



ANNUAL REPORT

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

“Why women entrepreneurship? What does Gender have to do anything with entrepreneurship?” someone asked me.

I waited for a nanosecond to pick my response and then said, “Why not?”

It is really as simple as that!

As Dhriiti turns 15 it has given us a chance to revisit our journey and look within. We recollected innumerable stories to chart the milestones we have covered and the learnings we have gathered. Over the years we have worked ground up seeding the entrepreneurial farmland working with grassroots micro-enterprises on the one hand and youth entrepreneurs on the other. We have worked with the government in policy building, enabling an ecosystem and implementing programs that have made entrepreneurship aspirational.

Back in the day entrepreneurship was a new word. Anyone without a job was either a wastrel, a hanger on, a dreamer or hopeless loser who had no other option but open a shop floor. Occupational to professional, abilities to skills, salary to a revenue, the vocabulary for entrepreneurship had to be brought into everyday parlance. When the start-up boom happened in India, the definition of an entrepreneur became about those with a technological backed idea. Further on, look up the investment, funding space and you will find the balance tilted towards male entrepreneurs.

What about home-run businesses? Where do the grass-root micro-enterprises fit in? What about skill-based entrepreneurs? What about those enterprises that work with traditional artisans and craftsmen? Can a school owner be looked at as entrepreneur? Or a woman in the hinterland of Odisha using Sal leaf from her front yard to stitch a leaf plate be seen as one? Or what about the woman who runs a salon in her house? More importantly do these ‘entrepreneurs’ look at themselves as one? When a woman chooses a livelihood activity she makes a conscious decision to



step out of the house to make a living. She may do it to complement the household income. But when you tell the woman that she can turn this activity into a 'business' you seed the idea of an entrepreneur. Why then is a woman's entrepreneurial identity any different from a man? What happens when a woman chooses to take her 'business' seriously? For us it is a moment of pure courage.

For a moment imagine a woman and the countless responsibilities, expectations, identities, moralities and realities that shackle her down. From being the second, third, or perhaps the last authority in her own house, to be the force at the centre of a family and society, to be a daughter, wife and mother to someone, to be a follower and never the leader. When a woman finds the courage to define herself as an entrepreneur she finds the courage to live her life for herself!

Women Entrepreneurship is a driving force for us at Dhriiti. After all these many years of work we see a long and laborious road ahead where there is lot left to be done. We see before us an ecosystem that has marginalised the needs and aspirations of women entrepreneurs. We see a space that has mistaken a woman's priorities as her weakness. We see a space that is coloured by stereotypes and prejudice like a woman is poor at managing the economics of her business. We see a space that believes that women entrepreneurship is temporary, transient and therefore not bankable. Women run enterprises are still standing in queues waiting for a loan or a funding to scale up. They are still waiting to be seen as credible businesses that offer employment and growth.

There is a lot of work waiting to be done. Walk with us as we tell you our story.

## PROJECTS AT A GLANCE



## PROJECT PRAGATI

**Supported By:** Interglobe Foundation

### **About the Project:**

Pragati is a micro enterprise development program for women, through arecanut leaf plate manufacturing in Kamrup district in Assam. It is an attempt at creating a local resource based micro-enterprise that generates employment, especially in women. The Arecanut Palm is a natural resource across the North-East. By tapping into a locally available resource the objective is to use sheaths to create bio-degradable dinnerware. Arecanut sheaths have a better dimensional stability, and are hygienic and microwave safe. The product therefore created gives a more environmental-friendly alternative to the existing options of styrofoam available in the markets in India and abroad. Pragati is a program that focuses on economics as much as it is social & ecological and on creating a complete ecosystem for women arecanut leaf plate entrepreneurs. Pragati is aimed at addressing the problems faced by women in rural Assam with regards to finding sustainable livelihood opportunities and also finding social business opportunities, which will help them to raise their standard of living, and generating viable source of income.

### **Dhriiti's Approach**

Entrepreneurship is a family decision. When a woman steps out of the house to become an entrepreneur, she does it with the complete knowledge that she has to build an identity separate from the one she already has. She will always have to look over her shoulder, handle the demands of domesticity and add additional income to her family. Our interventions are therefore tailored to engage the entire community at one go. Dhriiti's approach begins with building a relationship with community elders and leaders. Our awareness camps are open to the entire community where members attend with their families. Even though the project engages women only, we communicate the benefits of the program to their families.

Our carefully designed selection process seeks to pick women who look at entrepreneurship as a means to get their financial independence. With a bare minimum investment entry our entrepreneurs are given arecanut moulding machines and trained to manufacture plates in their homes.

*Pragati* is a process, it's a journey that we hope our women entrepreneurs make over the course of the program. We envision our women to become agents of change by employing and engaging more women in their work.

### **Program Highlights:**

1. For the first round of mobilisation Dhriiti conducted awareness camps reaching out to 439 men & women, 315 women applied for the program, of which 84 women were selected for personal interviews. The women were interviewed and graded on several factors like family background & livelihood, size of the family, decision making, local infrastructure, etc. 13 women were selected in the first batch. 13 spoke units were set up.
2. Through the year the women learnt to understand the nature of their business, peak season and low season. Each of the 13 women identified their raw material suppliers. Women also learnt to balance their personal and professional commitments. This cohort accrued a total income of Rs 30,661 till March 2019.
3. In the second group of mobilization Dhriiti reached out to 298 men & women through their awareness camps, 89 women applied, 27 women were shortlisted for the baseline interview and 21 women were selected.



## PROJECT SAL & SIALI

**Supported By:** Odisha Forestry Sector Development Society (OFSDS)

### **About the Project:**

Project Sal is a micro-entrepreneurship based value chain development of Sal & Siali leaf plate clusters in Keonjhar and Rourkela districts of Odisha. The project is co-created and implemented in partnership with Odisha Forestry Sector Development Society. The project was piloted in May 2017.

Sal leaf is a major source of income for forest dwellers in Odisha. The project involves women groups who are primary forest dwellers in collecting, stitching and moulding sal plate bowls and plates. Women are involved in various aspects of the project from leaf collection, to stitching and processing of the finished plate making. Women were given sewing machines in their homes and trained in the techniques of khali stitching. With mechanised support the stitched leaves are further strengthened through cardboard to make more durable plates.

The project enables the clusters to create market linkages and connections to find suitable markets for their eco-friendly products.

### **Dhriiti's Approach**

Leaf plate manufacturing is an age-old practice in the tribal regions of Odisha. Women have been involved in the government project for years however their incomes have not risen. One of the main reasons is that the market for leaf plates has evolved and there is a greater demand of better-finished durable products. Dhriiti joined hands with Odisha Forestry Sector Development Society to bring in its experience and technical know-how and strengthening the existing clusters. The effort was to create a stronger value chain of innovative products produced by skilled hands.

However, winning the confidence of the women and the community was the first hurdle. The community had in general lost interest in the activity and found it a futile effort. Dhriiti's ground-up approach meant we had to work towards building their confidence in generating a better outcome.

Dhriiti introduced the technique of khali stitching where nano entrepreneurs were involved in stitching the leaves in their homes. A better product satisfied the needs of the conscious consumer and who was in turn willing to pay a higher price for the products. With increased income, women were further motivated to build on their network of leaf gatherers, and finished leaf makers. The project therefore involves women in the plate production process by facilitating leaf plate production units at the village level. In the absence of middle men, the women are in full control of the number of leaves they gather, stitch and the plates they produce.

### **Program Highlights:**

1. Dhriiti conducted village level awareness, Orientation camps in 18 villages in Sanjiuli Cluster of District Keonjhar. 28 Women Self Help Groups and a total of 311 members were reached out to.
2. Trainings on Sal leaf collection and grading in Patabari, Pitapiti, Bidyadhar pur , Sarupat, Rutisila, Gajaamba Asanabahali and Adakata and Manipur of Jhangira village.
3. Book Keeping training was imparted to Board of Directors along with trainings on workplace management and inventory management.
4. Women producers were exposed to marketing events like Sal Leaf plates at Adhibasi Mela at Bhubaneswar, Adirang Mahotsav at Kalipadiya, Keonjhar. Akasbani ( Ama Chasabasa, 100.1 F.M, AIR Keonjhar.)
5. In July 2018, Siali Leaf Plate Making unit at Laing was inaugurated. A 3 days training was imparted to 12 women from Laing village.

6. Over the year a total of 129 women were involved in leaf gathering, 25 women were involved in stitching the leaves and 4 women involved in making the finished plate.
7. A total of 30,853 units of plates were produced, women made earnings in the range of Rs 3500 and Rs 4500.





## PROJECT BEAUTYPRENEUR

**Supported By:** Godrej Consumer Products Ltd

### **About the Project:**

The Beautypreneur Project, co-created by Dhriiti and Godrej Consumer Products Ltd. (GCPL) through Godrej Good & Green (CSR Initiative) - is an innovative model for skill development in the beauty and wellness sector to create an enabling ecosystem of empowered women. The vision of the project is to create **Beautypreneurs** – women who have developed expertise in the beauty and wellness sector and who run beauty-related businesses in their immediate communities and who will facilitate the progress of the women in their communities and promote consciousness-raising groups for women.

## **Dhriiti's Approach**

Women and beauty are synonymous. The Indian beauty market that was valued at \$6.5 billion in 2017 is expected to exceed \$20 billion by 2025 making it a global beauty market. The Beautypreneur Project caters to women who are on the extreme fringes of this segment in India and perhaps overlooked. Our program involves women who run salons in their homes and / or rented premises. Our approach is driven towards making women look at themselves as skilled professionals who run an enterprise.

For a woman running a small salon in her home is often seen as an effort to supplement the household earning. With basic skills in beauty services women fail to look at their salon as a sustainable enterprise. The program therefore enables women to create a sustainable business models by designing additional revenue channels during lean months, train women in the community to deliver beauty skills, maintain a log book of income and expenditure, create marketing and promotional schemes for customers and learn the ropes of customer relations, retention and service.

The Training of Trainer Program is a skill-based certificate program designed jointly by Dhriiti and Godrej Consumer Products Ltd. It is a 200-hour program that enables our Beautypreneurs to deliver training to other women bringing them into the fold of beauty business. Our specialised trainers are also alumni of the program who share their technical know-how and offer up-skilling opportunities to newer BPs.

In the course of our work we have discovered women with the dormant spirit of entrepreneurship. These are the BPs who have flourished in the program transforming their salon and its business during the course of the program. Likewise there are women who follow suit when they find inspiration. Our monthly meetings and field visits by the project managers help us walk the talk and stay inspired.

## **Project Highlights:**

1. 74 Beautypreneurs in Delhi are added to the project
2. The first cohort of Beautypreneurs were mentored through the year to implement more efficiency in their business operations. Dhriiti conducted regular cluster level activities to encourage networking, monthly meetings of Beautypreneurs to understand local issues and devise solutions.
3. Some of the growth indicators at Salons include procurement of new equipment, fresh investments in salons through loans and funds, better customer relationships and client retention, hiring and training of new staff & interns.
4. There have also been significant growth in quality indicators where we noticed Beautypreneurs have been able to maintain regular log books, conduct marketing activities, adhere to personal care and hygiene standards, set up and manage efficient training facilities and better their quality of services.



5. The project team conducted regular field visits and cluster level engagement to enable Beautypreneurs to function with a sense of purpose and commitment.



## PROJECT EKTA

**Supported By:** Cherie Blair Foundation for Women

### **About the Project:**

Supported by Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, Ekta is a grassroots project to empower 75 small women producer entrepreneurs in rural Maharashtra to become more competitive entrepreneurs. The project was designed to impart tailored skills training in market linkages, branding and packaging, financial systems and legal structures, as well as mentoring and business development support so they acquire the desired skills to emerge as competitive entrepreneurs.

The three regions selected for the project was Uruli Kanchan, Shirur and Ambegaon in Maharashtra. Based on assessment findings, the potential for scale up and the readiness of the women involved, the project worked with women in the following areas:

- Sun-dried fruits and vegetables
- Natural & herbal food products
- Soaps & herbal cosmetics
- Sweet Corn & cut vegetables
- Fisheries

## **Dhriiti's Approach**

Project Ekta was a unique program for Dhriiti. The project extended to five sub-groups of women in three geographical regions where the women were at different stages of their micro-enterprises. Even though the three regions were within the same state the women had unique challenges and opportunities to tackle.

Dhriiti's program was therefore customised and tailored to suit the needs of the women. Dhriiti ran a common 5-day program in each of the three clusters. The program was followed up by custom training by experts to the clusters to address their immediate needs. For example women in Urli Kanchan were at an advanced stage of their entrepreneurial ventures and hence marketing discussions were more focussed towards stream lining their production line. We found that the cluster had a cluttered product line of 130 products. We helped the network to bring down their product line to 30 and realign the women in the network to take up dedicated roles of production, packaging, marketing, selling, etc. In Shirur where most of the women were farmers we took the women to real supermarkets for them to witness and value of marketable products such as fresh-cut and packaged vegetables. In Ambegaon where the women belonged to fishing communities and supported their husbands we helped them create livelihood activities of production of fishling and build appropriate market linkages.

The project was rightfully called *Ekta* where we helped the women to see the merits of working as a community of focussed entrepreneurs. Most of the women had never stepped out of their homes and villages. Though the program engaged with the groups independently, we were keen that the women mingle and share their stories with one another. We conducted Learning Fairs in each of the three clusters where women from other regions visited each other. The women showed their products, presented their business learnings and challenges. For women to step out of their homes, live a day with the identity of an entrepreneur was memorable in many ways.

## **Project Highlights:**

1. 6 awareness meetings were conducted in three different locations with the field partners, 135 women participated in these meetings
2. 89 women were selected for the program. 80 women (5 batches) completed the 5 day training at 3 different locations
3. External resource persons conducted customized trainings and prepared an action plan for each group to be followed post the trainings



4. Coaching support was extended to the women to help them identify the local assets and resources that could support their entrepreneurial ventures, conduct market studies, identify and expand marketing channels thereby increasing sales.
5. Women Entrepreneurs were also provided with digital training such that they are able to leverage technology to enhance their business. For example, the groups in Urli Kanchan started selling online through WhatsApp and social media. All the members are equipped to use the hardware at a basic level.
6. The women developed business plans for the first time and used the formats explained during the training.
7. Learning Fairs were organised such that women entrepreneurs could step out of their immediate environments, meet other women entrepreneurs and share their journeys and lessons learnt. Women also participated in local exhibitions with great enthusiasm.





## PROJECT YOU START!

**Supported By:** Godrej Consumer Products Limited & Childaid Network

YOU Start! NE Enterprise Acceleration Programme for Youth Entrepreneurs is an initiative dedicated to promoting youth entrepreneurship in North East India. The program is developed in partnership with the Bosco Institute and is supported by Godrej Consumer Products Limited and Childaid Network.

YOU Start! NE trained and mentored 60 youth entrepreneurs from North East India in 3 cities i.e. Shillong, Guwahati and Dimapur.

The programme involved an intensive 3-day enterprise training course and a one-day enterprise pitch workshop. This was followed by four weeks of handholding support to enable the youth entrepreneurs develop business plans, providing them with a solid foundation to sustain and grow their enterprises. 10 youth entrepreneurs were selected to receive mentoring support to accelerate their businesses.

3 youth entrepreneurs with high growth potential were awarded.

### **Dhriiti's Approach**

The North East of the country has been largely overlooked in mainstream entrepreneurship programs. One of the main reasons why the youth of the region are job-oriented is that there is a lack of entrepreneurial climate. Ideas, dreams and businesses have never been seeded and nurtured. Therefore, for much of the youth that has grown up in troubled times there is very little to look forward to. As a result, much of the states' youngsters are either not able to find productive avenues or are migrating to other parts of the country looking for employment.

The YOU Start! Program is an attempt to address the gnawing needs, dreams and ambitions of the region's youth. Together with the Bosco Institute, Dhriiti worked towards creating an inclusive program that gave the participants a non-judgmental and non-threatening environment where business ideas were welcomed and discussed openly. Drawing from our experience of working with the youth, we realized that the idea of developing and sharing innovative ideas for business and social change is liberating for young people especially if done in a safe space which the program offered.

While Dhriiti has largely worked in rural micro-enterprises in the North East, Project YOU Start was our formal foray into working with urban youth in the region. It was also a means of strengthening our ties with the North East region. We are working closely with the Bosco Institute in setting up an incubation space thereby seeding the very entrepreneurial eco-system that the region rightfully deserves.

### **Project Highlights:**

1. A total of 96 applications were received. 52 registered for the business plan workshop.
2. 24 entrepreneurs undergo the business plan competition after business coaching calls. 11 incubates selected after the competition.
3. 8 entrepreneurs completed the incubation and made their final business pitches. Top 3 entrepreneurs receive cash rewards.
4. Enterprises include talent management agency, skill development company focussing on school-dropout youth, a video and animation company and domestic service placement and management company.