



Centre on Integrated Rural Development
for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP)

Unstoppable Spirits:
The Rise of Rural Women
in Asia and the Pacific

EDITOR

Dr. P. Chandra Shekara
Director General, CIRDAP

AUTHORS

Dr. Usharani Boruah | **Dr. Babu Kaji Thapa**
Gender Coordinator, CIRDAP | Former PO, (Research), CIRDAP



Unstoppable Spirits: The Rise of Rural Women in Asia and the Pacific



CIRDAP

Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific
(CIRDAP)

CIRDAP BOOK 2026

Unstoppable Spirits: The Rise of Rural Women in Asia and the Pacific

Year of Publication : 2026

@ CIRDAP

ISBN: 978-984-37-0628-7

Book Design

Arif Azam, IT Expert

Published by

Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP)

Chameli House, 17 Topkhana Road,

GPO Box 2883, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh

PABX: +88-02- 41053923, +88-02-41053924, +880-2-41053925

Office of the DG || Phone +88-02-41053920

E-mail: dgcirdap@cirdap.org, administration@cirdap.org

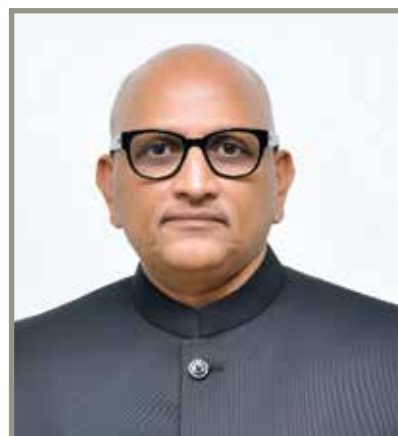
Website: www.cirdap.org

Printed by

Dot Ad, 31 Purana Paltan, K.R. Plaza 1st floor, Dhaka-1000

Editor:**Dr. P. Chandra Shekara, Director General**

As a leading Professional in the field of Rural Development and Agriculture, currently serving as Director General, (CIRDAP), Dhaka, Bangladesh. Dr. P. Chandra Shekara has more than three decades of experience towards integrated rural development, especially in the areas namely Agricultural Extension Management, Agri-Entrepreneurship Development, Agricultural Marketing Management and Public Private-Partnership. Dr. Shekara headed three premier National Institutions in India which work for the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India: Director General of CCS, National Institute of Agricultural Marketing (CCS NIAM), Director General (In-charge) of National Institute of Plant Health Management (NIPHM) and Director General of National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE). He published 84 Research papers including 27 books.



Email: chandradgcirdap@cirdap.org

Author:**Dr. Usharani Boruah, Gender Coordinator**

Dr. Usharani Boruah is currently serving as Librarian at the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP), where she also coordinates the CIRDAP Gender Programme and works as Project Coordinator for four CIRDAP research projects under the Women, Youth, and Rural Development Programme (WYRDP) in India, Iran, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. With over 24 years of professional experience in Library and Information Science, Dr. Boruah has worked across diverse institutional settings in Bangladesh and the Russian Federation. Prior to joining CIRDAP, she served as Librarian at several reputed organizations, including Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, the University of the Development Alternative (UODA), Dhaka, the Central Indian School, Moscow, Russia and the Embassy of India in Moscow, Russia.



Dr. Boruah has published numerous articles focusing primarily on Women's and Children's issues, written in English, Bengali, and Assamese. She has also compiled some CIRDAP publications, including two volumes of Success Stories in CIRDAP Member Countries (2014 and 2015), and two volumes of Rural Development in CIRDAP Member Countries: Aspiring Stories from Rural Communities (2017 and 2019). In addition, she is a contributing author to CIRDAP's international publication Integrated Rural Development Models of Asia and the Pacific Region. She is also the author of the article "Women's Good Health and Well-being," published in CIRDAP's book Integrated Rural Development in Asia and the Pacific: South-South Learnings, based on her webinar presentation. Her recent contributions include co-authoring the CIRDAP Policy Brief "Women's Economic Empowerment through Community-Driven Livelihoods: Lessons from Sri Lanka." (2026).

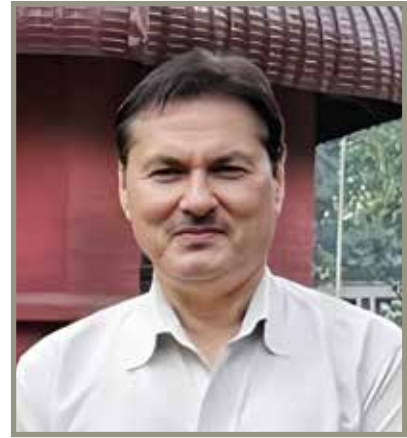
Email: usharani@cirdap.org

Author:

Dr. Babu Kaji Thapa, Former Program Officer

Dr. Babu Kaji Thapa served as the Former Programme Officer (Research) at CIRDAP in Dhaka, Bangladesh. His core work focused on research leadership, knowledge generation, and supporting evidence-based rural development programmes across the Asia-Pacific region.

Prior to joining CIRDAP, Dr. Thapa dedicated 24 years to the Agricultural Development Bank Limited (ADBL) in Nepal, where he rose to the position of Deputy General Manager. During his tenure, he played a pivotal role in agricultural credit and MSME development. Notably, he served as Project Coordinator for the IFAD-funded VITA Project and the World Bank-funded FPP Project.



Beyond banking, Dr. Thapa has an extensive portfolio as a researcher and social development expert. He has consulted for and led teams within prominent national and international organizations, including the Government of Nepal, UNDP (MEDEP), ActionAid, IUCN, GIZ, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.

Dr. Thapa holds a PhD from India, along with Master's degrees in Sociology and Public Administration (MPA), and a B.Sc. in Agriculture from Nepal. A prolific author and editor, he has contributed to numerous journals and books on rural finance and development. He is a frequent panelist at international forums and has presented papers in countries including Japan, Australia, China, Singapore, and South Korea.

Email: po_research@cirdap.org

Preface

United Nations General Assembly has declared 15th October as an International Day of Rural Women and March 8 as International Women's Day to acknowledge and honor women. Both the days are considered important to acknowledge the compounded challenges faced by women in terms of social, political, economic or cultural inequalities mostly because of their so-called disabilities, gender, religion and races etc. Being an institution dedicated for the rural development across Asia and the Pacific region, CIRDAP celebrated both the days by organizing an online live program inviting selected inspirational dedicated women to share their success stories from ten member countries across the Asia and Pacific regions. It is noteworthy to quote that United Nations, in recognition of CIRDAP's contributions to integrated rural development, has officially declared 6 July as World Rural Development Day, effective from 6 September 2024, which is also the foundation day of CIRDAP.

CIRDAP is an intergovernmental organization mandated to promote Integrated Rural Development (IRD) in the Asia-Pacific region through designated contact ministries and member-state link institutions. The CIRDAP's goal is to meet the felt needs of developing states and act as a servicing institution for promoting integrated Rural Development (IRD) in the region. CIRDAP reaffirms its commitment to transform the lives of people particularly rural women, positioning them not just as beneficiaries, but as the central drivers of a prosperous, resilient, and integrated Asia-Pacific future.

Despite immense contributions, the status of rural women in the Asia-Pacific region is found to be one of significant disparity. Women from the ten member countries who had shared their success stories were from the field of production of crops, running homestay, rearing poultry, keeping bee, handling dairy farm to processing and marketing of their products. Some of them also involved in creating awareness about environmental protection, women rights, child rights, education, food security and nutrition. During the online sharing program, rural women shared their stories of hard work, efforts and struggles that touched to all who participated the program. These inspirational women have perfectly showed them that women can do many things for their family, society and to the country as well. They found to be created employment to many rural people, their household income is increased and livelihood is enhanced remarkably. They have come out from their home boundary and proved themselves that they are the very next part of the coin. I strongly believe that; it would not only be honor to them but also be an inspiration to all women who are struggling for their livelihood across Asia and the Pacific.

I extend my sincere compliments to my fellow staff Dr. Usharani Boruah, Librarian and Gender Coordinator and Dr. Babu Kaji Thapa, Former PO, Research for their hard work from calling the proposals, organizing the event, editing the stories to bringing the stories in the book form entitled "**Unstoppable Spirits: The Rise of Rural Women in Asia and The Pacific**". I am very much hopeful that the readers will obviously be benefitted and encouraged by reading heart-touching stories of hard-working women featured in this book.

With warm wishes,



Dr. P. Chandra Shekara
Director General

CONTENTS

SI.N.	Story	Page No.
1	Defending Forests, Empowering Communities: Mrs. Delima Silalahi, Indonesia	1
2	Care to Collective Enterprise: Mrs. Umayanganie Senevirathna, Sri Lanka	4
3	The Architect of Inclusion : Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate, Fiji	7
4	Isolation to Inspiration: Ms. Shad Begum, Pakistan	10
5	Disaster to Discovery: Mrs. Chandramali Wijerathna , Sri Lanka	14
6	Cultivating Change on Less than a Hectare: Mrs. Jocelyn D. Reyes, Philippines	17
7	Resilient Journey to Leadership: Mrs. Hemmat Pour, Iran	18
8	Weaving the Success of Tribal Communities: Mrs. Manjulika Chakma , Bangladesh	21
9	Bustle of Kathmandu to Reviving Her Village: Mrs. Geeta Adhikari Pandey, Nepal	26
10	Rising from a 8× 8 feet Room: Mrs.Sagarika Mondal, India	29
11	Leader, Doctor and Rural Reformer: Dr. Thet Thet Zin, Myanmar	32
12	From Farmlands to Enterprises: Philippines	34
13	Enterprising, Empowering, Hygiene: Mrs. Saguna, India	37
14	Local to Vocal : One Woman, Many Livelihoods: Mrs. Parvaneh Pourang, Iran	39
15	Marginalization to Market Leader: Sajida Mumtaz, Pakistan	41
16	Struggles to Strength: Mrs. Sangeeta Dalai, India	43
17	On the Canvas of Integrated Rooftop Farming: Nasima Akhter, Bangladesh	46
18	Balibagada village to the World Stage: Mrs. Jyoti Reddy, India	49
19	Grassroots to Governance: Mrs. Kulsum Begum, Bangladesh	53
20	Life Woven with Resilience, Craft and Purpose: Mrs.Sharavva S. Daroji, India	55
21	Inspiring Journey of Integrity and Leadership: Mrs.Sri Wahyuni, Indonesia	58
22	Pathways of Local Leadership and Social Change: Mrs. Shiji James, India	61
23	Turning Hardship into Leadership: Ms. Sufia Begum, Bangladesh	63

Sl.N.	Story	Page No.
24	Humble Origins, Global Horizons: Ms. Sagarika Hitihamu, Sri Lanka	66
25	Turning Waste into Wonders: Ms. Luzviminda Cacanindin, Philippines	69
26	Self-help Group and Growth : Mrs.S. Sujatha, India	72
27	Decades of Service to Countless Lives: Ms. Khaing Cho Lwin , Myanmar	74
28	Honey Queen: of Mrs. Uma Kumari Khatri, Nepal	77
29	Hardship to Entrepreneurship: Mrs. Hinchavalli Nagasri, India	80
30	System Builder: Dr. Mehri Maddahi Kivi, Iran	83
31	Resistance to Resilience: Ms. Shahana Haque, Bangladesh	86
32	The Resilient Landscape: Ms. Antonia Mohametano, Philippines	90
33	Empowering Community Members, Transforming Lives: Mrs. S. Zubeida, India	93
34	Engineering the Resilience: Mrs. Mee Mee Htwe, Myanmar	96
35	Sculptured the Future: Mrs. Hadiseh Bagheri, Iran	99
36	Courage and Community Leadership Mrs. Anita Rani Bishoyi, India	103
37	Siembre Model: Ms. Emiliana Volante, Philippines	106
38	Income, Nutrition and Society: Mrs. Laggu Mounika, India	108

01. Defending Forests, Empowering Communities

Mrs. Delima Silalahi, Indonesia

In the mist-covered highlands of North Sumatra, Indonesia, where ancient forests have sheltered generations of Indigenous communities, one woman rose to defend what many believed was already lost. Mrs. Delima Silalahi's journey is a powerful story of resilience, justice, and unwavering commitment to the land and its people. Through years of fearless advocacy, patient community work, and courageous leadership, she has helped change the destiny of North Sumatra's forests. More than an environmental activist, Delima has become a symbol of hope—proving that when communities stand together and when women lead with courage, forests can be protected, traditions preserved, and futures reclaimed.



Mrs. Delima Silalahi, Indonesia

Roots of a Defender: Brief Biography

Delima Silalahi was born in Siborong-Borong, North Tapanuli, North Sumatra. Growing up close to the land, she witnessed firsthand how forests were not just sources of livelihood but the heart of Indigenous identity, culture, and survival. Over time, she emerged as one of Indonesia's most influential defenders of customary forests and Indigenous rights.

As the Director of Kelompok Studi dan Pengembangan Prakarsa Masyarakat (KSPPM)—a civil society organization dedicated to protecting customary forests—Delima committed her life to standing beside rural and Indigenous communities in their long struggle to reclaim ancestral lands. Her work was never about quick victories; it was about dignity, justice, and restoring the bond between people and nature.

A Historic Victory for Indigenous Communities

In February 2023, Delima's leadership achieved a historic breakthrough. After years of grassroots organizing, peaceful protests, and tireless community mobilization, the Indonesian government granted legal management rights over 7,213 hectares of customary forests to six Indigenous Batak communities of Tano Batak.

This monumental victory returned control of their ancestral land from a large pulp-and-paper corporation that had converted much of the forest into non-native



eucalyptus plantations. For the communities, it was not only the return of land—it was the return of identity, dignity, and hope.

Under Delima’s guidance, these Indigenous communities initiated forest restoration programs, replanting native species and restoring the ecological balance of North Sumatra’s rich tropical landscapes. Their efforts now contribute to creating critical carbon sinks, strengthening Indonesia’s climate resilience, and supporting global environmental goals.

Empowering Women, Protecting Biodiversity

At the heart of Delima’s work lies her belief in the power of women and Indigenous knowledge. Through her advocacy, she has empowered rural women and Indigenous groups to claim their legal rights, protect biodiversity, and strengthen community-based forest management rooted in traditional ecological knowledge.

Her impact is deeply personal to those she serves. As one Indigenous Batak woman shared with quiet strength:

“Because of Ibu Delima, our forest is safe for our children and grandchildren. She gave us hope that our voices matter.”



Ongoing Work: A Movement Still Growing

Delima’s fight did not end with the recognition of the initial 7,213 hectares. Her movement continues to grow across North Sumatra, reaching more Indigenous communities seeking justice and legal recognition.

Her current work includes:

- Mentoring and training Indigenous and rural women leaders, enabling them to participate actively in decision-making on land use, conservation, and community governance.
- Leading programs that integrate traditional ecological knowledge with sustainable forest management, ensuring biodiversity protection while supporting rural livelihoods.
- Collaborating with national and regional policymakers to strengthen Indonesia’s legal protections for Indigenous peoples, aiming for systemic and long-term change beyond her local region.

Through these efforts, Delima has become widely recognized as the Guardian of the Indigenous People, successfully defending management rights over 17,824 acres at Toba. Her work now serves as a powerful model of how women-led community leadership can transform environmental protection and social justice—not only in Indonesia, but across the world.

Impact and National Recognition

Delima Silalahi's achievements have earned widespread national and international recognition. Her movement successfully defended 17,824 acres of ancestral forests around Lake Toba, safeguarding the land for future generations. In 2023, her courage and leadership were honored with the Goldman Environmental Prize, one of the world's most prestigious awards for environmental activism.



The prize committee described her as:

"A visionary leader who has empowered Indigenous communities, especially women, to reclaim their ancestral forests and protect them from destruction." - Goldman Environmental Prize Committee (2023)

Her influence reached the highest levels of national leadership. Indonesian President Joko Widodo issued a formal decree returning the Pandumaan–Sipituhuta customary land to its traditional elders, officially removing it from the concession of PT Toba Pulp Lestari. President Joko Widodo stated that he was removing the Pandumaan-Sipituhuta traditional area from the PT TPL concession—a decisive moment in Indonesia's ongoing struggle for Indigenous land rights.

"When communities stand together and when women lead with courage, forests can be protected, traditions preserved, and futures reclaimed."- Mrs. Delima Silalahi

A Living Legacy

Today, Mrs. Delima Silalahi stands as a living testament to the power of perseverance and principled leadership. Her story reminds us that true change begins at the grassroots, that women's voices matter, and that protecting the earth is inseparable from protecting human dignity. For the forests of North Sumatra—and for generations yet to come—Delima Silalahi remains a guardian, a leader, and an enduring source of inspiration.



2. Care to Collective Enterprise

Mrs. Umayanganie Senevirathna, Sri Lanka

In the hill country town of Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka, where economic opportunities for rural women are often constrained by caregiving responsibilities and limited market access, Mrs. Umayanganie Senevirathna's story offers a powerful lesson in resilience, inclusion, and collective growth. Her journey—from a mother navigating profound personal challenges to a leader within a thriving women-led enterprise—illustrates how empowerment-driven development can transform not only individual lives, but entire communities.



**Mrs. Umayanganie
Senevirathna, Sri Lanka**

Today, Mrs. Umayanganie dreams of growing the Lady Chef Food Centre into a large-scale women-led enterprise that provides sustainable employment and skills training for rural women across Sri Lanka. Reflecting on the collective journey, she often says:

“Together, we have proven that when women rise, entire communities rise with us.”

Her words echo the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

A Mother's Challenge, a Woman's Resolve

Mrs. Umayanganie Senevirathna is a rural entrepreneur from Jayathilaka Mawatha, Nuwara Eliya, whose path to economic independence was shaped by caregiving, courage, and choice. Two decades ago, after giving birth to a son with a disability, she made the difficult decision to leave her job in order to care for him full time. Like many women worldwide, her unpaid care responsibilities limited her access to formal employment—an often-invisible barrier to women's economic participation.

Yet this challenge also became the seed of transformation. Through a parents' society for children with disabilities, she received training in bag sewing and batik making. Determined to earn an income from home, she started a small business. While market access remained elusive and income uncertain, she refused to abandon her pursuit of self-reliance. Her experience reflects the structural gaps that inclusive skills development and market linkages—central to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8—seek to address.

Turning Opportunity into Enterprise

A turning point came during a training session, when Mrs. Umayanganie met Women Development Officers from the Nuwara Eliya District. Recognizing her potential, they encouraged her to prepare food for official meetings. What began as a small catering opportunity soon opened a new chapter in her life.

Despite limited resources and the severe disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, she persevered. With support from the Divisional Secretariat and local authorities, she joined a group of women operating from a modest government-built shop, selling food and snacks. This collaboration marked her transition from informal survival activities to a structured, women-led enterprise—demonstrating how local government facilitation and community trust can catalyze grassroots entrepreneurship.

Lady Chef Food Centre: A Model of Women-Led Growth

With support from USAID, the facility was upgraded with modern amenities and formally launched as the Lady Chef Food Centre—a women-led food enterprise supported by the Vishaka Women’s Society and local government institutions. Starting with a small group, the initiative grew into a cooperative of twelve women offering home-cooked meals, short eats, and catering services.

Today, Lady Chef supports around 30 women across multiple outlets, operating under a fair income-sharing model where each woman earns based on her contribution. This approach promotes dignity, transparency, and financial independence—key principles aligned with SDG 8 and SDG 10. Mrs. Umayanganie is now a valued employee and active member of the Lady Chef team, contributing both her skills and leadership.

Skills, Solidarity, and Sustainable Livelihoods

Continuous training and mentoring by Women Development Officers have enabled the women of Lady Chef to strengthen their capacities in food presentation, customer service, cost calculation, and profit management. These practical skills have translated into real economic gains—some members now earn more than LKR 100,000 per month, a significant achievement in a rural setting.

For Mrs. Umayanganie, the impact is deeply personal. She is now able to provide quality education for both her son and daughter without financial hardship, contributing to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 1 (No Poverty). Equally important is the sense of solidarity within the group. The women celebrate cultural, religious, and family milestones together, creating a support system that extends beyond income.

Inspiring Change beyond the Kitchen

Beyond business success, Mrs. Senevirathna has become a source of inspiration for other rural women. She actively encourages collaboration, creativity, and confidence—values that strengthen social capital and community resilience. Her journey highlights how women-led micro and small enterprises can serve as platforms for leadership development, inclusion of caregivers, and economic recovery, especially in post-crisis contexts.

Her innovative food ideas, including her popular layered sandwiches, have earned strong customer loyalty. In recognition of her contributions, she received the Best Entrepreneurship Award in 2021 at both the Central Province and Nuwara Eliya District levels.

“Together, we have proven that when women rise, entire communities rise with us.”

- Mrs. Umayanganie Senevirathna

A Pathway toward Inclusive Development

Mrs. Umayanganie Senevirathna’s story demonstrates that sustainable development is most powerful when it centers women lived realities—care responsibilities, skills, solidarity, and ambition. Through partnership between women’s groups, local government, and development actors, Lady Chef Food Centre has become more than a business; it is a model of inclusive, women-led growth.

Her journey affirms a simple yet profound truth aligned with the SDGs: when women are supported to lead, earn, and care with dignity, families thrive, communities strengthen, and development becomes truly sustainable.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Umayangani Senevirathna, 30/2, Jayathilaka Mawatha, Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka

Mob: +94 072-4434306

3. The Architect of Inclusion

Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate, Fiji

In the heart of Fiji's journey toward social justice stands Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate—a woman whose life serves as a blueprint for leadership rooted in service. Her story is not merely one of academic prestige; it is a lifelong mission to champion the marginalized and transform the Pacific through the power of education.



Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate, FIJI

Seeds of Service: The Early Classroom Years

Dr. Kedrayate's journey began on the front lines of change: the local classroom. Starting as a teacher at the National Teachers College, she didn't just deliver lessons; she observed the systemic barriers facing young students. This hands-on experience led her to the Ministry of Education, Fiji, where she spent seven years weaving those grassroots insights into national policy. These early years grounded her in a fundamental truth: education is the only tool powerful enough to break the cycle of inequality.

A Powerhouse at the University of the South Pacific

When Dr. Kedrayate joined the University of the South Pacific (USP), Fiji, her influence rippled through the region's premier academic institution. Rising to become the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education, she became a formidable voice for integrity during eras of institutional reform. She was the chief architect of landmark policies that redefined campus life for thousands of students:

- **Gender Mainstreaming:** She ensured that equity wasn't just a buzzword but a requirement in university operations.
- **Protection of the Vulnerable:** She drafted the definitive policies on Child Protection and Sexual Harassment, creating a safer environment for the next generation of Pacific scholars.
- **Digital Leadership:** Long before remote learning was a global necessity, she led teams to deliver region-wide online training, ensuring that USP staff across 12 countries shared the same values of inclusivity.

A Global Scholar with Pacific Roots

Her pursuit of excellence took her across the globe, creating a bridge between Pacific wisdom and international expertise. Her academic pedigree is distinguished by a "global-local" balance:

- **The University of Glasgow:** Where she earned a Master's with Honors.

- The University of New England: The site of her PhD research.
- Harvard University: Where she underwent elite leadership training.

Despite these heights, she never lost her "Pacific way." She mentored countless educators, ensuring that as she climbed, she pulled others up with her.

The Consultant for Regional Change

Dr. Kedrayate's influence extended far beyond the ivory towers of academia. As a sought-after consultant, she became a vital link between international agencies and local communities. She collaborated with global giants like the ILO, Asian Development Bank, and AusAID, but her focus remained on the people. Whether training social workers in Fiji or developing community initiatives in the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, or Papua New Guinea, she ensured that policy reflected the "grassroots reality" of village life.

"Voices": Documenting the Pacific Woman

As a prolific scholar, Dr. Kedrayate captured the soul of her research in the written word. Her book, *Voices*, is more than an academic text; it is a collection of the lived experiences of Pacific women teachers. Today, it remains a core reference for Gender and Education courses at USP.

Her commitment to her own community was equally tangible. She spearheaded the Cocoa Plantation initiative in Vugalei, a project that blended local livelihoods with modern learning, proving that economic development and education are two sides of the same coin.

"When leadership is rooted in community needs and local livelihoods are strengthened through education and opportunity, national development and community advancement become more inclusive and sustainable." -Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate

A Pillar of the State

Even after her formal "retirement" in 2018, Dr. Kedrayate's sense of duty remained restless. She has been called upon to lead the nation's most sensitive and vital institutions, serving as Chair for:

1. The Fiji Constitutional Offices Commission: Guarding the democratic pillars of the nation.
2. The National Reconciliation and Unity Committee: Healing the social fabric of the country.
3. The College of Honour: Recognizing the contributions of citizens from the Office of the President.

Dr. Kedrayate notable national and community services within Fiji included:

Serving as the First Interim Chair of the Fiji Constitutional Offices Commission, Chair of the Fiji National

Reconciliation and Unity Committee, Chair of the Higher Salary Commission, and Chair of the College of Honour in the Office of the President of the Republic of Fiji. She also served as a member of the Fiji Public Service Commission, a member of the Fiji Education Forum, a member of the Joint Board of Higher Education of the Methodist Church in Fiji, and a member of the Central Divisional Development Board. In addition, she held leadership roles as Chairperson of the Adi Cakobau School Board and the Public Rental Board, President of the Fiji Girl Guides Association, and President of the Fiji Association of Graduate Women (FAWG). She also served as a Trustee of the Centre for Appropriate Technology and Development (CATD), contributing significantly to national development, education, leadership, and community advancement in Fiji.

Current Board Membership

Dr. Kedrayate's Current Board Membership includes serving as the Chair of the Education & Scholarship Committee for Tailevu Province, Member of the Tailevu Holding, Member of the Tailevu Provincial Council, and Member of the Methodist Church Holding. She also serves as Advisor to the Vugalei Women Development Projects, Chair of the First Nation Fiji Resources Foundation, and Member of the

i Taukei Land Development Board (TLTB). In addition, she is a Member of the Davuilevu (Methodist) Theological College and Academic Advisor/Consultant at the Institute of Leadership and Development at Pacific Theological College (PTC).

The Eternal Beacon

Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate's life is a living testament to the idea that true leadership is defined by who you lift up along the way. She remains a guiding light—a reminder to the entire Pacific that development is only sustainable when it is inclusive, and leadership is only meaningful when it is driven by service.

Contact Information:

Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate, Fiji

E-mail: kedrayate.at@gmail.com

4. Isolation to Inspiration

Ms. Shad Begum, Pakistan

In the rugged mountains of northwest Pakistan, where tradition often dictates silence for women, Shad Begum chose a different path—a path of courage, conviction, and transformative change. Born in Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan,—a region long marked by religious conservatism, militant violence, and systemic exclusion of women from public life—Shad grew up witnessing the injustices that most accept as immutable. But instead of bowing to circumstance, she resolved to challenge it.



Ms. Shad Begum, Pakistan

Inspired by her father’s engagement in social work, Shad began her journey as a teenage activist. At just 16 years old, she founded the Association for Behaviour & Knowledge Transformation (ABKT), the first women-led nonprofit in the Malakand Division. Her vision was radical yet simple: rural women are not victims—they are leaders capable of shaping their own destinies. She set out to empower them with education, livelihoods, and a political voice, planting the seeds of change in a landscape often resistant to it.

Her advocacy led to historic precedents in women’s right to vote. In her region, elections were invalidated twice by the Election Commission after women were barred from voting, the first such cases in Pakistan’s history. Her tireless activism contributed to a landmark national law requiring at least 10% women’s votes for an election to be valid, ensuring that women’s political voice can no longer be silenced.

Resilience in the Face of Adversity

When the Taliban seized parts of Swat and Dir, triggering a military operation in 2009–2010, hundreds of thousands were displaced. ABKT’s operations were uprooted, yet Shad refused to abandon her mission. Threats, displacement, and social pressure could not sway her. She led from within the crisis, believing firmly that “leaving would mean giving up on the women who need me most.” Against all odds, ABKT emerged stronger. Today, it operates in over 30 districts, linking gender equality with climate resilience, democracy, and social cohesion. Shad understood that empowering women wasn’t just a moral imperative—it was a cornerstone of sustainable development.



Empowering Women, Transforming Communities

Under Shad’s leadership:

- 800+ women entrepreneurs have received microfinance and vocational training to launch businesses.
- 1,800+ women farmers have gained skills in financial literacy, savings, and climate-smart agriculture.
- 49 community schools for girls have been established in remote areas lacking government education.
- Over 200 community development projects—from clean water and irrigation systems to solar tube wells and rural health facilities—have uplifted entire communities.

Shad’s vision goes beyond development—she has cultivated peace and social cohesion in post-conflict regions, restoring traditional hujras as spaces for dialogue, youth leadership, and reconciliation in partnership with UNDP and the Tourism Corporation of KP.

Breaking Barriers in Politics

In 2001, Shad made history by contesting local government elections as an independent candidate—an almost unimaginable feat for a woman from Dir. She won, serving as a **Tehsil and District Councilor**, championing women’s rights, youth development, and participatory governance.

Through ABKT, she has trained over 800 emerging women leaders, including minority and Tran’s women,

on campaign strategy, governance, and policy engagement. Many of these women now contest elections and influence policies across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, multiplying the impact of her trailblazing model.



A Voice That Resonates Globally

In 2019, Shad launched Women’s Voices Pakistan, connecting 300+ women leaders across civil society, government, and media to advocate for inclusive governance, gender-responsive policies, and social justice.

“When I see women speaking up for themselves, I see myself multiplied in thousands of Shad Begums... Silencing one Shad Begum doesn’t matter now. Nobody can silence the voices of thousands of Shad Begums.” Ms. Shad Begum

Her work has garnered international recognition:

- Ashoka Fellow
- Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow, NED-USA
- Acumen Fellow
- Consultant for UN-Habitat and UNDP on women’s political participation and leadership

Awards include:

- Prize for Creativity in Rural Life (2008) – Women’s World Summit Foundation
- Best Social Worker Award (2006) – Directorate of Social Welfare, KP
- Pride of Pakistan (2022) – ISPR
- FAO–Prime Minister’s Award (1998) – Food security initiatives

In 2018, she delivered a TED Talk in California, titled “How Women in Pakistan Are Creating Political Change”, inspiring audiences worldwide.

Rooted in Resilience, Driven by Hope

What makes Shad Begum’s story extraordinary is her choice to stay rooted, despite threats, asylum offers, and societal pressures.

Her upcoming autobiography, *In the Circle of Fire*, chronicles 25 years of courage, community, and conviction.



In 2012, Shad stood between Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton as she received the U.S. Department of State’s International Woman of Courage Award, a defining moment that symbolized her journey from a remote mountain village to the global stage. “When I was standing there, I was having flashbacks to my work, all the challenges I had experienced. I was there, between those two renowned women, but it felt like I was in my village where I started my journey,” she recalls.

As she says, “When I see women speaking up for themselves, I see myself multiplied in thousands of Shad Begums... Silencing one Shad Begum doesn’t matter now. Nobody can silence the voices of thousands of Shad Begums.”

Shad's life is a testament to the truth that one courageous woman can ignite a movement, transform communities, and inspire the world. From the mountains of Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to global platforms, she proves that change begins with conviction, courage and an unwavering belief in the potential of women everywhere.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Shad Begum, Founder & Executive Director, Association for Behaviour & Knowledge Transformation (ABKT), Pakistan

Email: shadbegum@gmail.com

Mob: +92 345 9002768

Website: www.abktpakistan.org

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/shad-begum](https://www.linkedin.com/in/shad-begum)

Twitter: @ShadBegum

Facebook: [facebook.com/ShadBegum](https://www.facebook.com/ShadBegum)

5. Disaster to Discovery

Mrs. Chandramali Wijerathna , Sri Lanka

In the mist-covered hills of Riverston in Sri Lanka's Matale District, innovation took root not in a laboratory or corporate kitchen, but in a small home shaped by loss, courage, and creativity. Mrs. W.W.M.M.G.S. Chandramali Wijerathna's journey—from disaster to discovery—illustrates how rural entrepreneurship, when grounded in local knowledge and women's leadership, can become a powerful engine for inclusive development.



**Mrs. Chandramali
Wijerathna, Sri Lanka**

Today, Chandramali dreams of expanding Kithula into a large-scale, women-led enterprise that supports underprivileged and unemployed women across rural Sri Lanka. Her vision is not only commercial—it is social. She imagines a growing network of self-reliant women who uplift their families through innovation rooted in local resources. As she reflects on her journey, she says proudly, *"I rose again from where I once fell and introduced a brand-new product to the world."*

When Everything Was Lost

Born in 1978, Chandramali began her entrepreneurial journey in 2010 with a small retail shop selling garments and household goods. Through hard work and persistence, the business began to flourish. But in December 2012, a devastating natural disaster struck the Riverston area, destroying her shop and wiping out everything she had built



Suddenly, survival replaced ambition. With five children to support, Chandramali and her husband—who earned a modest income as a three-wheeler driver—faced immense uncertainty.

Yet even in the aftermath of disaster, she refused to surrender to despair. Her experience reflects a reality faced by many rural women entrepreneurs in disaster-prone regions, where climate and environmental shocks can erase livelihoods overnight and expose the fragility of informal economies.

Reinvention through Learning and Local Knowledge

A new chapter began in 2019, when Chandramali joined the Riverston Hela Bojun food outlet, where she

gained exposure to traditional Sri Lankan cuisine and local food culture. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic, once again disrupting livelihoods. Confined to her home, Chandramali chose learning over fear. She spent countless hours exploring recipes, watching online tutorials, and experimenting with indigenous ingredients. Her curiosity led her to *Caryota urens*—the fishtail palm, locally known as Kithul. Traditionally valued for its treacle and flour, *Caryota* had rarely been explored for modern, value-added food products. In her small kitchen, Chandramali began experimenting, eventually creating Kithul chocolate and Kithul biscuits—nutritious, toxin-free, and uniquely Sri Lankan. What emerged was not only a product, but an innovation grounded in heritage and health.

The Birth of Kithula

As pandemic restrictions eased, Chandramali and her family began selling their *Caryota*-based products from a tiny roadside stall along Riverston Road. The response was immediate and enthusiastic. Encouraged by growing demand, they took a bold step in 2021, opening a modest 10-by-12-foot shop and officially launching the brand “Kithula.”

Under the Kithula brand, Chandramali has developed more than 20 varieties of *Caryota*-based products, including biscuits, chocolates, beverages, yoghurt, ice cream, jam, and butter. Each item blends traditional knowledge with modern tastes, celebrating the nutritional richness of *Caryota* treacle, flour, and nectar. Kithula quickly gained recognition for its originality, cultural relevance, and commitment to sustainable, locally sourced food.

Today, the brand stands as a symbol of grassroots innovation, demonstrating how indigenous resources can be transformed into market-ready products through women’s creativity and perseverance.

Women-Led Enterprise, Community-Wide Impact

Chandramali’s success extends far beyond her own household. Her small-scale production unit now directly employs six women and provides indirect income to more than 60 families, including those engaged in *Caryota* tapping and flour production. By strengthening local value chains, Kithula has created dignified livelihood opportunities in a rural area with limited formal employment.

Equally important is her role as a mentor. Chandramali actively supports other women to explore entrepreneurship, sharing her knowledge, encouraging



experimentation, and nurturing confidence. Through Kithula, women are not only earning incomes—they are redefining their roles as innovators and contributors to local economies.

"When disaster took everything I had built, I chose not to give up. I rose again, turned challenges into opportunities, and introduced a brand-new product to the world." -Mrs. Chandramali Wijerathna

Vision Rooted in Resilience: Chandramali proudly identifies herself as a strong woman, a loving mother, a devoted wife, a caring daughter, a supportive friend, and a passionate entrepreneur from “little Sri Lanka.” Her identity reflects the multiple roles rural women balance daily—and the extraordinary potential they hold when given space to lead.

From the ruins of disaster to the rise of a pioneering Caryota-based food enterprise, Chandramali Wijerathna’s story reminds us that resilience is not merely about recovery. It is about reimagining possibilities. Her journey offers a powerful lesson for development practitioners and policymakers alike: sustainable rural development flourishes when women’s knowledge, creativity, and leadership are placed at the center.

Kithula is more than a brand. It is proof that even in life’s darkest moments, innovation rooted in local wisdom can light the way forward—for families, communities, and generations to come.



Contact Information:

Mrs. Chandramali Wijerathna, Kithula, 17 Kanuwa, Riverston Road, Bambarakiriella, Rathtota, Matale, Sri Lanka

Mob: +94076 1930424

6. Cultivating Change on Less than a Hectare: Mrs. Jocelyn D. Reyes, Philippines

The Transformation: Many would consider 0.94 hectares a limitation. To Jocelyn Reyes, a DAR agrarian reform beneficiary, Philippines, it was the ultimate opportunity. She transformed her CLOA-awarded land from a simple plot into a Certified Learning Site for Agriculture (LSA)—a hub where organic farming and innovation collide.

The Innovation: Jocelyn is redefining the "Farm-to-Table" movement. By integrating vermiculture, livestock, and diverse crops, she ensures a sustainable cycle. Her ingenuity shines in her processed goods: turning raw farm produce into high-value 4-in-1 vegetable noodles and rice flour, proving that small-scale farmers can be major market players.



*Mrs. Jocelyn D. Reyes,
Philippines*

"Farming is a business, a science, and a service to humanity." - Mrs. Jocelyn D. Reyes

The Legacy: Through the Joyful Garden Farm Organic Farmers Association, Jocelyn serves as a lecturer, resource speaker, and community pillar. She teaches the next generation that farming is a business, a science, and a service to humanity.

"Small land, massive impact. Jocelyn Reyes is a beacon of grassroots innovation, proving that a harvest of hope can grow anywhere passion is planted."

As the leader of the Joyful Garden Farm Organic Farmers Association, Jocelyn has transitioned from a farmer to a mentor.



Contact Information:

Mrs. Jocelyn D. Reyes, Mataasna Parang, San Ildefonso, Bulacan, Philippines

Mob. +639175667215

7. Resilient Journey to Leadership:

Mrs. Hemmat Pour, Iran

In the remote village of Nok, in Iran's South Khorasan Province, opportunity once lay eight kilometers away—along a dusty road walked daily by a determined young girl. That girl, Ms. Hemmat Pour, would grow into one of Iran's most influential champions of rural women's entrepreneurship, proving that transformative development often begins with individual courage and collective vision.



Mrs. Hemmat Pour, Iran

Born into a context marked by limited educational access and deeply rooted social norms, Ms. Pour's early life reflected the realities faced by countless rural girls. Yet, even as a child, she defied expectation—walking hours each day to attend school in neighboring villages. Married at the age of 17 and soon responsible for raising five children, her formal education was interrupted. But her ambition was not extinguished. Years later, through independent study and unwavering discipline, she completed her high school education—an achievement that would lay the foundation for a lifelong commitment to learning, leadership, and service.

From Personal Resilience to Collective Empowerment

Over the past three decades, Ms. Hemmat Pour has played a catalytic role in reshaping rural livelihoods in Mod and surrounding communities. In 1994, she founded the Al-Zahra Rural Women's Cooperative, the first women-led cooperative in South Khorasan Province. What began as a small, community-based initiative soon evolved into a platform for economic inclusion, skills development, and social solidarity—serving hundreds of women who had previously been excluded from formal economic systems?



Recognizing that entrepreneurship cannot thrive without financial access, Ms. Pour established women-led microloan and welfare savings funds, enabling rural women to launch and expand income-generating activities with dignity and autonomy. Her efforts later expanded to the creation of Mod's first insurance brokerage, securing social and economic protection for more than 950 farmers and rural artisans—an often-overlooked pillar of resilience in fragile rural economies.

Her leadership extended beyond the local level. As a founding member of Iran’s National Union of Rural Entrepreneur Women, Ms. Pour helped amplify rural women’s voices in national development discourse, bridging grassroots realities with institutional frameworks.

Preserving Culture While Building Markets

Ms. Pour’s work is distinguished by her ability to align cultural heritage with economic innovation. Since 2003, she has led efforts to revive traditional Berak weaving and handwoven textiles, transforming endangered crafts into viable livelihood opportunities. Through hands-on training workshops, she enabled women to turn ancestral knowledge into market-ready products—culminating in national recognition when her custom-designed Berak vest received the National Craft Seal in 2024.



Beyond textiles, she expanded rural value chains through herbal distillation, rosewater production, and traditional pastry-making, leveraging locally sourced plants and ingredients. These initiatives not only created jobs but also promoted sustainable resource use, food sovereignty, and community pride.

Innovation through Learning and Systems Building

Understanding that sustainable development requires ecosystems—not isolated projects—Ms. Pour spearheaded a provincial pilot business incubation center for agricultural women, equipping over 200 women with entrepreneurship training, technical skills, and market access. Her approach combined practical learning with mentorship, enabling women to transition from informal labor to structured enterprise.

Recognition Rooted in Impact

Ms. Hemmat Pour’s contributions have earned widespread recognition, including:

- National Top Entrepreneur – Ministry of Labor (2009)
- Champion of Economic Resilience and Rural Development (multiple years)
- Winner, Innovative Women’s Microfinance Project – *Yaran-e-Roosta* National Festival (2020)
- People’s Entrepreneur Award in national competitions (2019)

Yet, her most enduring achievement lies beyond awards. It is found in the economic independence of

rural women, the revival of cultural identity, and the strengthening of community institutions that will outlast any single leader.

A Model for Inclusive and Sustainable Development

Ms. Hemmat Pour's journey illustrates how locally led; women-centered development can deliver lasting impact—particularly in marginalized rural contexts. Her story is not only one of personal perseverance, but of systems change driven by trust, tradition, and innovation.



"When women are empowered to lead, traditional knowledge becomes a catalyst for opportunity—preserving heritage, strengthening resilience, and shaping a more sustainable and prosperous future."- Mrs. Hemmat Pour

For international development practitioners, her work offers a powerful reminder: sustainable progress emerges when local leaders are empowered to shape solutions rooted in their own communities. From a long walk to school to a national movement for rural women's empowerment, Ms. Hemmat Pour's legacy continues to inspire across Iran—and far beyond its borders.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Hemmat Pour, Mod, Sarbisheh County, South Khorasan Province, Iran

Email: m.hematpoor1344@gmail.com

Mob: +98 915 361 1711

8. Weaving the Success of Tribal Communities: Mrs. Manjulika Chakma, Bangladesh

In the green hills of Rangamati, Bangladesh, where tradition breathes through every thread of handwoven cloth, a quiet revolution began—led by a woman whose courage and creativity would redefine the future of tribal communities. Mrs. Manjulika Chakma stands today as a living symbol of resilience, cultural pride, and women’s leadership. Her life proves that when

vision is guided by patience, hard work, and compassion, it can transform not only one life—but thousands.



***Mrs. Manjulika Chakma,
Bangladesh***

Roots in Tradition, Wings for the Future

Manjulika Chakma was born in 1947 in Tabalchari, Rangamati district headquarters of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. She grew up in a respected Chakma family where discipline, values, and culture were woven into everyday life. Her father, Late Kali Ratan Khisa, served as a government employee during British rule, while her mother, Late Panchalata Khisa, managed the household and passed on invaluable traditional skills—especially weaving.

In the 1950s, educating girls was not a priority in most families. Yet Manjulika’s father believed differently. He encouraged her to study, while her mother nurtured her character and cultural roots. The third of seven siblings and the eldest daughter, she was lovingly called “Hattali”—a playful nickname meaning “crazy girl”. Little did anyone know that this “crazy girl” would one day become a legend across the hills.

Her academic promise appeared early. In 1956, she earned a Primary School Talent Pool Scholarship, continuing her studies with remarkable determination. Even when she married young—while still in high school—she refused to abandon education. Instead, she learned to balance family life with academic ambition, a skill that would later define her leadership.

In 1960, she married the late Chiranjeev Chakma, a respected social worker from Keretchari village, Nayachar Upazila, Rangamati. Together they raised one son and two daughters, all of whom went on to build successful careers. As a wife and mother, Manjulika was caring and responsible—but her dreams extended far beyond her home.

Education as a Pathway to Empowerment

At a time when opportunities for tribal women were scarce, Manjulika excelled academically:

- Talent Pool Scholarship (1956)
- Passed Adyya and Madhya with First Division (1958–59), Anand Vihar Pali To
- Matriculation, Rangamati Government High School (1961). She continued her higher education with unwavering resolve.
- Primary Training (PT), Rangamati PTI (1967) — First in First Class with Merit
- IA, Rangamati College (1968)
- BA, Rangamati College (1973)



Alongside formal education, she trained in cooperatives, girl guiding, sports, cultural activities, and community development—experiences that quietly prepared her for a larger mission.

Immediately after matriculation, she began her career as the only female teacher at Shah Balak High School (later Shah High School). Her warmth and dedication earned her the affectionate title “Priya Didimani.” Many of her students later rose to national prominence, including former MP Ushatan Talukdar, MP Firoza Begum (Chinu), and former AIGP Nav Bikram Kishore Tripura.

A Vision Awakens

During the 1960s, Manjulika began to observe a painful reality: women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts possessed immense skills, yet had little economic voice. She realized that true rural development was impossible without women’s active participation.

Drawing upon the weaving skills her mother had taught her, she began collaborating with the Department of Cooperatives and the Department of Social Services. What started as a simple effort to preserve tradition soon evolved into a lifelong mission—to empower women through culture and livelihood.

BAIN Textile: A Loom that Changed Lives

In 1965, with only Tk. 500 and the encouragement of her husband, Manjulika Chakma did something unprecedented. She founded BAIN Textile, becoming the first industrial entrepreneur among the tribal communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The enterprise was named after the Bain, the traditional Chakma waist loom. More than a tool, it became a symbol—of identity, dignity, and economic independence.

The goals of BAIN Textile were clear:

- Preserve tribal weaving traditions
- Create sustainable employment for rural women
- Introduce modern designs and improved techniques
- Strengthen family economies through women’s income

By blending traditional craftsmanship with modern aesthetics, BAIN Textile revolutionized tribal weaving. Women who once worked silently within their homes began earning, leading, and dreaming. Financial independence brought confidence, and confidence transformed communities.

One of BAIN’s most celebrated creations, “Hottali Pinion Hadi,” was named after Manjulika’s childhood nickname, Hattali. Today, it stands as a beloved brand—symbolizing creativity, heritage, and women’s entrepreneurship.

Ripples across the Hills

The impact of BAIN Textile spread far beyond a single workshop:

- 15–20 handloom factories were established
- Numerous unemployed women gained stable jobs
- Many women began independent weaving enterprises
- 30–35 new businesses emerged in weaving and marketing
- Around 2,000 jobs were created across the region

BAIN Textile did more than revive a tradition—it reduced poverty, strengthened rural economies, and reshaped women’s roles in society.

Its products reached international markets, including the USA, France, Japan, Malaysia, Holland, and Australia. Collaborations with designers such as Bibi Russell and Chandra Shekhar Saha further elevated tribal craftsmanship onto global platforms.



"When cultural heritage is transformed into opportunity, communities can preserve their identity, empower women, and build a more resilient and inclusive future for generations to come." - Mrs. Manjulika Chakma

Documenting the Magic of Skilled Hands

In 2009, Manjulika co-authored the research paper “Strong Back’s Magic Fingers” with Dr. Niaz Zaman, presented at the International BAIN Conference organized by UNDP–CHTDF in Dhaka. Published by the Independent University of Bangladesh in 2010, the paper marked an important academic recognition of tribal weaving traditions.



Faith, Compassion, and Cultural Revival

A devoted follower of Gautama Buddha, Manjulika lives by the principle: “Sabbe Satta Sukhita Bhavantu” — May all beings be happy.

Her spiritual commitment inspired her to revive the ancient Buddhist tradition of Hard Cheever, the sacred robe prepared within 24 hours. Beginning at Rajban Vihara in Rangamati, this revival spread to Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh, giving rise to the modern Cheever Dan Utsav, now a major Buddhist observance.

Leadership without Borders

From the 1970s onward, Manjulika emerged as a national and international voice on women’s development, entrepreneurship, and cultural heritage. Her leadership roles included:

- President/Secretary, Rangamati Sambay Samity Ltd. (1965–1994)
- Editor, CHT National Women’s Organization (1978–1982)
- President, CHT Against Women Committee
- Vice President, National Crafts Council
- President, Rotary Club of Rangamati
- Women’s Secretary, Family Planning Association
- Advisor, CARE Bangladesh & CODEC
- Member, UNDP–CHTDF committees
- Director roles in chambers, banks, and associations



Her work took her across Australia, India, Thailand, Canada, Germany, Pakistan, and beyond. She lived in Malawi (2015–2017) and visited Singapore in 2018. Over the years, she received numerous national awards recognizing her contributions to education, handicrafts, entrepreneurship, and women’s empowerment.

A Dream for the Future

Now in her late seventies, Manjulika Chakma continues to dream. Her vision is to establish a Museum of Traditional Tribal Art, Literature, and Culture, ensuring that indigenous heritage survives in an age of rapid modernization. She hopes future generations will reconnect with their roots—and carry forward the stories woven into every thread of the hills.

Manjulika Chakma’s life reminds us that when a woman believes deeply in her culture and stands firmly with her people, her courage becomes a quiet force that transforms society and lights a path of change for generations to follow.



Contact Information

Mrs. Manjulika Chakma, Bain Textile, T.O. Colony, Rangamati, Bangladesh

Mob: +8801817587473

9. From the Bustle of Kathmandu to Reviving Her Village: Mrs. Geeta Adhikari Pandey, Nepal

Selling a beautiful city home in Kalanki, Kathmandu—the capital of Nepal—to settle in a remote village was more than a decision for Mrs. Geeta Adhikari Pandey—it was life-changing. Her bold move proved that “opportunity exists not only in cities, but within our own villages.” Today, as the founder of Green Himalaya Organic Agro Farm and Green Himalaya Farm Stay, she has seamlessly combined agriculture, tourism, and culture into a sustainable rural enterprise that fosters self-reliance, employment, and women’s empowerment.



Mrs. Geeta Adhikari Pandey, Nepal

A Journey Rooted in Home and Heart

Mrs. Geeta Adhikari Pandey hails from Bhanu Municipality–9, Chitikhola, Tanahun District, Nepal. After completing her school education in Chitwan, she moved to Kathmandu for higher studies, earning an Intermediate in Commerce and a Bachelor’s in Arts. Life in the capital, especially after her marriage to a government officer, was comfortable but confined —city walls limited not just space, but her imagination. She often thought about village life, dreaming of open skies, fertile land, and the vibrancy of her ancestral home. Inspired by her husband Mr. Rajendra Pandey, they made a daring choice: sell their Kathmandu home and return to their native village to build a life rooted in the soil of their ancestors.

When I came back, the village was quiet. The land was overgrown, the houses were old, and the air felt lonely. But in that silence also, I saw hope. I started Green Himalaya Organic Agro Farm. I raised local chickens, ducks, goats, and cows, and began growing organic vegetables, turmeric, ginger, and citrus fruits. The early years were full of challenges. Sometimes, my products didn’t get a fair price in the market. Then I thought, “If I can use what I grow here, I can create more value.” That simple idea changed everything. And then, I decided to connect farming with tourism, and that’s how Green Himalaya Farm Stay was born. Now, when guests visit our farm, they eat meals cooked on a wood fire, rice pounded by hand, and stay with local families. They enjoy the songs, dances, and traditions of our Indigenous communities. They taste not only food—they taste our culture, our hospitality, and our love. Today, my village is alive again. The once-silent hills are now filled with voices, work, and smiles.

From Empty Fields to Flourishing Farms

Reflecting on her early days in the village, Geeta recalls: “When I looked around, I saw empty houses, abandoned farmland, and young people leaving for cities or abroad. It made me sad. I asked myself, ‘Why can’t opportunities be created right here?’ Many doubted me, saying there was nothing left in the village. But I believed: everything we need is here if we believe in ourselves.”



In 2018, she left city life after 25 years, a decision both emotional and transformative, investing her city earnings into a dream she had nurtured for decades. Her farm, once barren, now spans 3.5 hectares of organic farmland and 1.5 hectares of eco-friendly farm stay facilities, drawing hundreds of visitors each year from across Nepal and abroad

Overcoming Early Challenges

The road was not easy. In the beginning, skeptics whispered that she would fail, that life in the remote village was too lonely, and that a woman couldn’t build anything substantial there. But Geeta persevered, letting vision and determination guide her path.

Major Achievements

- Employment Creation: Directly and indirectly employs around 110 local people.
- Women’s Empowerment: Trains and engages local women in farming, hospitality, and livestock production, generating income and confidence.
- Cultural Preservation: Works with the Magar community to promote traditional dance, cuisine, and crafts—over 100 indigenous men and women actively participate.
- Homestays: 20 local homes now host visitors, boosting tourism income.
- Organic Production: Produces poultry, ducks, pigeons, dairy products, lemons, turmeric, ginger, and seasonal vegetables.
- Tourist Experience: Guests enjoy traditional Nepali cuisine, rice milled by hand (dhiki), wood-fired cooking, waterfalls, and Himalayan vistas. Over 5,000 visitors have experienced her farm stay.



"Revitalizing rural communities requires more than investment—it requires the courage to believe that local talent, culture, and resources can build a prosperous future." - Mrs. Geeta Adhikari Pandey

Through this integration of agriculture, tourism, and culture, Geeta has proven that rural revitalization begins with self-belief and local innovation.

Recognition and Impact

For her remarkable contribution to rural economic development, Geeta was honored by Gandaki Provincial Government on the 18th Republic Day of Nepal. Affectionately known as “The Sister of Green Himalaya”, she embodies leadership, compassion, and entrepreneurial spirit.



Geeta’s message is clear:

“Only when women are given opportunities to lead and create enterprises can rural economic transformation truly begin—and I stand as a living example.”

Her inspiring journey has been featured widely, including Antaranga News, Makalukhabar, Dainik Nepal, and the government-owned Gorkhapatra Daily, under headlines like “From City Life to Village Revival” and “The Blossoming of Green Himalaya.”

Vision for the Future

Geeta envisions expanding Green Himalaya Farm Stay into a Rural Tourism and Skill Development Center. Her plans include Ayurvedic wellness programs, traditional food workshops, yoga and meditation spaces, children-friendly activities, and platforms for local artisans.

“If people can work 18 hours a day abroad, imagine what we could achieve dedicating the same energy to our own soil. Rural Nepal is full of possibilities,” she adds.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Geeta Adhikari Pandey, Bhanu Municipality–9, Chitikhola, Tanahun District, Nepal

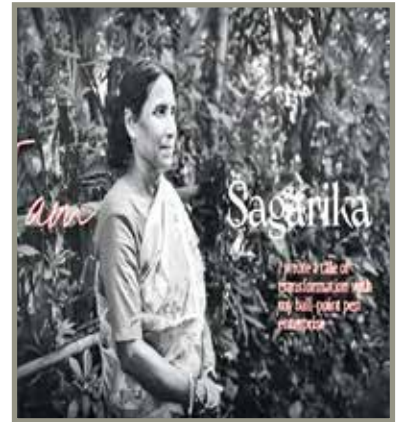
Email: greenhimalayafarmstay@gmail.com

Facebook: (Farmstay):facebook.com/greenhimalayafarmstay

Facebook: (Personal): facebook.com/geeta.adhikari.pandey

10. Rising from an 8×8 feet Room: Mrs. Sagarika Mondal, India

From an 8×8 ft. room in a quiet village of West Bengal, India to building a thriving enterprise that spans multiple Indian states, Mrs. Sagarika Mondal's journey is a powerful story of resilience, courage, and hope. Her life is not only a tale of economic success but also of dignity earned, confidence nurtured, and opportunities created for countless women. Today, she is regarded as a woman forged through hardship—an enduring source of inspiration for destitute and marginalized communities across India.



Mrs. Sagarika Mondal, India

Humble Beginnings

Born and raised in Boinciberia village in the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, Mrs. Sagarika Mondal (46) grew up witnessing the everyday struggles of rural life. Opportunities were limited, resources were scarce, and social expectations rarely encouraged women to dream beyond household boundaries.

In 2004, with little more than determination and faith in her abilities, Sagarika took a bold step. Alongside her husband, she began her entrepreneurial journey with just ₹10,000, a single manual ball-pen—making machine, and an 8×8 ft. room. There was no formal entrepreneurial training, no safety net, and plenty of skepticism from society—but there was an unshakable will to succeed.

A Dream Tested by Reality

The early years were filled with challenges. Limited capital, lack of working space, transportation hurdles, and low profit margins threatened to stall her progress. Balancing household responsibilities with enterprise management demanded extraordinary discipline and resilience. Yet, Sagarika refused to surrender her dream.

Through patience, persistence, and relentless hard work, she slowly strengthened her footing. Every pen produced was not just a product—it was a step closer to self-reliance and recognition.

Building an Enterprise

What began as a modest effort soon grew into something far greater. M/s Sagarika Enterprise, founded in 2004, steadily expanded through sheer perseverance.

From a single manual machine, the enterprise has grown into a 1,200 sq. ft. factory equipped with six automatic machines. Today, it records an impressive annual turnover of ₹22 lakhs, a remarkable achievement rooted in rural determination and vision.

"Every pen produced through perseverance tells a story of resilience, turning struggle into self-reliance and transforming dreams into reality." - Mrs. Sagarika Mondal

Creating Opportunities for Women

Sagarika's success story is deeply intertwined with the empowerment of others. Her enterprise now provides employment to 20 individuals, the majority of whom are women. Many of them had never earned an income before or stepped outside traditional roles.

Through dignified livelihood opportunities, these women gained confidence, financial independence, and a stronger voice in household decision-making. Sagarika did not just build a business—she built belief in women's potential.

Expanding Markets, Expanding Dreams

Initially, her products were sold only in local markets. Over time, as quality and affordability earned trust, her reach expanded far beyond village boundaries. Today, pens manufactured by M/s Sagarika Enterprise are supplied to Kolkata, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, and Hyderabad.

Her products are valued for their consistent quality and affordability, earning a loyal customer base across multiple states and proving that rural enterprises can compete on a national scale.

A Force for Social Change

Beyond business, Sagarika remains deeply rooted in community service. She actively mentors women from local Self-Help Groups (SHGs), guiding them in financial literacy, savings habits, and entrepreneurship. Her efforts have strengthened SHGs and inspired many women to consider income-generating activities of their own.

She also participates wholeheartedly in blood donation camps, health awareness drives, and village-level programmes through her local club. By creating employment opportunities within the village, she has helped reduce rural-to-urban migration, allowing families to stay together while earning dignified livelihoods.

Leadership Forged Through Resilience

Sagarika's journey has been anything but easy. She overcame barriers of limited capital, social doubt, and infrastructure constraints while successfully managing her household responsibilities. Her ability to balance family life with enterprise leadership has made her a powerful role model for rural women entrepreneurs.

Today, she stands as living proof that women—regardless of background—can lead, build, and inspire.

A Beacon of Hope

From an 8×8 ft. room to a flourishing enterprise, Mrs. Sagarika Mondal's life story shines as a beacon of courage and hope. She embodies the belief that when a woman rises, she lifts an entire community with her.

Her journey reminds us that empowerment begins with opportunity, grows through perseverance, and flourishes when success is shared.

Contact Information

Mrs. Sagarika Mondal, M/s Sagarika Enterprise, Magrahaat I Block, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India

11. Leader, Doctor and Rural Reformer:

Dr. Thet Thet Zin, Myanmar

Dr. Thet Thet Zin is a beacon of hope and a living testament to the transformative power of investing in women. Through her unwavering vision and leadership, she has shown that empowering rural women is not just a social imperative—it is the key to unlocking sustainable development and breaking the cycle of poverty. Her work inspires not only women in Myanmar but also communities across the ASEAN and Asia-Pacific region, proving that one determined leader can ignite change that radiates far beyond borders.



Dr. Thet Thet Zin, Myanmar

As a driving force in more than ten national committees, Dr. Thet Thet Zin has championed women’s rights, child protection, anti-human trafficking measures, disability inclusion, elderly care, gender-based violence prevention, and sustainable development. Her influence extends beyond policymaking; she leads by example, walking hand in hand with communities, advocating for change at the grassroots, and empowering those often overlooked.

A Trailblazing Journey

Dr. Thet Thet Zin’s career is marked by a rare combination of expertise, compassion, and leadership. She currently serves as Chairperson of the Myanmar Women’s Affairs Federation (MWAFF) and has represented Myanmar on prestigious regional and international platforms, including as the country’s Representative to the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) and as Board Member and Rotating Chairperson of the ASEAN Confederation of Women’s Organizations (ACWO). Her service as Deputy Minister for Environmental Conservation and Forestry underscores her commitment to sustainable development at every level.

Her medical and public health background—MBBS from the University of Medicine (1), Yangon; Postgraduate Diploma in Nutrition from the National Institute of Nutrition, India; and Master of Preventive and Tropical Medicine—reflects a career built on knowledge, experience, and service. Over more than two decades, she has worked as a Township Medical Officer and senior leader in the Department of Public Health, impacting countless lives through primary health care, school health initiatives, and public health leadership.

Rural Women Development Initiative: Lighting the Path of Change

In 2016, Dr. Thet Thet Zin launched the Rural Women Development Project, a visionary program transforming lives in over 300 villages across Myanmar. The initiative focuses on empowering women as catalysts of change, fostering community leadership, and creating lasting social impact.

The project prioritizes five areas:

1. Environmental sanitation and village greening
2. Prevention of communicable diseases
3. Ensuring school enrollment for all children
4. Nutrition enhancement and food security
5. Elderly care and social protection



Each year, the program selects villages across three townships per State/Region, training female volunteer leaders from every ten households to become community change agents. Under Dr. Thet Thet Zin's guidance, these women gain the skills, confidence, and authority to lead local development, creating a ripple effect of transformation throughout their communities.

"Investing in women, along with leadership training, shows that when women are empowered with knowledge, opportunity, and voice, they become catalysts for inclusive, healthy, and sustainable rural communities—driving change that extends far beyond borders." - Dr. Thet Thet Zin

The results are nothing short of inspiring:

- Women have stepped into leadership roles, becoming decision-makers in their villages.
- Families now enjoy improved access to education, health services, and livelihood opportunities. Communities have embraced better sanitation, nutrition practices, and social support systems.
- The initiative has fostered a culture of collective action, resilience, and hope, ensuring that development is inclusive and sustainable.

Dr. Thet Thet Zin's work is a powerful reminder that empowering women is not charity—it is the engine of societal progress. Through her vision, determination, and tireless advocacy, she has transformed rural villages into thriving communities, proving that when women rise, entire nations rise with them.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Thet Thet Zin, Ph.D, Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation, Myanmar

Email: tthetzin@gmail.com, mwafnational@gamil.com

Mob: +95 9448544422



12. From Farmlands to Enterprises:

Mrs. Maria Cecilia S. Canada, Philippines

In the fertile landscapes of Canlaon City, Philippines, Negros Oriental—where rice fields ripple under the sun and sugarcane defines both livelihood and identity—Ms. Maria Cecilia S. Canada has quietly built a model of rural development rooted in compassion, resilience, and enterprise. Her journey demonstrates how agriculture, when paired with entrepreneurship and social purpose, can become a powerful engine for inclusive growth.



Maria Cecilia S. Canada, Philippines

At a time when rural women often face structural barriers to land ownership, market access, and leadership, Ms. Canada transformed her family farmlands into a diversified ecosystem of enterprises that now serve agriculture, hospitality, and local tourism. What began as farming rice and sugarcane evolved into a portfolio of community-centered businesses, including F&C Restaurant, F&C Café, Mountain City Tourist Inn, and Kalaparan Farmhouse—each one reflecting her commitment to local employment, food systems, and place-based development.



Cultivating More than Crops

Ms. Canada's entrepreneurial path was never about leaving agriculture behind; instead, it was about expanding its value. By linking farm production with food services and rural tourism, she created

integrated value chains that strengthened local markets while celebrating Negros Oriental’s agricultural heritage. Her enterprises source locally, create jobs for nearby communities, and offer visitors an authentic rural experience—demonstrating how agribusiness diversification can stabilize incomes and reduce rural-urban migration.

This integrated approach aligns with global development priorities that emphasize resilient food systems, rural enterprise development, and women-led economic transformation. Ms. Canada’s work shows that small and medium enterprises, when grounded in local assets, can generate both economic and social returns.

Entrepreneurship with a Human Face

What truly distinguishes Ms. Canada’s journey is the way she channels business success into community service. A nurse by profession and a farmer by choice, she brings the ethic of care into every dimension of her work. Income from her farms and businesses supports relief operations, parish-based initiatives, and outreach programs of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, extending dignity and opportunity to some of the most vulnerable populations.

Her leadership reflects a development model where entrepreneurship is not detached from social responsibility, but deeply intertwined with it. In times of crisis—whether natural disasters or community hardship—her farms and enterprises become sources of support, solidarity, and hope.



"By combining agriculture with local resources, entrepreneurship, and social responsibility, rural women can transform local assets into engines of sustainable development that uplift entire communities." - Maria Cecilia S. Canada

Women’s Leadership in Rural Transformation

Ms. Maria Cecilia S. Canada’s story is especially resonant for women in rural contexts. She challenges the false divide between care work and commerce, between farming and enterprise, and between profit and purpose. By navigating multiple roles—health professional, farmer, entrepreneur, and community advocate—she exemplifies how women’s leadership can drive holistic rural development.

Her journey underscores a critical lesson for policymakers and development practitioners: empowering rural women is not only a matter of equity, but of economic strategy and social resilience. When women control productive assets and enterprises, the benefits extend beyond households to entire communities.



A Living Example of Sustainable, Inclusive Development

From farmlands to enterprises, Ms. Canada has turned land into livelihood—and livelihood into lasting change. Her story is not one of rapid expansion or distant markets, but of steady growth rooted in local realities and human connection. It reminds us that sustainable development is built not only through policy frameworks and investments, but through individuals who lead with purpose and compassion.

For donors, practitioners, and policymakers seeking scalable yet human-centered development models, Ms. Maria Cecilia S. Canada’s journey offers a powerful insight: when agriculture, entrepreneurship, and service come together, rural communities do more than survive—they thrive.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Maria Cecilia S. Canada, Aquino St. Mabigo, Canlaon City, Negros Oriental, Philippines

Mob: +639177110609

13. Enterprising, Empowering, Hygiene:

Mrs. Saguna, India

In the quiet corners of Somangalam Panchayat, India, a remarkable story of courage, vision, and social impact unfolded—one led by Mrs. Suguna, a woman whose determination transformed not only her own life but also the lives of countless women in her community. Her journey is a shining example of women-led entrepreneurship, demonstrating how grassroots leadership, when combined with self-help groups and supportive schemes, can drive sustainable development and meaningful social change.

Suguna's story is not just about business; it is about purpose. She recognized a pressing social need and transformed it into an opportunity—creating **affordable sanitary products** while empowering women economically.



Mrs. Saguna, India

Humble Beginnings and Vision

A dynamic and determined woman, Suguna has been an active member of the Kamadhenu Self-Help Group (SHG). With 15 committed members, she saw both a social challenge and an economic opportunity: many women in her community lacked access to affordable sanitary products, and at the same time, local women needed dignified income-generating work.

Despite financial constraints and limited resources, Suguna's resilience, leadership, and vision helped turn a simple idea into a thriving enterprise. By mobilizing her SHG members and tapping into available government schemes, she created a model that balanced economic independence with social impact.

From Idea to Enterprise

In December 2014, Suguna and her SHG members established the Napkin Manufacturing Unit. The goal was clear: provide affordable sanitary products while generating employment for women.

With an initial PLF loan of ₹3,00,000 under Mahalir Thittam and additional contributions from group members, they mobilized ₹10,00,000 to set up the unit. What began as a small, focused initiative quickly grew into a social enterprise with purpose, meeting the twin objectives of community health and women's empowerment.

Operations and Achievements

Today, the unit is a testament to what collective effort and strong leadership can achieve:

- Production capacity: 1,20,000 sanitary napkins per month
- Annual output: 50,000 packets (6 napkins per pack)
- Customer base: SHGs, private companies, and government agencies

Financially, the enterprise has flourished

- Profit margin: ₹0.50 per piece
- Annual profit: Over ₹5,00,000, distributed among members
- Employment: Provides direct employment to 7 SHG members, ensuring stable income for their households

"By turning a social challenge into opportunity, affordable sanitary products became a catalyst for women's empowerment, dignity, health, and inclusive rural community-based entrepreneurship development."

- Mrs. Saguna

Impact beyond Business

Suguna's work extends far beyond economic gains. Through her enterprise:

- SHG families achieved financial stability, improving overall living standards
- Women gained better access to sanitary products, promoting menstrual hygiene
- Other SHGs and women entrepreneurs in the region found inspiration to start similar ventures
- The role of women in community-based enterprises was strengthened, establishing SHGs as models of rural entrepreneurship

Her efforts have proven that empowered women can lift entire communities while addressing crucial social needs.

Challenges and Resilience

The journey was not without hurdles. Capital shortages, quality control issues, and fulfilling large orders posed persistent challenges. Suguna addressed these through collective pooling of funds, careful planning, skill training, and support from Mahalir Thittam. Her unwavering leadership ensured smooth operations, steady growth, and the long-term sustainability of the enterprise.

Recognition and Support

The PLF loan of ₹3,00,000 under Mahalir Thittam was pivotal in establishing the enterprise, financing machinery, raw materials, and training. This support, coupled with Suguna's determination, allowed her vision to transform into reality.

A Beacon for Rural Women

From a single idea to a thriving enterprise, Mrs. Suguna's story is one of purpose, courage, and empowerment. She demonstrates that rural women can be leaders, entrepreneurs, and change-makers, improving lives while building sustainable businesses.

Her journey reminds us that entrepreneurship is not just about profits—it is about impact, dignity, and creating opportunities for others.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Suguna, Napkin Manufacturing Unit, Somangalam Panchayat, India

Mob. +91 99620 71013

14. Local to Vocal: One Woman, Many Livelihoods

Mrs. Parvaneh Pourang, Iran

From the remote rural landscapes of Shahiyoun, Iran, emerges a powerful story of vision, perseverance, and community transformation. Ms. Parvaneh Pourang stands as one of Iran’s most inspiring pioneers of rural entrepreneurship, proving that meaningful development begins when local wisdom is empowered and shared. As the Managing Director of *Tavoni-e-Zanan Shahiyoun*, a women-led cooperative with more than 850 members, she has reshaped the social and economic future of countless rural women.



Mrs. Parvaneh Pourang, Iran

A Journey Rooted in Determination

Born in 1980 in a community where access to education was limited—especially for girls—Parvaneh’s early life was marked by challenges that could have easily constrained her ambitions. Yet, guided by determination and resilience, she pursued higher education and earned a master’s degree in accounting. In 1999, she joined the women’s cooperative of Shahiyoun, embarking on a lifelong mission to uplift rural women through opportunity, dignity, and self-reliance.

Transforming Tradition into Opportunity

Under Ms. Pourang’s visionary leadership, the cooperative achieved what once seemed impossible. She revived and modernized the traditional “*kapu*” basketry—an age-old local craft—transforming it into an internationally recognized handicraft. This innovation not only preserved cultural heritage but also created sustainable income for women who balanced productive work alongside household responsibilities.

Beyond handicrafts, Parvaneh introduced comprehensive empowerment initiatives, including vocational training, nationwide exhibition participation, and strategic marketing of artisanal products beyond provincial borders. Her efforts ensured that rural craftsmanship found its place in national and global markets.

Championing Social Security and Women’s Welfare

Ms. Pourang’s commitment extends beyond economic empowerment. Understanding the vulnerabilities faced by rural women, she facilitated insurance coverage for cooperative members and established a welfare fund offering micro-loans for essential household and livelihood needs. These initiatives strengthened social security, built resilience, and fostered a sense of collective dignity and confidence among members.

Achievements and Impact

- Cultural Preservation & Global Recognition: Revitalized traditional kapu basketry and elevated it to national and international prominence.
- Economic Empowerment: Created sustainable employment and skill-development opportunities for rural women.
- Exhibitions & Market Expansion: Promoted cooperative products through regional and national exhibitions.
- Social Protection: Enabled insurance coverage and established a cooperative micro-loan welfare fund.



Honors and Recognition

Ms. Parvaneh Pourang's tireless dedication and transformative leadership have been recognized through numerous prestigious awards:

- National Exemplary Rural Woman Entrepreneur (*Ministry of Agriculture, Iran*) — for advancing rural enterprises and empowering women artisans.
- Top Cooperative Manager of Khuzestan Province — for outstanding leadership and cooperative growth.
- Craft Heritage Preservation Award — for safeguarding and commercializing traditional *kapu* basketry.



“Meaningful development begins when local wisdom is empowered and shared—reviving and modernizing traditional ‘kapu’ basketry into an internationally recognized handicraft that preserves cultural heritage, creates sustainable income, strengthens social security, and expands rural craftsmanship into national and global markets.” - Mrs. Parvaneh Pourang

Excellence in Social Impact Leadership — for promoting sustainable employment and women-centered welfare initiatives like insurance and micro loan programs. These honors not only celebrate Parvaneh's remarkable journey but also amplify the collective success of over 850 women whose lives have been transformed under her guidance. Her exemplary work, reflected in the accompanying photographs, stands as a living testament to how tradition, when nurtured by vision and compassion, can open doors to global opportunity.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Parvaneh Pourang, Shahiyoun village, Dezful County, Khuzestan Province, Iran

Email: parvaneh.pourang@gmail.com

Mob: +989163439483

15. Marginalization to Market Leader:

Sajida Mumtaz, Pakistan

In rural Pakistan, the intersection of physical disability and economic hardship often creates a cycle of invisibility. For Sajida Mumtaz, a survivor of childhood polio, the challenge was not merely her limited mobility, but the societal and financial structures that equated disability with dependency. At 50 years old, facing the dual responsibility of caring for her elderly mother and securing a future for herself, Sajida stood at a crossroads that many in the international development field recognize: the gap between raw potential and the capital required to unleash it.



Mrs. Sajida Mumtaz, Pakistan

Social Mobilization and the NRSP Model

The turning point arrived in 2009 through the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP). For donors and practitioners, Sajida's story is a textbook example of the "Graduation Approach" and the power of local institution-building. Rather than receiving a one-off grant, Sajida engaged with NRSP's social mobilization framework.

She did not just seek help; she led. By organizing the women in her neighborhood into the "Said Purian" Women's Organization and serving as its President, she transformed from an isolated individual into a community architect. This shift in agency is the hallmark of sustainable development.

Her journey proved that no matter how distant or difficult the destination, every step taken with determination brings a person closer to success and the view from the top is truly beautiful.

Strategic Financing and Multiplier Effects

Leveraging Pakistan's growing landscape of Islamic Microfinance, Sajida took her first loan of PKR 10,000. For policymakers, the return on this modest investment is staggering:

- Human Capital Development: Sajida established a Vocational Training Center, personally supervising the training of 85 young women in tailoring and facilitating woodwork training for 30 others.
- Asset Diversification: She moved beyond a single income stream. Today, her portfolio includes a sewing business, a



home-based catering enterprise, and a welding workshop established for her husband through subsequent financing.

- Economic Resilience: By owning a rickshaw to distribute her homemade food, she has successfully integrated "last-mile" logistics into her micro-enterprise model.

"When barriers are replaced with access, women with disabilities move from marginalization to leadership—becoming drivers of entrepreneurship, skills development, and community resilience. Inclusive finance and social systems show that disability is not a limitation, but a test of institutional inclusivity, where those once seen as vulnerable emerge as resilient leaders and engines of growth."

- Mrs.Sajida Mumtaz

Disability as a Driver of Determination

For the general reader and the development practitioner alike, Sajida's journey offers a profound reflection: disability is not a deficit of ability, but a test of institutional inclusivity. When microfinance products and social support systems are designed to be accessible, individuals like Sajida don't just "exit poverty"—they become engines of regional growth.



"I realized that my condition was not a limitation, but a testament to my determination. Through NRSP, I found not just a loan, but the dignity of self-reliance."

The Global Takeaway

Sajida's story is a call to action for the international community to continue investing in localized, gender-responsive, and disability-inclusive economic programs. It proves that when we provide the right tools to the most "vulnerable," they often become the most resilient leaders in the field.

Today, as Sajida manages her thriving businesses in Pakistan, she stands as living proof that no destination is too distant when the path is paved with determination and supported by inclusive policy.



Contact Information:

Mrs.Sajida Mumtaz, Urban Area of Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: shaista.nrsp@gmail.com

Mob: +92 03335293758, +92 03155094294

16. Struggles to Strength:

Mrs. Sangeeta Dalai, India

From the quiet fields of Narendrapur to becoming a respected voice of leadership in Ganjam district, Odisha, India, Mrs. Sangeeta Dalai's life is a powerful reminder that strength is often born from struggle. Her journey—from the daughter of a marginal farmer to a community leader and entrepreneur—reflects courage, perseverance, and an unwavering commitment to social change. Today, she stands as a symbol of hope for rural women, proving that with determination, education, and collective effort, even the most difficult circumstances can be transformed into opportunities.



Mrs. Sangeeta Dalai, India

Roots of Resilience

Born in 1995 in Narendrapur, Sangeeta Dalai grew up in a small marginal farming family where life was defined by hard work and limited means. Though she successfully completed her graduation, financial constraints stood firmly in the way of her dreams of higher education. At a young age, she was married to Sukadev Mallik of Ankuli, Berhampur, and like many rural women, her future seemed confined to household responsibilities.

But Sangeeta carried something within her that poverty could not silence—a deep determination to rise above her circumstances.

The Turning Point

In 2015, a single decision changed the course of her life. She joined the Maa Gajabayani Self-Help Group (SHG), an act that marked the beginning of her transformation from a struggling young woman into a confident leader. What started as a small step soon became a powerful journey of empowerment, learning, and leadership.

Rooted in her understanding of rural life and farming, Sangeeta began working closely with her SHG. When the group received Revolving Fund (RF) support from the Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM), they initiated desi cow farming and began selling milk locally. It was a modest beginning—but one filled with vision and purpose.

Leadership in Action

Sangeeta's natural leadership soon became evident. Her ability to inspire and guide others led to the formation of the Prativa Producer Group (PG) in 2015. Under her guidance, group members received training in preparing milk-based products such as ghee, cheese, curd, and paneer. These products soon found their way into nearby markets like Chatrapur and Berhampur, bringing income and confidence to many women.

Recognizing her dedication and commitment, OLM sanctioned two Dairy Clusters worth ₹10 lakhs each, enabling the community to expand their dairy activities to 70 cows. On a personal level, Sangeeta steadily built her own enterprise. Today, she owns 15 milking cows, a cattle shed (cattle hostel), 12 goats, and a desi poultry farm with 50 birds.

Yet, her success has never been just about herself. She continues to provide training and handholding support to SHG members and community women, helping them learn milk product preparation and build sustainable livelihoods.

Growing with Support

Her Producer Group availed IBCB support of ₹2.04 lakhs and Equipment Cost assistance of ₹1 lakh. Personally, Sangeeta accessed CIF of ₹1 lakh from OLM and secured an interest subvention bank loan of ₹4 lakhs (in two tranches) to further expand her enterprise.

Her hard work and entrepreneurial spirit did not go unnoticed. The District Administration of Ganjam recognized her efforts and allotted her a permanent stall at Ramlingeswar Park, Berhampur, where she sells milk products to a wider market.



Education, Empowerment, and Dreams Renewed

Today, Sangeeta's annual income exceeds ₹2 lakhs, giving her financial stability and dignity. Most remarkably, she has returned to her own unfinished dream—education. She is currently pursuing a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree, funded entirely through her own earnings. She is also planning to expand her desi poultry farm by adding 30 more birds under government support schemes.



With humility and gratitude, Sangeeta acknowledges the continuous encouragement and support of the District Administration and the Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM), which played a vital role in her journey.

"A deep determination that poverty could not silence can grow into resilience and leadership—transforming struggle into strength and individuals into torchbearers of empowerment who guide others toward self-reliance, dignity, and opportunity. When this inner resolve is combined with collective action, it becomes a powerful force for advancing women's empowerment, education, and social justice. From grassroots struggle to shared progress, it is a living testament that when women rise, entire communities rise with them." - Mrs. Sangeeta Dalai

A Beacon for Rural Women

Beyond financial independence, Sangeeta Dalai has become a torchbearer of women's empowerment in her community. She dedicates her time and energy to guiding other SHG members to become "Lakhpati Didis", helping them achieve sustainable livelihoods and self-reliance.



She actively advocates for the education of girls,

prevention of child marriage, and eradication of gender-based violence. Through her leadership, many women have gained access to government subsidies, created assets, and built dignified, independent lives.

From the fields of Narendrapur to the hearts of countless women she inspires, Sangeeta's story is not just her own—it is a living testament to the power of resilience, collective action, and belief. Her journey reminds us all that when women rise, communities rise with them.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Sangeeta Dalai, Narendrapur, PO – Narendrapur

Block – Chatrapur, District – Ganjam, Odisha, India

Mob: +917735413938

Pin: 760007, India

17. On the Canvas of Integrated Rooftop Farming: Mrs. Nasima Akhter, Bangladesh

On a modest 1,300 square-foot rooftop in Cumilla, Bangladesh, a quiet revolution is unfolding. What appears at first glance to be a cluster of vegetable sacks, poultry cages, and climbing vines is, in fact, a living blueprint for sustainable development—painted with resilience, innovation, and purpose by one woman: Nasima Akhter.

Nasima’s journey demonstrates how women, even within limited physical and financial space, can become agents of transformation—strengthening food security, generating income, nurturing communities, and advancing global development goals from the ground up.



Mrs. Nasima Akhter, Bangladesh

Seeds of Leadership

Born and raised in Cumilla, Nasima showed early signs of leadership and curiosity. As a student, she actively participated in debating, sports, and gardening—experiences that nurtured her confidence, problem-solving skills, and connection to nature. These formative years planted the seeds for a lifelong commitment to self-reliance and community engagement.

Married for 28 years and a mother of three sons—now pursuing higher education abroad—Nasima’s household was not defined by extreme poverty. Yet, driven by a strong sense of agency and purpose, she sought to contribute independently to her family’s wellbeing. Her motivation reflects a key insight in gender and development research: women’s empowerment is not solely about income necessity, but about dignity, choice, and voice (SDG 5: Gender Equality).

From Learning to Livelihood

Nasima’s professional journey unfolded gradually, marked by continuous learning. She began as a primary school teacher and later served on a school management committee, gaining experience in leadership and governance (SDG 4: Quality Education). She then worked for four years at the hatchery unit of Kazi Farm, where she acquired hands-on knowledge in poultry management.



After marriage, she translated these skills into practice—starting small-scale poultry rearing and vegetable cultivation at home. Initially earning BDT 5,000–8,000 per month, she steadily expanded her enterprise. Today, her integrated rooftop farming generates BDT 25,000–30,000 monthly, illustrating how micro-entrepreneurship and incremental innovation can deliver sustainable livelihoods in resource-constrained settings (SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Transformational change does not require vast land or wealth—it requires vision, resilience, and action. From a 1,300-square-foot rooftop, a thriving model of integrated farming has emerged, strengthening food security, generating income, empowering women, and inspiring community-wide development. - Ms. Nasima Akhter

Innovation on a Rooftop

What sets Nasima apart is not merely persistence, but innovation born from necessity. On her rooftop, she manages a diversified system of ducks, chickens, turkeys, pigeons, and seasonal crops—bottle gourd, pumpkin, papaya, brinjal, tomato, ginger, turmeric, mango, banana, and amlaki.

Her integrated farming model reflects principles increasingly promoted in climate-resilient and urban agriculture:

- **Efficient Poultry Management:** By separating chicks from hens, she reduces mortality and accelerates egg production—improving animal welfare and productivity (SDG 2: Zero Hunger).
- **Circular Resource Use:** Poultry waste replaces transported soil, reducing costs and recycling nutrients (SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production).
- **Alternative Feed Systems:** Kitchen waste, taro leaves, rice husk, and fruit peels are converted into poultry feed—minimizing waste and input dependency.
- **Sack-Based Cultivation:** Rice husk mixed with fertilizer enables potato, ginger, and turmeric cultivation in sacks, optimizing space and yield.



Together, these practices form a low-cost, scalable model of sustainable urban and peri-urban agriculture, aligned with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

The Power of Institutional Support

Nasima's individual initiative was amplified through her association with the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD). Under the Lalmai Mainamati Project, she received poultry chicks, fruit

saplings, and multiple loans of BDT 100,000—resources she invested strategically. In 2019, she was appointed Project Manager, marking a transition from beneficiary to leader.

In this role, Nasima facilitated training, mentored other members, and promoted participatory problem-solving—an approach consistent with best practices in inclusive rural development (SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals). Her leadership was formally recognized when BARD awarded her the Best Manager Crest (2022–23).

Social Capital and Community Trust

Today, Nasima manages two associations—Fakirmura and Bara Durgapur—working directly with 60 members. Yet her influence extends far beyond formal structures. Community members seek her advice on agriculture, education, health, and even legal matters. Neighbors invite her to sow seeds in their gardens, believing crops planted under her guidance grow healthier and stronger.

This trust reflects more than technical competence; it reflects ethical leadership, integrity, and empathy. Nasima’s role has evolved into that of a community anchor—demonstrating how women’s economic empowerment often translates into broader social leadership (SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities).



Inspiring Collective Change

Nasima’s success has sparked a ripple effect. Other women, inspired by her example, have begun income-generating activities of their own—strengthening household resilience and community cohesion. This collective momentum embodies participatory rural development, where change is driven not by external actors alone, but by local champions.

Looking ahead, Nasima envisions establishing a larger agricultural farm to create employment for underprivileged villagers—particularly women and youth. Her aspiration underscores a shift from self-reliance to shared prosperity, aligning with SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8.

Her guiding message to other rural women is simple yet profound:

“If a person has goodwill and the willingness to work hard, anyone can change their situation.”

18. Balibagada village to the World Stage:

Mrs. Jyoti Reddy, India

Born in 1983 in the small yet culturally rich village of Balibagada, under Chikalkhandi Gram Panchayat of Ganjam district, Odisha, India, Mrs. Jyoti Reddy grew up amidst the realities of rural life. Her family depended entirely on agriculture, and from childhood she was familiar with the rhythm of farming seasons, the uncertainty of rainfall, and the dignity of hard labor.

Life in Balibagada was simple but demanding. Jyoti learned early that survival in rural India required resilience, patience, and collective effort. These formative experiences shaped her character—grounded, disciplined, and quietly determined.



Mrs. Jyoti Reddy, India

After her marriage to Mr. S. Lachheya Reddy, a small farmer, Jyoti stepped into the traditional role of managing household responsibilities while supporting agricultural work. Like countless rural women, her contributions were vital yet often invisible. Though her world appeared confined to home and farm, within her lived a strong aspiration—to secure a better future for her children and to stand on her own feet with dignity.

Journey into Empowerment

The first spark of transformation came in 2008, when Jyoti joined the Maa Samaleswari Self-Help Group (SHG). Initially, the SHG served as a platform for savings and mutual support among women. Over time, it became a space where Jyoti discovered her voice, confidence, and leadership potential.

In 2012, she began working as an electricity bill collector through her SHG. Though the income was modest, it marked a turning point. For the first time, she earned independently, interacted with institutions, and gained recognition beyond her household. This experience strengthened her self-belief and established her credibility within the community.



Her journey truly accelerated in 2014 with the intervention of the Odisha Livelihood Mission (OLM). Through structured training, exposure visits, financial inclusion, and convergence with line departments, Jyoti and her SHG members began to look beyond subsistence activities. She learned enterprise planning, risk management, and the importance of diversification—transforming from a participant into a leader.

Ground-Breaking Entrepreneurial Ventures

With renewed confidence, Jyoti took a bold step into entrepreneurship by availing a ₹2.15 lakh bank-linked loan under Odisha Livelihood Mission (OLM) and establishing a 3,500-bird poultry unit. The initiative was ambitious for a rural woman with limited resources—and the challenges were immediate.

Lack of electricity and water posed serious threats to the sustainability of the poultry unit. Many would have given up. Jyoti, however, chose perseverance. Through strong institutional convergence involving OLM, the Ganjam District Administration, and the Horticulture Department, crucial infrastructure support was provided:

- **A solar pump worth ₹1 lakh** ensured uninterrupted water supply
- **A dug well under MGNREGS** secured long-term water access

With these assets in place, the poultry unit stabilized and began generating consistent income.

Encouraged by success, Jyoti expanded and diversified her livelihood portfolio:

- She planted 3,000 Kewda plants across 1.5 acres, tapping into Odisha’s globally known Kewda economy
- She adopted multi-crop farming, cultivating vegetables, banana, papaya, and marigold for year-round income
- As a member of the Kewda Craft Producer Group, she accessed ₹2.04 lakh IBCB support, strengthening collective enterprise
- In 2025, she adopted the grafted brinjal “Lakhpatri Didi” prototype, a joint initiative of OLM and PRADAN-NSO
- She further accessed ₹50,000 CIF and ₹10,000 VRF loans to expand operations

Each initiative reflected her ability to learn, adapt, and innovate—hallmarks of a true rural entrepreneur.

Impact on Livelihoods and Community

Today, Mrs. Jyoti Reddy stands as one of the most inspiring SHG entrepreneurs in Ganjam district. Her diversified enterprises generate an annual turnover exceeding ₹7 lakh, with a net income of ₹4–5 lakh, firmly establishing her as an entrepreneur.

However, her true impact extends far beyond income figures. Jyoti has:

- Created employment opportunities for five rural women, ensuring income security for their families
- Become a demonstration farmer, showcasing innovative agricultural and livestock models
- Actively supported SHG members in accessing government schemes and subsidies
- Advocated strongly for asset ownership in women's names, promoting dignity and equality
- Taken a firm stand against child marriage, emerging as a respected social leader

Her journey has transformed perceptions—proving that rural women are not beneficiaries, but builders of development.

Recognition and National Honour

Jyoti's extraordinary journey has earned recognition at district, state, national, and international levels.

A defining moment came when she was selected to represent India at the International Day of Rural Women programme, organized by CIRDAP (Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific) in Bangladesh. On this international platform, she shared her story with delegates from across the Asia-Pacific region, highlighting India's women-led SHG and enterprise movement.

In 2025, her achievements reached the national spotlight when she was invited as a Special Guest to India's 78th Independence Day Celebration at the Red Fort, New Delhi. She was also invited to Rashtrapati Bhavan, where she interacted with the Honourable President of India. Both the President and the Prime Minister of India acknowledged her contribution to women's empowerment and rural transformation.



She is officially recognized as one of Odisha's Lakhpati Didis, symbolizing the success of grassroots entrepreneurship.

Women's empowerment begins with confidence, grows through collective action, and flourishes when opportunities are within reach. When women come together through Self-Help Groups, gain access to training, institutional support, and financial resources, they do not remain beneficiaries of development—they become leaders, entrepreneurs, and powerful agents of change, transforming their families, strengthening their communities, and contributing to the nation's progress.- Mrs. Jyoti Reddy

Family and Personal Aspirations

At the heart of Jyoti's success lies her deep commitment to family. Her increased income has enabled her to provide quality education and security for her son and daughter, fulfilling dreams once beyond reach.

Looking ahead, she aspires to become a "Crorepati Didi", scale her enterprises further, and mentor hundreds of rural women toward financial independence and leadership.



She also expresses heartfelt gratitude for the guidance and encouragement of Mr. Santosh Kumar Rath (DPM-OLM) and Mr. Rudra Ashish Behera (Zonal Coordinator, PRADAN-NSO), whose mentorship strengthened her confidence, clarity, and long-term vision.

A Role Model for Rural India

From the modest village of Balibagada to international platforms and the historic Red Fort, **Mrs. Jyoti Reddy's journey is a powerful testament to what rural women can achieve when opportunity meets determination.**

Her story reflects the transformative power of Self-Help Groups, institutional support, and **women's leadership. She stands today not just as a successful entrepreneur, but as a mentor, role model, and beacon of hope for rural India.**

Jyoti Reddy's journey reminds us that every empowered woman becomes a force—uplifting families, strengthening communities, and shaping the nation's future.

Contact Information :

Mrs. Jyoti Reddy, District: Ganjam, Village: kaliabali, Block: Chatrapur, Odisha, India

Email: sjyotireddy58@gmail.com

Mob: +919348255090

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/share/1HBsfEPMK5/>

19. Grassroots to Governance: Mrs. Kulsum Begum, Bangladesh

The Landscape of Vulnerability

In the remote village of Rupuddi, Bangladesh, life for Kulsum Begum was once defined by "landlessness"—a key indicator of extreme poverty in rural Bangladesh. Living on a small homestead with no cultivable land, her family relied on the precarious income of her husband, a day laborer, and her father-in-law, a traditional plowman. With four children to support, Kulsum faced the "triple burden" of rural women: domestic labor, financial insecurity, and a lack of social voice.



*Mrs. Kulsum Begum,
Bangladesh*

The Catalyst: Social Mobilization through BARD

Kulsum's trajectory shifted in 2000 when she engaged with the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD). This was not merely a story of receiving aid, but one of institutional capacity building.

Recognizing her innate leadership potential, the community appointed her as the Manager of the local Women's Development Program. Kulsum didn't just participate; she mastered the mechanics of micro-savings and credit discipline.

- Financial Literacy: She mobilized a personal share deposit of 20,000 BDT.
- Diversified Livelihoods: Through five strategic loan cycles totaling 200,000 BDT, she moved from subsistence to surplus, investing in a climate-resilient mix of vegetable farming, livestock, and poultry.
- Scale of Impact: Under her management, the Rupuddi organization's collective assets grew to 900,000 BDT, proving that localized, women-led financial circles are engines of rural economic growth.



True development begins when women move from poverty to leadership—gaining the opportunities, skills, economic independence, and voice needed to transform their communities and shape a more inclusive future.

Overcoming Structural Barriers

Kulsum's rise was met with the "social tax" often paid by trailblazing women in conservative settings. She faced deep-seated gender prejudice and suspicion regarding her mobility.

To bridge this gap, she utilized a multi-stakeholder approach. By partnering with legal experts and BARD officials, she organized courtyard meetings—a staple of community-led development—to address "taboo"



Subjects:

- Domestic violence and legal rights.
- The eradication of child marriage.
- Child protection and safety.

By solving communal problems, she converted her critics into constituents. Her transition from a community organizer to an elected Union Parishad Member represents the ultimate goal of development: moving from economic participation to political agency.

A Vision for Scalable Leadership

Today, Kulsum Begum is no longer just a beneficiary of development; she is a driver of it. Her aspirations have scaled from managing a village group to seeking the Chairmanship of the Union Parishad.

"My journey was never just about escaping poverty; it was about proving that a woman from a homestead can lead an entire Union. I want to transform service delivery for every citizen in my community." - Kulsum Begum

Lessons Learnt

Kulsum's story is a "Best Practice" case study for three reasons:

1. Sustainability: Her organization thrives on internal savings, not just external grants.
2. The Multiplier Effect: Her success triggered a "copycat" effect, where other village women adopted her model of self-reliance.
3. Graduation: She successfully "graduated" from extreme poverty to a position where she now influences local policy and resource allocation.

20. Life Woven with Resilience, Craft and Purpose: Mrs. Sharavva S. Daroji, India

From a small farming village in Karnataka, India to national recognition and global markets, Mrs. Sharavva S. Daroji's life is a powerful testament to resilience, creativity, and purpose. Her journey is not only about building a successful craft enterprise—it is about preserving India's traditional arts, empowering rural women, and transforming hardship into opportunity. Today, Sharavva stands as an inspiring symbol of how determination, skill, and compassion can weave together a life of lasting impact.



Mrs. Sharavva S. Daroji, India

Early Life: Roots in Struggle and Strength

Sharavva S. Daroji was born in a small village of Chikalgud, Karnataka, to Kalagouda S. Patil and Shanta Patil. Raised in an agricultural family, she grew up witnessing the harsh realities of rural life. Farming brought uncertain and often insufficient returns, and financial challenges were a constant presence. With many mouths to feed and limited income, survival itself required courage and sacrifice.

In 1988, when Sharavva was just ten years old, her father made the difficult decision to move part of the family to Goa in search of better opportunities. Life there was not easy. To support her family, young Sharavva began selling fruits and cold drinks to tourists on the beaches of Goa. What seemed like a small act of survival became an unexpected classroom—one where she learned communication, customer behavior, and the basics of business by interacting with people from around the world.

A defining moment came when Sharavva met Mrs. Annette Doyle, a tourist from Ireland. Recognizing the young girl's determination and potential, Annette introduced her to the world of crafts and fabric-based products. This simple encouragement planted a seed that would later grow into a life-changing enterprise.

Marriage, Responsibility, and an Unbroken Dream

In 1993, Sharavva married at a young age and took on significant household responsibilities. Yet, her passion for stitching and craftwork never faded. With no formal training, limited financial resources, and facing social barriers, she taught herself tailoring and handicraft skills through persistence and self-belief.

Her journey—from selling fruits on a beach to becoming a respected craft entrepreneur—reflects extraordinary grit. Each stitch she learned, each piece she created, became a quiet act of resistance against poverty and limitation.

Building Rural Arts: Crafting a Sustainable Future

Sharavva is the founder of Rural Arts, a retail outlet based in Belagavi, Karnataka, known for producing and marketing handmade crafts. Her creations include cloth bags, stoles, runners, godhadi quilts, patchwork sarees, and eco-friendly home décor items—each product blending tradition, skill, and sustainability.

Entrepreneurship and Expansion

Her entrepreneurial journey began modestly:

- She started with small tailoring assignments and handcrafted cloth bags.
- She secured her first financial support through a District Industries Centre (DIC) loan.
- With growing confidence and demand, she expanded her enterprise further with a ₹10 lakh MUDRA Yojana loan from Union Bank of India.

These milestones marked her transition from survival-based work to a structured and sustainable enterprise.

Landmark Achievements

Sharavva's craftsmanship and reliability soon earned national recognition:

- In 2014, she received a major order of 1,000 quilts from Mrs. Sudha Murthy, Infosys Foundation.
- In 2024, she successfully completed an order of 500 quilts for Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of Finance, Government of India.

These achievements not only validated her skills but also showcased the strength of rural women-led enterprises on national platforms.

Women Empowerment and SHG Leadership

Believing that true success must be shared, Sharavva founded the Matha Savithribai Self-Help Group (SHG) with 30 women members. Through this collective, she provides entrepreneurial guidance and skill-based training to women from vulnerable backgrounds.

Her impact is deeply human. She played a pivotal role in empowering women like Parveenbabai Mulla, a single mother and person with disability, by enabling her to earn a stable livelihood through embroidery and craftwork. Stories like these reflect Sharavva's belief that economic independence is the foundation of dignity.

Global Reach and Meaningful Partnerships

Sharavva's work has crossed borders while staying rooted in tradition:

- She continues to receive moral and creative support from Mrs. Annette Doyle (Ireland), whose early encouragement shaped her journey.
- She collaborated with Mrs. Ondi, a US-based entrepreneur and founder of the Atelier OM store in New York, which placed international orders for handcrafted bags, quilts, patchwork items, and eco-friendly products.

When women are given the opportunity to develop their skills, access resources, and pursue their aspirations, they transform adversity into enterprise, preserve cultural heritage, empower others, and create lasting change for their communities and future generations. - Mrs. Sharavva S. Daroji

These partnerships demonstrate how rural craftsmanship can find a place in global markets without losing its soul.

Social Impact: Beyond Livelihoods

Over the last decade, Sharavva has created more than her own livelihood. She has nurtured a growing network of rural women who are now economically independent. Her SHG members actively contribute to household incomes, strengthening families and breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Through Rural Arts, Sharavva continues to preserve India's traditional craft heritage while promoting sustainable and eco-friendly products, ensuring that cultural legacy and modern livelihoods grow together.

Vision for the Future

Mrs. Sharavva envisions transforming Rural Arts into a nationally and globally recognized brand, present both online and offline. Her dream is to scale production, train more rural women, and build a sustainable livelihood model that keeps traditional Indian crafts alive while adapting them to contemporary markets.

A Legacy Woven with Hope

Mrs. Sharavva S. Daroji's life reminds us that resilience can be learned, skills can be self-taught, and dreams can survive even the harshest beginnings. From the beaches of Goa to national recognition and global partnerships, her journey is a living inspiration—proof that when women are empowered, entire communities rise.

Contact Information

Mrs. Sharavva S. Daroji, Shramajeevi Foundation, India

Mob: +91 99009 71226

21. Inspiring Journey of Integrity and Leadership: Mrs. Sri Wahyuni, Indonesia

In the heart of Mesuji Regency, Indonesia, a woman's unwavering dedication, honesty, and transparent leadership has transformed the way her community functions. Ms. Sri Wahyuni is widely recognized as a leader of integrity, whose commitment to a corruption-free, empowered, and participatory village serves as an example for all. Her story is a living testament to how courage, vision, and ethical leadership can bring about profound community transformation.



Mrs. Sri Wahyuni, Indonesia

Sri Wahyuni's life demonstrates that true leadership is not just about titles or recognition—it is about fostering trust, accountability, and empowerment at every level.

Roots of Leadership and Integrity

From the beginning, Sri Wahyuni stood out for her dedication, hard work, and honesty. Her leadership philosophy is grounded in the belief that a village grows when every individual is empowered, corruption is absent, and every voice is heard. Guided by these principles, she has worked tirelessly to strengthen community participation, improve governance, and ensure transparency in every aspect of village life.

Recognitions and Achievements

Her remarkable work has earned both national and regional accolades, reflecting her tireless commitment to progress:

- 16th National Rank, representing Regional Innovation, and recognized as the Most Innovative Regency at the Innovative Government Award (IGA) by the Ministry of Home Affairs (Kemendagri)
- Selected as a Corruption-Free Village at the Provincial Level (2023 – Present)
- Awarded the Independent Village Badge from the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendes PDTT) in 2023
- Honored with the Best National Village Leader in Building Villages by PWDPI in 2023



- 1st Place, Regency-Level Village Cleanliness Competition (2023)
- 1st Place, Anti-Corruption Quiz Competition during World Anti-Corruption Day (HAKORDIA 2024), organized by the Mesuji District Attorney's Office
- Fastest and Over-Target Land and Building Tax Payment Award from Mesuji Regency Revenue Agency (Bapenda) in 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025
- 2nd Place, Neighborhood Security System (Siskamling) Competition at Mesuji Police Resort Level in 2024, and 3rd Place in 2023

“A village grows when every individual is empowered, corruption is absent, and every voice is heard”. - Mrs. Sri Wahyuni

These accolades reflect not just efficiency but also her unwavering commitment to integrity, accountability, and community welfare.

Policies for Participation and Transparency

At the heart of Sri Wahyuni's leadership is a people-centered governance approach. She introduced initiatives to encourage civic participation, transparency, and trust, such as:

- Gift Coupons and Door Prizes for the community to encourage timely compliance and payment of PBB P2, alongside rewards for the fastest RW and RT in completing payments
- “Grebeg RT” Program, conducted annually in every RT area, which gathers community aspirations, facilitates direct discussions with residents, and ensures clear communication on programs implemented and planned, promoting transparency in the use of village funds

Through these policies, she not only fostered compliance but also created a culture of accountability where residents felt involved and informed.

Village Fund Management and Innovation

Sri Wahyuni's approach to village development is built on collaboration, innovation, and resourcefulness:

- Partnered with local business actors to contribute to village development, providing materials and base stones for community infrastructure
- Increased Village Original Revenue (PADes) by exploring local potentials and creating Village Legal Products, such as renting out the Village Hall, Village Land, and Village Market

Her strategies demonstrated that sustainable community development is achieved not only through leadership but also through innovative use of local resources and collective participation.

A Legacy of Integrity and Progress

Ms. Sri Wahyuni's journey is more than a story of awards and recognition—it is a living example of how ethical leadership transforms communities. Her dedication to corruption-free governance, citizen empowerment, and transparent village management has set a standard for leaders across Indonesia.



Through her vision, courage, and unwavering integrity, she has shown that when leaders act with honesty and involve their community, villages can grow stronger, safer, and more prosperous. Her legacy is a beacon of hope, not only for Mesuji Regency but for all communities striving for accountability, participation, and sustainable development.



Notable Awards: Most Innovative Regency (IGA), Independent Village Badge (Kemendes PDTT), Best National Village Leader (PWDPI), Corruption-Free Village Recognition

Contact Information

Ms. Sri Wahyuni, Mesuji Regency, Indonesia

22. Pathways of Local Leadership and Social Change:

Mrs. Shiji James, India

In the lush landscapes of Kannur district, Kerala, India, Mrs. Shiji James has emerged as a symbol of women's empowerment, entrepreneurial spirit, and sustainable rural development. From the humble beginnings of purchasing a single cow to managing an integrated farm and guiding her community, Shiji's journey demonstrates how determination, knowledge, and leadership can transform not only individual lives but entire communities.



Mrs. Shiji James, India

Her story reflects the essence of the 'Lakhpati Didi' initiative under Kudumbashree NRLM, recognizing women-headed families earning over ₹1 lakh annually, and showcases how one woman's vision can create lasting impact through enterprise and collective growth.

Early Life and Motivation

Shiji James began her livelihood journey in 2015, driven by the simple yet profound goal of supporting her children's education. Coming from a rural background, she faced the challenges common to many women-headed households in India—limited resources, modest means, and minimal access to entrepreneurial guidance.

With unwavering determination, she converted these early challenges into stepping stones, gradually growing her small enterprise into a flourishing integrated farm and becoming a respected figure in her community.

Building a Sustainable Integrated Farm

What started with one cow has now expanded into a thriving integrated farm, reflecting Shiji's commitment to sustainability, innovation, and community development:

- Livestock: 25 cows, producing around 400 litres of milk daily
- Poultry: 200 native egg-laying hens
- Aquaculture: 250 fish
- Apiculture: 25 beehive colonies
- Fodder cultivation: 1.5 acres through her Joint Liability Group (JLG)



Shiji markets a wide range of dairy products under her brand, “Richoos Food Products”, including curd, butter, ghee, and milk. She also leads and organizes the Richoos Dairy Producer Group, mentoring and training other women in dairy entrepreneurship and sustainable farming techniques.

Leadership and Community Impact

Beyond her personal enterprise, Shiji has become a community leader and catalyst for change:

- Livelihood Subcommittee Convener of Ulikkal CDS (Community Development Society)
- Represented Kudumbashree at the 79th Independence Day celebrations in Delhi
- Actively trains other women, sharing her knowledge of dairy farming, integrated agriculture, and enterprise management
- Encourages sustainable practices and collective empowerment through SHGs and JLGs

Her efforts have strengthened the local community, created new income opportunities, and inspired rural women to adopt entrepreneurship as a pathway to self-reliance.

A person can transform humble beginnings into sustainable success and community-wide impact through determination, knowledge, continuous learning, entrepreneurship, and leadership.

- Mrs. Shiji James

Recognition and Milestones

- Featured in the ‘Lakhpati Didi’ initiative for women-headed households earning over ₹1 lakh annually
- Successfully integrated dairy, poultry, aquaculture, and apiculture, demonstrating innovative, multi-faceted rural enterprise
- Actively mentoring other women, creating a ripple effect of empowerment

Shiji’s journey shows how perseverance, strategic planning, and social leadership can turn modest beginnings into sustainable, community-wide transformations.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Shiji James, Thyparambil House, Vayathur, Ulikal, 670705, Kannur, Kerala, India

Mob: +919744082743, +919947012299

23. Turning Hardship into Leadership: Mrs. Sufia Begum, Bangladesh

In the riverine village of Ujirpur, Comilla in Bangladesh, leadership did not arrive through privilege or inheritance—it emerged from hardship, perseverance, and an unwavering belief in collective progress. Sufia Begum’s life story is a compelling reminder that transformative rural development often begins with women who refuse to accept poverty as destiny. Rising from landlessness and extreme poverty to become a respected public representative, Sufia embodies the power of inclusive development and women-led local governance.



Mrs. Sufia Begum, Bangladesh

Today, at 62, Sufia continues to work with quiet confidence and deep commitment, strengthening her community while constantly improving herself. Her journey speaks not only to personal triumph but also to the broader promise of investing in women as agents of change—an approach that lies at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

Early Life: Poverty, Responsibility, and Resolve

Sufia Begum married Latif Sardar in 1973 and together they raised one son and four daughters. Like many rural families, their livelihood depended on a fragile informal economy. Latif’s small grocery business collapsed, plunging the family into financial insecurity. At a time when women’s economic participation in rural Bangladesh was limited and often discouraged, Sufia made a decisive choice: she would take responsibility for her family’s survival.

This moment marked a turning point. It was not simply an economic decision—it was an act of quiet resistance against structural poverty and gender norms. Her resolve reflected the lived realities of millions of rural women whose unpaid labor sustains households, yet whose leadership potential often goes unrecognized.

“Leadership is not about position—it is about service. By turning hardship into purpose, empowering others through opportunity, and standing beside the most vulnerable, we can transform not only our own lives but the future of our communities. True progress begins when resilience is matched with compassion and a commitment to leave no one behind.” - Mrs. Sufia Begum

Collective Action as a Pathway Out of Poverty

In 2002, Sufia joined the Women’s Education, Income, and Nutrition Improvement Project (WEINIP)—later renamed RWSEEDE—implemented by the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD). Through this initiative, she discovered something transformative: the power of collective action.



With just 300 Bangladeshi taka and 25 women, Sufia established a cooperative society in her village. What began as

a modest savings group evolved into a robust women-led institution. Under her leadership, the cooperative’s capital grew to 800,000 taka, and membership expanded to 70 women. For many members, this cooperative became their first formal access to savings, credit, and income-generating opportunities—directly contributing to SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Building Skills, Confidence, and Leadership

Sufia’s leadership was strengthened through a series of capacity-building trainings facilitated by WEINIP/RWSEEDE. These included organizational management, self-care education, agriculture and fisheries development, garment design and block batik, computer skills, and mobile servicing. The diversity of these trainings reflects a holistic development approach—recognizing that poverty reduction requires skills, confidence, health awareness, and access to technology.

These opportunities expanded Sufia’s vision beyond survival. They nurtured her entrepreneurial mindset, enhanced her leadership abilities, and reinforced social values related to rights, inclusion, and dignity. Her transformation underscores the importance of lifelong learning (SDG 4) and women’s empowerment (SDG 5) as cornerstones of sustainable development.

Her impact did not go unnoticed. Sufia was recognized 15 times as Best Chairperson of the women’s cooperative at WEINIP’s annual planning conferences, becoming a role model for other societies across the region.

Entrepreneurship and Economic Resilience

At home, Sufia began designing garments and sewing three-piece outfits—turning creativity into income. This small enterprise not only strengthened her family’s financial stability but also demonstrated that rural women can successfully engage in value-added economic activities. Her example encouraged other women to explore entrepreneurship, reinforcing local economies and contributing to SDG 8 and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

From Community Leader to Public Representative

Sufia’s credibility as a cooperative leader naturally extended into public service. She played an active role in supporting destitute women, forming new cooperatives, and helping community member’s access government allowances, employment programs, and social safety nets. She worked tirelessly to ensure that the poor, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups received government assistance cards—bridging the gap between citizens and the state.

Her commitment to inclusive service led to her election as a local government representative, a role she held for three consecutive terms. Trusted by her constituents, Sufia became a vital link between policy and people, exemplifying grassroots democracy and accountable institutions (SDG 16).

Resilience through Personal Loss

Sufia’s journey has also been marked by profound personal tragedy. She lost her only son to cancer, followed later by the death of her husband. Yet even in grief, she did not withdraw from public life. Instead, she transformed loss into renewed purpose, deepening her commitment to serve others.

Her resilience is a powerful reminder that development is not only about infrastructure or income—it is about human strength, dignity, and solidarity.



A Living Example of Women-Led Development

Sufia Begum’s life story illustrates what becomes possible when women at the margins are given access to skills, institutions, and leadership opportunities. Her transformation—from a landless, hardcore poor woman to a public representative—demonstrates the interconnected nature of the SDGs and the critical role of women in achieving them.

She stands today not only as a leader in her village, but as a symbol of rural transformation in Bangladesh—proving that when women rise, communities rise with them.

Contact Information

Mrs. Sufia Begum, Ujirpur, Comilla, Bangladesh

24. Humble Origins, Global Horizons:

Mrs. Sagarika Hitihamu, Sri Lanka

In the complex landscape of South Asian agriculture, the "missing link" between policy and prosperity is often the lack of localized, evidence-based research. Ms. Sagarika Jayalath Manike Hitihamu, a Senior Research Officer at the Hector Kobbekaduwa Agrarian Research and Training Institute (HARTI), Sri Lanka, has dedicated over two decades to filling this gap. Her journey—from a farmer's daughter in Haguranketha to a leading voice in agrarian economics—is a testament to the power of lived experience meeting academic rigor.



Mrs. Sagarika Hitihamu, Sri Lanka

The Vision: Deciphering the Dairy Value Chain

For Sagarika, the dairy sector is not just a sub-sector of livestock; it is a critical vehicle for rural poverty alleviation (SDG 1). While many researchers focus on broad agricultural trends, Sagarika has spent twenty years identifying the specific "leaks" in Sri Lanka's dairy value chain—from production inefficiencies in the dry zone to marketing bottlenecks in peri-urban areas.

As the current Head of the Rural Development Division at HARTI, she bridges the gap between the "Heart" (community needs) and the "Head" (economic data). Her ongoing PhD research on Dairy Production and Marketing Efficiency using Stochastic Frontier Analysis (SFA) represents the high-level technical expertise required to modernize traditional systems.

Strategic Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sagarika's multi-decade portfolio is a blueprint for achieving the UN 2030 Agenda through targeted agricultural intervention. Under SDG 2: Zero Hunger, she has pioneered research on Sustainable Rice Intensification (SRI) and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) to enhance food security. For SDG 5: Gender Equality, she secured the 2025 CIRDAP grant for the "Women and Youth Empowerment Programme," focusing on bottom-up inclusive development. Under SDG 8: Decent Work, she has been developing agri-tourism models that leverage Sri Lanka's biodiversity to create alternative, sustainable income for rural families. Finally, under SDG 12: Responsible Production, she is evaluating the Dairy Development Policy to improve efficiency and reduce waste.

Resilience as a Research Methodology

Beyond her 30+ publications, Sagarika's most profound impact stems from her personal resilience.

Widowed with a nine-month-old daughter early in her career, she chose to turn personal adversity into a source of empathy for the rural women she serves.



Navigating the demands of high-level policy research and single parenthood, she demonstrated that professional excellence and personal responsibility are not mutually exclusive. This experience has made her a champion of Social Impact Assessment, ensuring that development projects are evaluated not just by their economic output, but by their effect on the family unit.

Innovation beyond the Farm: The Agri-Tourism Frontier

Sagarika is currently leading a transformative shift in rural livelihoods by integrating Sustainable Agriculture with Tourism. By working with farmer-managed societies to develop agri-tourism, she is helping Sri Lanka capitalize on its status as a biodiversity hotspot. This diversification is a critical strategy for climate resilience—ensuring that when crops or livestock face environmental shocks, rural families have a secondary, stable income stream.



“Where you begin does not define where you can lead. Humble beginnings can become the foundation for growth, and every challenge carries the potential to become a greater purpose. When knowledge is guided by service and connected to people's needs, even the quietest efforts can create lasting change. True success is measured not by recognition, but by the lives improved, the opportunities created, the communities empowered, and the hope inspired in others.”

- Mrs. Sagarika Hitihamu

Reflective Leadership: A Message to the Global Field

Sagarika’s career reflects the "Quiet Revolution" of institutional dedication. Her work with international bodies like the UNDP, FAO, and CIRDAP proves that local experts are the most effective conduits for global best practices.

"Research is only complete when it leaves the pages of a journal and enters the lives of the community. When a rural woman gains economic independence through a better-managed dairy cow, the purpose of my life's work is realized."

Policy Lessons for the International Development Community

- For Donors: Sagarika's success with the Alumni Grant Scheme and CIRDAP grants shows the high return on investing in "Homegrown Experts" who possess deep contextual knowledge.
- For Practitioners: The focus on Efficiency Analysis (SFA) highlights the need for technical precision in micro-enterprise development to ensure smallholders are competitive in a global market.
- For Policymakers: Her work on Agri-tourism offers a model for "Livelihood Diversification" that can be replicated across other biodiversity-rich developing nations.

Contact Information

Mrs. Sagarika Hitihamu, Hector Kobebbekaduwa Agrarian Research and Training Institute, Wijerama MW, Colombo 07, Sri Lanka

Email: sagarikajayalath@gmail.com

Mob: +94714434583,

[Linkedin.com/in/sagarika-hitihamu-a9249043](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sagarika-hitihamu-a9249043)

Website: www.harti.gov.lk

25. Turning Waste into Wonders: Mrs. Luzviminda Cacanindin, Philippines

In the agricultural heartlands of La Union, Philippines, the "residual" parts of a harvest—like corn husks—were traditionally seen as waste or environmental liabilities. Today, they are high-value export-quality products. At the center of this transformation is Ms. Luzviminda Edna D. Cacanindin, an agrarian reform beneficiary who has turned the concept of "waste" into a thriving economic engine for her community.



The Innovation: Scaling the Circular Economy

Luzviminda's journey is a masterclass in Value-Added Agriculture. By *Mrs. Luzviminda Cacanindin, Philippines* looking at the maize harvest through a lens of sustainability, she pioneered the transformation of discarded corn husks into intricate handcrafted goods:



Artisanal Products: Handbags, water holders, and decorative floral arrangements.

Agro-Processing: Extending the value chain into the production of artisanal wines and vinegars.

For international development practitioners, this is a prime example of SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), where agricultural "by-products" are diverted from landfills and upcycled into the market.

Strategic Leadership: From Farm to Market

Luzviminda's impact extends beyond her own workshop. As the Manager of the Maize Crafters de San Juan Agrarian Reform Cooperative, she navigated the complex landscape of agricultural finance to secure a PHP 1.5 million loan under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

This capital injection did more than just buy equipment; it provided the cooperative with the leverage to scale. Her strategic vision led to their enterprise being designated as the official "One Town, One Product" (OTOP) for Aringay. This policy-driven initiative by the Philippine government ensures that local ingenuity receives national marketing support and quality standard certification.

Aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Luzviminda's leadership directly advances several global targets:

Luzviminda's Leadership and Contribution to the SDGs

SDG 8: Decent Work & Economic Growth

Transforming a cooperative into a formal enterprise with access to PhP 1.5M in credit.

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure

Developing new manufacturing techniques for agricultural waste products.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

Leading a cooperative and serving on municipal agricultural councils as a female trailblazer.

SDG 1: No Poverty

Increasing the income of agrarian reform beneficiaries through diversified revenue streams.

The Policy Lens: Empowering the Beneficiary

Luzviminda's story is a reflection of the success of the Philippine Agrarian Reform program. It proves that when land distribution is paired with financial literacy and entrepreneurial training, the "beneficiary" becomes a "leader." Her active roles in municipal and regional agricultural councils ensure that the voices of smallholder farmers are integrated into regional development plans.



"Innovation is not just about new technology; it is about seeing value where others see waste. When we empower our farmers to be entrepreneurs, we secure the future of our rural communities." - Mrs. Luzviminda Cacanindin

Reflective Insight: Leading with Purpose

The success of the Maize Crafters is not just a story of profit, but of resilience. It shows that the most sustainable solutions to rural poverty are often hidden in plain sight—sometimes even in the husks left behind in the field.

Key Takeaways for the Development Community

For Donors: Luzviminda's success highlights the importance of "Agro-Industrialization" at the community level. Supporting cooperatives with low-interest credit (like RCEF) creates a massive multiplier effect.

For Policymakers: The "One Town, One Product" (OTOP) model is a replicable success for other developing nations looking to brand and market local rural innovations.

For Practitioners: Her transition from waste to artisanal goods demonstrates that "Climate-Smart Agriculture" can be highly profitable when linked to local craftsmanship.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Luzviminda Cacanindin, The Maize Crafters de San Juan Agrarian Reform Cooperative, San Juan, La Union, Philippines

26. Self-help Group and Growth:

Mrs. S. Sujatha, India

From the small village lanes of Anakapalli, Andhra Pradesh, India, S. Sujatha's life story is one of perseverance, courage, and unwavering determination. Despite financial challenges, societal expectations, and personal setbacks, she has carved a path not only for her own growth but also for the upliftment of her community. Her journey is a living testament to the power of education, resilience, and government support in transforming rural lives.

Sujatha's life reminds us that true success is measured not just by income or recognition, but by the positive impact we create for others.



Mrs. S. Sujatha, India

Early Life and Determination

Born into a middle-class family in a small village in Anakapalli, Sujatha grew up in an environment where opportunities for girls were limited. Financial struggles were a constant challenge, and societal expectations often constrained her dreams.

Yet, with determination and a thirst for learning, she completed her education up to a B.Ed. degree, balancing her studies with the responsibilities of family life after marriage. This early combination of perseverance and ambition laid the foundation for her future as a leader and entrepreneur.

Professional Beginnings

Sujatha began her professional journey as a private school teacher, earning a modest salary while supporting her family. In 2011, she joined the Sri Durga Self-Help Group (SHG), which helped her build financial independence through small loans for essential family needs.

Her entrepreneurial spirit soon led her to venture into mushroom farming in 2015, a bold step that ended in a complete crop loss. While this early setback could have discouraged many, Sujatha's resolve only strengthened.

Reviving Tradition: Anakapalli Bellam

Undeterred, in 2016, she returned to her roots and revived the traditional Anakapalli Bellam (jaggery) sweet business with her family. What began as a modest initiative with just two products blossomed into an enterprise producing 40 varieties of sweets. This business not only preserved local traditions but also created employment for 22 people in her community, blending heritage with economic opportunity.

Government support played a crucial role in her journey. Through DWCRA and Sri Nidhi loans, village society assistance, and seed capital, Sujatha was able to expand her operations. In 2023, her enterprise received a PMFME grant of ₹7,50,000, enabling large-scale production and further growth.

Growth, Impact, and Recognition

Today, Sujatha's enterprise is a thriving example of rural entrepreneurship:

- Monthly turnover: ₹5–6.5 lakhs
- Annual income for Sujatha: ₹6 lakhs
- Employment: Provides livelihood opportunities for local residents
- Tax contributions: Regularly paid, reflecting formalization and accountability

Beyond numbers, her business stands as a model of perseverance, skill, and community impact. She has preserved traditional sweets while empowering local families, and she actively promotes cultural heritage through her enterprise.

"Never underestimate the value of your roots. Tradition and innovation can grow together when guided by perseverance, vision, and purpose. By preserving cultural heritage while creating new opportunities, it is possible to build sustainable livelihoods, strengthen communities, and leave a lasting impact. True success is measured not only by economic growth, but by empowering others and creating a future where heritage, opportunity, and community thrive together."- Mrs. S. Sujatha

A Life of Gratitude and Giving Back

Despite challenges and setbacks, Sujatha consistently expresses deep gratitude for the support she received from government schemes and local officials. Her journey is not only about personal success—it is about using that success to uplift others, create opportunities, and inspire the next generation in her community.

From classrooms to sweet-making factories, S. Sujatha embodies the spirit of grit, growth, and community service, proving that determination, combined with support and vision, can turn dreams into reality.

Contact Information

Mrs. S. Sujatha, Anakapalli, Andhra Pradesh, India

Mob: +919705266968

27. Decades of Service to Countless Lives:

Mrs. Khaing Cho Lwin, Myanmar

In the delicate ecosystem of international development, the difference between a "project" and a "transformation" often lies in the depth of community ownership. For Ms. Khaing Cho Lwin, Assistant Director of the Department of Rural Development (DRD) in Myanmar, this has been the central mission of her 25-year career. By merging an analytical background in history with sophisticated managerial expertise, she has moved the needle from simple poverty alleviation to holistic community agency.



Mrs. Khaing Cho Lwin, Myanmar

The Vision: Moving Beyond the "Excluded" Status

Khaing Cho Lwin's leadership is defined by a refusal to accept the status quo of rural exclusion. She has transformed the "women's voice" in Myanmar's villages from a quiet presence to a decisive force. Her work ensures that participation is not just a metric on a donor report, but a structural reality:

- Institutionalized Parity: She has mandated a 50% women's participation rate in village committees, ensuring that those previously marginalized are now architects of their own socio-economic reality.
- The Power of Agency: Beyond mere presence, she has facilitated gender awareness training and public campaigns focused on violence prevention and child rights, creating a social safety net that underpins economic growth.

Key Pillars of Impact: Agriculture, Innovation, and Sustainability

As a high-level administrator, Khaing Cho Lwin oversees the nexus of planning and field execution. Her achievements are categorized by three strategic drivers:



1. The Livelihood Pipeline: Agriculture & Livestock

Through the Green Village Project and the Rural Business Fund (RBF), she has transitioned households from subsistence to enterprise.

- Targeted Skilling: Vocational courses in food processing, tailoring, and cosmetics are directly linked to market profitability assessments.
- Employment Generation: By providing veterinary services and technical livestock training, she has optimized year-round income for farmers, reducing the "seasonal hunger" gap.

2. The Modern Model Village: A Blueprint for Policy

Her successful implementation of the Modern Model Village Project has earned regional recognition. This initiative integrates six core components—ranging from environmental management to infrastructure—to create a replicable standard for national rural policy.

3. Infrastructure with a Human Heart

Her oversight includes the execution of "hard" infrastructure such as solar-powered water systems, roads, and bridges in the Danu Phyu and Hinthada Townships. However, her unique value-add is ensuring these projects include MSY (Monitoring, Sustainability, and Yield) activities, guaranteeing that a bridge or a well serves the community for decades, not just years.



Leadership and Impact at the Macro Level

Khaing Cho Lwin serves as a vital bridge between the grassroots and the Ministry. Her role in Policy and Program Implementation ensures that field-level realities inform national regulations.

The strategic focus centered on capacity building, demonstrated by achieving 50% women's representation in committees across project townships. It also emphasized resilience, as evidenced by the success of the Sustainable Enterprise for Basic Rural Households (SEP) pilot in Danu Phyu. In addition, cross-sectoral synergy was strengthened through collaboration with the Legal and Social Welfare departments to mainstream women's rights.- Mrs. Khaing Cho Lwin

Reflective Insight: The Architecture of Social Change

Khaing Cho Lwin's career offers a profound reflection for the international community: Economic development is only as strong as its social foundation. By integrating health, rights, and education into her technical projects, she has proven that a "Modern Village" is one where every citizen—regardless of gender—has the power to contribute.

"When a woman joins a committee for the first time, she doesn't just change her life; she changes the trajectory of her entire village. Our job is to build the systems that make that possible."

Policy Lessons for Development Stakeholders

- For Donors: The Rural Business Fund (RBF) model demonstrates that combining credit support with technical training and weekly monitoring significantly reduces default rates and increases project longevity.
- For Practitioners: The SEP Project's focus on "International Exposure Visits" proves that horizontal learning (farmer-to-farmer exchange) is a powerful tool for accelerating innovation.
- For Policymakers: Mainstreaming Social Audits into rural infrastructure projects ensures that public funds are used transparently and respond directly to local community needs.

"When communities have ownership, women have an equal voice, and development is grounded in inclusion, opportunity, and sustainability, lasting transformation becomes possible—empowering every individual to contribute to a stronger, more resilient future."

Contact Information

Mrs. Khaing Cho Lwin, District-Maubin, Street-No. (57), Budda Road, Danuphyu Township, Myanmar

Mob: +959799217681

Email: khaingcholwin2014@gmail.com

28. Honey Queen: Of Mrs. Uma Kumari Khatri, Nepal

The Shadow of Tradition and the Pandemic

In the remote landscapes of Kailali, Nepal, the intersection of cultural superstition and personal tragedy often marks the end of a woman's public life. For Mrs. Uma Kumari Khatri, the untimely death of her husband during the COVID-19 pandemic was not just a personal loss; it was a societal sentence. In a community where single women often face deep-seated taboos and are pressured to remain within domestic confines, Uma was expected to retreat into the shadows.



Mrs. Uma Kumari Khatri, Nepal

However, Uma's story is not one of retreat. It is a narrative of resilience, market-led recovery, and the dismantling of patriarchal barriers through the power of micro-enterprise.

The Pivot: From Grief to Growth

Ten years ago, Uma and her husband began beekeeping as a modest side-project with just six hives. Following his death, the enterprise stalled. The "rays of hope" vanished. Yet, it was the memory of that shared labor—and a refusal to let her children's future disappear—that drove her back to the hives.

The true "turning point" for Uma was the intersection of her determination with the Micro Enterprise Development Programme (MEDEP), a joint initiative of the Government of Nepal and UNDP. This program provided the technical bridge Uma needed to transition from a grieving widow to a professional entrepreneur.

Scaling the Value Chain: The Birth of "Abhishek Beekeeping Farm"

Through relentless discipline, Uma transformed a small investment of NPR 50,000 (USD 360) into a thriving national enterprise. Her impact metrics serve as a powerful case study for development practitioners:

- Production Excellence: She now produces 3–4 tons of pure honey annually, earning the title "Honey Sister" for her commitment to zero adulteration.
- Job Creation: Her farm provides direct employment to 10



Key Takeaways for the Development Community

- For Donors: Skill development (like beekeeping) is most effective when paired with long-term "psychosocial" empowerment that helps women navigate cultural resistance.
- For Practitioners: Uma's story emphasizes the importance of "Post-Crisis Graduation." Helping a widow restart a business during a pandemic requires a nuanced, empathetic approach to enterprise.
- For Policymakers: Promoting collateral-free lending may be the effective way to unlock the "Honey Sisters" of the world.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Uma Kumari Khatri, Kailali, Nepal

Email: uma.k.khatri0@gmail.com

Mob: 977-9848811780

29. Hardship to Entrepreneurship:

Mrs. Hinchavalli Nagasri, India

In the humble village of Pillapeta, Andhra Pradesh, India. Smt. Hinchavalli Nagasri transformed financial hardship into an inspiring journey of entrepreneurship, resilience, and community empowerment. From working as an agricultural laborer to becoming a successful bakery entrepreneur, her story exemplifies how knowledge, determination, and support from government schemes can turn challenges into opportunities.

Hinchavalli's journey is not just about business—it is a story of hope, perseverance, and the power of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to uplift families and communities.



Mrs. Hinchavalli Nagasri, India

Early Life and Motivation

Hailing from a poor community in Pillapeta, Hinchavalli is the wife of Satheesh and a devoted mother of two children—her elder son in 4th class and her younger child in 1st class. Life was challenging; her family worked as agricultural laborers, and opportunities for financial independence were limited.

Before joining the SHG, she had little awareness of government welfare programs, poverty alleviation schemes, or self-employment opportunities. Yet, Hinchavalli held onto a strong belief that joining the SHG could help uplift her family from poverty, and she decided to take that first step.

Joining the SHG and Discovering Opportunities

She became an active member of the Sri Durgabai Deshmukh Self-Help Group (SHG), regularly attending SHG and Village Organization (VO) meetings. Through this engagement, she gradually became aware of various government welfare schemes and livelihood opportunities that could support her family.

During this period, Hinchavalli identified an opportunity to start a small food processing (bakery) unit in her village. With guidance from the Community Coordinator (CC) and Assistant Project Manager (APM), she learned about the PMFME Seed Capital Scheme, which assists individuals in establishing food processing enterprises.

Through combined efforts, she secured financial support:

- PMFME Loan: ₹9,00,000
- Bank Linkage Loan: ₹1,00,000

Overcoming Challenges

Starting the bakery was not without hurdles. Hinchavalli faced:

1. Limited technical and manufacturing knowledge related to machinery
2. Need for subsidized credit facilities
3. Limited marketing access for her products

These challenges were addressed through training in food processing and marketing, as well as financial assistance from PMFME, which enabled her to purchase machinery and raw materials, laying the foundation for a sustainable business



From Knowledge to Action

With the support of the SHG, VO, CC, and APM, Hinchavalli successfully applied for and received the PMFME loan, establishing her bakery unit with appropriate equipment. Family involvement, coupled with her dedication and training, allowed production to scale up gradually, turning her small initiative into a thriving local business.



Achievements and Impact

Today, the bakery unit stands as a model of rural entrepreneurship:

- Production has increased steadily with improved machinery and training
- Currently provides employment to 5 local individuals
- Her family enjoys a healthier, more stable lifestyle with increased income
- Future plans include expanding machine-based production, increasing product range, and generating more employment opportunities

Through her journey, Hinchavalli has gained financial independence, strengthened her family's well-being, and empowered her community by demonstrating the transformative power of knowledge, effort, and collective support.

"With determination, knowledge, and collective support, hardship can be transformed into opportunity. Empowering women through skills, financial access, and strong community networks enables them to build successful enterprises, secure their families' futures, and inspire positive change throughout their communities." - Mrs. Hinchavalli Nagasri

Future Vision

Hinchavalli is committed to further growth, aiming to:

- Gain additional knowledge and skills with the support of community-based organizations (VO/MS/ZS)
- Expand bakery production with more machinery and diversified products
- Create additional employment opportunities within the village, further uplifting her community

Contact Information

Smt. Hinchavalli Nagasri, Pillapeta, Cheepurupalli, Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh

Mob: +919701864798

30. System Builder:

Dr. Mehri Maddahi Kivi, Iran

In the late 1980s, in the city of Kivi, Iran, a young woman made a choice that would ripple through generations: she chose to pursue a university degree in Economics despite deep-seated cultural resistance. Today, Dr. Mehri Maddahi Kivi stands not just as an individual who broke a glass ceiling, but as the architect of a national infrastructure that empowers millions of rural and nomadic women.



Dr. Mehri Maddahi Kivi, Iran

The Vision: Moving Beyond "Training Only"

Dr. Mehri Maddahi Kivi is a distinguished development professional with more than 32 years of experience in the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad of Iran. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics, a Master's degree in Education Management, and a Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA). Throughout her career, she has served in a range of leadership and technical positions, including Provincial Expert, Central Office Expert, Head of Department, Deputy Director, and Director-General. Currently, she serves as Deputy Director of the Office for the Development of Agricultural Activities of Rural and Nomadic Women, where she leads efforts to strengthen the economic empowerment and sustainable development of rural and nomadic women across the country.

When Dr. Maddahi Kivi began her career, rural development initiatives were often limited to basic vocational training. Over the years, she recognized a fundamental truth: education alone is not enough without economic opportunity, social inclusion, and decision-making power. Guided by this vision, she and her team developed a holistic Empowerment Model that helped move rural and nomadic women from the margins of the economy to active participants in agricultural value chains, entrepreneurship, and community leadership.

The Pillars of a National Model

The "Mehri Model" is a masterclass in scalable development, built on four strategic pillars that align directly with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

1. Grassroots Leadership (SDG 5 & 16): She established a network of 11,000 Women Facilitators across 11,000 villages. These are not government appointees, but locally elected leaders who act as the vital bridge between state policy and community needs.

2. Financial Inclusion (SDG 1 & 8): Inspired by the Grameen Bank, she institutionalized the Rural and Nomadic Women's Micro-Credit Fund. Today, this network includes 4,570 funds with 130,000 members, providing the lifeblood of capital to women who previously lacked collateral.
3. The LNSIE Entrepreneurship Strategy (SDG 9): Moving beyond subsistence, she implemented the Life Skills, Knowledge, Start, Improve, Development (LNSIE) model. This systematic approach resulted in 2,870 new startups and the expansion of 3,200 existing businesses across 18 provinces.
4. Policy Institutionalization (SDG 17): Perhaps her greatest legacy is the Office for the Development of Women's Activities. By embedding women's empowerment into the national budget and five-year development plans, she ensured that these programs were not "projects" but permanent state mandates.

A Legacy of Strategic Partnerships

Dr. Mehri recognized that the scale of nomadic poverty required global collaboration. Under her leadership, Iran successfully integrated international best practices through:

- FAO Telefood projects and UNDP pandemic-resilience programs.
- GGP and JICA collaborations to modernize agricultural techniques.
- Virtual Marketplaces: Transitioning rural artisans into the digital economy through e-commerce training and digital storefronts.

Reflective Insight: The Architecture of Hope

Reflecting on three decades of service, Dr. Mehri's career proves that localization is the key to national impact. By empowering 11,000 facilitators, she didn't just provide a service; she built a self-sustaining ecosystem of leadership.



"Empowerment is not a gift we give to women; it is the process of removing the systemic barriers that prevent them from leading their own development." - Dr. Mehri Maddahi Kivi.

Key Takeaways for the Development Community

- For Donors: The "Mehri Model" demonstrates the high ROI of micro-credit networking. By grouping small funds into city-level "Support Funds," the model creates a resilient financial safety net.
- For Policymakers: Success lies in Legal Mainstreaming. Dr. Mehri's work shows that when women's empowerment is written into national law and budget lines, it survives political cycles.
- For Practitioners: The LNSIE Model is a replicable tool for transitioning from "home-based hobbies" to "market-competitive micro-enterprises."



Contact Information:

Dr. Mehri Maddahi Kivi, Deputy Director of the Office for the Development of Agricultural Activities of Rural and Nomadic Women, Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, IR Iran

Email: maddahi@gmail.com

Mob: 091244013778

31. Resistance to Resilience: Mrs. Shahana Haque, Bangladesh

On a small piece of land, she purchased in Kotbari, Cumilla, Bangladesh, Shahana Haque carries a bold dream—one that speaks to the heart of inclusive development. She envisions a free training center where women can acquire practical skills, earn dignified livelihoods, and claim economic independence. For Shahana, empowerment is not a project cycle or a policy slogan; it is a lifelong commitment.



Mrs. Shahana Haque, Bangladesh

“I want to contribute to the development of neglected and helpless people until my last breath,” she says—a declaration that reflects both conviction and lived experience”. - Mrs. Shahana Haque

“I want to contribute to the development of neglected and helpless people until my last breath,” she says—a declaration that reflects both conviction and lived experience.

Shahana’s journey from resistance to resilience captures the essence of grassroots leadership in Bangladesh and illustrates how women’s agency drives progress across multiple Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 16 (Strong Institutions and Civic Participation).

Early Life: Education as an Act of Courage

Born in Choubbas village of Cumilla District, Shahana grew up in a respected family that valued integrity and learning. Her marriage in 1991 to Md. Mohibur Rahman Khondokar Faruk brought her into a financially stable household—but stability did not translate into freedom. When Shahana expressed her desire to continue her education, she faced resistance from her in-laws, reflecting the deeply rooted social norms that often limit women’s aspirations.

Yet Shahana persisted. Education became her quiet rebellion and her most powerful tool. She completed her Higher Secondary Certificate, earned a Bachelor’s degree from Cumilla Government Women’s College, and later enrolled in a Master’s program in Law, aspiring to become a lawyer. Her determination highlights how access to education remains a transformative force for women and girls, central to SDG 4 and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

A mother of three daughters, Shahana endured profound personal loss when her first child passed away due to illness. Even in grief, she remained resolute—channeling pain into purpose and resilience.

Entering Leadership: Learning to Lead from the Ground Up

Shahana's path to leadership took shape in 2004, when she joined the Women's Leadership Development training organized by The Hunger Project. This experience expanded her understanding of leadership—not as authority, but as service and collective action. She continued her leadership journey through Animator Training and Volunteer Trainer Training, equipping herself with the skills to mobilize communities and facilitate social change.

These capacity-building opportunities exemplify the importance of investing in women's leadership ecosystems—an essential enabler of SDG 16 and participatory governance.

From Skills to Solidarity: Economic Empowerment in Action

Returning from training, Shahana began working as a teacher while simultaneously exploring income-generating activities. Mushroom cultivation training from the Cooperative Academy enabled her to start small-scale farming. Later, she pursued tailoring, block batik, and cooking training through government institutions—demonstrating how diversified skills can strengthen household resilience.

By 2009, Shahana was earning a stable income through full-time tailoring and private tutoring, contributing meaningfully to her family's wellbeing. She later served as a sewing instructor under BARD's Women's Education, Income, and Nutrition Development Project, and currently works as a trainer under the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED).

Her professional journey reflects how skills development and women's entrepreneurship directly advance SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 1 (No Poverty).

Building Institutions, Building Power

In 2005, Shahana founded Suchona Mohila Samiti, a women's cooperative that began with just 10 members. Through trust, transparency, and collective effort, the cooperative grew to 400 members with a capital base of 1.5 million taka, eventually purchasing land—an extraordinary milestone in women's collective ownership.

She later established the Bashpur Grassroots Women's Association, further expanding platforms for women's savings, leadership, and solidarity. These institutions became engines of local development, demonstrating how grassroots cooperatives can reduce inequality and strengthen social capital (SDG 10 and SDG 11).

Social Mobilization and Crisis Response

Shahana's leadership extends far beyond economic empowerment. She has actively worked to prevent child marriage, facilitated dowry-free marriages, and led hundreds of courtyard meetings on adolescence, sexual harassment, nutrition, health, and COVID-19 awareness—directly contributing to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).



During the COVID-19 pandemic, Shahana emerged as a frontline responder. She personally produced and distributed masks, organized relief efforts, and collaborated with government offices, local authorities, NGOs, and philanthropies to support thousands of vulnerable families with food, hygiene supplies, medical aid, and livelihood tools.



Her crisis leadership underscores the critical role of community-based women leaders in strengthening resilience during shocks—an often-underrecognized pillar of sustainable development.

Partnerships that Multiply Impact

Shahana's work thrives on collaboration. She has partnered with local government officials, district administrations, civil society organizations, foundations, expatriate groups, and youth networks to distribute relief, plant trees, support domestic workers, train women, and uplift street children and underprivileged students. These partnerships illustrate the value of multi-stakeholder cooperation in achieving the SDGs (SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals).

Leadership, Recognition, and a Living Legacy

Her contributions have been nationally recognized through prestigious awards as:

- President, Suchona Women's Development Training Institute
- President, Bikoshito Nari Network (District Committee)
- Joint Secretary, SUJAN (Citizens for Good Governance, District Committee)
- District Representative, National Human Rights Commission

Her accolades include:

- Best Female Entrepreneur (Chattogram Division)-SME Foundation, 2016
- Mother Teresa Award for Best Organizer- Dhaka Ekushey Parishad
- Best Organizer & Entrepreneur — BARD, 2020 and many more.

Yet her greatest achievement lies not in awards, but in the hundreds of women who now earn incomes, the girls who stayed in school, the children protected from early marriage, and the communities that learned to organize and care for one another.

A Grassroots Vision for Sustainable Development

Shahana Haque’s story reminds us that sustainable development is built from the ground up—through courage, education, collective action, and unwavering commitment to justice. Her life reflects the interconnected nature of the SDGs and the indispensable role of women leaders in translating policy into practice.

From resistance to resilience, Shahana stands as a powerful testament to what becomes possible when women are empowered not only to survive—but to lead

Contact Information:

Mrs. Shahana Haque, Suchona Mohila Samiti, Cumilla, Bangladesh

32. The Resilient Landscape:

Mrs. Antonia Mohametano, Philippines.

In the heart of Tampilisan, Philippines, where the volatility of weather and markets often threatens smallholder stability, Ms. Antonia E. Mohametano is demonstrating a powerful alternative. As an agrarian reform beneficiary and a trained agricultural scientist, she has transformed her land from a simple plot into a high-functioning ecosystem of Diversified Production.

Her journey is a masterclass in how institutional support, when met with individual grit, can catalyze sustainable rural development.



Mrs. Antonia, Philippines

The Innovation: Scaling Ecological and Economic Resilience

Antonia's farm is a vibrant rebuttal to the risks of "Monocropping." By cultivating a diverse portfolio—including corn, rubber, coconut, abaca, cacao, cassava, falcate, and pineapple—she has built a buffer against both climate shocks and market price fluctuations.

For international development practitioners, Antonia's farm serves as a living laboratory for SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). If one crop fails due to pests or drought, the others provide a safety net, ensuring the family's economic viability is never compromised.



Institutional Synergy: The Convergence of Knowledge and Reform

Antonia's success is not an isolated event; it is the result of a deliberate "Convergence" of Philippine policy and education. Her trajectory highlights the effectiveness of two key national initiatives:

1. Project ConVERGE (Value Chain Enhancement): Antonia utilized this project to move beyond subsistence farming, learning how to link her diverse harvests to broader market value chains.
2. Project SPLIT (Support to Parcelization of Lands for Individual Titling): Now transitioning from beneficiary to practitioner, Antonia works with Project SPLIT to advance land tenure improvement. This represents the ultimate goal of development: Empowering a former beneficiary to become a facilitator of the system.

Strategic Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

SDG 1: No Poverty: Utilizes land tenure (Project SPLIT) as a foundation for multi-stream income generation. SDG 4: Quality Education, as a TESDA-certified farmer and a parent of a DAR scholar, she embodies the "Intergenerational Wealth of Knowledge." SDG 12: Implementing sustainable, diversified cropping patterns that preserve soil health and biodiversity. SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals: Leading local cooperatives to pool resources, technical expertise, and bargaining power.

The Policy Lens: From Land Titles to Leadership

Antonia's story offers a critical reflection for policymakers: Land distribution is the beginning, not the end, of agrarian reform. Her status as a TESDA-certified farmer (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority) underscores the necessity of pairing land rights with technical vocational training. By serving as a leader in local cooperatives, Antonia ensures that the technical expertise she gained is socialized among her peers, creating a "Multiplier Effect" that strengthens the entire community's resilience.

"Through diversified farming, lifelong learning, and community leadership, challenges can be transformed into sustainable prosperity, creating stronger communities and a better future for generations to come." - Mrs. Antonia Mohametano

Reflective Insight: Nurturing the Future

Antonia's journey is a narrative of "Growing with Knowledge." She proves that a farmer is not just a laborer, but a scientist, a manager, and a policy advocate. Her work with Project SPLIT to secure individual land titles for others is a profound act of paying it forward—ensuring that the dignity she found in the soil becomes accessible to all.



"Diversified agriculture is the heartbeat of sustainability. It is not just about what we grow; it is about the security we build for our families and the strength we give to our neighbors."

Key Takeaways for the Development Community

- For Donors: Antonia's farm demonstrates the high ROI of "Integrated Farming Systems" over traditional single-crop support.
- For Policymakers: Her transition into Project SPLIT highlights the importance of Localization—using successful farmers to lead land tenure and empowerment initiatives.



- For Practitioners: The synergy between Project ConVERGE and Project SPLIT shows that rural growth requires a "Full-Stack" approach: Land Rights + Technical Skills + Market Access.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Antonia Mohametano, Brgy. Poblacion, Tampilisan, Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines

Mob: +639554770751

33. Empowering Community Members, Transforming Lives: Mrs. S. Zubeida, India.

In the rural village of Tadakanapalli, Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh, India, S. Zubeida has emerged as a remarkable example of resilience, vision, and women-led empowerment. From managing a modest household and saving for her children’s education to motivating rural women to pursue income-generating ventures, Zubeida’s journey is a testament to how determination, knowledge, and collective action can transform lives.



Mrs. S. Zubeida, India

Her story reflects not only personal growth but also the power of community-focused entrepreneurship, showing how one woman’s initiative can uplift an entire village.

Early Life and Motivation

Born into a traditional family business of making Pala Kova, a popular Indian milk-based sweet, Zubeida worked tirelessly alongside her husband, Sharif Mia, to manage household responsibilities and save small amounts for their two sons’ education.

Despite modest means, she nurtured a vision: to not only support her family but also empower other women in her village to stand on their feet, take up productive ventures, and achieve financial independence.



Joining the SHG and Strengthening Roots

In 1995, Zubeida joined the Shanti 1 Self-Help Group (SHG) in her village. The SHG’s internal lending system allowed her to finance her children’s education—her elder son eventually earned a B.Tech degree, while her younger son became a graduate.

Her involvement with the SHG also opened doors to government schemes and entrepreneurial support, helping her transform the family’s traditional Pala Kova business into a thriving enterprise.

Scaling the Traditional Enterprise: Pala Kova

For years, Zubeida produced 20–30 liters of milk per day, making Pala Kova and selling modest quantities locally. While the income was limited, her commitment to quality and persistence never wavered.

In 2021, Zubeida accessed PMFME Seed Capital of ₹40,000, which she invested in bulk milk procurement, scaling production significantly. With the purchase of 10 buffaloes, she secured a steady milk supply, eventually reaching 100 liters per day (from buffaloes and market purchases).

Production & Earnings Breakdown:

- Sugar Pala Kova: 35 kg/day (from 80 litres milk) → Rs. 7,000/day
- Jaggery Pala Kova: 10 kg/day (from 20 litres milk) → Rs. 3,000/day
- Total daily earning: Rs. 10,000; expenditure: Rs. 7,500 → Profit/day: Rs. 2,500
- Monthly income: Rs. 75,000

Zubeida's enterprise not only stabilized her family's income but also laid the foundation for community leadership and economic empowerment.

A New Opportunity: Vegetable Solar Dryers

Her entrepreneurial spirit soon embraced innovation. Through APMIP & APFPS officials, Zubeida learned about Vegetable Solar Dryers, introduced by the Kurnool administration to help farmers reduce moisture in onions and other produce.

She encouraged 15 SHG women to attend a 2-day training program on using these dryers. Initially, banks hesitated to provide loans, doubting the venture's viability. Determined, Zubeida and the group approached the CEO of SERP, who intervened, enabling PMFME HOE loans for 10 members.

Financial Details per Unit:

- Cost: Rs. 1,00,000
- Bank Loan: Rs. 90,000
- Beneficiary Contribution: Rs. 10,000
- Subsidy (35%): Rs. 35,000

Zubeida was the first among the members to establish a Vegetable Solar Dryer unit, inspiring others to follow.

"Through traditional knowledge and collective action, even modest home-based activities can grow into sustainable enterprises. Small beginnings can transform livelihoods, empower women, and create lasting inspiration that uplifts entire communities." - Mrs. S. Zubeida

Community Transformation

Encouraged by Zubeida's success:

- 15 more women set up units initially
- Eventually, 48 units became operational under buy-back agreements with Society Techno Services Pvt. Ltd.

Income Model per Unit:

- Rs. 2.50 per kg of dried produce
- Electricity cost: Rs. 40/day
- Average daily income: Rs. 500

The business model allowed women, including Zubeida, to balance the dryers with other income-generating activities, enhancing their livelihoods without full-time commitment.

Dual Income Streams and Financial Summary

1. Pala Kova Enterprise

- Daily Profit: Rs. 2,500
- Monthly Profit: Rs. 75,000
- Annual Profit: Rs. 9,00,000

2. Vegetable Solar Dryer Unit

- Daily Income: Rs. 500
- Monthly Income: Rs. 15,000
- Annual Income: Rs. 1,80,000

Total Impact: Zubeida created a thriving family-run enterprise, supported her family, and inspired women in her community to achieve financial independence.

Legacy and Vision

Zubeida's journey demonstrates that knowledge, determination, and collective empowerment can turn modest beginnings into transformative impact. By combining tradition with innovation, she has uplifted not only her family but also the entire SHG community, creating a model of rural entrepreneurship and women's leadership.

Contact Information

Mrs. S. Zubeida, Tadakanapalli, Kallur Mandal, Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh, India

Mob: +919000440030

34. Engineering the Resilience:

Mrs. Mee Mee Htwe, Myanmar

In the complex and diverse topography of Myanmar, a road is never merely a strip of asphalt; it is a lifeline to emergency healthcare, a bridge to primary education, and a vital corridor for economic survival. For Ms. Mee Mee Htwe, Director at the Department of Rural Development (DRD), Myanmar, the rural landscape is a canvas where technical precision meets social justice.



Mrs. Mee Mee Htwe, Myanmar

With a Master of Civil Engineering and an MBA, she has spent over 27 years proving that the most durable infrastructure is built not just with concrete and steel, but with the "social cement" of community trust and local ownership.

The Vision: Smart, Inclusive, and Connected Communities

Mee Mee Htwe's leadership marks a fundamental shift in Myanmar's developmental paradigm—moving from top-down construction to Community-Driven Development (CDD). Her vision is rooted in the belief that rural people are not passive recipients of aid, but the primary architects of their own progress. Her goal is to build a "resilient, connected, and prosperous" network of villages where infrastructure is smart, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable.



Leadership Through Technical Innovation and Accountability

As a result-oriented leader, Mee Mee Htwe has modernized the DRD's operational framework to meet international standards. She moved beyond traditional project oversight by introducing sophisticated tools for transparency and resilience:

- **Digital Governance:** She spearheaded the use of rural infrastructure mapping and geo-tagging. This ensures that every bridge and water system is accountable, traceable, and visible to planners in real-time, reducing "leakage" and improving maintenance schedules.
- **Climate-Smart Engineering:** Recognizing Myanmar's vulnerability to extreme weather, she integrated Environmental Social Management Frameworks (ESMF) into all projects. By utilizing

Cash for Work (CfW) programs, she provides immediate income to vulnerable families while building the very sea walls and drainage systems that protect their future.

- Eco-Friendly Connectivity: She promotes the use of local materials and bio-engineering for road embankments, ensuring that modernization does not compromise the ecological integrity of the rural landscape.

The Power of Participatory Planning and Gender Equity

Under her guidance, the Village Development Planning (VDP) approach has transformed over 1,000 villages. In these communities, residents—not distant bureaucrats—identify their own priorities. This transfer of agency is backed by a massive commitment to Gender Mainstreaming.



Through the National Community Driven Development Project (NCDDP), she has overseen a monumental capacity-building effort:

- Massive Outreach: Training over 575,013 women staff and committee members.
- Institutionalized Leadership: By ensuring that women hold 50% of the seats on village committees, she has normalized female voices in public decision-making across 12,000 villages.
- Professional Pathways: The local facilitators trained under her program often "graduate" to higher positions within INGOs and government departments, creating a sustainable national talent pool.

Strategic Impact: A Nation in Motion

The scale of Mee Mee Htwe's impact is evidenced by the tangible transformation of Myanmar's rural connectivity:

- 10,000 km of rural and farm-to-market roads have been rehabilitated, directly linking remote smallholders to regional economic hubs.
- 37,000 community infrastructure units—including water supply systems and public buildings—have been completed across 63 townships.
- 5,000 women have been specifically empowered through leadership and entrepreneurship training, moving them from household laborers to community CEOs.

Global Collaboration and Reflective Insight

Mee Mee Htwe is a respected representative of Myanmar on the global stage, collaborating with the World Bank, IFAD, ASEAN, and CIRDAP. She advocates for a "technology-based" rural service model that remains deeply human-centric.

For the international development community, her career offers a vital reflection: Infrastructure is only as strong as the community that manages it. Her frequent field visits are not

for ceremony; they are working sessions to ensure that the voices of smallholder farmers and women's groups are the primary data points informing national policy.



"My mission is to ensure that no village is left behind. We are not just building roads; we are building the pathways to prosperity, one village-led plan at a time." — Ms. Mee Mee Htwe

Policy Takeaways for Development Stakeholders

- For Donors: The Myanmar experience proves that Geo-tagging and Management Information Systems (MIS) are essential for maintaining transparency and evidence-based planning in large-scale rural portfolios.
- For Practitioners: The Training of Trainers (TOT) model creates a professionalized class of local facilitators who can sustain development long after a specific project ends.

For Policymakers: Integrating Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) into standard civil engineering is the most cost-effective way to protect national infrastructure investments from climate-related shocks.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Mee Mee Htwe, Country-Myanmar, Lewe District, Arthawaddy Street (9) Corner, Detkhinathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

Email: mee2htwe@ncddpmyanmar.org

Mob: +95095062063

35. Sculptured the Future: Mrs. Hadiseh Bagheri, Iran

In the Alamut Western district of Iran, a quiet revolution is taking place. It is not led by heavy industry or top-down mandates, but by a "Multifaceted Personality" whose vision bridges the gap between ancient heritage and modern sustainability. Mrs. Hadiseh Bagheri, the elected Village Head of Zanasuj, has turned her community into a living laboratory for holistic rural transformation.



The Visionary: Merging Art, Policy, and Soil

Hadiseh's journey is unconventional for a civil servant. With a background in Cultural Affairs and a Master's in Rural Development, she began her career as a photographer and journalist. This "storyteller's lens" allows her to see rural development not just as a set of statistics, but as a narrative of human dignity and environmental balance.

Since her election in 2015, she has utilized her skills in filmmaking and design to document and promote the "Zanasuj Model," proving that transparent communication is a vital tool for community mobilization.

The "Clean Village" Model: Radical Environmentalism

Under Hadiseh's leadership, Zanasuj achieved a milestone rare in rural development: a Zero-Waste Culture. By removing traditional trash cans and educating residents on source-separation, she transitioned the village toward a circular economy.

- SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption & Production): Her workshops on waste management for children and fellow village heads have scaled this local success into a provincial curriculum.
- National Impact: Her role as a supervisor for the National One Billion Trees Project and her recognition as a National Forest Guardian highlight her status as a key interlocutor between local grassroots and national environmental policy.



"My goal is to share the richness of our cultural and environmental values while proving that economic self-sufficiency and nature can progress hand in hand." — Mrs. Hadiseh Bagheri

Economic Empowerment: The Distillates of Self-Sufficiency

Hadiseh understands that environmental protection fails without economic security. To address this, she established the Zanasuj Distillates Workshop, an initiative approved by the National Organization of Village and Municipality Affairs.

- SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth): By focusing on local products—sumac, rosewater, and medicinal herbs—she has created a value chain that prioritizes single and widowed women.
- Ecotourism as Education (SDG 11): Her "Ecovillage Zanasuj" project, which won first place in the Provincial Rural Startup Competition, uses responsible travel to connect visitors with local culture and herbal medicine, ensuring that tourism protects rather than exploits the land.

Strategic Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Hadiseh's multi-sectoral approach provides a blueprint for the UN 2030 Agenda:

SDG 5: Gender Equality, she empowers rural women through startup funding and specialized handicraft training. For SDG 11: Sustainable Communities, she has helped eliminate village garbage dumps through source-separation and community education. Under SDG 13: Climate Action, she leads wildlife surveys and reforestation projects as a "Natural Resources Assistant." Furthermore, under SDG 17: Partnerships, she founded the HOMA NGO to bridge the gap between government agencies and local environmentalists.

Reflective Leadership: The "Village Head Lady"

Hadiseh's life was recently immortalized in the documentary "The Village Head Lady." The film reflects a leader who is as comfortable behind a camera as she is in a policy briefing or a sumac harvest. Her mastery of Intangible Heritage laws and agricultural skills allows her to protect the village's past while building its digital and economic future.



Awards and Recognition

Hadiseh's contributions to rural development, environmental conservation, tourism, and community empowerment have earned widespread recognition at local, provincial, and national levels. She was recognized as the Outstanding Village Head of Alamut Western District in 2017 and Province-wide Outstanding Village Head of Qazvin in 2018. In the same year, she earned first place in the Qazvin Traditional Foods Festival, was named the best villager in both the district and province at the Shahid Rajaei Festival, and received recognition as a National Forest and Rangeland Guardian. Her environmental leadership continued with her appointment as Supervisor of the National One Billion Trees Project in Qazvin Province and her recognition as a Leading Environmental Figure by the Arts Center of Qazvin Province. She was also honored for her contributions to tourism on World Tourism Day in 2019 and was selected as the face of progress of Qazvin Province.

Her achievements extend beyond awards. She received a commendation at the Festival of Successful NGO Experiences in the presence of the Vice President and the Head of the Environmental Protection Organization in 2016. She won first place in the inaugural Rural Start-up Competition in Qazvin Province with the "Eco-village Zanasuj" project and established a village distillates workshop to support the economic self-sufficiency of Zanasuj village, a project approved by the National Organization of Village and Municipality Affairs.

As a long-standing environmental activist, she has served for ten years in environmental conservation efforts, including three years as a board member of the Alamut Yar Environmental Group. She is the Founding Board Member and CEO of the Hamyaran Environment and Natural Heritage of Alamut (HOMA) environmental group and has continuously cooperated with the Department of Environment in wildlife censuses of protected areas in Qazvin Province. She also serves as a Natural Resources Assistant, works closely with the Provincial Department of Natural Resources, and has been recognized as a wildlife photographer by the provincial environment authorities.

Her commitment to public awareness and education is reflected in her continuous participation as an environmental expert on Qazvin Network television, Qazvin Radio, and other public programs. She has worked as a facilitator and trainer in watershed management projects funded through the National Development Fund, trained rural women in the sustainable use of natural resources and value-added products such as sumac, and participated extensively in educational and promotional programs related to natural resources and watershed management. Through collaboration with the Qazvin Environmental Department, she has organized numerous waste management workshops in schools and led waste separation initiatives that transformed Zanasuj into a clean village with no trash cans or garbage dumps.

She has also published articles on rural women, spoken at national conferences, participated in rural empowerment exhibitions, and contributed to public relations activities in the Alamut West District, further advancing community development and environmental stewardship.

Policy Lessons for the International Development Community

- For Donors: The Zanasuj model proves that micro-startup competitions at the village level can surface high-impact, low-cost environmental solutions.
- For Practitioners: Hadiseh's use of multimedia (photography/film) to report on progress is a best practice for building "Social Trust" and ensuring donor transparency.



For Policymakers: Her success as the first woman to hold a Provincial Environmentalist Assistant Card underscores the need to mainstream gender in environmental enforcement and natural resource management.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Hadiseh Bagheri, Alamut, Zanasuj, IR Iran

Email: Hadis.bagheri14@gmail.com

Mob: 09124812877

36. Courage and Community Leadership

Mrs. Anita Rani Bishoyi, India

In the heart of Belaguntha block, Odisha, India, Anita Rani Bishoyi has transformed not only her own life but also the lives of her community. From the daughter of a small and marginal farming family to a successful farmer-entrepreneur and community leader, Anita embodies courage, resilience, and innovation. Today, she is a beacon of women's empowerment, inspiring rural women to pursue livelihoods, education, and sustainable development.



Mrs. Anita Rani Bishoyi, India

Anita's story shows how determination, collective action, and a commitment to sustainability can turn adversity into opportunity, and ordinary villages into centers of growth and progress.

Early Life and Motivation

In Sasana GP of Belaguntha block, Anita Rani grew up in a family entirely dependent on farming. Her family faced constant financial struggles, which limited her education to matriculation. Married at an early age and settled in Palasapalli village, Surada block, she continued to confront the challenges of low income, scarce resources, and limited opportunities.



Yet, Anita's determination never wavered. In 2017, she joined the Maa Saraswati Self-Help Group (SHG) under the Odisha

Livelihoods Mission (OLM), marking the beginning of her journey toward self-reliance, community empowerment, and sustainable livelihoods.

Building Sustainable Livelihoods

After joining the SHG, Anita steadily transformed her life and her village:

- Revolving Fund (RF) support and a CIF loan of ₹50,000 from OLM helped her invest in initial farming activities.
- She later secured an SHG-based bank loan of ₹3 lakh and a personal loan of ₹2 lakh, allowing her to expand farmland and livelihood activities.

- The Department of Veterinary & Animal Husbandry supported her with a 500-capacity poultry shed, while her SHG received a larger ₹6 lakh loan to strengthen collective enterprise.

With growing confidence, Anita purchased 4 acres of land, constructing two farm ponds on one acre. She diversified into fishery, poultry, and large-scale plantations, cultivating:



- 1,000 moringa plants on her farm and mobilizing the community to plant 2,000 additional moringa trees
- Bananas on 1 acre, mangoes on 0.2 acre, along with oranges, coconuts, and other fruits
- Produce marketed locally in Surada and Berhampur.

Her poultry enterprise expanded to two sheds of 500 birds each, and she promoted desi poultry rearing using ethno-veterinary practices and organic feed, advocating for a local poultry feed unit to strengthen the initiative.

Innovation in Agriculture

Anita's commitment to sustainable agriculture deepened through training and technical support from PRADAN-NSO. She adopted the "Lakhpatri Didi Prototype Model – Grafted Brinjal in 15 decimals", achieving remarkable results:



- Within 2.5 months, she sold 1.5 quintals of organic brinjal, demonstrating the profitability of organic farming
- Plans are underway to adopt Grafted Tomato Prototype in another 15-decimal area

To address irrigation challenges, Anita installed solar electricity and a solar pump with departmental support, ensuring reliable water and power supply for her fields.

"With courage, determination, and collective support, women can lead change in society, build sustainable livelihoods, and inspire future generations and their communities." - Mrs. Anita Rani Bishoyi

Community Leadership and Social Impact

Beyond her personal success, Anita has grown into a true community leader:

- Motivates farmers to adopt organic cultivation
- Mobilizes women into productive livelihood activities
- Leads plantation drives and advocates for sustainable practices
- Actively promotes girls' education, speaks against child marriage, and raises awareness about sustainable livelihoods

Her work reflects a holistic approach to rural development, combining economic growth with social progress, environmental responsibility, and women's empowerment.

Contact Information:

Mrs. Anita Rani Bishoyi, AT–Palaspalli, Kaliaguda, Surada, Ganjam, Odisha, India

Mob: +919937556396

PIN: 761124

37. Siembre Model:

Mrs. Emiliana Volante, Philippines

The transition from the informal economy to formal enterprise management is one of the steepest climbs in the development world. Ms. Emiliana Volante of Camarines Sur, Philippines has completed that climb. Once a street vendor navigating the daily uncertainties of the informal market, Emiliana utilized land awarded by the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), Philippines, to build a permanent economic anchor for her community.



Mrs. Emiliana, Philippines

Value-Addition: The "Siembre" Model

Emiliana recognized that selling raw bananas would only yield marginal returns. As the leader of the Siembre Agrarian Reform Beneficiary Organization, she spearheaded the group's move into banana chip production. This shift from "raw producer" to "processor" allowed her community to capture a larger share of the value chain and insulate themselves against price shocks

The Power of Policy Convergence

Her success was accelerated by the CoCRoM (Convergence on Chain Resilience of Micro-enterprises) program. This institutional support provided the entrepreneurial "scaffolding" Emiliana needed to turn her grit into a scalable business. Her story reflects a profound shift in identity: from a woman standing on the street to survive, to a leader managing a factory to thrive.



"Adding value to local resources creates new opportunities, strengthens rural economies, and empowers communities to become drivers of their own prosperity." - Mrs. Emiliana Volante

Reflective Insight for the Development Community

These three stories from the Philippines offer a unified lesson for donors and policymakers: The "Last Mile" is not just a location; it is a mindset.

- Luzviminda proves that circularity is a viable rural business model.
- Antonia proves that diversification is the most robust form of climate and market insurance.
- Emiliana proves that *value-addition* is the primary engine of social mobility.



Contact Information:

Mrs. Emiliana Volante, Brgy. Siembre, Bombon, Camarines Sur II, Philippines

Tel: +639511457812

38. Income, Nutrition and Society:

Mrs. Laggu Mounika, India

In the quiet village of Koppara, Andhra Pradesh, India, Smt. Laggu Mounika transformed financial hardship into an inspiring story of entrepreneurship, empowerment, and community impact. From a life of uncertainty as an agricultural laborer to becoming a successful black gram processing entrepreneur, her journey demonstrates the power of knowledge, persistence, and government-supported initiatives in reshaping lives.

Mounika's story is not just about business—it is about hope, determination, and uplifting an entire community through enterprise.



Mrs. Laggu Mounika, India

Early Life and Motivation

Smt. Laggu Mounika, wife of Srinivasa Rao, comes from a poor BC-D (Yadava) community. She is a devoted mother of two children—her elder son studying in 4th class and her younger child in 1st class—and actively participates in all social and community activities.

Her family's life was marked by financial struggles. While her husband worked as a private school teacher, Mounika and her family also labored in agriculture. Despite the hardships, she held a strong belief that joining a Self-Help Group (SHG) could provide a pathway to lift her family out of poverty.

Joining the SHG and Finding Opportunity

Mounika became an active member of the Sri Rajulamma SHG. Through regular participation in SHG and Village Organization (VO) meetings, she gradually gained knowledge about government welfare schemes, poverty alleviation programs, and self-employment opportunities.

During this period, she identified a potential opportunity: starting a small food-processing unit in her village. With internal lending support and bank linkages, she pursued the venture. She also learned about the PMFME Seed Capital Scheme, which supports food-processing enterprises, and with guidance from the Community Coordinator (CC) and Assistant Project Manager (APM), she successfully applied for financial support.

- PMFME Loan: ₹6,90,000

Challenges Overcome

Like many rural entrepreneurs, Mounika faced multiple challenges:

1. Limited knowledge of machine-based manufacturing
2. Need for additional low-interest funds
3. Limited marketing facilities to reach larger customers

With the PMFME loan, proper guidance, and family support, she was able to overcome these obstacles, purchase machinery, and establish her black gram processing unit.

Implementation and Growth

After receiving training in food processing and marketing, Mounika began large-scale production with her family's help. Using the newly purchased machinery, she started producing black gram-based products efficiently, gradually increasing production and quality.

- Monthly raw material: 300 bags × 50 kg = 1,500 kg
- Season turnover: ₹1,50,000
- Raw material cost: ₹80,000
- Profit: ₹70,000
- Monthly expenditure: Labour ₹22,000; Power ₹3,000; Bank EMI ₹14,000
- Off-season turnover: ₹75,000; monthly income: ₹20,000
- Employment: Provides work for 5 individuals



Impact and Community Benefits

Mounika's enterprise has brought financial stability and improved living standards to her family and the surrounding community. Her active engagement with SHG and VO meetings not only empowered her socially and economically but also created employment opportunities for other SHG members.

Her initiative demonstrates how small enterprises, supported by knowledge and government schemes, can generate sustainable income and strengthen community livelihoods.

"I learned that when we are willing to learn, work hard, and make use of the opportunities available to us, we can change our lives. What started as a small idea became a successful enterprise that supports my family and creates opportunities for others in my community."- Mrs. Laggu Mounika

Future Plans and Vision

Looking ahead, Mounika has ambitious goals:

- Gain additional knowledge with support from community-based organizations (VO/MS/ZS)
- Expand production with additional machinery
- Diversify the product range and scale up operations
- Generate more employment opportunities for SHG members and their families
- Supply products in larger quantities to CHEYUTHA Mahila Mart

Through these plans, she envisions creating a thriving, sustainable enterprise that benefits both her family and her community.

Contact Information:

Smt. Laggu Mounika, Koppara, Vangara, Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh, India

Mob: +919347201769



CIRDAP

Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP)

Chameli House, 17 Topkhana Road, GPO Box 2883, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh

PABX: +88-02- 41053923, +88-02-41053924, +880-2-41053925

Office of the DG II Phone +88-02-41053920

E-mail: dgcirdap@cirdap.org, administration@cirdap.org

Website: www.cirdap.org



Facebook



Linkedin



Youtube



X