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DISHA

Women Empowerment through Entrepreneurship
Development Training in Assam

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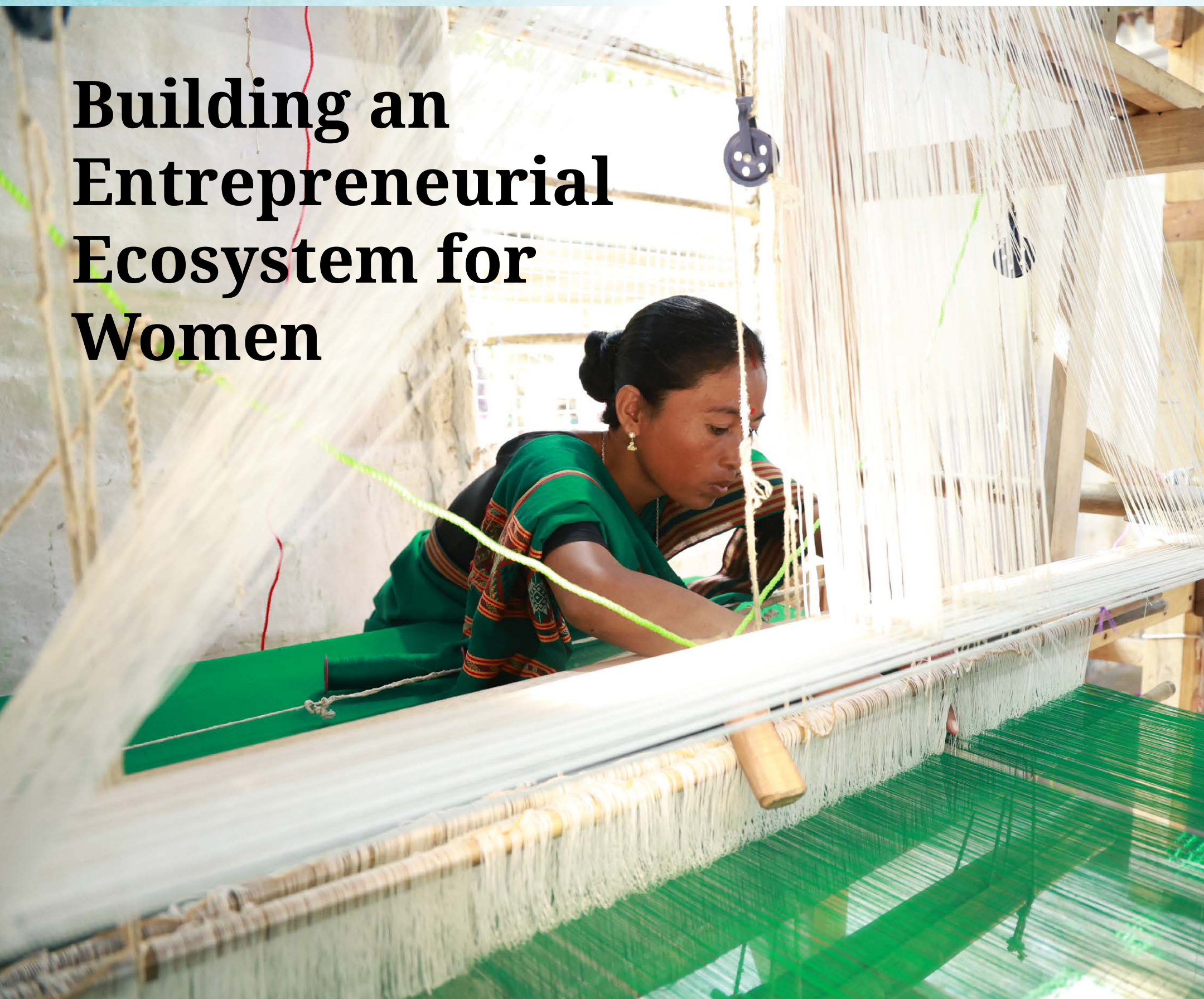
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Building an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem for Women



The proverb, “If you educate a boy, you train a man; if you educate a girl, you train a village,” rings true in every aspect. Supporting women entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses not only mitigates the gender imbalances, but also the success of women businesses has ripple effects that boost the overall economy.

Women in rural areas often encounter numerous challenges when initiating and expanding their businesses, including limited access to resources, lack of education and training and low digital and financial literacy. However, with the establishment of the pertinent support system and infrastructure, rural Indian women have the potential to not only succeed as entrepreneurs but also drive economic and social change within their communities.

Project Disha is supporting sustainable livelihoods for rural women in Assam by equipping them with entrepreneurial skills, developing vocational skills in them, supporting their enterprises, training them with finance management and digital literacy, fostering innovation and providing essential support for business growth and market integration. This compendium holds stories of women entrepreneurs realising their business aspirations in rural Assam. These are narratives of women pushing boundaries, creating, strategising, accessing spaces, scaling up, networking and enabling others along the way.

Building on the project’s goals, Disha is making an entrepreneurial ecosystem for women. This systemic strengthening can bring in the winds of change for a more sustainable and equal society. The Disha Project is being supported by YES Foundation and implemented by Humana People to People India.



Key achievements

Project Disha was executed in Jorhat, Sonitpur and Bajali Districts of Assam from 1st October 2022-30th September 2024.





Warp and Weft

Minati Senapati

Jacquard Handloom Weaver and Trainer



Tukuria Village, Jorhat

“Every woman in Assam knows how to weave on a handloom. I too was taught by my mother, but over the years I let go of the craft,” reflects Minati showing her mother’s loom fondly. “Now, at the age fifty-nine, I have gone back to my roots and the same loom my mother had passed on to me has led the way of changing my life,” explains Minati.

Minati Senapati is a Jacquard handloom weaver and trainer in Jorhat. Jacquard loom produces fabrics characterised by their intricate woven patterns and textures yielding the fabric a luxurious feel, beautiful with visual depth, is sustainable and environmentally friendly. The complex and detailed designs produced by the Jacquard loom are created by weaving warp threads which run lengthwise along with weft threads running crosswise.

Minati previously had tried her hand at different businesses but did not find success, “I started a food processing business a few years ago but I had to shut down because I could not make any profit.”

When Minati heard about Project Disha she decided to take the plunge and explore. She took the Entrepreneurship Development Training, Financial Literacy Training, among others in March 2024 offered by the Project. She also learnt about the idea of starting a business by building on her existing handloom expertise by getting trained for weaving on a Jacquard handloom. “I enrolled myself for Jacquard handloom training with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) after learning about it from Disha. Soon, I took out a financial loan and bought Jacquard handlooms,” explains Minati.

When asked what is her favourite thing to weave, Minati responds by showing the Assamese traditional scarf, “Gamocha, the identity of Assam”. She proudly explains that it has received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag from the Geographical Indications (GIs) Registry. Gamocha with a big flower motif is the evidence and example of the skills of Assamese weavers.

Minati started her business in July 2024 and within a few months started making profit. She is able to give extra weaving work to other women in the community who work in her workshop. Nestled in the back of her home, where she lives with her family, is a bamboo shed workshop which houses three Jacquard handlooms.

Minati displayed her work and was able to sell through the skill melas organised by the government and NABARD. The contacts made from these events keep the orders flowing. “I am now able to earn a profit of Rs 15,000-16,000 from selling my products every month, besides earning as a trainer,” she tells.



According to Minati, “I am proud for not only being financially independent, but also that I am able to provide livelihood opportunities to other women weavers in the community.”

Witnessing Minati’s quick learning curve and success, NABARD hired Minati as a Jacquard handloom trainer. From starting as a student to now becoming an entrepreneur and trainer Minati has started looking at herself in a new light, “I have realised the value of the legacy passed on by our previous generations. We should look ahead, adapt to the new world, but we should not let go of our roots.”





Served with Love

Dulumoni Devi

Niranjan Foods Banana Chips



Bihaguri Mekanor Chuburi Village, Tezpur

“This is the first time in my life that I am earning money,” states Dulumoni. The thirty-five year old lives with her husband, daughter and mother-in-law. Before starting out as an entrepreneur, Dulumoni was a homemaker and her husband earned for the family through seasonal farming and from a job as a security guard in the slack season. “Relying on a seasonal source of income was tough,” she explains. When Dulumoni heard about the Disha Project from the local village self-help group Progoti, she decided to be a part of the Project.

“I learnt about financial management, digital literacy among others during Disha’s Entrepreneurship Development Training in 2023,” Dulumoni tells. She adds, “I had decided I wanted to do a business. Yet,

despite the skill training I received, I wasn’t sure what business I should do. Ultimately, I went with my instinct.”

While scooping out thinly sliced banana chips, fried crispy golden with a strainer, Dulumoni smiles and explains why she decided to sell chips, “I love to cook food. I may not be very knowledgeable, but I know that anything served with love is always appreciated. So, I gravitated towards a business related to food. My husband had traveled to the southern part of India sometime back, and he had gotten banana chips from there. We all savoured it! Considering the availability of raw material, scope in the market and understanding what people would like I decided to do a business of making and selling banana chips. Not many in Tezpur were making and selling banana chips.”

It took Dulumoni some time to streamline the process of making the chips. “I wanted the taste to be perfect,” she reasons. Dulumoni invested Rs 10,000 to buy all the raw products, machines, utensils to start her business. “I utilised some of my savings and loaned money from Progoti,” explains Dulumoni while showing her workplace set-up in a big corner of her home. She got the food licence from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to sell her chips.

Dulumoni started with the help of publicity done through word of mouth of family and friends. She also set up a stall in the skill fairs organised by the Disha Project. It was at the fairs where she understood the uniqueness of her product. She received a heartening amount of orders and good feedback.” Dulumoni understood the potential of her product.

Soon, Dulumoni’s husband, Niranjan, started delivering the packed chips packets to nearby local shops in the district. The sales of



the chips started increasing exponentially. Consequently, Dulumoni’s husband quit his part time job as a security guard to support Dulumoni’s business.

“Currently, we are making Rs 30,000-40,000 per month. We have so much work now that I have to give work to five more women from the village’s self-help group to support my orders,” Dulumoni shares happily.

When asked about her future plans, Dulumoni asserts confidently,

“I want to scale up my business. I will invest in more machines and a bigger workplace to get my production up. The success of being seen, appreciated changes how we see things. Now I believe anything is possible.”





Preserving the Past, Building the Future

Swapna Swargiary

Swapna Enterprise Group

Batabari Village, Tezpur



“I was invited to my school and felicitated as an achiever for being a woman entrepreneur,” shares Swapna with quiet pride. It is a huge achievement for Swapna who dropped out of school after 10th grade due to difficult family circumstances. She got married soon after, and like many women, got caught in the daily grind of taking care of her family.

The forty-one year old lives with two children and husband. She heard about the Disha Project through the local self-

help group in February 2023. Having older children and fewer responsibilities, Swapna decided to explore this new opportunity.

Swapna already knew basic sewing, used to tailor clothes for her children, and at times picked up work from the neighbours to earn some extra money. After receiving Disha training she decided to build on her tailoring skills and scale it up as a business. “I bought a new sewing machine, made a shop in my home and started providing stitched clothes to people.

In order to increase the customer base and sales potential, I also started making pickles and selling them. I make many kinds of pickles, and bamboo pickles are my specialty,” she says while offering some on a plate. Swapna took a small loan from the local self-help group to start her enterprise.

Project Disha organised a few job fairs and skill melas and Swapna, like other entrepreneurs, displayed her products at a stall. She states, “It was extraordinary to see my name up there as a stall name: Swapna Enterprise Group. Many people bought my pickles.” The fairs provided not only a platform to display products, but also hands-on educational experiences in sales techniques, customer interaction and business management. “I also learnt doing online transactions,” exclaims Swapna.

Detailing her experience, Swapna narrates, “Even after the fair I got many repeat orders. A customer bought and gifted my pickles to someone else, and now that person orders from me regularly even though they live in another part of the country. My name has an identity, people value what I make!”

Swapna has started making Rs 8,000-10,000 per month with her business. After paying off her loan, Swapna is now thinking of growing



her business. She has bought a handloom to produce woven cloth to add to her inventory of products.

A full circle moment came for Swapna when she was invited to the 75 year anniversary celebration of her alma mater Hem Barua Higher Secondary School Ghoramari. Here, she set up her stall with her products and she was recognised as a high achieving alumnus.



“I had missed out on life after having to leave school and education early, yet I preserved my grit. Now, with a new life as an entrepreneur I feel independent and accomplished,” beams Swapna.



Weaving Sustainability

Jyotimoni Saikia Gogoi



Banana Fibre Crafts Artisan

Samogoni Charialai Village, Jorhat

“I bought Mekhela Chador for myself with my first earning as an artisan and entrepreneur,” Jyotimoni says shyly. She further details, “I got married right after 12th grade and it ended my education journey. Caught up in the early years of married life and motherhood I didn’t work for a while.”

The twenty-six-year old lives with her husband, son and in-laws. A few years ago, to earn a better living for the family, Jyotimoni tried starting a small business with her husband. “We had a store selling mobile phone accessories. But the business never took off as there were not many takers in this village area. We had to close it,” explains Jyotimoni.

Failures are great learning experiences. They can be stepping stones for success. Jyotimoni resonates with sentiment, “My failed first business attempt taught me that to succeed at any kind of business one needs to understand the market needs and scope of business.”

Jyotimoni decided to explore the opportunity of being part of the Disha Project when she heard about it. “I took their three-day training which opened my eyes to the plethora of possibilities. I learnt about how to run a business,” she explains.

Jyotimoni decided to work with banana fibre. In a 12-day skill development training programme organised by the Project in Chamoguri village in Jorhat. Jyotimoni, along with twenty-nine other women, learnt to extract banana fibre and create marketable handicraft items.

The training programme was comprehensive, blending theoretical knowledge with hands-on practical sessions. Jyotimoni reflects, “I gained practical skills in operating the Raspador machine (a machine specifically designed for banana fibre extraction) for safe and efficient fibre production. We were also trained in craft including the foundational techniques like creating the ‘3-Layered Mota Beni Chain’ and made to practise crafting the base structures for products such as handbags, fruit vases and water bottle holders.” To further enhance their creative potential, the training programme introduced participants to dyeing techniques, with a focus on preparing blue dye for their fibres. The training was provided by Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) with certified trainers.

Jyotimoni finished her training in September 2024. While excitedly narrating about the making of her products, Jyotimoni explains, “The process for making banana fibre involves cutting the banana plant, separating



the sheaths (or stem), extracting the fibres and then drying and weaving the fibres.”

Banana fibre is versatile as it has high tensile strength, flexibility and is biodegradable. According to her, “Even the waste produced during the process of banana fibre extraction can be used to feed cattle. I am able to support my family’s welfare and have the power to purchase things for myself by making Rs 7,000-9,000 every month.” Jyotimoni is making and selling banana fibre crafts to Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship’s Incubation Centre in Guwahati.



“It is liberating to take care of myself and my family’s needs. I am proud of myself for not only becoming independent, but also making a living by creating sustainable products and can have long lasting benefits,” Jyotimoni concludes.



The Alchemy of Sisterhood

Mouchumi Gogoi



Jacquard Handloom Weaver

Samoguri Adhalkata Village, Jorhat

“Earlier I used to weave at home using a handloom, but could not make much profit as I didn’t know how and where to sell it,” narrates Mouchumi.

“I learnt about the Disha Project and decided to join their entrepreneurship development and financial training. Subsequently, I also took a three-month-Jacquard training course,” explains thirty-six year old Mouchumi. Through a collaborative effort with Rakta Sanjeevani, a NGO, the Disha Project equipped 120 women with the valuable skill of Jacquard weaving. This initiative leveraged the Ministry of Textiles SAMARTH Scheme, implemented under the guidance of the Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship, Guwahati. The

Jacquard weaving trained the women to create innovative textile designs, expanding their product range and market reach. Additionally, this faster technique allows them to produce more and potentially increase their income.

“After finishing my training in September 2024, I have started working with the looms provided by the Project Disha at the Samoguri Handloom Centre. I am able to sell and earn Rs 6,000-9,000, explains Mouchumi. She adds, “Now that I have the means to buy whatever I want, I feel liberated. I feel all women should step out of their homes to explore what all they can achieve beyond their roles as a wife and mother. To be completely happy in ourselves we need to know who we are as individuals.”

The Project has equipped the Centre with four Jacquard handlooms and facilitated three Raspador machines (for making banana fibre). Twenty women work out of this Centre making handloom and handicrafts products and selling their products through Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship’s Incubation Centre, Guwahati.

Mouchumi narrates, “Having a consistent source of income has invigorated my life with hope and pleasure.” Being able to partner her husband in the household expenses has made her feel capable. “Since I have started coming to this Centre and working together with other women artisans, I have started enjoying my work and getting better at my craft. Besides sharing our work load and techniques, we share our lives and dreams with each other,” explains Mouchumi.

Work is not taxing when one enjoys what they do. It is especially rewarding for those



working with their hands; creating is satisfying because there are tangible results. Mouchumi seconds this thought with, “I enjoy weaving clothes, especially those which I like to wear.

When I create I feel I have control. I can create what I like to wear, it gives me joy.”

A profound power arises when women come together and support other women. Where women can occupy space, be vulnerable, make authentic connections and be seen, deep healing occurs, and anything is possible. “With the respect, work and monetary satisfaction I have received as an artisan working at this Centre, I am motivated to grow my business and become the best version of myself,” Mouchumi concludes.





Weaving Courage

Swapna Sonowal

Handloom Weaver



Urangial Village, Jorhat

Like the north star that guides those who are lost back on track, Swapna sought direction making handloom products to get on track with her life. The forty-three year old hasn't had things easy. Youngest of the three kids of a family living in a small village in Assam, Swapna braved adversities when she lost her father and an elder brother tragically. Things took a turn for the worse in 2019 when her arranged marriage quickly led to a divorce. Swapna shut out the chatter of "concerns" over her being divorced and decided to take things head on. "I decided to end my claustrophobic marriage, and that I will survive without anyone's support," narrates Swapna.

In her survival mode, Swapna first started

working in her ancestral paddy fields. "My priority was to take care of myself and my mother. I hired help and started farming on our 30 bighas or approximately 19 acres of land. In the growing season we produced enough to feed ourselves and sell the remaining for some profit." Swapna's elder brother and sister are married and settled elsewhere. "With the money from selling black rice and my elder brother's monetary support, my mother and I were able to survive. But I knew, I didn't want to merely survive, I wanted to thrive independently," explains Swapna.

Swapna always had a knack to weave. "Growing up as a child, I would always sit and watch my mother weave at home. I wove my first flower with my aunt's help. Whatever the kind of loom, I was always quick to pick up and do well," reflects Swapna. She decided to go back to what she loved and started making and selling handloom weaved gamochas. According to her, "Since my work is good and Assamese households always need gamochas I started making a little income."

With a thirst to grow fast, Swapna decided to take Disha Project's business and handloom training. She explains, "With the Disha trainings I learnt practical aspects of how to run a business. I decided to increase the inventory of the products I make." Besides making cotton gamochas and cotton Mekhela Chadors, Swapna started making Muga silk Mekhela Chador. "I sourced the silk thread from a sericulturist I met at the Disha training. Soon, my Muga Mekhela Chador became a hit. I am the first women to make it in my village. People started coming to my home to place orders," beams Swapna. She also bought another Jacquard loom to increase her work production.



With her business growing steadily, Swapna easily makes Rs 7,000-9,000 per month. During the time around Bihu festival she has started making Rs 40,000 making and selling Muga Silk Mekhela Chador. Swapna also managed to get an artisan card from the Ministry of Textiles with the help of the Project. The card will aid her in availing relevant schemes, loans and trainings.

"I want to grow my business. I will explore new markets beyond my village, hire women and train them for producing polished products for my business," says Swapna while explaining her future plans. Adding emphatically, she concludes,

"I don't want to be defined by what happened to me, but with what I create with my life."





Crafting Reality

Pallabee Neog Bora

Bamboo Craftsperson



Mariani Village, Jorhat

“Project Disha has me realise my real self,”

states Pallabee poignantly. Living a idyllic life in Mariani, thirty-six-year old Pallabee lives with her two daughters and husband. Being a busy homemaker she has been seeing life pass by being a mother and wife. But there was always something more she yearned for. So, when she heard about the possibility of becoming an entrepreneur she knew it was an opportunity she didn't want to miss.

Pallabee finished her graduation in Assamese literature in 2003. She details, “I come from a village in Jorhat which, at the time, had limited job opportunities. After

I graduated, I even got shortlisted for a job at a private bank's first ever branch in the city. But since it was far away from home in the town I was discouraged by my family members to pursue it. I did not have the gumption to push for it even though I was keen to explore. Soon, I got married and became busy with family life. But a desire to do something of my own persisted.”

In February 2024, Pallabee took the training offered by the Project. According to her, “The initial three-day training taught me the basics about why and how to do a business. I was hooked!”

After the entrepreneurship development training, Pallabee decided to do a business with bamboo crafts. Through Disha she took a ten-day bamboo craft training. “My father used to make bamboo crafts like stools, birdhouses, one-horned rhino among others, and I used to be fascinated with his hobby while growing up. Being familiar with bamboo craft, I started this training and learnt to produce refined products with practical knowledge about the craft,” tells Pallabee.

Soon, Pallabee started making her products and gaining proficiency. She makes products with bamboo growing in her verdant backyard and at times buys it from bamboo sellers. Assam is one of India's largest bamboo producers. Bamboo is renewable, recyclable, durable and no mechanical devices are used in making crafts with it.

Skill and Job Fairs organised by the Project aided her to interact with a wide range of customers and develop other potential market linkages. She went door-to-door in her neighbourhood to show her products and spread the word. Furthermore, Pallabee also displays her products at her husband's grocery store VB Brothers in the



neighbourhood. These networks keep the flow of orders coming to her. “I have started making a monthly profit of Rs 7,000-10,000. For the first time in my life I am making my own money, that too while working from home. I don't have to ask my husband for anything. Even my daughters have started respecting me more” exclaims Pallabee.

“I thought I could only use a knife to cut vegetables, now I can cut bamboo to carve out products, along with the direction of my own life. I didn't know I had this talent. We don't know the depths of ourselves. Especially women, we get limited by society's perception of who we should be. It's time we realise who we are. Women can do anything,” Pallabee concludes with a smile.





Breathing Threads

Samina Begum

Tailor



Saikia Elubuni Muslim Village, Tezpur

“These earrings are the first thing I bought from my earnings,” Samina says, showing them proudly. The forty-one year old lives in a village with her thirteen-year-old son and husband. Samina couldn’t continue with her education after the 10th grade. “My mother was ill and bedridden. She needed 24x7 support. I nursed her for a few years and therefore had to drop out of school. Since I had a lot of responsibilities and duties to fulfil, I had to let go of my education even though I was a good student. You know, I wanted to be a nurse,” reflects Samina nostalgically.

With her happy-go-lucky disposition, Samina seldom complains about her unrealised

dreams. “My husband provides for us, as much as possible, with his job as a mechanic. But I always think that if I had become a nurse, I would have felt more fulfilled as my dream would have come true,” expresses Samina.

Samina details, “Once I heard about the Disha Project’s training I decided to explore. Until that point I thought doing a business was something only ‘big’ people could do, not a regular person like me who is not much educated and without resources. With Disha, I learnt that I can start a small business from home and scale it up gradually.”

Samina learnt about business concepts of investment, budgeting, online banking along with basic skill training in stitching. “I realised I can build on the skills I already have. I had learnt sewing clothes long ago and used to make clothes for my son when he was younger. But I had never utilised the skill for earning money,” narrates Samina while detailing her aha moment.

Samina took a loan from the local self-help group to buy a second-hand sewing machine. Sewing with the thread of her new dreams, Samina peddled away stitching new clothes while breathing life into old dreams.

Taking the opportunity head on, Samina displayed her products at the skills fair organised by the Project. “Besides the clothes that I stitched myself, I made bamboo swans too. It was liked by many! Within two days I made Rs 4,000 at the fair,” says Samina.

Currently, Samina is a full-time tailor for women’s and children’s clothes. She also



stitches curtains among other things for people in her neighbourhood. She is making Rs 4,000-5,000 per month. According to her, “Now I am able to buy what I want without depending on anyone. I even bought a mixer grinder to make my kitchen work easy.”

Samina is also contributing towards construction of her house. She plans to set-up a shop nearby soon after her home construction is complete. She concludes,



“I know it’s a small start, but I want to breathe life into my threads and stitch my dreams into reality.”



Indomitable Spirit

Lili Borah

Maa Lili Cloth Store Owner



Likhakgaon Village, Tezpur

“Nobody believed that I could make my business work,” exclaims fifty-five-year-old Lili. She adds, “They all thought I would not be able run an enterprise, let alone make a success out of it. But they didn’t understand the power of persistence.”

Lili used to sell grocery products in her first venture. According to her, “I would go to the local market and set-up a stall to sell grocery products and would earn Rs 4,000-5,000 every month.” She even contributed money towards her family home’s renovation. Lili lives with her husband, two sons and a daughter-in-law. She could not study beyond grade 9 as she was married. Providing financially for her family was a changing point for Lili’s psyche.

The grocery-selling business was a lot of hard work, and Lili even had to pay rent for her temporary stall. The profits did not match Lili’s expectations. “Many thought I am an ineffectual old woman, and commended me on my effort. But I wanted more,” narrates Lili. She continues, “I learnt about the Disha Project and thought it might be the perfect opportunity for scaling up my business.”

With the business and finance training Lili got from the Project in February 2024, she realised the basic mistakes she was making in her business. She explains, “There are many grocery markets within close vicinity, the chances of mine growing were slim. I understood I needed to do a survey of what people need in the local area. I also figured that I should create a brand name for my business, have an identity and commit to the business idea. After surveying my village, I came to the conclusion that there is a dearth of clothes shops. So, I decided to open a shop selling cloths.”

Gaining clarity about her business, Lili took a loan of Rs 50,000 from a local self-help group. She used the money to get a shop constructed outside her home and bought ready-made clothes from the wholesale market at a cheaper price. She named her shop on her own name, “Maa Lili Cloth Shop.”

“To spread the word about my business, I started taking some of my products to the local market on Saturdays and Sundays. This marketing strategy worked as slowly people started coming to my shop,” exclaims Lili smiling.

Building a business is fundamentally about working with people. It involves interacting with customers to understand their needs, providing value through one’s products and ultimately establish strong relationships



that drive business growth. “Being a homemaker makes you intuitive towards other people’s needs. I am attentive and quick to understand my customers’ needs. Even if I don’t have the product the customer requests, I ensure to get it arranged for them to get it later. Customer satisfaction is my priority,” explains Lili.

Lili’s hard work has started paying off as her shop has started profiting Rs 15,000-20,000 per month. She has also paid off her loan.



“Women should explore different roles in their lives to be completely fulfilled. If I can become a successful entrepreneur at fifty-five, so can any other woman,” signs off Lili with a smile.



Never to miss an opportunity, Lakhimai decided to get the three-day Entrepreneurship Development Training from Project Disha as soon as she heard about the opportunity. During this training she learnt about the idea of doing Eri silk business. Soon after, Lakhimai took a training from Assam silk board and started making Eri silk and its products. Now Lakhimai Lohan is a sericulturist. She has been making Eri silk, its handloom products and also selling silk worms to others for five-six months now and is able to make Rs 15,000 per month. She sells locally and through North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi).

Seeing her drive and the quality of her products, Lakhimai was hired as a trainer by the Assam Silk Board. She trains women from the farming community so that they can learn another skill and earn a living. She states, “I am a trainer too with the Silk board and have trained twelve groups (each group has thirty trainees). Working with Eri silk and training is turning out to be profitable for me, and I wish to share my prosperity with others in the farming community.”

Eri silk is renowned as the world’s only vegan silk, where, unlike other silks, the moth inside the cocoon is not killed. Instead, the moth naturally exits the cocoon, leaving it behind for us to use. This ethical and eco-friendly process sets Eri silk apart, making it a symbol of compassion and sustainability in the textile industry. Having a Geographical Indication (GI) tag helps Eri silk establish a strong international presence and its recent prestigious Oeko-Tex certification by Germany further cements Eri silk’s status as an eco-friendly fabric.

According to Lakhimai, “I displayed my work at the Project-organised artisan fair in Jorhat and I got some orders and made contacts.

“You know, I had my maiden trip to Delhi recently to be a part of a national Hathkargha event where I met the Prime Minister of the country,” Lakhimai tells proudly. The fifty-nine-year-old adds, “I used an electric elevator to go up and down for the first time!”

Agriculture is the mainstay of this Urungial village. But it is a seasonal livelihood. People need other sources of running income in the lean season of paddy production. Lakhimai, like most Assamese households, could work on a loom, but didn’t know how to earn income from weaving.

Ahimsa Silk

Lakhimai Lohan

Sericulturist & Eri Silk Trainer



Urungial Village, Jorhat



I observed others and I also learnt about how to present and enhance my products.” Adding to her silk products’ sustainability, Lakhimai uses natural colours to dye the yarn she weaves. With her work she also employs other women to weave the Eri silk thread into fabric and finished products.

“With the help of the Disha Project, I have received an Artisan card from the Ministry of Textiles and it can help me grow my business,” Lakhimai adds. Artisan cards can help artisans access financial assistance, insurance and other government programmes.

“I am happy to that my business has a positive impact. I am able to make a profit while also benefiting the society and the environment,” concludes Lakhimai.





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“There has been a growing recognition of the importance of supporting and nurturing women entrepreneurs in rural India. In Assam there is immense scope to build on the rich handlooms and handicrafts culture. This is especially true for developing innovative businesses. The Disha Project, supported by Yes Foundation and implemented by Humana People to People India, has encouraged and promoted the entrepreneurial ecosystem for women to do business. I hope to see this ecosystem grow and be strengthened in the future.”

Barsha Talukdar, ACS

Assistant Commissioner of Office of District Commissioner, Sonitpur, Tezpur
Government of Assam



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I have witnessed that many women who after starting from scratch are doing businesses successfully with the support of Project Disha. Business women from the project have been connected to the Ministry of Textiles and we have provided them artisan cards. This will help them avail different training and marketing opportunities from the department and ultimately grow their businesses. I hope to see Project Disha grow to other districts of Assam and support more women entrepreneurs to realise their aspirations.”

Shashikant Gupta

Assistant Director of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Jorhat
Ministry of Textiles, Central Government of India

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I would like to convey my appreciation for the exceptional endeavour taken by the Disha Project in Assam facilitated by the Humana People to People India and supported by Yes Foundation initiated in the year of 2022 dedicated for empowering rural women through entrepreneurship development training. Their commitment to fostering the spirit of entrepreneurship among women is commendable. These efforts are not only changing lives but also shaping a more equitable and prosperous future for generations to come.”

Bhabesh Tamuly

Assistant Director of Handloom and Textile, Jorhat
Government of Assam



YES Foundation is a charitable Trust driven by a vision of an empowered and equitable India. The Foundation strives to achieve this by focusing on building innovative and inclusive ecosystems to catalyze social transformation. YES Foundation was registered in 2012 with YES BANK as its 'Settlor'. Being a part of the financial sector, YES BANK has embedded CSR into its core business operations, keeping in mind the impact it has on people, planet and prosperity. YES Foundation is YES BANK's concrete step to realize this vision of an empowered and equitable India.



Humana People to People India is a development organisation registered as a not-for-profit company under Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956, since May 1998. It is a non-political, non-religious organisation working for the holistic development of the underprivileged and marginalised people in rural and urban India. We work through social development and poverty alleviation interventions by coordinated, strategic approaches focusing on school education and teacher education, life skills, improved livelihoods, health, women empowerment and environment protection.



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