



**Solar Powered Trans Kitchen
Madurai Tamil Nadu**

Background

Transgender community members, often met with repudiation, are dependent on India's vast informal sector to earn their living. Due to socio-cultural denial they generally end up in gig jobs including street side entertainment, prostitution and begging while struggling to find social affirmation. Covid-19 caused millions of job losses both in the formal and informal sector, further worsening the situation for vulnerable groups alike. An already isolated minority group, this transgender community in Madurai struggled to maintain their livelihood. As part of SELCO Foundation's (SF) overarching goal to improve livelihoods which includes strengthening micro businesses and vulnerable communities, the solar powered interventions capably complements the livelihood generation. The interventions are designed to support the end user's livelihood ecosystem. During the peak of COVID SF organized a food distribution drive for the frontline workers sourced from the transgender community, tying covid relief operations to livelihood sustainability. This is to enable a comprehensive livelihood ecosystem.

The Problem

Ms. Jeyachitra, the transgender community group lead, was into catering business for the past 3 years, specializing in biryani and meals. Further plans to start a restaurant of their own were met with several challenges. Having struggled to find a spot to rent for their restaurant, Jeyachitra lacked the resources to start their business. The impediments included lack of basic infrastructure including resources such as grinder-mixer, fridge and cooking-stove. Moreover, the grid system electricity is an expensive input cost to bear under the given circumstances. Further, the grid connection can be erratic interfering with crucial work hours. Therefore solar powered energy solutions to basic infrastructure can help eliminate irregularity with power connections. Solar powered solutions also reduce input costs in the long term as compared to grid.

The micro business unit's approach is conceptualized to create a decentralized ecosystem both in outcome and input - infrastructure requirements. It is to enable an enterprising business environment that creates employment opportunities locally. Therefore, in cases where there is no grid connection, solar power bridges that crucial gap or replaces grid connection alternatively to reduce input cost. The energy solution to an end user includes upgrading the resources with solar technology, enabling ownership/individual/group run enterprises and, creating channels for inclusive finance models.

Selco Foundation sanctioned funds to procure the necessary resources. The interventions are listed below:

- Solar powering the wet grinder, DC fridges 150 Lt - 2 Nos, Mixy, Lights and Fan
- Efficient Cook Stove - Tea boiler & Tava



Impact

- Alternative sustainable livelihoods to the transgenders' and improved socio economic status
- Enhanced Income and good market linkages for their products
- Process for scaling these projects among these vulnerable communities across the country with different NGO Partners and Government
- A successful financial model to emerge from this intervention as part of the existing business models. An initial study of this enterprise indicates that they would be able to pay back their EMI in 2 years with an interest rate of 12% (commercial bank rate) saving grid electricity costs typically charged 3000 per month for similar businesses.
- Selco foundation supported funds and enabled access to procure solar powered machines to start the restaurant business. The foundation contributed 88% of the funds. The total project cost is INR 5,95,00. The intervention, thus far, has had beneficial impacts upon a team of 6 transgender group including positive impacts on 20 households.
- Since this intervention in September 2021, Selco Foundation has engaged 20 transgender community members directly and indirectly reaching 30 community members.

Learnings/Practical Implications

The RMB unit's approach is to create a decentralized livelihood ecosystem for not only small businesses but also create opportunities for marginalized communities otherwise absent. The focus is on efficiency, transparency, and use of case study from piloted evaluations (such as this) to inspire commitments from various stakeholders (public institutions, local ngo Swasthi in this case) helping us expand multifaceted livelihood program to isolated minority groups. According to our initial analysis, an enterprise of this size would be able to pay back their EMI in 2 years with an interest rate of 12% with the energy costs offset alone and how it accords in loan repayments. This can help establish an evidence based successful pilot to showcase long term benefits for food enterprises alike. It highlights the sustainability of such programs based on cost - effective financial models.

As a larger goal of the livelihood program, the organization hopes to engage in conversations leading to implementations about how to best uplift isolated minority groups such as this. We aim to understand the long term impact of a multifaceted livelihood intervention program to scale in the near future. Further, the Foundation plans to partner with organizations working with vulnerable local communities to scale livelihood interventions and help them transition out of isolation/poverty and enable basic needs to lead a dignified life.



First Trans Kitchen in Madurai now open for business

VIGNESH V @Madurai

JEYACHITRA, Rubika, and 13 other transpersons started a new chapter in their life with the inauguration of their restaurant here on Friday. Madurai Trans Kitchen located at Panagal Salai near Government Rajaji Hospital in Goripalayam, is a first-of-its-kind restaurant in the district run and managed by transpersons. A similar initiative had begun functioning in Coimbatore last year, run by 10 transpersons.

The Madurai team had been running a catering service, Nambu Nayaki Amman Catering Service, for the past few years at Ulaganeri until the pandemic hit. Just like other businesses, they were forced

into a dry spell. It was then that the idea of a restaurant dawned upon them. With support from organisations such as Arghyam, Vritti Livelihood Impact Partner, Swasti, SLPMS and SELCO Foundation, they were able to set up the venture.

Although they got money from sponsors, no 'gentlemen' from the city was ready to rent out a building for them to run the business. "We ran from pillar to post for four months, until we met one Arunkumar Menon, who gave us the building," said Jeyachitra (43). "We are happy as the restaurant is near Government Rajaji Hospital. People who come here can have quality food at decent price," Jeyachitra added. At a time, the restaurant can seat 20 people.



Lunch being served at the newly inaugurated trans kitchen in Madurai | KK SUNDAR

NOT A PROFIT SOURCE, BUT A SOCIAL SERVICE

One among the 15 transpersons running the restaurant, Rubika, said: "Our customers are also an extension of the family. Hence, the objective of running a restaurant is not to earn profits but to serve the society."

Rubika (28), one among the 15 transpersons, said the work is equally shared among all of them, from preparation of food to supplying it and collecting bills. Though the restaurant has given a new colour to their life, Rubika said they would continue to run the catering service for it provided them a platform to rise.

All of them, although hailing from different regions of the State, stay together as a family in Ulaganeri. "Our customers are also an extension of the family. Hence, the objective of running a restaurant is not to earn profits but to serve the society," Rubika said.

The restaurant was inaugurated by District Collector Dr S Aneesh Sekhar.

Trans Kitchen inaugurated in Madurai

'It will play a great role in removing the stigma surrounding trans people'

STAFF REPORTER
MADURAI

In a first-of-its-kind initiative in the city, Trans Kitchen, a hotel run by a group of transgender people, was inaugurated near Goripalayam junction on Friday morning.

Swasti, an organisation that has been working towards the upliftment of marginalised people across 20 districts in the State, funded for the initiative, in association with organisations like Arghyam, Virutti and Sri Lakshmi Pengal Munnetra Sangam.

Priya Babu, Regional Programme Manager at Swasti and transgender herself, believes that the hotel will play a great role in removing the stigma surrounding trans people, apart from providing them with a reliable form of employment.



Collector S. Aneesh Sekhar inaugurated a hotel run by a group of transgender people in Madurai on Friday. ■ G. MOORTHY

She says, "There is no better way to connect with a human than serving them with tasty food. In that way, this hotel will pave way for trans people to form connections with the public who are generally hesitant to communicate with us."

The hotel which sells food at a nominal price is also planning to provide free hot water to the public and free milk to the quantity of 100 ml to mothers of infants who reach out to them.

"We want to show the society that we are socially responsible too," adds Priya.

Headed by T. Jayachitra, the hotel has 11 other trans persons as employees who will be working on a shift basis. Jayachitra says that people in the surrounding have already responded positively to their hotel.

SELCO Foundation has extended its helping hand to the hotel by ensuring that 80% of the power consumption inside is done using solar power.

They had installed a wet grinder, freezers, a mixie, juicers, lights and fans that can function using solar power.

The restaurant was inaugurated in the presence of Collector S. Aneesh Sekhar on Friday morning.