Understanding women-run weaving enterprises in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, India

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Note to readers

This process evaluation report has been submitted as part of the Swashakt: Empowering Women's Collectives Evidence Program. This program aimed to generate evidence-based scalable technical interventions for building collective livelihoods in India that economically empower women and are economically viable. 3ie has copy-edited and formatted the content for publication.

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Executive summary

In 2020, 3ie launched a program called Swashakt: Empowering Indian Women's Collectives, which aims to generate evidence on interventions that enhance the viability, sustainability, and returns for women's empowerment collectives (WECs), thereby promoting women's empowerment. Under Swashakt, 3ie supported the implementation of four pilot and five at-scale projects across ten Indian states that support collectives and group-based models for women-led businesses.

Chitrika Foundation's intervention is one of the five scaled projects being implemented. Chitrika was formed in 2006 as an incubator of handloom and artisan enterprises. Since then, they have successfully incubated three registered producer companies in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. During the Swashakt project period, their goal was to scale up to include 1,100 additional members. They plan to work with weaver communities in four districts in Andhra Pradesh – East Godavari, Guntur, Krishna, and Srikakulam – and one district in Telangana – Narayanpet.

Their theory of change hypothesises that a combination of skills training, integrated processing units, and management and marketing support will enhance the capacity of these women-led collectives, thereby increasing women's income and their ability to have intergenerational influence in their communities. This would, in turn, increase their agency in the weaving value chain, empowering them to have greater control of the value chain.

This report presents the results of a process evaluation conducted by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The main objective of the study is to document processes and glean lessons from Chitrika's implementation model, identify enablers and barriers to setting up collectives and overall project implementation, understand the socio-economic and cultural context and its impact on project implementation. The study also provides recommendations for the implementation partner and policy makers, technical support units, and other organizations working on similar interventions.

For the study, qualitative research was conducted in four districts, i.e., Srikakulam, Narayanpet, Guntur and East Godavari. The methodology relied on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with women members, their husbands, Board of Directors, managers of the producer companies, master weavers in the villages, key informant interviews with village heads, and project managers from the Chitrika team.

The study examines the implementation of major interventions planned by Chitrika under the Swashakt project. These interventions include starting their Handmade MBA program which aims to enhance the managerial and entrepreneurial skills of women weavers, improving their accounting and business management systems, enhancing women's skills through trainings, and facilitating improved market linkages for the producer companies.

Findings show that Chitrika's interventions are innovative in their attempt to empower women weavers and ensure sustainability of their producer companies. During the training programs, Chitrika takes the weavers on exposure visits, organizes film screenings, provides them with compensation for wage loss during the training period, and supports their accommodation and travel. Chitrika has also developed an innovative system of recruiting local weavers as employees of the producer companies – this not only provides employment to local weavers, but also ensures buy-in from the local community. Setting up work sheds at the village-level where women can come together, weave and conduct all other operations is a crucial part of Chitrika's intervention. The work sheds are meant to promote overall health and well-being of the weavers, promote efficiency, productivity and improve quality of work.

However, it is important to highlight the various challenges faced by Chitrika during the implementation of the program. During the mobilization phase, challenges varied in the different districts. Some households were unwilling to weave professionally due to low wages and high effort required; others were already working with master weavers and were unwilling to leave and join the producer company. During the implementation process, attrition of members and employees from the producer companies proved to be a cause for concern – some left because of the low wages, others left for short periods to take up other employment opportunities like MGNREGA. The general loss of interest in weaving among the younger generation was also a challenge, likely to be because weaving is not looked at as a lucrative occupation anymore.

On the other hand, women weavers faced a different set of challenges during the intervention. During the Handmade MBA training, some women found it hard to understand and keep up with the course content and attributed it to their lack of prior education. The duration and location of the training was another major challenge for them– many women reported that their family members were reluctant to let them attend the training program in a city for 30 days, and neglecting domestic responsibilities including childcare and other household chores was difficult for them. Social and gender norms prevalent in the region also had an impact on the power dynamics within the producer companies – some women BoD members struggled to assert their authority in the company where male employees had to report to them.

Several key recommendations emerge for more effective implementation. Setting up work sheds with optimum working conditions for production can lead to improved quality of products, better efficiency, and improved social capital for women weavers. Therefore, work sheds should ideally be set up in all project villages to provide women weavers the opportunity to come together and work. However, gender norms pose a challenge to this in several locations where women traditionally don't go outside their homes to work. To counter this, conducting awareness generation sessions with family members, especially men, is crucial. In addition, setting up informal village-level creches might also be extremely helpful to many women who can't go to the work shed on a regular basis due to childcare responsibilities. Overall, it might be beneficial to adapt the Handmade MBA program based on the women's needs and challenges and the overall local context for successful scale up. Identifying and splitting up the different important training components and conducting trainings of shorter durations in locations close to the weavers' homes – either at the village or district level – might be more conducive to the scale up of this program.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

WEC	Women's Empowerment Collectives
PC	Producer Company
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
BoD	Board of Directors
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDI	In-Depth Interview
KII	Key Informant Interview
IRB	Institutional Review Board
RoC	Registrar of Company
GWWSPC	Godavari Women Weavers' Services Producer Company
VWPC	Vamshadhara Weavers' Producer Company
CAPCL	Chitrika Artisans Producer Company Limited
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DCCB	District Cooperative Central Banks
HMBA	Handmade MBA
HR	Human Resources
MW	Master Weaver
KVIC	Khadi and Village Industries Commission
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

1. Introduction

Empowering women to control their economic lives is a critical means of achieving gender equality and a more equitable and just society. World over, organizations are laying a strong emphasis on enhancing women empowerment for economic growth, particularly through the promotion of women-owned businesses.

In 2020, 3ie launched a program called Swashakt: Empowering Indian Women's Collectives, which supports women-owned businesses by funding nine organizations, including private and public partnerships, to establish or replicate models of women's collective rural enterprises in India. The program defines women's collective enterprises as those where a group of women come together for a common entrepreneurial activity – such as production, procurement, or marketing –with formalized joint ownership of the business, or informal methods of pooling and sharing resources. These collectives may be registered as companies or cooperatives, or informal clusters such as producer groups. These rural women's group enterprises are viewed as vehicles for promoting women's economic empowerment and are therefore called women's empowerment collectives (WECs) (Dang et al 2022).

The Swashakt program was launched at a critical time when decades of advancement towards women's empowerment was set back with the outbreak of COVID-19 (ibid). Globally, between 2019 and 2020, women's employment declined by 4.2 per cent, (representing a drop of 54 million jobs), while unpaid work has increased (ILO 2021), women- owned businesses have also been affected disproportionately due to the pre-existing gender biases, which further deepened during the pandemic (Manolova et al., 2020; Torres et al. 2021). In this context, it becomes important to study the viability and sustainability of women's collective enterprises, and eventually potential for scale.

The Swashakt program aims to generate evidence on interventions that enhance the viability, sustainability, and returns for WECs, thereby promoting women's empowerment. Under Swashakt, 3ie is funding the implementation of four pilot and five at-scale projects across ten Indian states that support collectives and group-based models for women-led businesses. These include farm, non-farm and service enterprises operating in partnership with the government.

Chitrika Foundation's intervention is one of the five scaled projects being implemented. Chitrika was formed in 2006 as an incubator of handloom and artisan enterprises. Since then, they have successfully incubated three registered producer companies (PC) with 600 members across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Under the Swashakt project, their goal is to scale up to include 1,100 additional members. They plan to work with weaver communities in four districts in Andhra Pradesh – East Godavari, Guntur, Krishna, and Srikakulam – and one district in Telangana – Narayanpet. The districts of East Godavari, Srikakulam and Narayanpet have pre-existing producer companies set up by Chitrika. In these locations, they are mobilizing women from new villages and in Narayanpet, they aim to consolidate all the three producer companies into one single Chitrika Artisans Producer Company. In Guntur and Krishna, operations are being initiated for the first time. They are mobilizing new women weavers here and collectivizing them into the Chitrika Artisans Producer Company.

Services currently provided by Chitrika to the PC include skilling of weavers, providing access to modern weaving and value-addition technology and marketing support.

Under the Swashakt program, there are four components to Chitrika's intervention:

1. **Managerial skill enhancement through a micro-MBA program**: The larger goal of the MBA program is to enhance women's role in management of the PC and their own businesses. The MBA training program will be delivered to 100 selected women members.
2. **Improved accounting and business management systems**: The project aims to set up an advanced Enterprise Resources Planning (ERP) at the collective level to track enterprise outputs systematically. The creation of such a one-stop facility for weavers is likely to reduce dependencies on middlemen for inputs and provide learning opportunities among weavers.
3. **Enhancement of technical skills:** Chitrika aims to train women on different weaving techniques, quality assurance, and value addition activities such as garmenting, printing, tasselling, upcycling, and finishing of a product. They will also focus on training on marketing, including exposure visits, as well as soft technology such as sending emails and using WhatsApp and Google.
4. **Improved market linkages**: Chitrika aims to enhance existing marketing channels or set up new online and offline marketing channels for their products.

Chitrika's theory of change hypothesises that a combination of skills training, integrated processing units, and management and marketing interventions will enhance the capacity of these women-led collectives, and thereby increase women's income and their ability to have intergenerational influence in their communities. The project expects that with an increase in women's income, their agency in the weaving value-chain will increase, and women will be empowered to control the value chain.

Research Questions:

The main research questions that the process evaluation responds to are:

1) What are the enablers and barriers for setting up women's collectives?
2) What are the enablers and barriers to project implementation?
3) How does overall context influence the project implementation, specifically its impact (and lack thereof)?

The process evaluation fieldwork was conducted in four districts, i.e., Srikakulam, Narayanpet, Guntur and East Godavari. This report examines the context and implementation model of Chitrika and their PCs. Chitrika has been working in Srikakulam since 2006, East Godavari since 2014 and Narayanpet since 2018, and have already set up PCs. Guntur is a new terrain for them. Field work revealed instances of how prior presence of Chitrika in the three locations affected their implementation and mobilization for trainings and other programs under Swashakt. When the fieldwork was conducted in Guntur, mobilization efforts were still ongoing. As a result, this report's findings are primarily from the other districts. The field work was not conducted in the Krishna district since Chitrika had not yet started their operations or mobilization at that time.

This process evaluation examines the major interventions and their implementation planned by Chitrika under the Swashakt project. Programs like the HMBA are aimed to capacitate women weavers as entrepreneurs and embed sustainability in the PCs. Apart from interviews with women weavers, BoD members, and Chitrika staff, the study also explores engagement alternatives available to weaving households, which was identified as 'master weavers'. Master weavers are skilled artisans with an entrepreneurial mode of operation. They typically employ labour and sometimes provide raw material to produce weaving outputs that are either sold directly in the market, to other master weavers, or traders. As per the handloom census, around 48% of weavers in Andhra Pradesh and 49% weavers in Telangana work with master weavers, making them a major source of employment for weavers (All India Handloom Census, 2019-2020). The study also explores challenges faced by women weavers in attending trainings due to socio-cultural norms such as reluctance of family to allow attendance outside the village, childcare and house responsibilities etc. Further, the study also dives into the overall financial and resource challenges faced by weavers and the weaving industry, and possible ways to mitigate the same.

The first section of the report provides an overview of the methodology used to conduct the study, a description of the PCs set up by Chitrika and their implementation model. The next section describes the context, i.e., socio-economic, cultural, and gender norms predominant in these areas, which impact the lives of women weavers. The report ends with a section on the enablers and barriers during the implementation process and provides few recommendations to mitigate these barriers.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample Size

Qualitative data was collected from four districts across the two states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. In Andhra Pradesh, data was collected from East Godavari, Srikakulam, and Guntur districts. In Telangana, data was collected from Narayanpet district. The process evaluation was designed to go hand in hand with impact evaluation. For impact evaluation, a set of villages were randomly divided into treatment and control. The interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) for process evaluations were undertaken in three villages in each district. While two villages were from the list of treatment villages, i.e., villages where the intervention was being undertaken, one village was a control village with no treatment. In the treatment village, in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with some women members and their husbands, and master weavers, whereas key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with village heads, managers of the producer companies, and project managers from the Chitrika team. The FGDs in treatment villages were conducted with women members, women non-members who are working with master weavers, and the Board of Directors (BoD) of the producer companies. In the control villagers, a FGD was conducted with women working with master weavers in the village, an in-depth interview was conducted with a woman weaver in the village and a KII was conducted with the village head. This was undertaken to gain a better understanding of the context in both treatment and control villages, so any impact on the participants post-intervention can be observed in the treatment villages. Details of the sample have been provided in the table below.

Table 1: Sample Details

Location	No. of villages	Stakeholder	Focus group discussion (FGD)	In-depth interview (IDI)	Key informant interview (KII)
East Godavari, Andhra Pradesh	3	Women members	2	2	
		Women working under a master weaver (non-members)	3		
		Board of Directors of the PC	2		
		Village head/panchayat member			3
		Husband of woman member		2	
		Master weaver		2	
		PC staff/manager of the PC			2
Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh	3	Women members	2	2	
		Women working under a master weaver (non-members)	3		
		Board of Directors of the PC	2		
		Village head/panchayat member			3
		Village head/panchayat member		2	
		Husband of woman member		2	
		Master weaver			2
		PC staff/manager of the PC			2
Narayanpet, Telangana	3	Women members	2	2	
		Women working under a master weaver (non-member)	3		
		Board of Directors of the PC	2		
		Village head/panchayat member			3
		Village head/panchayat member		2	
		Husband of woman member		2	

Location	No. of villages	Stakeholder	Focus group discussion (FGD)	In-depth interview (IDI)	Key informant interview (KII)
		Master weaver			2
		PC staff/manager of the PC			2
Guntur, Andhra Pradesh	3	Women members	2	2	
		Women working under a master weaver (non-member)	3		
		Husbands of members	2		
		Village head/panchayat member			1
		Master weaver		2	
Hyderabad, India		Chitrika management team			1

2.2 Data collection process

- **Selection of consultants**: Consultants for data collection were selected through an interview process, and a key criterion was proficiency in the local language to ensure seamless conversations between the respondents and the interviewer.
- **Training the consultants**: Consultants underwent extensive training by the 3ie team before the fieldwork. They were introduced to the Swashakt program and were explained the tools and process of conducting the fieldwork extensively. They received a fieldwork protocol guide which highlighted the do's and don'ts for the fieldwork.
- **Tool preparation**: Designing the tool for data collection was an iterative process. The fieldwork for process evaluation started within three to four months after completion of the baseline data collection. Mobilization of women was ongoing, and some trainings had taken place. Trainings for the first batch of HMBA were conducted during the course of the process evaluation. In Guntur, mobilization had just started, and the process was yet to begin in Krishna. This information is important as it also guided the way in which the tools and research questions were envisaged. The interview guides and tools were prepared for the following categories: FGDs and IDIs with participants and non-participants, IDIs with husbands of participants, KIIs with the field team - community mobilizer, production coordinator and the management team. The tools can be found in Annexure 1.
- **Piloting the data collection tool**: Once the interview guides were prepared, the process for getting Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval began. Simultaneously, the guides were piloted with few groups of women in Narayanpet and Telangana to check their viability. Based on this pilot, few questions within the broader sub themes were added, and irrelevant ones were deleted. An important objective of piloting the tool was not only to test its efficacy, but also timing. Both the IDIs and FGDs were targeted for around 1 to 1.5 hours to maintain the focus and interest of respondents.

- **Planning the field work**: All field work was planned in close coordination with the implementation partner, Chitrika. It was conducted in two phases over a period of three months. In the first phase, field work was conducted in the district of Narayanpet and East Godavari, and in the second phase, it covered the district of Srikakulam and Guntur. This is because Chitrika had planned for the HMBA classes in Hyderabad and continuous fieldwork would have disrupted the implementation plan or affected the sample as members participating in the HMBA training would have to be left out. In Guntur, the mobilization process began only later, and thus the fieldwork was conducted during the second phase. A detailed field plan was created, with district, village location, and the data collection, i.e., FGDs and IDIs to be undertaken. The field coordinator and project manager from Chitrika helped with the mobilization and facilitation of the interview process in the treatment villages, i.e., where the intervention was being undertaken by the Chitrika team. In the control villages, i.e., where the intervention was not being undertaken, the mobilization process to interview women was carried out by the 3ie field consultants with support from Chitrika team members. On an average, fieldwork was conducted for a week in each district.
- **Challenges during data collection:** The team faced several challenges during the data collection process.
    - The field locations were remote and finding accommodations to stay as well as commute was difficult for the researchers.
    - It was also important to meet women at a time when they would be free and available to engage. This was not always easy since women had to go to their place of work, take care of their children, undertake household chores, and then find time for these interviews. Thus, many a times, the field consultants had to wait before they could conduct the interview.
    - The fieldwork was slightly delayed as recruitment and training of the research consultants took time. Since the fieldwork was conducted after baseline, the implementation process had also begun. To ensure that implementation is not hampered by the fieldwork, the data collection process was staggered.
- **Translation and transcription**: Once the interview guides were recorded and uploaded, they were transcribed and translated by the consultants.
- **Coding**: The translated interviews were coded in NViVo. A coding framework was prepared, which was used for coding the interviews on NViVo. The framework had thematic codes and sub-codes (coding framework is attached in the Annexure 3)
- **Analysis**: Once the coding was complete, the team analyzed the data to understand the broad themes and observations emerging. This data was thematically analyzed and organized in notes which were helpful for the report writing.

2.3 Timelines

Table 2: Study timeline

Activity	Jan - Mar 2022	April-June 2022	July-Sept. 2022	Oct-Dec 2022	Jan-March 2023	April-May 2023	June-August 2023
Tool Preparation							
IRB							
Piloting the tools							
Recruitment and training of field consultants							
Preparation of the coding framework							
Data collection							
Transcription and translation							
Data coding							
Data analysis							
Report writing							

3. The Project

3.1 A brief description of Producer Companies

Before diving into the structure and functioning of the PCs, it is imperative to understand cooperatives, albeit briefly. Modern cooperatives originated in Europe during the late nineteenth century and gradually spread to the Global South where they met with mixed success in the initial years. African cooperatives met with initial failure, but India, Argentina and Brazil witnessed successful establishment of cooperative ventures (Ortmann & King, 2007). In India, the concept of cooperative institutes was first introduced in 1904 with the passing of the Cooperatives Credit Societies Act by the Government of India (Kamenov, 2019). Cooperatives provide an alternative to the marginalized producer to come together in an organized manner and move up the value chain with assured business ownership (Venkatkumar & Sontakki, 2012). Aggregation of producers allows for exploiting economies of scale, which in turn reduces the cost of inputs, provision of credit and other resources. (*ibid*).

The concept of PCs came to the fore in 2002, when it was introduced in the 2002 Companies Act by incorporating a new section IXA.1956 based on the recommendations of the Y.K. Alagh Committee set up for this purpose. The PCs are incorporated with the Registrar of Company (RoC). The objective of the Indian government for such an initiative was to formulate a legislation that would enable incorporation of cooperatives as companies and conversion of existing cooperatives into companies, while ensuring that the unique elements of the cooperative business remain intact in the new legislation (GoI 2013). A PC is formed with the equity contribution by the members. The day-to-day operation is expected to be managed by external professionals under the direction of the BoD elected/selected by the General Body of the PC for a specific tenure (*ibid*).

In the weaving sector, PCs have gained prominence for the aforementioned reasons. Many a times, an NGO is the initiator towards establishing a PC (GoI, 2013). In this case, Chitrika first worked towards mobilization of weavers in the district of Srikakulam and initially established cooperatives. This was later changed to PCs in 2014 called the Vamshadhara Weavers' Producer Company (VWPC). This was done as the Company Act was more amenable to change compared to the Cooperative Societies Act, as informed by the founder member of Chitrika.

In the other two places, i.e., East Godavari and Narayanpet, they directly registered themselves as a PC called the Godavari Women Weavers' Services Producer Company (GWWSPC) - the first 'all-women weavers' PC in Andhra Pradesh set up in 2014. Interviews with the program management team of Chitrika revealed that the culture of collectivization already existed here due to the presence of master weavers in the weaving landscape. They said, *"The collective comes first, and self-interest has to be balanced with the interest of all. Collectives help to create leaders who can take the work forward. They also create an enabling environment for women to learn more skills, thus making it more sustainable in the long run as compared to a company or entrepreneur model. The role of Chitrika is like that of an accelerator, they help them in managing their business better"*.

The program manager also mentioned that most of the existing weaver cooperatives in the state of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana comprised of men. Chitrika was one of the first organizations to initiate the formation of women collectives in the region, as they noticed the feminization of weaving around 2011 due to migration among men and lack of interest in weaving due to low wages. It was not economically prudent for two people to work on a loom, and when men migrated outside for other employment opportunities, women took over the looms and became the primary focus of Chitrika's work as well. Chitrika also changed its model to suit the needs of the times. Feminization also meant a slight change in production systems so that women could adapt and conduct tasks that male weavers originally conducted. However, marketing and designing processes did not see any changes.

Women's empowerment was not the primary motive of Chitrika's program initially. However, when they noticed how collectivizing women was helping to build their social capital and networks, it became the primary focus of their work. It was also realized that in order to work with women weavers, they need to have a holistic approach that engages with weavers' socio-economic context and their concerns.

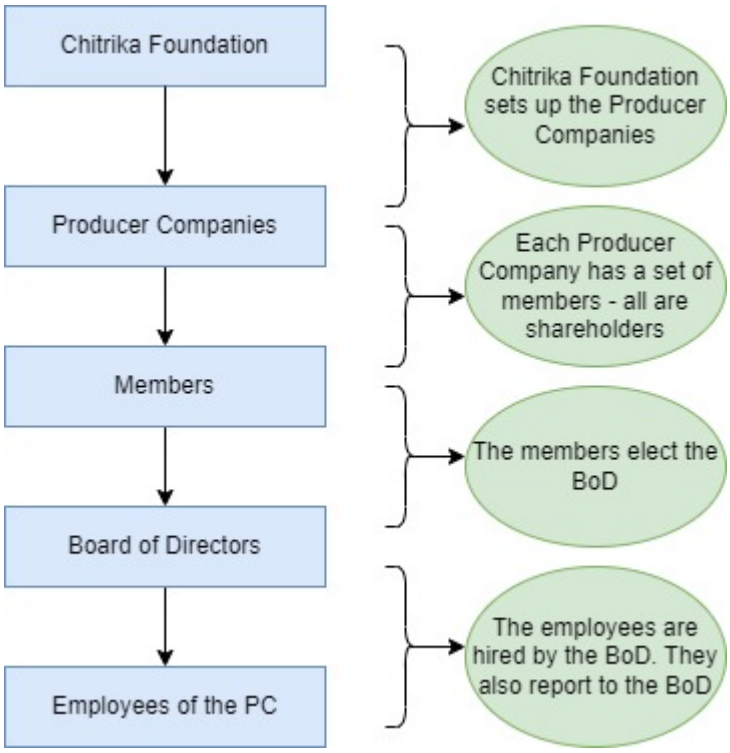
3.2 Structure of the PCs set up by Chitrika

Chitrika Foundation works to set up PCs which are owned by women weavers in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. They mobilize women weavers, set up Producer Companies and the value chain, and provide a range of trainings to make women members capable of running a weaving enterprise. Most aspects of the value chain are handled by either Chitrika, members of the PC, or households of members. A few activities are outsourced to households who are not members of the PCs.

While Chitrika has three PCs as of now, they plan to consolidate all the three into one single registered PC which will operate out of Narayanpet district. This is being done with

the objective of improving scale and ease of operations. It will be called the Chitrika Artisans Producer Company Limited and will include women members from Narayanpet, Srikakulam, East Godavari, Guntur and Krishna.

Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of Chitrika Foundation, the producer companies it sets up and their internal structure



The PCs set up by Chitrika give membership only to women weavers, who are also the shareholders and owners. The BoD are elected from the members, based on their performance in weaving production activities, and literacy level. The BoD is a rotational post as per the mandate for PCs and must have a minimum of five members. Each member can serve for a maximum of three years and the duration is based on a draw. Office bearers in the BoD include a president and treasurer. The BoD also has one additional external non-voting member who is usually an external expert or can be from companies like Fab India or from the trader's side. This position was included due to demand from various funders.

The PCs also have employees or staff members who are hired by the BoD and accountable to them. Members of the PCs are not involved in the hiring of employees. The CEO of the company, who is an employee, reports to the BoD, and all the other company employees report to the CEO. The company has three verticals within which they function – finance, marketing, and production.

It is important to note that most of the PC employees are men, so there is a certain power dynamic that exists between the women BoD members and the male employees. Interviews with Chitrika's program management team revealed that male employees considered themselves experts and did not always respect the women BoD members, despite them having the authority to fire them. There are currently twelve employees across the three producer companies, of which eleven are men and one is a woman.

Chitrika is working to train BoD members, so they are equipped to navigate this existing gendered power dynamic.

3.2.1 Roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders

This section covers the role played by Chitrika Foundation, the PCemployees, the Board of Directors and the members. Chitrika functions as an incubator – they mobilize and collectivize women, set up and register the PC, set up the value chain and facilitate market linkages, and provide skill development training to women members to run an enterprise. Chitrika thus helps overcome the significant coordination costs entailed in the formation of collectives and further reduces the fixed costs of complying with regulatory norms and accessing more remunerative markets. Additionally, its focus on training and skilling weavers is intended to produce higher value products suitable for these markets and enhance the managerial skills required for transacting in these markets. Even after the set-up phase is complete, Chitrika continues to provide support by facilitating access to markets and raw materials. The Chitrika staff reports that 90% of the working capital for the Producer Companies is provided by Chitrika Foundation. After the PC is functional, the BoD members and employees also start working to mobilize short term loans or credit – which makes up for the remaining 10%. The working capital provided by Chitrika comes either from their own pool of funds accumulated through consulting and other activities or from loans. It is important to note that the working capital does not come from grant money. So far, Chitrika has relied on loans for working capital from institutions like NABKISAN, Friends of Women's World Banking, and the ACCESS Livelihoods Development Finance, which works to mobilize finance for such collectives. These institutions lend money directly to the Producer Companies. They mention that it is difficult to acquire working capital loans from mainstream banks because they require collateral, which Producer Companies do not have. District Cooperative Central Banks (DCCB) also don't traditionally provide loans to Producer Companies.

The Board of Directors runs the PC as per the goals and jointly developed vision of the organization. Their primary responsibility is to ensure the sustainability of the PC and managing the members, employees, and external stakeholders and relations between them. They are also trained in monitoring and evaluation so they can efficiently monitor progress and functioning. The employees play a more hands-on role, where they manage all the daily tasks, the production process, as well as finance and marketing related operations. The women members only have one role – to focus on production activities which essentially involves weaving on the loom.

3.2.2 Value chain

This section describes the various activities undertaken in the value chain, which are mostly outsourced. Weaving is the major activity undertaken by the members, which takes place both at the household level and at the work shed.

Below the broad steps in the weaving value chain:

1. *Designing* – This phase includes identifying the type of product and the design – including the kind of weave, colour combinations, material, among other things. This decision is based on market demand and other factors. Designing is currently only being undertaken by the Chitrika team, and they will continue to do this as there is still an 'aesthetic gap, not a knowledge gap' among the weavers. After the design decisions are made, the yarn requirement is estimated based on

the design specifics, order quantity (if the production is because of an order placed by an external vendor), and for general production of different kinds of products to be sold independently. The estimate is entered into their Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.

2. *Procuring raw materials* – Yarn required for production is usually purchased by employees of the PC, by identifying and approaching traders in a wholesale market. The Chitrika team added that they are currently purchasing yarn from spinning mills in nearby towns or from co-operative societies if there is an urgent need.
3. *Dyeing:* The yarn is then sent to a central dyeing unit, usually by the employees of the PC. The dyeing unit sends a sample of the dyed yarn to the PC to check for colour bleeds and accuracy of shade. If it is approved, the rest of the order is completed and sent to the PC. Currently, each PC is getting their dyeing done separately.
4. *Processing of yarn* – This refers to all the pre-loom activities which include winding, warping, and sizing. Most of these activities are outsourced and the payment is done per piece. The pre-loom process described in this section is for the East Godavari PC.

   Winding: The yarn is then wound on the thistles using a *charkha* (spinning wheel) by women workers from a nearby town.

   Warping: The yarn is then transferred from the thistles or cones to a warping wheel, which usually requires two people. In Narayanpet, this is done in the work shed itself, but in the other districts, this is usually done in the weavers' homes by the women members and their husbands.

   Sizing: This activity is also outsourced to groups of three individuals from nearby towns. One person sprays a natural adhesive (starch) and the other two individuals run a long brush along the sides from one end to another.

   Attaching the warp to the yarn: The warp is attached to the yarn based on the design of the saree or other product. This is done by local designers from the villages who are either employees or paid per piece rate for this work. Setting up one design on a loom takes an entire day, albeit this is dependent on the complexity of the design.
5. *Weaving* – Weaving takes place either at the weavers' homes or at the PC's work shed, which so far has only been set up in Narayanpet. Since there is no work shed in Srikakulam and East Godavari, the weavers weave only from their homes. In Narayanpet, most women members come to the work shed to weave, depending on convenience. Most women who choose to work from their homes in Narayanpet have looms at home; and if they don't, Chitrika arranges for looms to be set up in their homes.

   In Srikakulam, East Godavari and Narayanpet, both men and women (usually husband and wife) share the workload of weaving on the loom. A PC staff member says, *"Men work on the loom, when women are engaged in household chores early in the morning. Men take rest when the women work on the loom."* However, only the women work at the work shed that is set up in Narayanpet, while at home, both men and women engage in weaving. Thus, a work shed becomes a place for collectivization and coming together of women as a group.
6. *Branding, sales and marketing:* The woven product then comes back to the PC office. As mentioned earlier, production takes place based on orders which are

placed by external vendors or for sale directly by the PC with Chitrika. Sales processes are usually looked after by the employees All direct sales are facilitated from a warehouse or outlet where buyers can come and see the stock, make purchases, or place orders. Chitrika has also recently provided the capital to set up a retail store in Hyderabad called Creyo, which is another important avenue for sale. Chitrika plays a significant role in taking orders from buyers, sales, and branding.

3.2.3 Organization of production through work sheds

Work sheds are rented or bought spaces for production activities, including weaving, sales, marketing, and other management related work. So far, only one rented work shed has been set up in Narayanpet district and the capital was provided by Chitrika Foundation. It took the team around one year to identify a space that was suitable and within their budget. This work shed used to be a power loom unit owned by a master weaver in the village. It is used by not only the women members who weave on the loom daily, but also the PC staff who manage the overall functioning of the company and other procurement, marketing, and sales activities. Most women members in Narayanpet come to the work shed to weave, but there are some women who continue to weave from their homes because they find it more convenient. Chitrika allows for both set-ups but encourages women to come to the work shed.

The program management team mentioned their plan of setting up similar work sheds in Srikakulam, Guntur and Krishna. They set up the work shed in Narayanpet first because the weavers in the district have undertaken weaving activities at work sheds set up by master weavers. In East Godavari and Srikakulam, working from work sheds in not a norm and women are more used to weaving from their homes.

Setting up work sheds is impacted by availability of funds. In Narayanpet, Chitrika took a loan of INR twelve lakhs out of which INR eight lakhs were used to purchase forty looms and the rest was used to change the roof of the property. The monthly rent for the Narayanpet work shed is INR 30,000. Buying land and building a sustainable work shed would cost approximately INR fifty lakhs. High cost of land and rent in East Godavari is a big deterrent in setting up a work shed there.

Chitrika believes that work sheds create an office-like environment for the weavers, which has the potential of incentivizing young people to take up weaving. Workspace certification also helps increase their exports. The Chitrika team has also observed higher productivity and efficiency among weavers working from the work sheds. It is good exposure for the women – they have a better understanding of the weaving value chain, along with enhanced knowledge about product types and designs. Chitrika plans to set up work sheds in their other intervention areas as well, provided they have the capital and rent requirements are within their budget.

4. Implementation

4.1 Selection criteria for members

Chitrika has a simple and straightforward selection criterion for women to be a part of their program as highlighted below:

1. The member should be a woman weaver or should be involved in any other part of the weaving value chain (spinning/winding/pre-loom activities).
2. The member should be willing to pay the share capital required to be a part of the PC, i.e. INR 100 per share.

In addition to the two criteria mentioned above, Chitrika requires its members to fulfil a specified minimum work or production requirement. Membership is conditional on them being able to fulfil this requirement, which is to weave a total of 1,000 metres in a year, and 500 metres in a year for weavers in East Godavari. In Narayanpet, weavers are required to weave a total of 100 sarees in a year. This criterion is set to ensure that the PC can meet market demand and the minimum levels of production needed so that they don't incur losses. Prior to COVID-19, members were given warnings when they didn't meet the yearly production requirement, and some women were even laid off if requirements were not met. After the pandemic, Chitrika has been less stringent with this requirement criteria. Production has also gone down.

Chitrika prefers this method of making sure an existing batch of weavers can meet production requirements over giving membership to a larger number of women weavers to meet production requirements. Their reasoning is that they prefer to work with women who can follow rules and instructions and meet deadlines while maintaining quality.

Until two years ago, male weavers were also given membership to the Producer Companies, but it proved to be very challenging. *"In Srikakulam, we noticed that the men always asked for more wages and were more difficult to work with. The men also thought their time was of more value, so they were unwilling to come for trainings and lose out on wages. We were forced to negotiate with them each step of the way."*, reports a team member from Chitrika. In the other Producer Companies as well, they realized it was easier to work with women, as they were more amenable to changes in product design and willing to come for trainings and learning new skills. Therefore, memberships are now restricted to women only with a standardized selection criteria across districts. It is worth noting that men and women are paid the same wage per metre of weaving, whether weaving is done at the work shed or in household. The wages are transferred to the bank account, but it is not always necessary that the bank account is in the woman's name who is weaving. Although Chitrika is making concrete efforts especially post demonetization to ensure that the bank accounts are in the name of weavers so that they are responsible for the money earned by them.

4.2 Mobilization process

The mobilization process followed by Chitrika is the same across districts in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The Chitrika team in Hyderabad first does their own research with inputs from their field teams to identify which villages and districts to work in. They then identify a field person from the weaving community in the intervention village or an

employee of the PC, who is called ‘promoter’ and conducts mobilization activities. There are no strict criteria to select promoters except that they should be a weaver, well-spoken and educated to a certain extent. In Srikakulam, the promoters are currently mostly men, whereas in the other locations, they are mostly women.

When Chitrika first started their work of setting up Producer Companies, they would undertake mobilization activities themselves. However, they switched to hiring a local ‘promoter’ from the weaving community to mobilize women weavers as it was easier to build trust among people from same communities. Even if the promoters are not weavers themselves, they know the nuances of the sector as they belong to the community.

These promoters conduct door-to-door household visits and group meetings for mobilization. In these meetings, they screen a film called Manthan which is about building co-operatives in rural areas. They also take interested women weavers on exposure visits to Hyderabad – show them their warehouse, the final products, the production unit, among other things. The women’s transportation, lodging and stay is taken care of by Chitrika during the exposure visit. Women are also informed about the various training programs conducted to upskill members of the Producer Companies, which is an additional incentive for women to join the program.

Chitrika has a recognition program through which the efforts of three women weavers are recognized every year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they also provided groceries and other items of necessity to women members and their families, as a way to motivate women to join the program during mobilization.

Chitrika field teams also identify influential members of the community who understand the importance and benefits of the intervention and use their help to gain trust and get buy-in from the rest of the weaver community in the villages.

4.3 Training

4.3.1 HMBA

Chitrika conducted a short-term training called the HMBA, with multi-pronged objectives of:

i) developing competencies among women to start their own micro-enterprises.
ii) creating competent leaders to steer the Producer Companies.
iii) Mobilize other women.
iv) create a cohort of teachers, trainers, and experts who can upskill other members of the PC.

As highlighted earlier, eleven out of twelve PC staff are men. Chitrika hopes that women trained through the HMBA can help assuage the gender imbalance and create a pool of skilled women weavers to hire as employees. It is essential to note, however, that program completion does not guarantee an automatic promotion to staff or leadership roles.

Chitrika had initially planned that participants of HMBA would be from among the existing PC members only. However, the final cohort also included some non-members who were strongly recommended by members and other participants. Some of these women did not possess prior weaving experience but showcased considerable weaving knowledge and motivation during the various phases of selection.

Chitrika held four phases of selection rounds:

- Written test to assess language and numeracy skills in Telugu - 20 marks
- Group Discussion to gauge women's ability to navigate in a group setting - 25 marks.
- Women's marketing and business skills - 25 marks.
- Personal Interview to better understand women's motivations - 30 marks.

Women had to score a total of 35 marks on 100 to be accepted in the program. For its first cohort, Chitrika screened 92 women from three districts, of which 55 were accepted in the program and 45 graduated. The average score was 47, marks. average age of participants was 42 years old, and they had an average education exposure of 4.77 years.

Chitrika trained women on 12 modules – Accounts, Design, Human Resources, Legal, Marketing, Production, Technology, Skilling in Handlooms, Self-Transformation, Gender, Governance, and Sustainability, staggered over four to six months. Participants sat for an end-of-program MCQ based test on the first seven modules, and a practical component for the last five modules. Women were also graded for their class participation and attendance and were required to complete take-home assignments for some of the modules. Chitrika engaged industry professionals as well as PC staff for their training. An external trainer was identified for the design module and visited producer companies to conduct the sessions. A dedicated PC member was identified for each of the modules on HR, Production, Marketing, and Technology who visited different producer companies to conduct training. The courses were short trainings, ranging from half a day to two days. Self-Transformation, Legal, Governance, and Gender modules were taught by external trainers in two weeklong visits to Hyderabad at a common time for participants from all districts.

The Chitrika team in Hyderabad designed all the training modules after conducting a needs assessment in the field. No external consultants were hired to design the training modules for the first cohort, but they intend to hire one for the next round of the HMBA program to design and implement the Gender and Self-Transformation module.

The participants of the program were provided transport, food and accommodation for the training period. Chitrika arranged for 'Contingency Wage' by providing some work to weavers during the training period and arranging for simpler designs to be weaved by the partner of the trainee in case they weaved together, to avoid any wage loss from attending the training. In addition, women were compensated for wage loss by leveraging past wage data to calculate the compensation. as follows:

1) The difference between the 'Contingency Wage' and previous years wages was calculated.
2) An additional 20% was added.
3) The average of this marked-up difference was calculated (M)
4) For women whose marked-up difference was less than the average M, they were compensated with the average amount
5) For women whose marked-up difference was more than M, they were given M + the difference.

While a detailed record of women's own past wages was used, the calculation of the compensation was hard to understand for most women and many expressed that the compensation was inadequate.

As part of the program, participants were taken to IKEA and Creyo for exposure visits. 3ie also interviewed graduates from HMBA's first cohort to understand their experience. Participants expressed that the exposure helped them observe classroom concepts of designing, pricing, and marketing at play, and understanding the importance of producing good quality outputs. Participants from Srikakulam's Laveru village said, *"They have taken us to IKEA and Creyo. We saw different machine-made clothes and handmade clothes. After visiting there we saw many designs and that inspired us to weave more complex designs. It enabled us to appreciate our own designs after seeing them in the Creyo store."* A member from East Godavari's Valluru village said, *"I have understood how to sell things. At IKEA I have understood how to make a beautiful house in a small place. How to sell different products in different markets is another insight I got through the field visit."*

Chitrika had initially planned on administering the final examinations as written tests. However, during the program, they realized that women's comprehension skills when posed with formal and technical language, even if in Telugu, was poor. Thus, the final examination pattern was changed from written to oral with a mix of objective and open-ended questions. Conducting oral examinations came with a set of considerations. Even though women were taken to Hyderabad close to the end of the program, some sessions were held at the PC level and production had already started. Asking women to pause production and mobilizing them in a central location for the examination (even if it is at the PC level) would be difficult and raise concerns of fairness (since oral answers can be overheard heard easily if held simultaneously). Thus, PC staff went from door-to-door and administered the test by reading the questions out loud and noting down the answers, very similar to administering a survey.

The average age of the participants was 42 years, with ages ranging across 28 years from 27 to 55. Younger women, who were also more educated, performed better on the program. Chitrika mentioned that post-HMBA engagement of these women was low and challenging as they did not express interest in either weaving, leadership or staff positions. On the other hand, older women have been associated with Chitrika for a long time and continued their engagement post the program, even though they may have found it hard to keep up with. For the upcoming cohorts, Chitrika staff faces a dilemma in terms of which demographic they should focus on mobilizing.

4.3.2 Technical training

Chitrika also conducts half to one day training courses on Weaving Techniques, Technology, Marketing, Quality Assurance, and Value Addition at the PC level. These training courses do not have any selection criteria and participants are roughly allocated/invited based on needs assessment conducted during mobilization to identify the training required in different PCs. BoDs also report having learnt skills related to writing vouchers, inventory management, governance, ERP and wage calculation. For all these trainings, Chitrika provided monetary compensation for wage losses. These trainings can have a class size of 15-45 participants. These had not started during the field visits for this process evaluation, but the program management team informed that

these were conducted at least once across the different producer companies after the field visits. It is not necessary that every PC conducts all the trainings. The training is conducted based on the needs and interest of women weavers. These trainings are aimed at inculcating an appreciation and enhanced knowledge of the systems and processes in place, and some weavers are also identified for advanced trainings and roles. Chitrika provides an example of the design trainings and explains that while the weavers themselves do not create designs, a deeper understanding of the process reduces the chances of weavers changing designs or colour combinations (which can pose a serious problem in terms of scaling up since the orders would no longer be uniform) and allows the Producer Companies to have a high design turnaround.

5. Context

This section provides an overview of the four districts in which the fieldwork was undertaken.

5.1 Overview of districts

Chitrika works across three districts in the state of Andhra Pradesh and one district in Telangana. They began work in Narayanpet in Telangana only in the year 2018. Andhra Pradesh has the second highest number of weavers among the southern states, estimated at around 32% and also among the top ten in the country, estimated at around 5% of total weavers in India (All India Handloom Census, 2019-20). Handloom industry has been one of the largest in India and provides the second highest employment to people in rural areas after agriculture. More than three million people are engaged in the direct and allied sectors of the handloom industry in India (All India Handloom Census, 2019-20). Within the industry, 10% work for institutions such as the cooperatives, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), whereas 66% work for master weavers (MW) and the rest are independent weavers (Bhagavatula 2020).

5.1.1 Srikakulam

Srikakulam district is the extreme northeastern district of Andhra Pradesh. The Srikakulam city is connected by major roads to Visakhapatnam in the southwest and Bhubaneshwar in Odisha in the northeast. The main occupation of people here is agriculture, with paddy as the main crop. Cash crops like groundnut, mesta, cashew, chillies, oilseeds, pulses and sugarcane are also grown in the district (NABARD 2016). Ponduru in Srikakulam district is well known as the khadi hub, and first came into recognition when Mahatma Gandhi appreciated the khadi which was spun in the region.

Chitrika began working in the Srikakulam district in 2006 with ten weavers in a village 9 kms from Ponduru called Devaravalasa. Each weaver contributed a share capital of INR 1000. While Ponduru is famous for its khadi, the weavers in Devaravalasa are inconspicuous. Ponduru had a presence of cooperative societies, independent weavers and master weavers, who were functioning like a well-oiled machinery. Due to these systems already in place, it was difficult for Chitrika to carve a space and create demand among the weavers. The ground was more fertile for engagement in Devaravalasa where weavers were looking for opportunities within the village. Most of them were weaving for traders in Ponduru and therefore, would lose half a day in travel, collection of raw material/wages and depositing the finished product. Thus, Chitrika's initiative was welcomed by these weavers, and this led to the inception of their work.

The program was initiated with both men and women weavers, chiefly men. They also started mutually aided cooperative societies in Srikakulam in the year 2006, which were merged into a single PC in 2014 – 15 called the Vamshadhara Weavers' Producer Company with 50 members. Weaver families belonging to backward *Padmasali* and *Devanga* communities are usually involved in spinning and weaving work. Srikakulam remains the only hand spinning belt in the country, where fine yarn up to 100 counts are spun. The district has a long history of traditional weaving including Khadi, Jamdani and Kuppadam, with at least 33 weavers' societies.

5.1.2 East Godavari

East Godavari is one of the largest, most populous and richest districts in the state of Andhra Pradesh. It lies on the northeast coast of Andhra Pradesh, bound by Visakhapatnam district in the north, the state of Orissa in the east, the Bay of Bengal in the south, and the Khammam district of Telangana and west Godavari district in the west.

It is known for its cotton/silk products, famously called 'Uppada Jamdani'. Weavers mostly weave 80 counts, with a few skilled enough to weave 100 as well. This was the second district after Srikakulam where Chitrika established operations. Here, the work began only with women, as there was an increase in migration among men, coupled with low income and avenues in weaving, and weak pre-loom support. The GWWSPC is the first women weavers' PC in Andhra Pradesh.

5.1.3 Narayanpet

Narayanpet district is a relatively new district in the state of Telangana. It was formed on February 17, 2018, when it was carved out of the larger Mahbubnagar district. Narayanpet is located in the southern part of Telangana and shares borders with the states of Karnataka and Maharashtra. The district is primarily an agricultural region with a focus on the production of crops like cotton, maize, and groundnuts.

Narayanpet is famous for its handloom industry, especially the sarees produced here. Chitrika works only in Narayanpet in Telangana. One of the reasons to initiate work here was to empower the weavers in the region, who come from very poor backgrounds, and do not own their looms. Chitrika works primarily with women here as most men who practised weaving have migrated outside to look for higher paying jobs.

5.1.4 Guntur

Guntur lies on a lowland plain in the Krishna River delta in the centre of Andhra Pradesh. It has a 64 km coastline along the Bay of Bengal in the Southeast, with Prakasham district in the South, Mahbubnagar district in the West and Nalgonda district in the northwest.

Guntur's economy is predominantly agriculture with crops like jute, tobacco, and rice. The district is the main producer and exporter of most varieties of chillies and chilli powder from India to countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Middle East, South Korea, U.K. and USA & Latin America.

Chitrika initiated its work in Guntur for the first time in 2023. They undertook scoping visits to understand the overall context, barriers, and facilitators for setting up the operation. It took them around five months to mobilize weavers and identify villages in

the district with scope for a production unit. When the fieldwork was conducted, 40 women weavers had been mobilized in the region to work with Chitrika.

5.2 Findings

5.2.1 Socio-economic context

Across East Godavari, Guntur, Srikakulam and Narayanpet, some common socio-cultural changes are apparent. There is a decline in the interest in weaving and other traditional activities from the younger generations across all districts, and an uptake in education as parents desire for their children to study and take up other jobs. Parents highlight the lack of sufficient work from weaving and the requirement of heavy physical work which they do not want for the next generation. A 53-year-old non-member from Bandarulanka village of East Godavari even said that in her village *"No young person is weaving at present. It's mostly the older generation that is still engaged in weaving."* There is absence of child marriages and a steady rise in the age at which people are getting married. Participation in weaving is caste based. While each district has households that are engaged in either weaving or other activities or both, households of weaving castes usually only perform weaving. In these districts, weavers are usually from backward castes like the Karnabakthulu, Devangulu, Padmasali, Chatri, Atkaru, Sale, Patkari, Mudhiraj and, in few places, Muslims. Across all districts, most women report having learnt weaving during their childhood up to early teen years, with some learning from their in-laws after marriage.

5.2.2 Overall employment landscape and migration

There are two main factors that affect the supply of weavers in villages. The first is the caste-based determination of occupations within a village, and the second is growing opportunities and wages outside the village. This section elaborates on each of these points.

For those households who do participate in weaving, it constitutes a major source of income. Other sources of livelihood vary across the different districts and is determined based on caste.

In East Godavari, weavers have traditionally woven cotton sarees and shirts, and this is their main source of income. For non-weaving communities, the sources of livelihood are farming, MGNREGA work, wage labour, work in stores such as grocery, coconut husk factories, and clothing shops. Few people also have their own businesses. Among the activities listed above, agriculture is the main source of livelihood for non-weaving households. This includes working on their own land, or as labourers on land owned by others. Among other castes, it is more likely that people from upper castes own agricultural land. While people from East Godavari do migrate, the intensity of migration varies from village to village. The sarpanch of East Godavari's Nalluru village notes that his village has experienced pronounced migration over the last two years, mainly due to crop failure in the region.

In Narayanpet, up until recent years (late 1990s), both men and women would engage in weaving but lately men have switched to other opportunities. Women have also started to take up other work, but most have continued weaving. Women from weaving castes have traditionally not gone out for work. Most women state that they have continued to work with weaving due to lack of other 'appropriate' opportunities at the village level. If

any other work is taken up, it is agricultural labour in nearby villages, *beedi* rolling within their homes, or working as sales people in nearby villages. Some women have also said that if they had other skills, they would pursue other jobs. Thus, women's continuation with weaving is a mix of both supply (lack of opportunities that would fit with the traditional mobility and norms restrictions that weaving community women are subjected to) and demand (missing or poor skills for other occupations) factors. People have either switched to *beedi* rolling or to sales of power-loom sarees in the surrounding villages within and outside their districts. There has also been a considerable permanent migration mainly towards power looms in Bhiwandi near Mumbai in Maharashtra and Ahmedabad in Gujarat for higher wages. Some also migrate on a seasonal basis as construction workers, drivers, watchmen, and salesmen. Women usually accompany their husbands to work as maids. Since Hyderabad is close from Narayanpet, many people, especially from younger generation, prefer to migrate to the city and earn a living by working as Uber drivers or being employed in showrooms in the malls. Narayanpet is also the only district in which people from other castes also engage in weaving in the PC. The exact reason behind this is unclear but Chitrika admits they had no role to play in this and it could probably be because of the existing value chain process in Narayanpet. Since Narayanpet is close to Maharashtra, there were influences of the power loom industry and that resulted in the pre-loom work in Narayanpet being very centralized. This meant that people from other castes did not need to know a vast range of traditional, and often complicated processes, and only had to learn specific weaving techniques, which in today's time is even easier.

Srikakulam, Guntur, and East Godavari also have presence of other traditional activities. In Srikakulam, this includes palm wine cultivation, goldsmith, furniture making and carpentry. Other communities in Guntur include toddy tappers, masons, and carpentry workers. Weaving and activities practised by traditional communities alike, have seen a decline in participation from younger generations. In Srikakulam, individuals from weaving families have shifted to construction, farming, and driving autos. In Guntur, the switch away from weaving in the younger generation is supported by parents as they think their children should not suffer the same fate as they have. In some cases, people have migrated to towns to support their children's education. A Sarpanch from Guntur's Illavaram village summarized *"People from weavers' households are going to town and staying there for their children's education and are finding some work in those towns. Most of the younger generations from these families have left weaving and are depending on their education to get some formal job and are staying in towns and cities."* Weavers have switched to working in power loom factories, jewellery designing, masonry, and wage work with migrating to town for work and children's education. According to one respondent, a couple can easily make INR 12,000 a month when working in a power loom factory which would be extremely difficult as a handloom weaver. Some have migrated to nearby villages to work as salespersons in gold and clothing stores. According to one of the community members who was interviewed during the field visit, since COVID-19, people are feeling isolated and disconnected from government services, and losing livelihood opportunities by living in villages, therefore migrating to cities.

While the shift from weaving affects the future of the craft, in these districts, it is also impacted by changes in other communities' activities. Specifically, that of the carpentry

community of Vadrangis[1]. This community makes wooden instruments necessary for weaving and the declining interests of the younger populace in the craft has caused weaving communities to search for and depend on people from newer places to meet these requirements. For example, East Godavari's weavers now depend on craftsmen from Chirala and Pendan city for these instruments.

5.2.3 Earnings from weaving

Earnings from weaving vary greatly based on the technique, design, end product etc. The weaving work is decided by the one who gives the order for weaving, and this can be the master weaver, society, or PC. Field work for this evaluation process revealed the below weaving wages, which is not an exhaustive coverage of the types of designs nor the types of materials in the region.

In East Godavari and Srikakulam, PC members have reported that the wages per warp can range from INR 2,400 (East Godavari) and INR 1,800 (Srikakulam) to INR 12,000. The actual wages vary based on the design and type of material. For example, PC members of Srikakulam have reported that they receive INR 6,000 per warp for Buta and INR 3,500 per warp for Kuppadam. They can weave roughly two warps per month. Depending on the designs and materials, some weavers take 10 to 15 days to complete a warp, and some can complete it in a week. Some weavers weave up to three to four warps in a month and some can weave only two warps in a month. So, the monthly income of the weaver members varies accordingly.

Non-Chitrika members have reported that they receive INR 5,000 per warp for Buta silk and about INR 6,000 per warp for self-design silk. They can weave around two warps per month. Members of societies have also reported similar wages per warp for cotton. People working with master weavers have reported that they receive INR 5,000 per warp and can weave around three warps per month. Thus, wages can vary from INR 10,000 to INR 15,000 per month.

In Narayanpet PC, women weavers' wages range from INR 225 to INR 500 per saree. Depending on the designs and yarn count, weavers' wages are currently INR 225, 350, 400, 450 and 500. Weavers who weave 80 count yarn are paid more than those who weave 40 and 60 count yarn. Weavers usually take one to three days to weave a saree. If the design is complicated, then weavers take more time. The monthly income of the weavers is between INR 2,000 to 5000.

In Guntur, women working on dobby design with zari border receive INR 3,000 per warp and master weavers pay INR 1,500 or 3,000 per warp for Checks sarees.

The monthly income of weavers, thus, is highly uncertain based on decisions (type of material, final product, design) made by whom they work for as well as their productivity, which can also be affected by multiple factors. This is captured by the response from a Chitrika member from Laveru village when asked about her monthly income *"Our monthly income from weaving is between INR 5,000 to 10,000. If we are in good health, we can earn INR 10000. If our health is not good, we can only earn INR 5000.*

[1] Vadrangi is a community in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana in India. They were part of Viswabrahmin group. Their traditional profession is carpentry. They are classified as Backward Class according to the national commission for backward classes.

Sometimes, we also earn INR 8000, depending on the number of materials we are weaving". Further, a non-Chitrika weaver from Guntur sheds light on the migration away from handloom weaving, *"the work in handlooms has reduced considerably and the wages are insufficient. So many people are now working at power loom factory as that is also related to weaving. If husband and wife both work in handlooms it is very difficult to earn Rs.10,000 per month. But in the factory even if one person is paid Rs.6000, both husband and wife together earn Rs.12,000 a month. It is much better than working in handlooms."*

5.2.4 Gender Context

Across all districts, norms around working women have become liberal due to rising prices and the need for resources for better education of younger generations, as well as financial strain caused during COVID-19. However, there still exists division of labour at the household level and within the weaving value chain based on traditional weaving roles. Household work is primarily considered to be the woman's responsibility and men are the decision makers. A Project In-Charge also indicated that they have to often approach men of the household when mobilizing the community, as it is still the men who perform the administrative formalities and perform a major part of weaving, even if membership is given to the women.

The next sub sections highlight different aspects which have a bearing on women's work in these locations, such as mobility and gender roles.

5.2.5 Women's mobility

Women in all four districts can move around in their own village without any restrictions but are usually accompanied by someone when traveling outside their village. There is no clear preference for the companion to be a male – it could be their husbands, neighbours, friends, women from SHGs, etc. Most of the concern around women travelling outside villages was attributed to the lack of reliable, timely, and safe transport.

In all four districts, women rarely go out to buy groceries despite no restriction due to norms. They are not used to going out to purchase groceries and prefer prioritizing household chores or weaving related work. When asked about whether women could go out if they wanted, based on the responses it seems that younger women for whom it would be necessary to go out to schools or colleges face no mobility restrictions. It is plausible there are some age or marital status related norms are at play in Guntur.

In East Godavari, Guntur, and Narayanpet, women from weaving households consistently express that women from their castes do not work outside. The recurring opinion from both men and women is that it is acceptable for women (from non-weaving castes) to work outside as long as it is to support her family. The belief is that if a woman has to work outside, then the situation at her home must certainly be dire. A woman from Guntur's Adepalli village said, *"It is respectable if we stay at home and weave. I feel a little shame in doing the work I am doing but what can we do? People talk about us, they discuss that I am going and sweeping in hostels but what I can do, my husband is diabetic and has issues with his kidneys since past five years... People will talk about us, but will they give us money? No. So, we have to go and work."*

Some also mentioned that it is important for working women to conform to other norms such as not being arrogant about earning money. Working for financial independence or

women's own aspirations was mentioned only seldom. Similarly, in very few instances did people mention that women who work also take better care of children, become confident, and understand the world better.

In Srikakulam, norms around working women vary by villages. In some villages, women believe that villagers speak ill of working women. In other villages, respondents do not think that anyone would object to working women. In both type of villages, however, respondents agree that given the rise in the cost of living, women have to work to support the family and that, ideally, it should not be viewed negatively. COVID-19 has changed the situation for women working outside their homes, *"From last two years, the situation has changed. More women started coming out of their homes to work outside. Covid has forced many women to work. Women from our Devanga caste (a weaving caste) also stopped weaving during COVID 19 and joined other jobs."* Another woman noted the financial independence that comes with earning more money. She said, *"Some women who earn more money are independent and take their own decisions. We don't have that freedom to take our own decisions"*.

Restrictions around women's mobility among weaving communities can be attributed to gendered division of work within the value chain as well. Women usually perform pre-loom tasks and one such task is winding, which is a skill that men do not possess. Thus, if women ventured out of their villages for long durations, it would stall weaving work for even their husbands. Similarly, certain weaves such as Kuppadam requires the involvement of two people. Work can get stalled if women attend trainings that require them to be out for days, like the HMBA or go out for work.

Among all the PCs, the Narayanpet one has a work shed where women gather to weave unless they live very far away. Chitrika staff has noted that women who work from the work shed are better informed about the value chain activities, wage rate and are more engaged in the weaving work as their husbands do not accompany them to work sheds.

The extent to which SHGs can be credited for improvements in women's mobility is unclear. Some people, including husbands and Sarpanches, have credited SHGs for the liberalization of norms around working women. For example, a member's husband from Laveru village of Srikakulam remarked, *"Today, women have freedom to work outside, that freedom came with SHG. Women became confident after joining SHG."* On the other hand, there are instances where women's participation in SHGs is deemed beneficial only because it increases access to finance for the family. Women have very limited decision-making power even in the context of SHGs. This was captured by response of an SHG member from Guntur's Illavaram village, who said, *"We discuss with men at home and take loans from SHG groups. Without their support we can't even go to work. They are the ones who repay it. So, we have to have an agreement on taking loans from SHG".* A member's husband from Narayanpet's Jajapur village spoke on his wife's participation in SHGs, saying, *"Yes. I was not happy about her attending the meetings, but I had loans back then. So, it was a necessity for us, and she continued participating in the SHG since then. I personally hire auto when there is a meeting or drop her myself. She attends meetings and comes back home. I won't let her go anywhere else. The PC has asked us to send her to Hyderabad for training, but I refused. I told them that it is not accepted in our community to send women alone to far off places."*

These issues regarding women's mobility affect Chitrika's operations. In some regions, this implies a limited ability to travel to work sheds for employment or to participate in external trainings or exposure visits. For example, 50-year-old Vijay Rao from Laveru village whose wife is a member in Srikakulam PC says, *"Through these trainings, my wife has learnt a lot about weaving and new designs. By attending trainings my wife has become more confident and active."* However, women have also reported that villagers have questioned their stepping out for trainings and travel to Hyderabad. One of Srikakulam PC's members said, *"The men have passed comments on us saying these women are going like men to Hyderabad."*

5.2.6 Gender roles and self-efficacy

Across all districts, there is gender-based division of weaving related activities. Within the pre-loom activities, women usually undertake reeling thistles, bobbin winding, and spinning, whereas men undertake warping, street sizing, and attaching warp to the beam.

Women across districts perform housework and weave in between that work throughout the day. Typically, a woman's day starts early in the morning around 5-6 am with household work (cleaning, preparing breakfast, getting children ready for school) while her husband weaves. A woman usually starts weaving between 8-10 am for a couple of hours until lunch, during which time her husband rests and she resumes weaving in the afternoon until before dinner. Some women also weave again in the night. This schedule differs if both have to weave together for certain types of fabrics or weave patterns such as Kuppadam. However, the responsibility of taking care of household chores still rests upon the women, which has implications for program implementors. Not only does it reduce the number of hours women can devote to weaving, managing a household schedule can prevent or make it difficult for women to participate in group trainings and require smart planning from the implementors/instructors to accommodate larger numbers of women.

Women's interest in taking up sizing and other weaving tasks that men perform is usually low. Kalyani from East Godavari's Bandarulanka, in her interview said *"The tasks that men do like sizing is very difficult for women because it needs pressure to be put on the yarn. Even if given training, I don't think women can take up this role."* Women and men both highlight that the work men do involves a lot of strength and hence women are not suited to do them. As explained by 50 years old Maheshwar from Srikakulam's Laveru *"In street sizing, the yarn is stretched between two opposite ends of the stand. The starch is applied to the whole yarn with the help of a pump. After this, men brush the applied starch on to the whole yarn. The brush is very heavy to carry, and it needs to be applied pressure to distribute the starch onto the yarn. Therefore, it's difficult for women to do this activity."*

There are exceptions to this. Some unmarried or widowed women currently perform all activities including sizing. Sometimes, women take up sizing as a group since it requires two to three people and women do not want to do this activity with men. A very small number of women show interest towards learning new skills. Some were very optimistic towards the prospect of learning how to correct designs and some women, from East Godavari and Narayanpet, were also confident that they could learn warp attachment to the beam, which is another task mostly performed by men.

Across all PC's, membership is provided solely to women. In Srikakulam, membership was previously provided to men but was changed to women-only members a few years ago. Despite the rule of women-only members, in East Godavari and Srikakulam men's involvement remains significant. According to Chitrika staff, due to the shift of men's occupations out of the weaving sector and the presence of a work shed, men's involvement in weaving is relatively low in Narayanpet as compared to other districts.

5.2.7 Autonomy and decision-making

In East Godavari, Narayanpet, and Srikakulam, there is a lack of interest as well as confidence to take on leadership positions, as it entails increased responsibility such as more work, travel for marketing and business development. Women are aware of these aspects and therefore, are apprehensive to take up these positions. Their concerns include lack of support for household work, the extent of travel they would have to undertake without their husbands, and lack of knowledge of how societies or Producer Companies work. For example, the East Godavari PC office is located in a town called Mandapeta and some of the current BoD members are located at distances as far as 40 kms from this office. Women also think that their lack of education would hinder their decision-making ability as BoD members. Their confidence in trainings to bridge the gap is low.

Some existing BoD women have expressed that they feel positively about their involvement in the program. A 52-year-old Kaveri, a member of the BoD from Srikakulam expressed that she was proud to become the President, *"It earns me respect and a good name in the society. I feel proud to say that I am BoD member and president."* She also believes that transferring money to bank accounts helps women to be financially independent.

Women from these districts often report that they are included in decision making along with other members but that the husband's word is considered final.

5.2.8 Social capital

The limited mobility of women discussed in the previous section also inhibits the development of social capital. In East Godavari, some villages are open to women attending meetings but even here, women do not actively participate in Gram Sabha and Panchayat meetings. It is the husband of female ward members' who attend the meetings on their behalf. In other villages, men's dominance in meetings is prevalent as highlighted by East Godavari's Bandarulanaka village's Sarpanch. She said, *"Because I am a woman, male ward members of Gram Panchayat don't take me seriously. They also don't respect my opinions. They try to silence my voice. Male ward members don't respect women, and they believe that women can't run political offices. They did not let me do my work many times."*

However, in both types of villages, there is slow rise in women's participation either as volunteers or ward members. Women's interaction across communities is limited since most of the people in their vicinity are related and are the point of contact for weaving as well as non-weaving related discussions. When asked who would support them during times of distress, most respondents seemed confident that their neighbours/friends (who are also their relatives) would help them in case of financial difficulties. This was also said based on their past experiences of being in similar situations.

The community patterns of living can also affect the type of people women know or interact with daily. It is common for weaving communities to live close by across all districts. Women of East Godavari specifically mention that most of their neighbours are also their relatives. While this could be the case even in Guntur, Narayanpet, and Srikakulam, women of these regions do not specifically mention such a habitation pattern. It is likely that women and men in the latter regions would have a slightly diverse set of relations in their networks simply because of the increased opportunities for interactions with people other than their relatives. In Guntur and Narayanpet, people express less confidence that their neighbours would help them during financial crisis since they are aware that the financial condition of the community in general is poor and would not be able to spare money even though they would trust each other if they had the means. In Guntur, women usually approach experienced male weavers in the vicinity if they need help with weaving related problems. In Narayanpet, since financial help from neighbours is limited, SHGs or family/relatives are a more commonly used source for financial support.

5.2.9 Access to resources

The state government has various schemes that provide direct grants to weaving households. Weavers, however, complain that these grants are insufficient to ensure the profitability of the occupation. For instance, the Andhra Pradesh government runs the Nethanna Nestham Scheme through which INR 24,000 is credited each year directly into the bank accounts of the weavers who have their own looms. However, Chitrika members in East Godavari said that this level of support is insufficient. They believe that they deserve higher wages for the weaving work. A respondent also expressed concern about how a shift in government can cause instability for the future of the scheme and hence cannot be a substitute for good wages.

Non-members in different villages had different reactions. Non-members of East Godavari's Nalluru village think the scheme is good, since it provides additional assistance for household expenses or loan repayment. On the other hand, non-members of Someswaram village of East Godavari district echo a desire for higher wages and are not satisfied with the scheme alone. This is similar to the responses of most people in Guntur and Srikakulam who said that the INR 24,000 were not sufficient nor a substitute for better wages. Some respondents in Guntur also mentioned that several more schemes existed but were not implemented, such as the Samarth program by the central government. A master weaver from Guntur's Addepalli village highlighted that some people disproportionately benefit from schemes because of their poor design. He said, *"I bought my yarn from Rajole society and Charukupalli society (yarn sales depot) or from Chirala. They buy the yarn from National Handloom Development Corporation Limited (NHDC). The government has given yarn-identity cards to some people which give(s) them the eligibility to sell yarn. These cards were also useless as one person took monopoly of yarn purchase from NHDC and all the people with cards had to approach him instead of directly purchasing from NHDC and the entire process was tiresome."* People from Narayanpet complained about the difficulty of acquiring necessary documents such as GI tag number or weaver ID. They had not received these essential documents to become the scheme beneficiaries despite practising weaving for years. In this context, Chitrika's success will clearly depend on its ability to significantly improve the returns to weaving households through aggregation, market linkage and training. In

the absence of significant income gains, the decline in the numbers engaged in weaving are likely to continue.

In East Godavari, both members and non-members report taking loans from master weavers or societies. Members also reported that Producer Companies are a source for credit and finance. Both members and non-members mentioned that acquiring finance from banks is an arduous process since they are weavers and do not own assets to mortgage as collateral. They also find bank interest rates to be higher. When people take loans from master weavers, they are recovered by reducing the wages of weavers working for the masters. Mostly, loans are taken for wedding, health, loom repair, etc. In Guntur and Naraynpet, bank loans are difficult to secure as it requires numerous documents which is tedious for villagers to collect. In the Illavaram village of Guntur, it has been especially hard to secure loans since COVID 19. Even master weavers, who would provide loans until a few years ago have refused to do so. Non-members from Illavaram village of Guntur lament, *"no one is giving (loans) now. Since the COVID 19 lockdown we are just happy to get the wages on time".*

The field work also enquired about the sources of information for weaving related insights among members and non-members. This could mean sources for information about schemes or steps for getting GI tags, etc. as well as questions regarding weaving techniques or corrections. For members and non-members of East Godavari, the most common sources of information for weaving are Gram Panchayat volunteers. Other than this, non-members usually turn to societies and master weavers for information. For members, their fellow members or even PC staff serve as sources. Some non-members said they reach out to relatives who are weavers for information.

In Guntur, government appointed volunteers are the common source of weaving related information for both members and non-members. Some even reported approaching experienced male weavers for help regarding weaving. In Srikakulam, panchayat volunteers are the only mentioned sources of information for non-members. Members mention panchayat/government appointed volunteers and their husbands most often as relevant sources. Some report reaching out to staff and society members/staff. The members of producer companies in Narayanpet turn to staff and other members and neighbours while non-members turn to master weavers.

This suggests a possible role for Chitrika that may significantly enhance its value to weavers by helping weavers in securing benefits from different schemes. While Chitrika does help weavers in collecting documents and provides information, they do not try to secure schemes for weavers as a PC. Until 2014, Chitrika tried to secure benefits for its weavers, however, the process proved to be challenging because the rules make it hard to secure schemes for women weavers and also due to unclear recognition of producer companies as collectives.

Alternatives to weaving PC's: master weavers

Master weavers are an alternative to employment with Chitrika or with other cooperatives. People can weave independently, work for a master weaver, with societies, or with producer companies. After the power loom boom and associated reduction in demand for handwoven cotton sarees, there are little to no independent weavers in the region. Reasons for opting to work with a master weaver, society, or PC

depends on factors such as relative ease or difficulty of being inducted into the fold (of either a master weaver, society, or PC), available opportunities in the region, provision of raw materials, relative wages, etc.

Master weavers, especially in Narayanpet and East Godavari, have high regard for Chitrika and the work done by them, despite many weavers joining the PC who originally worked for these master weavers. For the overall benefit of the community, the master weavers have also encouraged weavers to join PCs since the wages paid there are higher.

Chitrika has not faced any attempts from master weavers to sabotage their work or mobilization efforts, except in a one-off event in Guntur. While selecting which village to work in, Chitrika would hope the following conditions be met:

1) Fewer master weavers or cooperatives
2) Villages with sufficient weavers
3) Villages which are easily accessible

Even though the first criterion highlights a preference for fewer master weavers, Chitrika notes that it is mainly to avoid falling into a loop of wage negotiations which can arise when there are many alternative employment options. The presence of master weavers does not affect their market penetration since Chitrika's products are unaffordable for local markets given their quality and weaver wage benchmarks.

Even with the positive opinion that master weavers hold towards Chitrika, their presence does impact PC's membership. Master weavers usually provide work for weaving cotton and silk. But in some regions, master weavers only provide silk weaving work. Weavers who have worked solely with such master weavers in the past are more likely to be trained in weaving silk only. Currently, Chitrika makes silk products only on order and plans to produce more silk products in the future. Right now, they focus on cotton since silk requires five times more working capital and is more polluting. Since Chitrika mainly works with cotton materials, the lack of practice in weaving cotton is cited as a reason for not joining Chitrika. Also, the wages earned while weaving silk is higher than that for cotton, and thus many weavers prefer to weave silk only. When asked about the advantages of working with master weavers, 56-year-old Priya from East Godavari's Nalluru village mentions *"Master weavers give silk materials to weave. Weaving silk gives us more wages."* 28-year-old Laxmi states *"I also weaved silk. I have never woven cotton before. I heard that Godavari PC only gives cotton materials to weave so I didn't join"*. Master weavers usually provide the warp for weaving, which weavers use to perform pre-loom and pre-weaving activities themselves. The finished product is also delivered back to the master weaver by the weavers. However, these tasks are usually performed by men.

The weavers' choice to work with a master weaver, society, or PC is based on various reasons, one among which is the selection criterion in place. Master weavers have certain rules that they follow when employing weavers. In East Godavari, master weavers only give warps to the weavers who have been weaving for a long time. Most of their employees are old members who have been weaving with them for many years. Some of them even weaved for their fathers. Only few of their employees are new members. When asked how they select new weavers, master weavers responded that

they check the quality of the woven materials before giving warps to the weavers. 49 years old Shivnaga from East Godavari explains *"Yes, weaving is a part of my family tradition. My father was a master weaver, and my grandfather was also a weaver. I took up my father's business 20 years ago. Most of our employees are old members, who have been working with us for many years. If any new member wants to join, then we check the quality of their weaved materials. If the quality is fine, then we start giving warps to them."*

Similarly in Guntur, master weavers said that they give warps only after checking their previously woven materials. In Narayanpet, master weavers take any person who can weave, but they should not have any pending loans with other master weavers. In Srikakulam, master weavers employ weavers after looking at their previous woven materials and also give sample materials at first to check weavers' skills.

Almost all female respondents from the four districts who work with master weavers reported that they preferred working with them since they provide loans whenever needed, even if the amount is subsequently compensated from their wages. While Chitrika's PC also provides loans, it is only provided against the member's savings.. Some women from East Godavari mentioned that master weavers continuously provide the yarn, allowing the weavers to continue their work without any break which is not the case with Chitrika.

Women weavers of Narayanpet were more comfortable working with master weavers since it offered a flexible schedule, and they also didn't have to worry about procuring raw materials or selling products. This is captured in the response of a woman weaver from Narayanpet who said *"we are convenient here with the master weaver in terms of time, taking care of children and there are no penalties. We have been weaving here for a long time and they are flexible with all of this."*

However, there are also certain challenges when working with master weavers. Weavers from all the four districts reported low wages vis-à-vis effort required as the major disadvantage of working with master weavers, even when weaving silk which already secured them higher wage than cotton. Weavers seem to be aware that master weavers sell their products for higher prices and make good profits. Yet these profits are not passed on to the weavers. Weavers also mentioned that master weavers don't increase wages for many years but are often the first ones to cut them during market fluctuations or at the time of crises, for instance during COVID 19.

Several respondents across all four districts also cited the poor quality of raw materials as another disadvantage. Weavers spend a lot of time weaving low-quality materials to ensure no mistakes. Some weavers from East Godavari, Narayanpet and Srikakulam mentioned that master weavers impose fines and occasionally refuse to accept damaged products.

Master weavers themselves have had to brave several challenges in recent years. One such being a rise in the price of raw materials which has doubled in the last few years. As an example, the price of one kilogram of yarn has increased from INR 3,000 to 6,000 in the last ten years. Rising prices coupled with the popularity of power looms has resulted in reducing the competitiveness of handloom products in the market. During an

interview with a master weaver, he mentioned, *"Power loom imitations of a Rs. 3000 Handloom saree can be produced for as low as Rs.1000. Which ones will the buyer prefer?"*

5.2.10 Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 had an impact on the entire weaving landscape, including the PCs, the master weavers as well as weavers. The PC's as well as Chitrika, being their accelerator, suffered setbacks in retail due to cancelled orders and lack of resources, which in turn had an impact on the scale of the program. For instance, the construction of work sheds by Chitrika, as well as its work under Swashakt project was impacted and delayed due to the outbreak of COVID 19.

Many weavers left weaving during this time because of low production and low orders. The displacement was more visible in Guntur, where many people took up other occupations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason was possibly the age factor, as younger people were involved in weaving in Guntur, unlike in Srikakulam and East Godavari. In Srikakulam, people who migrated to cities came back to their villages after losing their jobs during COVID times. Weavers who work with master weavers, societies, and with Chitrika reported that their work was impacted during COVID -9 especially during the first few months where there was little to no work given. However, some weavers from Narayanpet, East Godavari and Srikakulam 's did mention that they received help from Chitrika during COVID and found it useful to have been a part of the PCs.

COVID-19 was a major setback for all the master weavers. Reduced market demand translated to cut back in production. Some even stopped giving warps to weavers for several months. Lack or absence of availability of work with master weavers caused many weavers to quit working with master weavers completely during the pandemic.

6. Implementation – enablers and barriers

As aforementioned, this process evaluation was undertaken at the start of the project, prior to the scale-up intended during the project and hence prior to the transition to a high-value sector which Chitrika intends. Thus, the report identifies characteristics of the current process, paying close attention to those that would have to change if Chitrika is to transition into a high-productivity enterprise. The enablers and barriers are those that affect the (future) transition to a more dynamic industry. Thus, this section identifies aspects that Chitrika has already started putting in place, the returns of which will probably be seen down the road. It also identifies those barriers that can be addressed by Chitrika going forward.

6.1 Enablers

6.1.1 For Implementation

- **Innovations in training programs:** One of the most important steps taken by Chitrika to ensure the transition of the PCs into high productivity enterprise is the development of a structure that enhances skills and managerial ability. Chitrika uses various methods to engage and mobilize women, which also helps to boost the overall morale of the women. For instance, they organize exposure visits for women weavers to other cities like Hyderabad and cover their food and lodging expenses, as well as provide an honorarium to compensate for their foregone

income due to training. They engage with women in training programs and group meetings through movie screenings and case studies. They also have a recognition program to commemorate the work done by three chosen weavers in a year. Even during the HMBA program, women weavers were taken for exposure visits, provided with travel and accommodation facilities, and also some compensation for their training stint in Hyderabad to enable and encourage them to attend these trainings.

- **Setting up of work sheds**: A second critical element for high-value enterprises is investment in fixed capital that allows growth. Chitrika has done this through the development of work sheds. This allows improvements in productivity, but equally importantly, also allows the project to empower women. The work shed in Narayanpet offers proper working equipment, water, fans, comfortable seats to work which have a positive impact on the overall health, wellbeing as well as efficiency and work of women. These factors also enable women to work better and earn higher income. The rent for this work shed is managed by the PC. Work shed also offers a professional environment to the weaving work, thus increasing its traction among the younger population who are not keen on pursuing the profession.
- **Using local people for mobilization**: Chitrika has developed an innovative system of recruiting employees that draws on members from the local community. This not only provides employment, but also ensures buy-in from the local community. These mobilizers provide community members with information on the benefits of working with Chitrika. Because they are members of the same community, they are able to foster trust and enhance employment in Chitrika.

6.2 Barriers

This study clearly reveals that current wages, lack of growth and opportunities in the sector, and proliferation of power looms, among other reasons is leading to lack of traction among weavers to continue with weaving or join the collectives. Some of these barriers have been spelled out below. Although Chitrika is trying to fill this gap by providing skilling and managerial training, there are some challenges in its implementation as well which have been postulated below.

6.2.1 To formation of collectives

- **Challenges in mobilizing women to become part of the Producer Companies**: Forming a collective requires a minimum level of employment. One of the first constraints, or rather preconditions for forming a collective is employment at scale. Secondly, women need to pay a minimum amount for ownership to be part of the collective.

  When Chitrika mobilized these women to join the PC, they had to face some resistance and challenges. One main challenge for them was the lack of interest and unwillingness of some households to weave professionally. The mobilizer shares that despite multiple attempts at mobilisation, women from some households refuse to join the PC. He shares, *“we tell them they should join us and work rather than sitting idle. But they do not listen to us. The yarn is very thin now, and it takes a lot of hard work to weave with this yarn and the wages are also low. They say that they would rather sit idle or work in some shops than*

weave." A woman participant in Narayanpet also speaks about how weavers these days are educating their children with the hope that they don't have to weave professionally. She says, *"We weavers are providing education to our children so that they do not end up like us. The younger generations from the weaving households are moving towards other sectors, and also getting educated as there is no hope in the handlooms industry. Handlooms may end with the current generation that is engaged in it."*

Some women weavers in the intervention areas are also working with master weavers. Some of these women were mobilized by the Chitrika team, so they left employment with master weavers and joined the PC primarily for better pay at the company. However, other women, despite wanting to leave and join the PC, were not able to do so because they had taken loans from the master weaver and not repaid them. The PC staff member says, *"Master weavers also give credit to the weavers and that money is recovered by deducting some money every month from the wages. So many women cannot leave the master weaver until this credit is cleared."* The master weavers in some villages also don't respond well to Chitrika's presence and the setting up of the weaver's Producer Companies. They express concern over their production getting affected because of attrition issues. The Chitrika team shares that a master weaver drove them out in one village in Guntur by putting pressure and employing different tactics. Chitrika tries to mitigate some of these challenges by providing better wages at the PC to women, and encouraging a merit-based approach, wherein the better work they do, the more wages they can earn. In some cases, the field mobilizer mentioned that they approach the husband or men in the household, as their buy-in increases the chances of women's participation in the PC.

Thus, it is evident that for women to become part of these collectives, traction like higher wages, provision of loans, is required. This can be feasible through upgradation of their skills, new designs, better managerial techniques honed by these women. Chitrika is undertaking these initiatives through various trainings as aforementioned. However, since the data collection was undertaken after baseline, the impact of these interventions is yet to be assessed.

6.2.2 To implementation

- **Improving managerial ability**: Participants found it difficult to keep up with the course content and attributed it to their lack of education. A participant from Srikakulam highlighted "*I found everything difficult to understand. Many women understood but it was difficult for me to understand because I have no education. I have understood things related to weaving, rest of the things I did not."* Difficulty to cope with the course content due to lack of prior education was highlighted by participants of other (non-HMBA) trainings as well. These women also noted challenges related to the lack of practice and short nature of trainings such as that of the Design training. Women mentioned that they received training for only a day and was not sufficient. This was corroborated by a trainer from Narayanpet who had conducted training on Design for Chitrika and believes that people usually require a month to learn the requisite skills. There were also space constraints to practice in design trainings, like buta training, where women need to practice during training.

- **Alternative employment opportunities with master weavers:** As aforementioned, master weavers occupy the major share of the work being done in the handloom industry, and thus, despite better wages provided by the PC and democratisation of income, many weavers prefer to work for the master weavers. Apart from the provision of loans and credit provided by master weavers, the social capital and social network of master weavers is strong in these locations (Mukund & Syamsundara, 1998; Bhagvatula, 2010). They handle the yarn, they know the market dynamics, and people from their caste who practice weaving. Master weavers prefer to work with families they know, and who practise weaving. Some of these master weavers have worked across generations with families, which consolidate the social capital and network. This is especially important in rural areas, where society is very much dependent on these inter-connected networks. They also work with silk, unlike the producer companies which work with cotton. Weavers earn more working on silk as compared to cotton, and thus prefer to work for the master weavers.
- **High attrition of employees and members in the PC:** There was attrition seen among the Chitrika employees which potentially impacts the project work. One of the reasons for high attrition was the low wages and income, which made retention of employees difficult. To ensure retention of employees at least for a certain period of time, Chitrika now signs a stipulated time period bond with them. Chitrika also observed that weavers would sometimes stop weaving for the PC for short periods to work as agricultural labourers or for MGNREGA work. In order to deal with this, Chitrika now has a minimum production requirement in a year that each member must fulfil in order to continue their membership. However, the issue of salaries not being commensurate to the work expected from employees is an issue that would need to be addressed.

6.2.3 The effect of socio-economic context on implementation and the program's potential impact

- **Challenges in attending training sessions**: Women highlighted some challenges they had to face during the HMBA training. Participants mentioned that having to stay away from home for weeks at a time proved very difficult since they could no longer take care of household chores, or their children and the burden would fall on other household members. Other household members were not always supportive since women from the weaving community, across all the four locations, had not stepped outside the house for work or other activities. Thus, apart from childcare and household chores, these women had to also negotiate with power dynamics within their families to attend the trainings. Chitrika provided accommodation, travel and some monetary compensation for the wages lost during the training sessions. However, participants found the monetary compensation to be inadequate. Chitrika also made it mandatory for BoD members to attend the trainings, failing which they could lose their position. This possibly reduced attrition levels during the training program.
- **Gender and power dynamics in the PC**: Some BoD members noted that the male employees in the producer companies try to undermine their power and authority. Social and gender norms prevalent in the region, especially among the weaver community, made it difficult for women to have agency despite being BoD members. For instance, women in the weaving community lack the freedom of

mobility, they face resistance from family members to attend training, going outside for work etc. Women are also responsible for childcare, household chores, making it difficult for them to move out of their homes. To mitigate this challenge, Chitrika has initiated separate training for BoD members to empower them and capacitate them in handling these situations, like the HMBA program.

- **Loss of traction for weaving among younger generations**: The younger generation from the weaving community are not keen on pursuing it as an occupation. Most weavers are above the age of 40. This is because of low wages in the sector, lack of growth and opportunities and changing aspirations among the younger generation as well as their parents. Many of them prefer to move to new occupations. Some try to learn new techniques in weaving due to decreasing profits (Apparao & Rao 2012). Traditionally, weaving starts at the age of 12 or 13 years. These young individuals are expected to weave after coming back from school or college. In the 1990s, weavers were dissatisfied and unhappy because weaving wasn't profitable, so they stopped teaching their children to weave – this means that the current generation of young people (20-30 years) don't know how to weave. Chitrika, through the Swashakt program, is introducing innovative design and management training programs like the HMBA, which can increase the traction for weaving among younger generations. However, it is too soon to have any evidence or information on this.

7. Recommendations

1) To facilitate production

- **Setting up a work shed with optimum working conditions for production can lead to improved quality of products, efficiency of women weavers, and social capital**: Having access to a work shed where women can come together and work is an empowering process, for more efficient work and the overall social capital of the women. This also leads to the women's exposure to all aspects of the value chain – end to end – which is not possible when they are working from home. Secondly, at home, most of the equipment (loom, chairs) using which they weave is made by men and with men's needs and comfort in mind. These do not consider the female build and physiology, which leads to ergonomic issues among women weavers (Durlov *et al* 2014; Siddiqui *et al* 2021; Pandit *et al* 2013). The work sheds that are being created for women weavers, including the already functioning one in Narayanpet, are sensitive to the health issues and comfort of women. This is good for their overall wellbeing, as well as for the productivity of the women weavers. The work shed provides better working conditions, including looms, fans, water filters, among other basic facilities which also facilitate efficiency, and in turn better income for the weavers.

  However, challenges remain in setting up work sheds across each location. The program management team at Chitrika pointed out that while they wanted to have work sheds in each location, it may not be feasible at this point in one of the locations. In East Godavari, the rent and land rates are very high – worth crores - which makes it difficult for them to rent a place. The work shed is being planned in other locations like Srikakulam, Guntur and Krishna, but it will depend on the cost and the availability of funds. It took some time to set up the work shed in

Narayanpet as well. The delay was also due to COVID-19, and the lack of funds with the PC. As of now, in Narayanpet, the space is rented from a master weaver who owns it, and a rent of INR 30,000 is paid by the PC for this space. Thus, one needs to be mindful of capital availability and cost constraints while scaling up such an initiative.

2) **To facilitate changes in the socio-economic context**
   - **Awareness generation sessions with family members, including husbands**: Some women mentioned that while the idea of a work shed is good and appealing, but highlighted that it will be difficult for women in the villages to work from there. This is because traditionally women weavers have never gone out of the house to work, and thus there is little or no acceptance from their family members. Thus, it could be beneficial for Chitrika to conduct awareness sessions with family members to help them understand the benefits of working from a work shed for the health, productivity, efficiency, and income of the women. Additionally, having the provision for a creche or space in the work shed for the weavers' children could prove to be helpful for the women. This could ensure that women who do not have support system at home can bring their children to the creche in the work shed and weave from there. Research also indicates that community awareness, especially with the help of influential members from the community, can lead to changes in social norms (Cornwall 2016; Quisumbing 2022 *et al*).

3) **To facilitate implementation**
   - **Customisation of the HMBA program for scale up**: While the HMBA program model and its curriculum is being changed from the first batch to next, it could be beneficial to adapt it based on the women's needs and challenges and the overall local context for successful scale up. Despite efforts by Chitrika, women weavers found it difficult to leave their families and domestic responsibilities and come to Hyderabad for a long duration. Identifying and splitting up the different important training components and conducting trainings of shorter durations in locations close to the weavers' homes – could be at the district level – might be more conducive to the scale up of this program. During our interview with the program management team from Chitrika, they mentioned that going forward, they would like to engage some of their trainees from HMBA program as trainers. This training of trainers (ToT) model would make embed sustainability to the program and can also have traction for the members. It is also important to explain to participants of the HMBA training, as well as their family members that learning these skills will lead to high returns of income in long run. As of now, they feel low probability of high-income employment after these trainings, which is combined with high costs they have to entail to attend trainings in the short run. This creates problems and resistance to attending these trainings.
   - **Setting up informal creches at the village level**: Given the importance of women working from work sheds and the challenges reported by the women in doing so, it might be beneficial for Chitrika to set up village-level informal creches. This would benefit several women who can't go to the work shed on a regular basis due to childcare responsibilities. The creche could also be an informal arrangement with a trusted woman in the village who would be paid to care for the weavers' children for a period of time. This could also be a rotational role played by the women weavers themselves.

- **Access to credit through the producer companies**: Some women weavers mentioned that the reason they were unable to stop working for the master weavers and join the producer companies, despite better wages being offered in the latter, was due to the loans provided by master weavers. Master weavers are able to use social network to affectively leverage their position and retain the weavers (Bhagavatula 2010). The program management team of Chitrika told us that all the three producer companies of Chitrika provide loans to its members after approval is shared by the BoD. This can prove to be an enabler for women weavers to join the PC and continue working there.

8. Conclusion

This report examines the implementation model of Chitrika, the weaving value chain activities, and various trainings provided by Chitrika to capacitate the women weavers. It also examines the various ways in which women weavers can collectivize. The study also looks at the overall context, gender, and social norms prevalent in these regions, especially among the weaver community. It examines the prevalent challenges in the weaving industry, that's also leading to its decline and possible mitigation strategies.

As mentioned earlier, under Swashakt, the project interventions are being implemented across five districts, four in Andhra Pradesh and one in Telangana. In three of these districts, i.e., East Godavari, Srikakulam and Narayanpet, Chitrika already has a strong presence. As part of Swashakt, they are mobilizing new women in these regions, but it is important to note that the implementation process is considerably easier for them due to the existing network and social capital in the region. It is possible that their prior presence also helped them to mobilize women to participate in the HMBA program which took place in Hyderabad. Despite the socio-cultural norms prevalent in the country that place several restrictions on women, Chitrika successfully completed the training program. It is, however, difficult to say if they would be able to do so in the future, when women are expected to stay away from their homes for several days. In Guntur and Krishna, Chitrika is setting up its operations for the first time. The process evaluation data collection was conducted only in Guntur since the process of mobilization of women had only started there. Findings showed that were evidently some challenges during the mobilization process. It will only be determined in the long run how the impact of the intervention differs in locations where Chitrika had an earlier presence, and where they are mobilising women and establishing operations for the first time. The creation of a work shed in Narayanpet, and the other districts as per plan, is crucial for collectivizing women in one place. This is important not only from an efficiency and productivity perspective, but also overall social capital, network, and agency of women (Cornwall 2016; Brody 2017).

Chitrika, as an organization, apart from focussing on the economic empowerment of women, is also looking at different ways to ensure the sustainability of its Producer Companies. It is evident that given the current state of weaving industry, it is important to embed the principals of sustainability within the PC model. Chitrika is trying to do that by ensuring financial sustainability, human resource sustainability and using sustainable technologies. Chitrika's policy to ensure financial sustainability is that if the PC doesn't become profitable in two years, they shut it down.

While working for a few years in these locations, Chitrika has also understood the importance of social networks to ensure human resource sustainability. An ecosystem in which women can survive and thrive, which ensures their well-being, and an organisation or collective which engages with the larger issues of the village in which they are working is critical to ensuring the sustainability. To this effect, Chitrika is working towards creating an integrated handloom hub (IHH). IHH is envisaged as a space where all of the value chain activities happen in one place. This would be compact with less of a carbon footprint. Along with the IHH, they also want to create a learning lab where all the kinds of trainings can be conducted – combination of social sciences, design and technology and management. This learning lab would also be a space for them to experiment with different/new kinds of technology – something that will work for people at the grassroot level. The idea is to create a community space to share ideas and work together. The trainings done at the learning lab will also have practical components. For this, the participants can easily go to the IHH which will be close to their homes, with all the production activities happening at one location. IHH has been envisaged under the Swashakt program, although its implementation is not under Swashakt.

As part of Swashakt, Chitrika has taken steps towards ensuring sustainability. It will be interesting to see how activities like capacity building of women weavers through the handmade MBA program and the other training programs, and the availability of the IHH once it is set up, reap benefits in the long run and offer lessons for long term sustainability of producer companies engaged in the weaving sector. Since this fieldwork was conducted immediately after the baseline, the mobilisation process was ongoing and few interventions had been initiated, like the first cohort of the HMBA program.

In the endline survey, it could be of interest to explore the impact of trainings on the skill, efficiency, and income of the women weavers. It will be good to understand the impact of these interventions on social capital, efficacy, mobility, confidence, agency, social network of women, aspirations and intrahousehold dynamics. It might also be interesting to explore if there is interest from women who are working with master weavers and are not members of the PC for the trainings being provided by Chitrika. The endline evaluations will aim to understand the impact as well as the barriers and facilitators that Chitrika faced, and their key takeaways for the long run.

Online appendix

Online appendix A: Tools

https://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/Chitrika-PE-report-Online-appendix-A.pdf

Online appendix B: Fieldwork Protocol

Guidelines for Swashakt Fieldwork

Online appendix C: Coding framework

https://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/Chitrika-PE-report-Online-appendix-C.pdf

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