

MOUNICA POGULA

Logging in from Pothulamadugu

In a small village in Telangana, digital empowerment didn't arrive with big infrastructure. It began with one woman, one smartphone and the determination to lead.

As part of the Mera Gaon Mera Pride (MGMP) program, Samhita-CGF worked in partnership with local organisations in Telangana's Mahbubnagar district to empower women through digital and financial literacy, health awareness, and livelihood training. The program focused on equipping women with practical knowledge and skills to access government schemes, improve their health outcomes, and build pathways to economic independence. This is the story of one such woman we met - Mounica Pogula who not only trained with us but helped us reach those who needed the program most, and continued supporting her community long after the sessions were over.



When we travelled to Mahbubnagar district in southern Telangana, the terrain shifted around us. Stretches of dry, red soil typical of the Deccan Plateau, scattered with paddy, jowar, and cotton fields, slowly gave way to small clusters of homes. The roads narrowed, broken occasionally by patches of dusty rocky land, and we began to see women balancing pots of water, bundles of firewood, or leading goats down winding paths.

Pothulamadugu, like many villages in the region, depends heavily on rain-fed agriculture and seasonal migration. Despite state investments in infrastructure and housing, access to consistent water, healthcare, and income-generating opportunities remains fragile especially for women. It was here that we were launching the Mera Gaon Mera Pride (MGMP) initiative — Samhita-CGF's flagship program aimed at building the capacities of rural women through digital literacy, financial inclusion, and health awareness.

Our meeting with ASHA workers, SHG members and the lady village sarpanch were filled with warmth and curiosity. The women were full of questions, ideas and a contagious enthusiasm. It was during one of these meetings that we first noticed the 27 years old Mounica Pogula. She stood slightly apart — observant, thoughtful. A BSc graduate and one of the few English speakers in the village, Mounica was confident. When she did speak, it was not to impress, but to understand. She wanted to know how the program worked, what it would offer, and more importantly what she could do with it.

Over tea one afternoon, she shared her story. She had studied hard, dreamed of a career and imagined a life beyond the boundaries of her village. But marriage and early motherhood and rising expenses forced her to take up any job she could find. Most of the jobs were low-paying and none of them aligned with her education or potential. ***"I had done everything right,"*** she told us. ***"But there was nothing here for someone like me".*** What struck us most was her clarity. She wasn't just looking to improve her own life, she wanted to bring others along.



Mounica joined the MGMP training sessions — six core modules covering digital literacy, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, social security, menstrual health, and childcare. She was a quick learner, often staying back after sessions to ask questions or assist others. In the days that followed, she volunteered to support our intervention. Soon she became one of our core volunteers and joined our door-to-door campaign, speaking to women, reassuring them, helping us translate not just the language but build trust.

She created and managed Whatsapp groups to mobilise participants, taught women how to navigate YouTube and Facebook and explained how to use digital platforms for health, banking and business. She often worked with them one-on-one to scroll through the internet for relevant ideas, and developing and accessing informative or promotional videos. Her comfort with technology grew and so did her confidence. As part of our extended team, she helped us reach over 10,000 individuals, including youth and women, across 10 villages in Mahbubnagar district.



Along the way, Mounica discovered a deep interest in systems and data. She began organising meetings on Google Meet, brushing up on Excel and Word through online courses, and exploring more ways to use digital tools for community development. She also trained as a MeeSEVA Kendra operator in a nearby village helping over 500 women access government benefits, and facilitating open, stigma-free conversations around menstrual health and hygiene.

Mounica also played a vital role in strengthening the program's health outreach in both Pothulamadugu and Hasnapur. She brought together key local figures from the village like the medical officer and school headmaster to community health workers to support and attend Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) sessions. One of her most meaningful contributions was helping onboard a local nurse from the Obstetrics department of the Government Medical College. With support from the Samhita CGF team, the nurse was trained alongside master trainers to continue delivering SRH sessions ensuring that the work would continue beyond the formal program.

One of her other contributions was setting up a Sanitary Pad Kiosk in her village, a safe space for women to gather, learn, and talk about health concerns that were otherwise kept silent. For Mounica, it became a way to earn and a way to serve.



Today, Mounica hopes to set up a dedicated MeeSEVA Kendra in Pothulamadugu, so that people no longer have to travel to the neighbouring village to access government services. Through the MGMP program, she began earning in small but meaningful ways by supporting self-help groups, distributing sanitary pads, and helping others access digital government schemes. These experiences gave her more than just an income. They gave her confidence, purpose, and the belief that she could lead.

Now, she wants to help more women apply for loans, manage debt, and use digital tools to build micro-enterprises. ***"When a woman manages things on her own,"*** she says, ***"people start to respect her. When you're managing so many responsibilities on your own, being respected means a lot."***

