



# Action Lab for the Inclusion of Transgender & Gender-Variant Youth in Mainstream Livelihoods in India.

*An adaptive, community-anchored model piloted across Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, India —translating evidence into dignified, enterprise-led livelihoods.*

## AUTHORS

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**338**

Individuals reached across 7 districts

**56**

Trained in enterprise-based livelihoods

**4**

Livelihood models piloted in 2 states

## AT A GLANCE

The Action Lab is a joint initiative of CIRDAP and NIRDPR that grounds livelihood design in the lived experiences of rural transgender and gender-variant youth — combining demographic mapping, community-anchored service camps, and entrepreneurship-based pilots in coconut-shell craft, apparel, mushroom cultivation, spice processing and poultry.

## ALIGNED SDGs

**SDG 1** No Poverty · **SDG 5** Gender Equality · **SDG 8** Decent Work · **SDG 10** Reduced Inequalities

## 01 · Background

Transgender and gender-variant youth in India face systemic barriers to education, employment, and social inclusion, resulting in multidimensional poverty and marginalisation. In response, the **Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP)** and the **National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR)**, Hyderabad, have collaborated on an action research project — Action Lab for the Inclusion of Transgender and Gender-Variant Youth in Mainstream Livelihoods.

The project addresses socio-cultural, context-specific livelihood complexities through iterative, adaptive solution-building, implementation, learning and course correction. By grounding interventions in lived experiences of rural transgender and gender-variant youth, the Action Lab develops sustainable models that foster meaningful inclusion in the mainstream economy — designed with sensitivity to ethos, cultural sensibilities, and safety concerns of beneficiaries.

### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Establish **Action Labs** as innovation hubs for livelihoods.
- Collaborate with national initiatives to **combat multidimensional poverty**.
- Develop an inclusive **policy framework**.
- Provide **technical support** to livelihood initiatives.
- Run **collaborative interventions** across sectors.
- Document and disseminate **best practices**.
- Bridge gaps in skills, employment, resilient livelihoods, and **entrepreneurial leadership**.

## 02 · Key Interventions

Two complementary streams shaped the work: a **Livelihood and Demographic Mapping Study** in West Bengal that surfaced community needs across demographics, access, inclusion, and health; and **entrepreneurship-based livelihood models** under the Action Lab — coconut-shell crafting, apparel stitching, mushroom cultivation, and spice grinding — designed to strengthen local economies and individual agency.

### 2.1 Mapping Study — West Bengal, India

Eight service camps were conducted across seven districts — North & South 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Hooghly, North & South Dinajpur, and Malda — reaching **338 transgender and gender-diverse individuals**, well above the initial target of 150.

Camps offered material support (bedsheets, pillow covers, backpacks, sarees, blankets, side bags) alongside health services including HIV, VDRL, Hepatitis B & C testing and general check-ups — a dual focus on dignity and well-being.

### Survey insights spanned three dimensions

#### DEMOGRAPHICS

- **Gender Identity:** Captured both self-identified gender and cultural gender identity perspectives.
- **Age:** Age group-wise distribution highlighted generational differences.
- **Urban-Rural Ratio:** Provided clarity on disparities in access to resources.
- **Caste and Religion:** Offered intersectional insights into diversity and challenges faced.

#### ACCESS AND INCLUSION

- **Email Access:** Measured digital connectivity.
- **Literacy Rate:** Assessed through the ability to sign one's name.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Evaluated access to bank accounts, savings, and government documents.
- **Tech Savviness:** Determined readiness for digital skill-building programs.

#### SOCIAL AND HEALTH INDICATORS

- **Mental Health Conditions:** Documented prevalence and highlighted need for psychosocial support.
- **Education and Skillset:** Mapped existing qualifications and competencies.
- **Livelihood:** Captured current professions, monthly income, and professional aspirations.
- **Violence:** Recorded experiences of discrimination and violence, underscoring the urgency of safe spaces.

Findings highlighted widespread educational exclusion, income precarity, and clear preference for practical, enterprise-oriented livelihoods — directly informing intervention design.

## 2.2 Entrepreneurship-Based Livelihood Models

### OVERALL REACH

- 4 training programmes
- 56 transgender beneficiaries
- 2 Action Lab sites

Rather than pursue a single pathway, the Action Lab tested **multiple enterprise models across regions**, recognising that feasibility, markets, and institutional ecosystems vary by geography. Models were developed iteratively — drawing on mapping evidence, community consultations, partner expertise, and institutional convergence.

### Action Lab 1 — Southern Region

#### Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, India · Coconut-shell crafting

<b>LOCATION</b>	Pollachi, Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu, India
<b>PARTNER</b>	Sahodari Foundation
<b>TRAINING</b>	3-day programme · 28–30 July 2025
<b>BENEFICIARIES</b>	11 transgender individuals
<b>BRAND</b>	COCOFRIENDS — eco-craft enterprise

The three-day programme equipped participants with skills to transform discarded coconut shells into kitchen tools, jewellery, and decorative items — tea cups, wine glasses, snack bowls, and sustainable lifestyle pieces. The group has commenced activities, marketed products under the brand **COCOFRIENDS**, and begun fulfilling customised orders.

### OUTCOMES

The training produced immediate and tangible results. Participants, that included one differently-abled transgender participant, successfully crafted coconut shell products, which received media coverage, amplifying the visibility of the initiative. Importantly, orders were placed for the products, demonstrating market acceptance and validating the quality of the trainees' work. This early success highlighted cocoshell craft as a viable livelihood option and created momentum for future skill development programs. By blending traditional craft with modern market demands, Action Lab-1 has laid the foundation for economic empowerment, social recognition, and long-term resilience among the transgender community in Pollachi, setting a precedent for future Action Labs across other regions.



Above · Coconut-shell craft training and finished products, Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, India

## Action Lab 2 — Eastern Region

### Baruipur, West Bengal, India · Apparel · Mushrooms · Spices · Poultry

<b>LOCATION</b>	Baruipur, West Bengal, India
<b>PARTNERS</b>	PLEQSUS India Foundation · USHA International
<b>BENEFICIARIES</b>	45 transgender individuals (15 per training)
<b>TRAININGS</b>	Apparel (15 days, Nov 12–26 2025) · Mushroom (4 days, Sep 15–18 2025) · Spice (3 days, Jul 28–30 2025)

### 01

#### Apparel Stitching & Allied Livelihoods

USHA International — under an MoU with NIRDPR — provided a professional trainer and 15 machines (14 sewing + 1 interlock; worth INR 85,000) as CSR. Trainees mastered six-cut *saya*, boys' school uniforms, girls' *kameez*, and reusable cloth tote bags — moving from **fear to confidence, doubt to determination**.

### 02

#### Mushroom Cultivation

15 individuals trained; indoor production set up on a bamboo-frame *Khar Macha* platform with mud flooring. Harvest is underway from growing cylinders. Schools, military barracks and prisons are being explored as steady institutional buyers for nutritional supply.

### 03

#### Spice Grinding

Practical instruction on drying, grinding, sieving and packaging — alongside quality control, food-safety compliance, branding and SHG enterprise models. Equipment installed; exposure visits to wholesale markets covered pricing, demand and competition.



Above · Spice processing and apparel training, Baruipur, West Bengal, India

In addition, **poultry farming sheds** were installed to seed a complementary enterprise that integrates with broader animal-husbandry livelihoods — selected for rural relevance and capacity to generate recurring income when managed collectively.

## 03 · Implications of the Initiative

### 3.1 Social Inclusion

- ▶ Builds confidence, dignity and self-reliance.
- ▶ Reduces stigma by showcasing skills and contributions.
- ▶ Affirms the central role of community-based organisations in mobilising, customising and sustaining.

### 3.2 Economic Empowerment

- ▶ Marketable skills in eco-craft, apparel, agriculture and food processing.
- ▶ Pathways to self-employment and micro-enterprise.
- ▶ CSR partnerships (e.g., USHA International) model scalable private-sector engagement.

### 3.3 Policy Innovation

- ▶ Establishes a replicable **Action Lab** model for inclusive livelihoods.
- ▶ Strengthens evidence-based policymaking through action research.
- ▶ Aligns with poverty reduction, Viksit Bharat 2047, skill development and social justice.

### 3.4 Institutional Collaboration

- ▶ Catalyses partnerships across government, NGOs, CSR and CBOs.
- ▶ Builds technical capacity and resource mobilisation for marginalised groups.

### 3.5 Long-Term Impact

- ▶ Scalable across India — livelihood hubs for marginalised communities.
- ▶ Contributes to SDGs 1, 5, 8 and 10.

## 04 · Policy Recommendations

01

**Institutionalize Action Labs** for rural transgenders within national skill development and rural livelihood programs, in collaboration with Community-based organizations.

02

**Expand CSR engagement** to provide infrastructure, training, structured mentoring, capacity building and market linkages.

03

**Integrate transgender livelihood models** into state-level rural development policies.

04

**Develop monitoring frameworks** to track progress and ensure sustainability.

05

**Promote knowledge-sharing platforms** for documenting and replicating best practices.

## 05 · Conclusion

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The project established Action Labs as innovation hubs for livelihood interventions, skill development and entrepreneurial leadership. **56 transgender individuals** were trained across four programmes in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, with tangible impacts on confidence, stigma reduction and dignified work. Partnerships with CSR actors such as **USHA International**, alongside community-based organisations, demonstrate viable routes to scale inclusive livelihood models.

Policy implications emerging from this work include **institutionalising Action Labs** within national skill-development frameworks, **expanding CSR engagement**, **integrating transgender livelihood models** into state-level policies, and fostering **knowledge-sharing platforms** to disseminate best practices. By directly contributing to **SDG 1, 5, 8 and 10**, the initiative shows the transformative potential of inclusive livelihood strategies.

The collaboration between CIRDAP and NIRDPR marks a significant step toward inclusive development in India. By equipping transgender and gender-variant youth with livelihood skills, the project not only addresses poverty but also advances **dignity, resilience and social justice**. The Action Lab offers a scalable framework for governments, civil society and the private sector to replicate and mainstream transgender inclusion across livelihood programmes nationwide — and across other **CIRDAP member countries**.

### JOINT INITIATIVE

- Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP), Dhaka
- National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad

### SUGGESTED CITATION

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