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UN Side Event: Azad champions Women’s Co-ops on Global Stage

G20 and BRICS recognize Women’s role in sustainable development: Azad

by [Staff Reporter](#) | [February 16, 2025](#) | in [Featured](#)



Dr. Nandini Azad, President of the Working Women’s Forum – Indian Cooperative Network for Women (WWF-ICNW), opened the historic side event of the 63rd session of the U.N. Commission for Social Development (UNCSocD63) in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. She welcomed global participants, emphasizing the significance of this momentous

occasion.

The event, hosted by WWF-ICNW, gathered an impressive array of speakers, including representatives from Latin American governments, the Caribbean Common Market, the World Farmers Organization, European cooperative unions, and bilateral agencies. Attended by participants from Africa, Asia, North America, and Europe, it also connected with 300 grassroots women workers from various Indian states.

Dr. Azad expressed gratitude to the U.N. for recognizing WWF-ICNW’s achievements, highlighting the organization’s global influence and leadership over the past 44 years. She emphasized its role in ensuring that women from informal sectors in BRICS and G20 countries have a voice on international platforms.

Dr. Azad acknowledged the solidarity of H.E. Brazil’s Minister for Agrarian Development; Mr. Gustavo Westmann, in supporting global women cooperatives. The event featured three sections, both live and virtual.

First, Dr. Azad presented a report on WWF-ICNW’s latest initiatives. Milagro Matus from CARICOM praised WWF-ICNW as a transformative force, elevating women from struggle to success through mentorship and capacity-building programs. She reaffirmed CARICOM’s commitment to gender-equal policies that empower women entrepreneurs.

Viviana Bezerra De Mesquita, Undersecretary for Rural Women at Brazil’s Ministry of Agrarian Development, conveyed greetings from President Lula and Minister Paulo

Teixeira. She emphasized the crucial role of women in Brazil's family farming sector, which constitutes 45% of the workforce.

Highlighting progressive initiatives like PRONAF and the Food Acquisition Program, which mandates 50% of food purchases from women, she stressed Brazil's commitment to gender-inclusive policies and economic freedom for rural women.

Andreas Kappes, Secretary General of the IRU, commended Dr. Azad's leadership in empowering women through cooperatives. He emphasized that women's leadership in cooperatives is essential for global economic transformation.

The IRU supports training, mentorship, and capacity-building programs, fostering a global network where women entrepreneurs can thrive. With the International Year of Cooperatives 2025 approaching, he called for strengthening women's roles in the cooperative movement. Dr. Azad, the first woman elected to the IRU in a century and re-elected, was celebrated for her contributions.

Arnold Puech d'Alissac, President of the World Farmers Organization, highlighted how cooperatives fuel community resilience and food security. He stressed that agricultural cooperatives empower rural women by providing access to resources, markets, and financial stability. As the world gears up for the International Year of Cooperatives, he called for reinforcing these networks to ensure women's leadership in rural economies.

Key discussions at the event focused on capacity building, gender inequality in agriculture, global cooperative networks, policy advocacy, and climate change's impact on gender dynamics.

The second section of the event was the prestigious Founders Day Awards, named after Padma Shri Jaya Arunachalam, recognizing excellence among women entrepreneurs in cooperatives. Six micro-entrepreneurs from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh were honoured for their resilience and success. These women transformed small loans into thriving businesses, moving from the informal to pre-formal sectors, creating employment, and securing education for their children.

Shanthakumari Sekar from Chennai built a successful provision store after overcoming financial struggles. Sasikala Krishnamoorthy turned a small WWF-ICNW loan into a booming sweet-making business and became a community leader against domestic violence. Deicy Rani expanded her tailoring shop while supporting her children's education.

Malathi Kannan, through cattle rearing, funded her son's journey to becoming an eye doctor in the U.S. Nafees Zahra revived her family's pottery business, ensuring financial stability. Barisetti Savithri, abandoned by her husband, built a tailoring business that enabled her sons to secure stable jobs.

This side event at UNCSocD63 reinforced WWF-ICNW's role as a global leader in economic empowerment. With over 600,000 women members, it showcased the potential of cooperatives in fostering sustainable development.

Dr. Azad called upon cooperative leaders and global stakeholders, including the G20 and BRICS, to integrate financial inclusion with gender equality. The achievements of these women micro-entrepreneurs highlighted how cooperative networks drive economic growth, resilience, and sustainable progress.

‘Cooperatives create space for women to take the lead’

Updated - February 12, 2025 | Page-4 – CHENNAI | [The Hindu Bureau](#)



Investing in women empowerment is not just fair, it is transformative, Arnold Puech D'Alissac, president, World Farmers' Organisation (WFO), Rome, said here on Monday.

He spoke at an event 'UN Year of Cooperatives:

Building Women's Cooperative Leadership Networks Through Capacity Building' organised by The Working Women's Forum (India)- Indian Cooperative Network for Women. It was held as a side event of the 63rd session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development. "When women have opportunities, communities grow stronger, and agriculture becomes more resilient. Cooperatives can break down barriers. They create spaces where women's voices are heard, where women can take the lead," he added.

Andreas Kappes, Secretary General, International Raiffeisen Union (IRU), Germany, said, women leaders are stepping forward to create solutions that benefit all.

Nandini Azad, president of the Working Women's Forum (India) and Indian Cooperative Network for Women said, she noted that WWF-ICWN focus on women cooperatives has garnered internationally attention, solidifying its reputation as a leading force in the cooperative sector.

Six women cooperative entrepreneurs have been honoured with the H.S. Jaya Arunachalam Awards for Excellence.

Milagros Matus, Representative of the CARICOM Agricultural & Agro-Industrial Development, Directorate of Economic Integration, Innovation and Development, Secretariat, Guyana and Viviana Bezerra De Mesquita's, Representative of the Minister of Agrarian Development and Family Farming of Brazil (MDA) were among those who spoke at the event.

Financial inclusion should be integrated with gender equality, says Nandini Azad

Published - February 23, 2025 | The Hindu Bureau|Chennai| Page-8



Representatives from Latin American governments, Caribbean Common Market, World Farmers Organization, European cooperative unions, and bilateral agencies, gathered at the 63rd session of the U.N. Commission for Social Development in Chennai. This was opened by Nandini Azad, president of the Working Women’s Forum – Indian Cooperative Network for Women (WWF-ICNW).

The event, hosted by WWF-ICNW, also connected with 300 grassroots women workers from various Indian States.

Dr. Azad emphasised role of WWF in ensuring that women from informal sectors in BRICS and G20 countries have a voice on international platforms. She called upon cooperative leaders and global stakeholders, including the G20 and BRICS, to integrate financial inclusion with gender equality.

Viviana Bezerra De Mesquita, undersecretary for Rural Women at Brazil’s Ministry of Agrarian Development, stressed on the crucial role of women in Brazil’s family farming sector, which constitutes 45% of the workforce. Highlighting progressive initiatives such as PRONAF and the Food Acquisition Program (PAA), which mandates 50% of food purchases from women, she stressed Brazil’s commitment to gender-inclusive policies and economic freedom for rural women.

Andreas Kappes, secretary-general of the International Raiffeisen Union (IRU), emphasised that women’s leadership in cooperatives was essential for global economic transformation. With the International Year of Cooperatives 2025 approaching, he called for strengthening women’s roles in the cooperative movement.

Arnold Puech d’Alissac, president of the World Farmers Organisation, highlighted how cooperatives fuel community resilience and food security. He stressed that agricultural cooperatives empower rural women by providing access to resources, markets, and financial stability. As the world gears up for the International Year of Cooperatives, he called for reinforcing these networks to ensure women’s leadership in rural economies.

Discussions at the event also focused on capacity building, gender inequality in agriculture, global cooperative networks, policy advocacy, and climate change’s impact on gender dynamics. Six micro-entrepreneurs from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh were also honoured for their resilience and success.

BUSINESS, HOME, LIFE & STYLE, NEWS

Future of Cooperatives is now and Female: Brazilian Govt's Agrarian Women Representative, Caribbean Common Market, Worlds Oldest European Credit Union, World Farmers Organization in solidarity laud WWF-ICNW

ADMINISTRATOR FEBRUARY 10, 2025

Dr. Nandini Azad
President, Working Women's Forum – Indian Cooperative Network for Women

Ms. Yvonne Soares de Menezes
Representative of the Women's Agrarian Movement and Secretary of the Brazilian Government of International Relations

Padmasri Late H.S. Dr. Jaya Arunachalam
Awards for Excellence on Women Cooperative Entrepreneurs (2024-2025)

International Year of Cooperatives 2025
COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
UN YEAR OF COOPERATIVES-BUILDING WOMEN'S COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP NETWORKS THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING-THE WORKING WOMEN'S FORUM (INDIA) - INDIAN COOPERATIVE NETWORK FOR WOMEN - SIDE EVENT
Date: 10th February 2025, (1.15 p.m. and 2.30 pm. EDT) 11.45p.m. to 1.00 a.m. IST

Malati Kannan Rearing Cows and Swetha to send Doctor sons to U.S.A. 7 years member, Central Chennai, Tamil Nadu	Sankala Krishnamoorthy Sweet Making Business, 7 years member, Central Chennai, Tamil Nadu	Prasanna Lakshmi Panchamam Store - Water Cans, 23 years member, South Chennai, Tamil Nadu	Devi Raji Tailoring Shop 23 years member, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu	Helen Zebra Mohamed Iyer Pottery Maker 8 years member, Chennai, Karnataka	Bharathi Sathish Pottery shop, MIA Vendor 23 years member, Mylapore, Andhra Pradesh
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- Working Women’s Forum – Indian Cooperative Network for Women (WWF-ICNW) Side event at the 63rd Commission for Social Development (CSocD63) from U.N. H.Q. New York. (Held in Chennai)
- The UNCSOD-63 event entitled: “UN Year of Cooperatives: Building Women’s Cooperative Leadership Networks through Capacity Building,” will take place on February 10, 2025, from 1:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. EST.

Dr.Nandini Azad, President of the Working Women’s Forum – Indian Cooperative Network for Women (WWF-ICNW), welcomed everyone to this historic side event of the U.N. Commission for Social Development (63rd Session), being held for the third time in the historic city of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, near the tip of the South Asian subcontinent. Dr.Nandini Azad was recently at the Social summit at G20 in Brazil (November) was honoured as the only International Civil Society Activist to speak at the Inaugural of the Social Summit.

Organized by the Working Women’s Forum and the Indian Cooperative Network for Women Headquarters, UNCSOCD event today brought together speakers from Latin American Governments, Caribbean Common Market, European led oldest cooperative

unions, the World Farmers Organization, bi-laterals, European union, Mass Cooperatives from most continents, participants from Africa, Asia, North America, women members, CEOs, and Dr.Nandini Azad herself, who warmly welcomed participants and shared the inspiring stories of their movement. The event connected with registered online participants from 30 countries, distinguished panellists, and over 300 grassroots women workers from various states in India, including Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Delhi, Jharkhand.

With a network that has reached 6,00,000 women across 270 trades in 13 branches throughout South India, Dr. Azad expressed deep gratitude to the U.N. Commission for Social Development (UNCSocD63) for awarding today's panel from the U.N. Headquarters in New York. She acknowledged the trust placed in the Working Women's Forum, a mass organization of primarily poor women workers, which has held UN ECOSOC Consultative Status for 29 years.

Recognizing the pioneering role in organizing and empowering women in the unregulated informal sector through this mass movement. Dr. Azad emphasized that their work spans across four Southern states of India: Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana.

She continued by highlighting the organization's growing influence and its rise to global leadership. Over the past 44 years, WWF-ICNW has become a key player at international forums and high tables, ensuring that the voices and issues of informal sector women is heard in the rural/urban areas in countries of the BRICS and G20. Also in Germany, the Netherlands, Brazil, Japan, New York etc.

WWF-ICNW is now represented in both major global unions and alliances of the International Cooperative Movement, having been elected by the apex cooperative bodies of several countries. This marks an extraordinary milestone-the first time globally that a powerful mass women's cooperative union, representing poor women from the informal sector, has become an active global player on gender and cooperative issues.

Dr.Azad thanked H.E. the President of Brazil, the Hon'ble Minister for Agrarian Development cause for their Solidarity with poor informal sector women cooperative worldwide Mr.Gustavo Westmann from the Brazilian President office supported this event on social/economic event participation with great commitment and efforts.

The panel was divided into 3 sections both live and video. Firstly brief on new status report on the WWF-ICNW was given by WWF-ICNW, Dr.Nandini Azad.

- Next the Representative of the CARICOM Agricultural & Agro-Industrial Development at the **CARICOM Secretariat**, the speaker. **Ms.Milagro Matus, hailed WWF-ICNW as a powerhouse of transformation**, turning ordinary women into **Innovative entrepreneurs and fearless leaders**. She emphasized how the organization doesn't just offer **tools and training**-it delivers a **lifeline of empowerment**, fuelling women's journeys from **struggle to success**. Through **dynamic mentorship programs**, WWF-ICNW is **laying strong foundations**,

pushing women to **seize leadership roles** and **set new standards** in cooperatives and beyond. Matus also reaffirmed **CARICOM's unshakeable commitment to women-led initiatives**, pledging access to **resources, training, and networks** that fuel entrepreneurship. She highlighted CARICOM's active role in crafting **progressive, gender-equal policies**, ensuring women don't just participate-they **thrive** across sectors. Dr.Nandini Azad thanked both head of division Mr.Shaunbaugh and colleagues Mme.Matus analysed the WWF-ICNW model better than the original best practice.

- **Bringing warm greetings from H.E President Lula and Minister Paulo Teixeira of Brazil (the G20 and BRICS presidency)Ms. Viviana Bezerra De Mesquita, Undersecretary for Rural Women at Brazil's Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Farming (MDA), delivered a power-packed address, celebrating the unstoppable force of women in cooperatives. She applauded the UN's focus on cooperatives as driving engines of sustainable development and social equality. She revealed that women power is 45% of Brazil's family farming workforce, driving food security and local economies despite challenges like unpaid care work and limited access to credit. But the tide is turning-Brazil's government is on a mission to boost gender inclusion and economic freedom for rural women. Programs like PRONAF, the National Policy on Agro ecology, and the Food Acquisition Program (FAA) are game changers-with the FAA mandating 50% of food purchases from women. In 2024, a whopping 62% of food came from rural women! She also spotlighted the Productive Backyards Program, the National Program for Strengthening Rural Women's Organizations, and the Citizenship and Wellbeing Program, which issued 22,000+ civil documents, giving women the power to claim their rights. Ms.Mesquita closed by urging more training and global partnerships to supercharge women's roles in cooperatives, paving the way for a fairer, more inclusive world. Heartfelt thanks to Mr.Gustavo Westmann from the Presidents Office was sincerely offered for efforts.**
- **IRU Dynamic Secretary General, Andreas Kappes, praised the bold leadership of Dr.Nandini Azad and WWF-ICNW, calling them driving forces behind women's empowerment through cooperatives. He credited their efforts with shaking up women's leadership across sectors, turning cooperatives into foundations for empowered women leaders. Kappes stressed IRU's firm belief in backing women, giving them the tools, networks, and platforms to rise and lead. "The future of cooperatives is female, and that future is now," he declared. Through hard-hitting programs like training, mentorship, and capacity-building, IRU is unlocking women's potential in cooperatives worldwide. Kappes highlighted the power of global networks connecting women from Asia to America, not just to collaborate, but to amplify their voices and drive change. He called WWF-ICNW a game-**

changer for women entrepreneurs, especially in **rural and agricultural sectors**, where women are the **backbone of sustainability**. With the **International Year of Cooperatives (IYC) 2025** around the corner, Kappes declared it's time to **supercharge these networks** and put women **front and center** of the global cooperative movement. **Dr.Azad was the first women to be elected to the IRU in 100 year and re-elected.**

- **Mr. Arnold Puechd'Alissac**, President of the **World Farmers Organisation**, delivered a **powerful message** on how **cooperation fuels stronger communities, resilience, and sustainable growth**. He called **agricultural cooperatives the backbone of global food security and poverty reduction**, helping farmers **boost incomes** through **shared resources** and better access to **tools, markets, and knowledge**. **Mr.Puechd'Alissac** praised **women** as the **driving force** in rural areas, leading farms and nurturing communities. He stressed that **cooperatives break barriers**, giving women the **platform to lead** and thrive. With the **International Year of Cooperatives (IYC)** ahead, he urged the world to **strengthen cooperatives, empower women members, and ensure no one is left behind.**

Key Issues discussed in the event to summarize are:

- **Capacity Building and Mentorship**
- **Gender Inequality in Agriculture**
- **Global and Regional Networks**
- **Intersectionality of Challenges**
- **Empowerment through Cooperatives**
- **Addressing gender-based discrimination**
- **Policy Advocacy for Gender Equity**
- **Breaking Gender Norms**
- **Climate Change/Gender**

Section-II

This Founders Day Awards – Padma Shri Jaya Arunachalam Awards for Excellence amongst Women Entrepreneurs in Cooperatives.

"Next, the Dr. H.S. Padma Shri Jaya Arunachalam Women Micro Entrepreneur Excellence Awards in South India were announced. Six awards in three states of South India honored poor women that helped their organization/cooperative by utilizing its services with commitment. Women members who for 37 years, from Rs. 200 loans (Euro 2 loans) to Rs. 1,00,000 (1000 Euros) loans, were able to, through the various holistic services, aspire, educate girls as doctors or children as engineers.

They moved their children slowly into the formal sector. Also, they moved to employing other women and slowly entered the formal sector. Till the last four years – 29 such awardees were honored from South India, who employed 3 to 4 staff each. **Creating wealth and growth from the grassroots by poor women and girls. They never even defaulted! Even during Covid."**

***Padmasri
Late Dr. H.S. Jaya Arunachalam
Founders Day Awards (2024-2025)***



Process of Award Selection

***Padmasri Late H.S. Dr. Jaya Arunachalam
Awards for Excellence on Women Cooperative
Entrepreneurs (2024-2025)***

- 1. Ms. Shanthakumari Sekar, Provision Store - Water Can, South Chennai, (T.N.)*
- 2. Ms. Sasikala Krishnamoorthy, Sweet Making Business, Central Chennai, (T.N.),*
- 3. Ms. Deicy Rani , Tailoring Shop, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu (T.N.),*
- 4. Ms. Malathi Kannan, Rearing Cows and Goats, Adiramapattinam, (T.N.),*
- 5. Ms. Nafees Zahra Mohamad iliys, Pottery maker, Chennapattinam, Karnataka,*
- 6. Ms. Barisetti Savithri, Petty shop, milk vendor Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh*

This year 6 other Jaya Arunachalam awardees were announced today for 2024-2025 are:

- 1. Ms. Shanthakumari Sekar, Provision Store – Water Can, South Chennai, (T.N.)**
- Shanthakumari Sekar, 44, from South Madras, **broke free from financial struggles after her husband refused support.** With WWF-ICNW loans, she built a thriving saree petticoat and water can business, now earned Rs. 1,000 daily. She credited WWF and Dr. Nandini for transforming her life and securing her daughter's future.



Shanthakumari Sekar,
Provision Store – Water Can,
15 years member,
South Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Shanthakumari Sekar, 44, from South Madras, struggled as her husband refused to contribute financially, a challenge many women face. Determined to gain independence, she joined WWF-ICNW under the President's guidance. A Rs.2,500 loan helped her initiate the Saree petticoats and nighties business. She steadily expanded into cold drinks business with Rs.5000, Rs.20,000 for inventory, Rs.25,000 for a new shop and Rs.35,000 loan continuously to start water can supply business. Overcoming economic dependence and societal barriers, she sustained her business with a Rs. 50,000 loan during COVID-19, now earning Rs.1,000 daily! Today, she is financially secure, has invested in her daughter's future, and proves that empowering women economically is key to breaking cycles of poverty. She credits Dr. Nandini ma'am and WWF's unwavering support.

2. Ms.SasikalaKrishnamoorthy, Sweet Making Business, Central Chennai, (T.N.)

- From **financial struggles to sweet success**,Sasikala turned a Rs. 7,000 WWF-ICNW loan into a thriving business. **She became financially independent, employing her husband** and others, she's not just a successful entrepreneur but also a fearless advocate against domestic violence and dowry, inspiring women in her community.



Sasikala Krishnamoorthy,
Sweet Making Business,
7 years member,
Central Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Sasikala Krishnamoorthy, 55, from Mugappair, turned financial struggles into success through sheer determination. Born in Thanjavur, she moved to Chennai Mugappair with her husband, a daily wage painter, but their unstable income left them struggling. She worked in a sweets shop for 22 years before joining WWF-ICNW, where a Rs. 7,000/- loan helped her start her own sweet-making business. With successive loans, she expanded her business, hired workers, and gained financial independence. Training sessions not only strengthened her business skills but also gave her the courage to fight social issues like domestic violence and dowry, making her a voice for women in her community. During COVID-19, a Rs.50,000/- loan under Dr. Nandini Amma's leadership kept her business afloat. Today, she employs two workers, including her husband, and has secured her family's future. Beyond financial success, Sasikala embodies women's empowerment, proving that with opportunity and support, women can rise as entrepreneurs, leaders, and change makers. She credits WWF-ICNW and Dr. Nandini Amma for transforming her life and enabling her to uplift others.

3. Ms.Deicy Rani , Tailoring Shop, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu (T.N.)-Facing the struggles of her husband's irregular income, Deicy Rani found strength and support through WWF-ICNW. With guidance and training, she grew her small tailoring business into a thriving venture, balancing family and work while educating her children and building a secure future. **Her journey reflects the power of resilience and the life-changing impact of a strong support system.**



**Deicy Rani,
Tailoring Shop
24 years member,
Dindigul, Tamil Nadu**

Deicy Rani, a small business owner and tailor, has been a member of WWF-ICNW for 24 years. Struggling with her husband's irregular income, a common issue many women face in managing household finances and lives. She took her first loan of Rs.200 to buy a sewing machine. Over the years, she accessed additional loans starting from Rs.3,000, along with training that helped her balance family responsibilities and run a small business. A Rs.50,000 loan allowed her to expand her tailoring business, open a fancy store, buy a Xerox machine, and set up a home shop. These loans enabled her to educate her three children, one who completed BSc Mathematics and another a Diploma, finance two of their marriages, and build a house. Today, she is financially stable and successfully managing her business. Her journey highlights how economic empowerment can help women overcome their struggles and improve their financial situations apart from gender status. This transformation was made possible through the consistent support and guidance of the Sangam.

4. Ms.Malathi Kannan, Rearing Cows and Goats, Adiramapattinam, (T.N.) - From rearing goats and cows in her village to supporting her son's journey to the U.S.A to becoming an eye doctor in America, Malathi Kanan's story was one **of unwavering dedication**. Through WWF-ICNW's support, she balanced family life and farm work, building a secure home and a brighter future. Her journey reflected a woman's love and determination to rise above challenges for her children.



**Malathi Kannan,
Rearing Cows and Goats to
send Doctor son to U.S.A
7 years member,
Adiramapattinam, Tamil Nadu**

Malathi Kanan, is a farmer's daughter from village Idaiyaathu. Married to a vegetable shop owner, she has one son, who is now an eye doctor in America! She joined the WWF-ICNW to support her son's education and took her first three loans, including Rs.5,000/- and Rs.10,000/-, for his studies. Later, she used a loan to build a new home, combining her earnings from rearing goats and cows with her husband's income. Though balancing family and animal care was tough, she managed it on her own while ensuring every loan is used wisely and repaid promptly. Now with a loan of Rs.40,000/-, she continues to expand her efforts. She is deeply grateful to the sangam for empowering her to build a stable and happy life for her son and family.

5. Ms.Nafees Zahra Mohamadiliys, Pottery maker, Chennapattinam, Karnataka - Nafees Zahra turned her family's modest pottery and doll-making business into a thriving source of income, ensuring her children's education and a stable home. With WWF-ICNW's support, she and her husband overcame financial struggles, growing their business and transforming their lives. Today, **Nafees Zahra stands proud, grateful for the journey that turned challenges into lasting success.**



Nafees Zahra Mohamad iliys
Pottery Maker
8 years member,
Chennapattinam, Karnataka

Nafees Zahra Mohamad iliys, 47, from Chennapattinam, is a pottery maker and Sangam member. Her husband, runs a doll-making business. Her husband's small income from doll-making was insufficient to support their family. With the help of a local WWF member, Nafees Zahra joined and received her first loan of Rs. 6,000/-, which helped them buy materials and grow their business. Subsequent loans of Rs. 10,000/-, Rs. 15,000/-, and Rs. 30,000/- were used to create a workspace, renovate their home, and expand production. While also supporting their children's education. With the final loan of Rs. 50,000/-, they scaled the business further. Her husband now sells dolls on his bike, while Nafees Zahra sells from home. Today, they are financially stable, and Nafees Zahra credits her success to the Sangam and Dr. Nandini madam's support, which transformed their lives.

6. Ms.BarisettiSavithri, Petty shop, milk vendor Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh - Abandoned by her husband, Savithri faced the overwhelming challenge of raising her two sons alone. With WWF-ICNW's support, she started a dairy business, but when it didn't succeed, she turned to tailoring. Through hard work and guidance, she built a thriving business, and today, both her sons are employed. **Savithri's journey reflects strength, resilience, and the power of support in transforming lives.**



Barisetti Savithri,
Petty shop, Milk Vendor
15 years member,
Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh

Barisetti Savithri, a mother of two faced the devastating loss of her children, leaving her unsure of how to support the family. A neighbour suggested taking a loan, and she learned about a WWF-ICNW organization that helps women in need. After joining their program, she received her first loan of Rs. 3,000/-, which she used to start a dairy business. The milk business did not give her profit so she learnt tailoring, purchased a machine, and began offering tailoring services. Over time, she expanded her skills and business. Her elder son now works as a bricklayer, and her younger son is employed in a shop. Recently, she took a Rs. 10,000/- loan to further grow her business, ensuring timely repayment every month. Thanks to the organization's guidance and support, she is now successfully managing her family and business.

In their heartfelt acceptance speeches, the six awardees poured out their gratitude for the unwavering support they received from WWF-ICNW. Each of them spoke of how the continuous training and timely loans not only transformed their businesses but also reshaped their lives. With voices filled with emotion, they thanked their cooperatives, the dedicated staff, and most importantly, Dr.Nandini Azad, whose leadership lit the path to their success. From provision store owners and sweet makers to tailoring shop entrepreneurs, dairy vendors, pottery makers, and those rearing cows and goats, these resilient women have defied the odds. Through perseverance and the strength of the cooperative network, they transitioned from informal to pre-formal sectors, creating employment opportunities within their communities. Their children now pursue education with bright futures ahead, while they stand as pillars of empowerment, actively involved in WWF/ICNW women-based initiatives. Six of these inspiring micro-entrepreneurs shared their journeys as case studies from South India, each story echoing the powerful impact of support, resilience, and hope.

The side event at the 63rd session of the Commission for Social Development provides a platform for global stakeholders, particularly women cooperative leaders, micro women entrepreneurs, to share their successful models, advocate for economic empowerment, and contribute to the global agenda of sustainable development through cooperative networks. The focus on inclusive family farming structures and empowering women in various trades is crucial for achieving long-term prosperity in rural and urban communities worldwide. The event showcased stories of resilience and success from women who have transitioned from informal sectors to becoming thriving business owners, creating employment, and ensuring educational opportunities for their children.

Historic, global recognition of our economic empowerment model, with over 6,00,000 members across four South Indian states and 270 trades. WWF-ICNW stood as a beacon of hope and success for poor women in the informal sector. We welcome you on behalf of our members to celebrate these inspiring journeys and the impact of women-led businesses on communities and economies.

Indeed, this event served as a powerful call to action from Dr.Nandini Azad, President of WWF-ICNW and ICPRD, urging cooperative leaders—both men and women **as well as the supportive G-20, BRICS Presidency** to combine financial inclusion with broader gender equality within community development. The achievements of these poor women micro-entrepreneurs highlight the critical role that cooperative networks play in driving economic growth, building resilience, and promoting sustainable development. She concluded.



Author: ADmiNISTRAtOR