering online transactions using the Beam app, which enabled her to send and receive money securely without depending on others.



creating and posting engaging content, opening up opportunities to showcase her skills and ideas. What once seemed like just an entertainment platform became a space for self-expression, learning, and even potential business growth. Beyond creativity, Smiley also gained proficiency in practical smartphone applications that made her daily routine smoother. She learned to share locations via WhatsApp, access informative content on YouTube, and explore useful apps through the Play Store. These skills improved her communication and helped her stay informed about the latest trends and updates. A crucial part of the training focused on cybersecurity and safe online practices. With the increasing risks of digital fraud and misinformation, she learned how to identify and avoid online threats, safeguard personal information, and confidently navigate the internet without fear. With these newfound digital capabilities, Smiley no longer sees technology as a challenge but

as a powerful tool for empowerment

Impact on Personal and Professional Life

The training program bridged the educational gaps Smiley had faced and empowered her with digital skills, transforming both her personal and professional life. It opened doors to financial independence, self-confidence, and new ways to engage with her community, proving that technology is not just for the younger generation but for anyone willing to learn and adapt.

One of the biggest changes was in her financial independence. With the ability to handle online transactions securely, she no longer had to rely on others for financial management. Using apps like Beam, she now makes digital payments with ease, allowing her to save time, avoid unnecessary risks associated with cash handling, and efficiently manage her household and business



One of the biggest changes was in her financial independence. With the ability to handle online transactions securely, she no longer had to rely on others for financial management.



expenses.

Beyond financial empowerment, her confidence soared as she became proficient in using everyday applications. Learning WhatsApp for communication, location sharing, and networking, as well as YouTube for knowledge-sharing and entertainment, helped her stay informed, engaged, and connected with the world beyond her village.

A key highlight of her digital journey was discovering the power of social media engagement. With her newfound skills in Instagram content creation, Smiley started sharing glimpses of her daily life, interests, and community activities. "Before, I never thought people would care about what I had to say. Now, when I post on Instagram, I see people liking, commenting, and asking me questions—it makes me feel heard and valued," she shared with pride.

The engagement she receives

has encouraged her to explore more creative ways to share her experiences, inspiring other women in her community to do the same. Through this transformation, Smiley has not only gained self-reliance but also a voice in the digital space.

Future Aspirations

Smiley's digital literacy journey has opened up a world of possibilities, and she is determined to continue exploring them. One of her key aspirations is to enhance her presence on Instagram, using the platform to share stories and promote local initiatives, blending creativity with community engagement. Beyond social media, she is eager to venture into entrepreneurship, planning to leverage her digital skills to explore small business opportunities and use online platforms for sales and promotions. Furthermore, Smiley is passionate about sharing her



"Before, I never thought people would care about what I had to say. Now, when I post on Instagram, I see people liking, commenting, and asking me questions—it makes me feel heard and valued,"



knowledge with others. She hopes to guide women in her community, helping them embrace digital literacy and empowering them to reap its benefits. Her transformation from a homemaker with interrupted education to a confident and digitally empowered woman is a testament to the profound impact of digital literacy programs. By bridging educational gaps and equipping individuals with the tools to navigate the digital world, these initiatives enable women like Smiley to unlock their potential, enhance their lives, and inspire those around them.



She hopes to guide women in her community, helping them embrace digital literacy and empowering them to reap its benefits.



MALARKODI'S INSPIRING TALE



Malarkodi, a 34-year-old woman from Nayakkarkuppam village in the Mayiladuthurai district, had been using an Android phone for several years. Her usage, however, was confined to basic functions such as making calls and using WhatsApp. Despite having access to a smartphone, she lacked awareness of its full potential to simplify daily tasks and support her children's education.

Intervention: Digital Literacy Training

Malarkodi's journey toward digital empowerment began when she participated in a specialized digital literacy training program designed to equip rural women with essential technological skills. The training opened new avenues for her by introducing advanced mobile applications that transformed the way she managed daily activities and household responsibilities. She

learned to navigate Google Maps, which enabled her to find locations with ease, plan travel efficiently, and even guide others in her community. The training also introduced her to YouTube, where she discovered a vast resource of educational videos, helping her acquire new skills, from household management techniques to potential livelihood opportunities. Perhaps most impactful was her newfound ability to use Google Pay (GPay) for secure and hassle-free financial transactions, eliminating the need to carry cash and reducing dependency on others for banking services.

Another crucial aspect of her training was Google Translate, which helped her overcome language barriers when communicating with individuals from different linguistic backgrounds. This proved particularly beneficial in expanding her ability to interact confidently in marketplaces and social settings. With these digital tools integrated into her daily life, Malarkodi not only became more



The training also introduced her to YouTube, where she discovered a vast resource of educational videos, helping her acquire new skills, from household management techniques to potential livelihood opportunities.



independent and efficient but also gained the confidence to explore new opportunities beyond her immediate surroundings.

Transformation: Maximizing Smartphone Capabilities

Malarkodi's journey into the digital world began with small yet significant steps, ultimately reshaping her daily life and responsibilities. Before the training, her smartphone was merely a device for calls and basic messaging. However, with newfound confidence, she started exploring advanced features, making her more independent and resourceful.

One of the most impactful changes was in communication and navigation. By learning to use Google Maps and location-sharing, she no longer had to rely on others to guide her when traveling to new places. This independence gave

her a sense of security, especially when visiting markets, hospitals, or community events.

The training also introduced her to Google Translate, a tool that revolutionized how she assisted her children with their education. Previously, language barriers had made it difficult for her to help them with English assignments. But now, with a simple photo scan, she could instantly translate complex instructions into Tamil. "Earlier, I would feel helpless when my children asked me to explain their schoolwork. Now, I can confidently guide them, and that feeling is priceless," she shared with a proud smile.

Beyond education, her financial literacy improved significantly. While she had used GPay before, it was only for sending money. After the training, she understood how to check transaction histories, monitor balances, and even set reminders for bill payments. These



"Earlier, I would feel helpless when my children asked me to explain their schoolwork. Now, I can confidently guide them, and that feeling is priceless,"



skills empowered her to manage household finances more efficiently, reducing dependency on cash transactions and giving her a greater sense of control over expenses.

Malarkodi's personal transformation inspired other women in her community to embrace digital tools. She took the initiative to teach her friends and neighbors how to use mobile applications, especially those struggling with financial transactions and online learning. "Technology isn't just for the younger generation. If I can learn, any woman can. We just need the right support and willingness to try," she said confidently.

Her journey is a powerful testament to the transformative power of digital literacy. By integrating technology into her daily life, she has bridged gaps in education, communication, and financial management. More importantly, she has become an agent of change in her community,

proving that empowering one woman with digital knowledge can create a ripple effect, uplifting many others along the way.



Malarkodi's personal transformation inspired other women in her community to embrace digital tools.



SATHYA'S SUCCESS



Sathya, a resident of Panithittu village in Pondicherry, has long been dedicated to her work as a tailor. Initially specializing in simple stitching and basic tailoring tasks, she faced limitations in the variety of services she could offer, which restricted her customer base and income. However, her journey took a remarkable turn after participating in a digital literacy.

Before the intervention, Sathya's tailoring business was modest, constrained by traditional methods and a lack of access to new techniques and tools. Her work was largely limited to basic stitching tasks, and her ability to innovate and expand her service offerings was hindered by a lack of exposure to broader learning resources. As a result, her business growth was slow, and her income remained limited.

Intervention: Digital Literacy Training

Recognizing the potential for digital skills to enhance traditional businesses, WCC introduced a digital literacy training program aimed at empowering women like Sathya. The program covered essential skills, including basic computer literacy, internet navigation, and the effective use of smartphones and applications like YouTube and WhatsApp. The goal was to open new avenues for learning and business expansion by equipping participants with the tools needed to access and utilize digital resources.

Transformation

The digital literacy training marked a profound turning point in Sathya's tailoring business. Equipped with new skills in navigating the internet



The program covered essential skills, including basic computer literacy, internet navigation, and the effective use of smartphones and applications like YouTube and WhatsApp.



and using applications like YouTube, she gained access to a wealth of online tutorials that introduced her to advanced stitching techniques and innovative cloth-cutting methods. This exposure allowed her to elevate her craft, enabling her to offer more intricate and diverse tailoring services to her customers. Through these tutorials, she learned how to perfect her techniques and incorporate contemporary styles into her work, setting her apart from other tailors in the community.

"I never imagined that learning from a YouTube video could change my business so much," Sathya shares. "I can now create designs that I had only seen in magazines, and it's amazing how much my customers appreciate it." Armed with these new skills, she started creating detailed, intricate designs that not only expanded her service offerings but also attracted more clientele. As she began to deliver more sophisticated and customized garments, her

reputation for quality and creativity grew significantly.

Sathya also embraced WhatsApp as a tool to enhance her communication with customers. By sending model references and design samples directly to clients, she made the process of selecting and ordering much smoother. Customers could now browse through designs at their convenience, and this ease of communication made it simpler for them to place orders, ask for adjustments, and receive updates on their tailoring projects. "WhatsApp has made it so much easier for me to stay connected with my customers," Sathya adds. "I can share photos, discuss details, and get immediate feedback, which has made my work



"WhatsApp has made it so much easier for me to stay connected with my customers," Sathya adds. "I can share photos, discuss details, and get immediate feedback, which has made my work more efficient."



more efficient.”

Practical Application and Impact

The transformation Sathya experienced through digital literacy had a profound impact on her tailoring business. Her ability to access online tutorials and apply newly learned techniques directly to her work not only improved the quality of her services but also broadened her offerings. This expansion attracted a wider range of customers, and her ability to deliver specialized, high-quality garments allowed her to charge higher prices. As a result, she saw a substantial increase in her income, which provided her with greater financial independence and security.

By integrating WhatsApp into her business operations, Sathya streamlined the entire process, from order placement to final delivery.

Customers found it more convenient to interact with her, and she could now offer personalized updates and ensure satisfaction every step of the way. This improvement in efficiency and communication boosted her business reputation and strengthened customer loyalty. “My customers now see me as someone who can meet their needs, whether it’s a custom design or a quick alteration,” she reflects. “The digital tools have helped me become more professional and responsive, which has made a big difference in my success.”

Personal Growth and Community Impact

Sathya’s transformation from a basic tailor to a versatile and skilled professional highlights her personal growth and the empowerment achieved through digital literacy. Her willingness to embrace new technologies and continuously



“My customers now see me as someone who can meet their needs, whether it’s a custom design or a quick alteration,” she reflects. “The digital tools have helped me become more professional and responsive, which has made a big difference in my success.”



improve her skills has made her a prominent figure in her community. She has not only elevated her own business but also inspired other tailors in her village to pursue similar training, fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation.

Gratitude and Future Aspirations

Sathya expressed profound gratitude for the digital literacy training provided by MSSRF. She acknowledged that these new skills have transformed her business operations, increased her income, and inspired others in her village. Looking forward, she hopes to continue expanding her digital skills and explore even more innovative ways to enhance her tailoring business.

Sathya's story underscores the significant impact of digital literacy programs on traditional

businesses. By equipping women with essential digital skills, these programs enable them to expand their services, improve customer engagement, and increase their income. Her transformation from a simple tailor to a skilled professional leveraging digital tools illustrates the importance of WCC initiatives in fostering empowerment, economic independence, and community development.



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EMPOWERED EDUCATOR: SHARMILA'S STORY OF GROWTH



In the heart of Kalaingar Nagar a irular tribal village, Cuddalore District, Sharmila, a 28-year-old with a passion for education, running a small tuition centre for local children. Her classes, attended by about 20 students, were a beacon of learning for children needing extra academic support. However, Sharmila knew that traditional teaching methods alone were no longer sufficient in the rapidly evolving digital era. Determined to create a more enriching learning environment, Sharmila sought ways to adapt and innovate.

Her vision to modernize her tuition centre marked the beginning of a transformative journey that would impact not only her students but also her livelihood.

Embracing Digital Literacy

In December 2023, Sharmila enrolled, Digital Literacy Training Program. The program introduced her to a range of digital tools and mobile technology, equipping her with the skills to navigate the digital landscape effectively. Through the training, she gained valuable skills that enhanced her teaching methods and student engagement. She developed search engines tools proficiency, learning to use apps like WhatsApp to share learning materials effectively with students and their parents. Additionally, she mastered the use of digital resources, enabling her to access a wide range of online platforms to source diverse and high-quality educational content. To further enrich her teaching approach, she incorporated creative engagement tools, utilizing multimedia to make lessons more



“Earlier, I struggled to make learning exciting for my students. But now, with digital tools, I can show them real-world examples, videos, and interactive content that spark their curiosity.”



She developed mobile application proficiency, learning to use apps like WhatsApp to share learning materials effectively with students and their parents.



interactive and to encourage participation in activities such as drawing and elocution competitions, fostering creativity and confidence among her students.

Enriching Education with Technology

With her newfound digital skills, Sharmila revolutionized her teaching methodologies, transforming the learning experience at her tuition centre. By seamlessly integrating digital tools into her daily practices, she provided her students with a richer, more interactive way to learn. She enhanced access to educational resources by sharing supplementary study materials, video tutorials ensuring that students could revisit lessons anytime, from anywhere. Beyond academics, she played a pivotal role in guiding project work and nurturing creativity, using online resources to introduce students to innovative ideas beyond textbooks.

"Earlier, I struggled to make learning exciting for my students. But now, with digital tools, I can show them real-world examples that spark their curiosity," she says with enthusiasm. Her teaching style became more engaging and student-centered, as she incorporated multimedia elements into lessons, making complex concepts easier to understand. She leveraged digital quizzes, animations, and educational games, transforming passive learning into an immersive, hands-on experience. This new approach not only helped students grasp difficult subjects more effectively but also made them more eager to participate and learn. The results were remarkable. Word of her innovative teaching methods spread quickly, drawing in more students to her tuition centre. Attendance doubled to 50 students, a testament to the power of digital learning. "I never imagined my small tuition centre would grow this much. Parents trust me now because they



"I never imagined my small tuition centre would grow this much. Parents trust me now because they see the difference in their children's learning,"



Beyond academics, she played a pivotal role in guiding project work and nurturing creativity, using online resources to introduce students to innovative ideas beyond textbooks.



see the difference in their children's learning," she shares proudly.

Growth Beyond Education

The surge in student enrolment had a direct impact on Sharmila's income, significantly boosting her financial stability. Her tuition centre became a model of success, drawing attention within the community and serving as a testament to the economic opportunities created by digital literacy.

In a world increasingly shaped by technology, investments in digital literacy programs are essential. They unlock new pathways for individuals and communities, creating a ripple effect of positive change. Sharmila's inspiring journey serves as a shining example of how bridging the digital divide can empower individuals to become catalysts for progress.



"As I adopted digital literacy, I realized that empowering my students went beyond textbooks; it meant giving them the tools to thrive in an ever-evolving world."





Uniqueness of the Case Studies: Blueprints of Change

Each case study in this report offers a lens into transformation—not as abstract ideas, but as real, lived experiences. They are stories of women rewriting their destinies by fusing tradition with technology, proving that innovation can emerge from the grassroots.

What makes these case studies one-of-a-kind?



Empowered Trailblazers:

These stories capture fisherwomen who have stepped out of the shadows of tradition to become leaders, entrepreneurs, and role models for their communities.



Seamless Fusion of Old and New:

By combining age-old practices with digital tools like mobile apps, solar dryers, and WhatsApp, these women have preserved their heritage while unlocking modern opportunities.



Tangible Impacts:

Every narrative demonstrates measurable progress—better product quality, increased incomes, and newfound confidence. These aren't just anecdotes; they're blueprints for scalable success.



The Ripple Effect:

The transformation doesn't stop at the individual. These empowered women inspire their peers, improve their families' lives, and catalyze change across entire communities.

These stories are a celebration of resilience and proof that empowerment isn't just an outcome—it's a movement.

Key Challenges

While technology promises new opportunities, several barriers stand in the way of full adoption and empowerment. Here are the key challenges faced on this journey:



The Digital Divide

Many fisherwomen lack access to smartphones and stable internet connectivity, leaving them on the wrong side of the digital revolution. Without these essential tools, they struggle to tap into digital markets and learning platforms that could transform their livelihoods.



Bridging the Learning Gap

The training sessions are a melting pot of learners—some are literate, others neo-literate, and a few have never held a smartphone before. Designing a one-size-fits-all approach is impossible, making inclusive and adaptive learning strategies essential.



Mobilization Hurdles

Convincing fisherwomen to join training programs is no small feat. Their workdays start before dawn and stretch into the night. To overcome this, community leaders and trusted village figures have played a crucial role in rallying participation and ensuring attendance.



The Age Factor

Younger women tend to grasp digital skills quickly, while older women often hesitate, feeling left behind. This gap in adaptability can create frustration and disengagement.



Customizing the Learning Journey

To make training more effective, participants are grouped based on their learning levels—beginners receive patient, step-by-step guidance, while advanced learners delve into more complex digital applications.



The Smartphone Dilemma

Many fisherwomen prefer sturdy feature phones over fragile smartphones. With their hands constantly wet from handling fish, they fear that touchscreen phones are too delicate for their everyday reality. Some hesitate to adopt digital tools, worried about the extra care required.



The Power of Peer Learning

– Sometimes, the best teachers are those who have walked the same path. Pairing literate fisherwomen with neo-literate or illiterate peers has proven to be a game-changer, fostering confidence and collective growth.



Weak Signal, Strong Will

Coastal villages often struggle with poor mobile network coverage, creating frequent disruptions in digital engagement. Without strong connectivity, even the most willing learners face obstacles in accessing online resources and services.



Shifting Mindsets

The fear of the unknown keeps many fisherwomen tethered to traditional ways. Overcoming skepticism and building confidence in digital tools is a gradual process that requires patience, encouragement, and hands-on demonstrations.



Juggling Priorities

– Between mending nets, vending fish, and managing households, fisherwomen have little time for training. Flexible schedules and short, practical sessions help them fit learning into their busy lives without disrupting their livelihoods.

Way Forward: Steering Toward Inclusive Growth

As the MSSRF continues its journey, the road ahead is paved with opportunities to deepen its impact, scale its reach, and secure long-term sustainability for coastal communities. Here's the vision for the next phase:

Scaling Reach and Inclusivity:

Expand Training Programs: Introduce advanced digital literacy modules that cover e-commerce, branding, and market analytics to help fisherwomen transition into fully-fledged entrepreneurs.

Youth Engagement: Launch dedicated training for younger generations to foster a digitally literate and entrepreneurial workforce within coastal communities.

Creating Stronger Market Linkages:

Direct Market Access: Facilitate partnerships between fisherwomen and wholesale buyers, enabling them to bypass intermediaries and secure better prices for their products.

Empowering Through Technology:

Broader Access to Tools: Scale the digital payment systems, and smartphones to ensure every fisherwoman can participate in the digital economy.

Upgraded Mobile Applications: Enhance the FisherwomenConnect Mobile app by integrating features like multilingual support, and e-marketplace capabilities.

Strengthening Financial Independence:

Tailored Financial Support: Expand credit linkages, enabling fisherwomen to invest in scaling their businesses and upgrading their tools.

Financial Literacy: Provide ongoing workshops on budgeting, savings, and investment strategies, fostering greater confidence in managing income and resources.



Building a Supportive Ecosystem:

Collaborative Networks: Strengthen connections among fisherwomen, Self-Help Groups, and community leaders to encourage peer learning and collective problem-solving.

Policy Advocacy: Engage with policymakers to ensure that fisherwomen's needs and voices are prioritized in resource management and governance.

The way forward is about more than scaling numbers—it's about sustaining impact. By ensuring continuous learning, fostering innovation, and building resilient ecosystems, the WomenConnect Challenge India round 2 can empower fisherwomen to lead long-lasting transformations. Together, we can create communities that thrive on shared strength, adaptability, and opportunity.



Conclusion: Anchoring Hope, Inspiring Change

The digital learning program has illuminated the power of combining innovation with empowerment, creating a transformative changes among the enrolled women. By equipping fisherwomen with digital access, practical skills, and sustainable solutions, this initiative has redefined what is possible for women in the fisheries sector.

Through their remarkable journeys, fisherwomen have demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and leadership. They have embraced modern technology—turning smartphones into business hubs and financial literacy into pathways for independence. These achievements go beyond personal victories; they represent the collective strength of communities rising together.

The initiative has not only empowered women economically but also reshaped social narratives. Women who once stood on the margins are now leading with confidence, inspiring their families, peers, and the next generation to dream bigger.

Looking ahead, the potential for growth is immense. By scaling the digital literacy programs, deepening market

linkages, and promoting eco-friendly practices, this initiative can reach even greater heights. Sustainability will remain a cornerstone, ensuring that these efforts endure despite environmental and economic challenges.

The journeys chronicled here are a testament to the fact that when women are given the right opportunities, they don't just improve their lives—they transform the very fabric of their communities. They challenge conventions, break barriers, and create legacies of empowerment and innovation.





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