Working Women's Forum (India) was born out of an activist commitment to facilitate women in extreme poverty, in terms of organized platform, access to credit, education, healthcare, training/orientation towards promoting social and financial independence to fight poverty, matching the objectives of millennium development goals of the United Nations. Taking responsibilities to organize these poor women around their own households, markets, communities and neighbourhoods, the forum initiated its maiden endeavour in the year 1978 with 800 women, now a social movement of 11,03,726 women in three southern states of India in 14 branches spread over 3676 villages and 2270 slums. The forum's success lies in its innovative attempt to integrate the poor women at all levels in its institutional framework, using them as an effective delivery mechanism to reach other poor women extensively.

Indian Co-operative Network for Women, as an effective wing of WWF enhances the social/financial independence of poor women, provides low interest loan encouraging their entrepreneurship. The credit programme of ICNW reaches over 5,00,092 poor entrepreneurs effecting nearly 1745.45 million rupees accomplishing about 98.85% recovery rate in the urban slums/rural areas.

National Union of Working Women, WWF’s trade union wing facilitates the poor women in their struggles to fight for labour, land and housing rights of poor working women and their children. Equally union's concern is to fight other human rights issues like female foeticides, female infanticides, child prostitution and child labour that affect the poor on a daily basis.

Further, WWF’s Reproductive Health Care programme builds a strong network of cadres in slum/village neighbourhood who constantly raise the consciousness of the poor women on their reproductive rights (including HIV/AIDS). Crucial to the programme was the enhancement of the decision-making power of...
women on their reproductive rights, with reference to number of children and contraceptive choices. The programme impacted nearly 16,18,842 families (1.5 million) accomplishing 72% couple protection rate in the poorest communities, providing employment to 960 grassroots health cadres spread out to 720 slums and 340 villages.

The initiation of social security programme for poor women impacted, maternity benefits and insurance cover to over 772891 women for life, disability and health aspects. Networking with several insurance companies, WWF has evolved a comprehensive social security programme for its members such as life insurance, health insurance disability insurance and accident insurance. WWF transfers its expertise through training and orientation to other NGOs in the country. The solid grassroots character of the organization has been maintained inspite of the organizations' amazing growth over 30 years.

The current liberalization and economic restructuring does not benefit the poor in India as elsewhere, with 41% living below poverty line, WWF is a future oriented multi-pronged initiative and a pro-poor strategy helps the Indian poor women to face the onslaught of globalization. Currently, WWF's initiative is to transfer this strategy of pro-poor advocacy to other NGOs through orientation. In conclusion, WWF believes in moving along a transitional path between market responses and social demands with an imperative gender focus.

Dr. Jaya Arunachalam, President, Working Women's Forum (India) a pioneer in social mobilization-strategy committed to transform over a million women in extreme poverty into powerful and confident leaders of many households, equal partners in community/neighbourhood. A graduate in Economics and Geography, Diploma in Management, Washington, USA, was awarded ‘Padmasri’ in 1987 by the President of India for her distinguished services among the poor, Stree Shakti Puraskar by the Tamil Nadu State Government in 2002. Internationally she was awarded Honorary Doctorate from the University of Lueenburg (Germany) in 1999; International Activist Award by the Glietsman Foundation, USA in 2003; Global Leadership for Economic Development by Vital Voices, USA, in 2005; 12th Mandavelli Award from Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands in 2006. Besides she has received several honours/awards from many civilian organizations in India for replication of WWF's model among other poor women entrepreneurs in other parts of India through training/orientation. She joined former U.S. President Hon'tle Mr. Bill Clinton for a two day meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) Asia Meet, Hong Kong on December 2 & 3, 2008 to share the exemplary work of working Women's Forum (India).