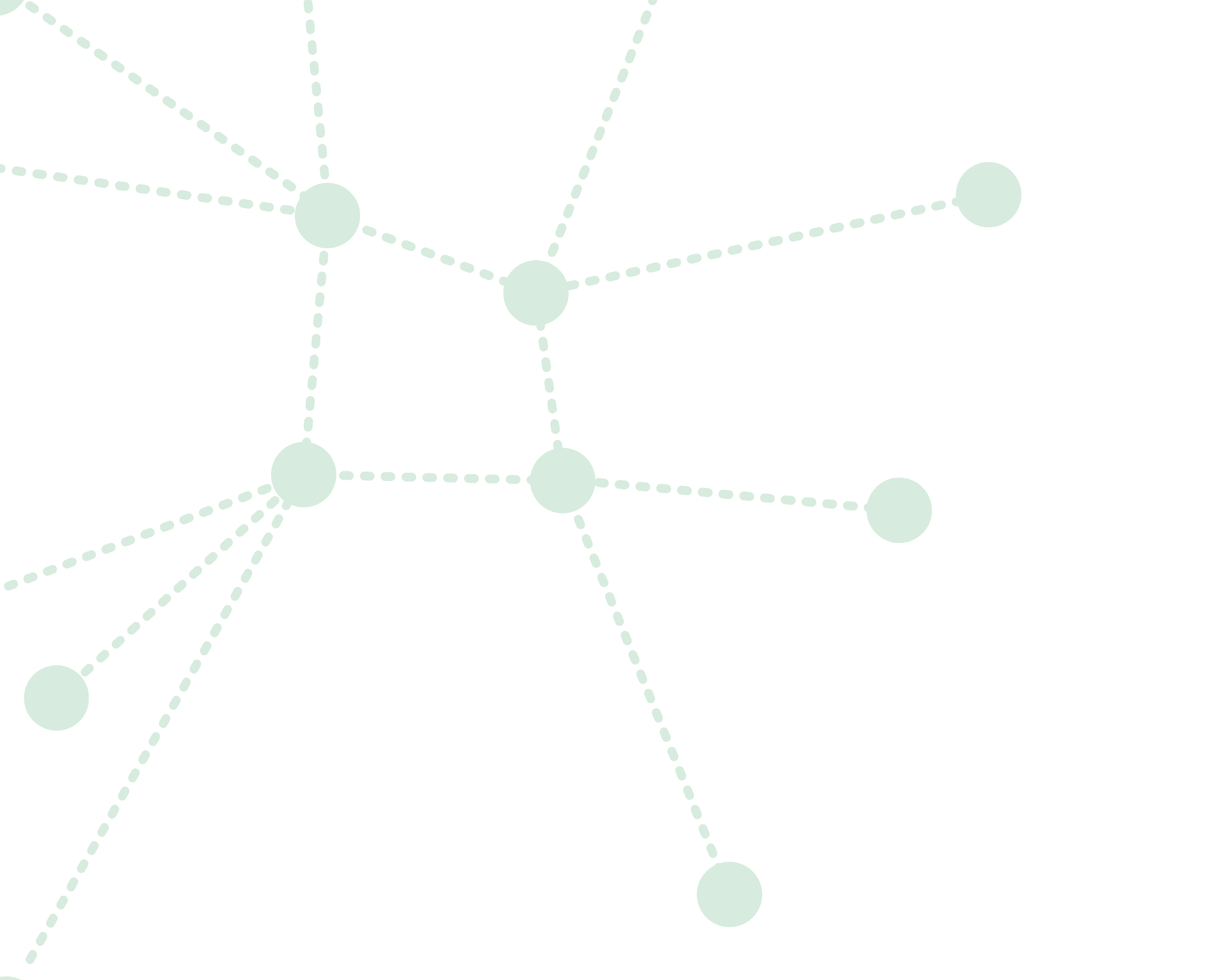




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S U C C E S S S T O R I E S



Disha - a partnership between United Nations Development Programme and India Development Foundation, supported by IKEA Foundation, aims to improve the lives of one million underprivileged women in India by enabling them to acquire marketable skills and become employable. Disha supports women to become economically self-sufficient so that they and their families can have better and equitable opportunities in life.



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FOREWORD



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

In a span of five years, the Disha Project has evolved from a set of pilots to a full-fledged movement across villages and towns of Delhi NCR, Haryana, Maharashtra, Telangana and Karnataka enabling women with employable skills and connecting them with livelihood opportunities. The project has succeeded in creating a ripple effect in India through its unique approaches and gives us a hope that women in India will not be left far behind when it comes to India's growth story.

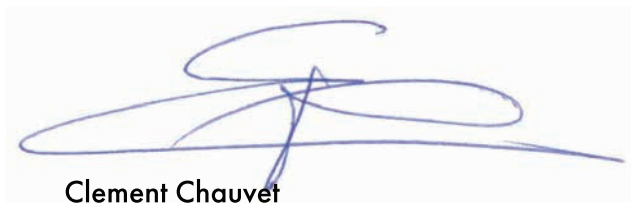
The need to improve women's participation in the economy has been a long-standing priority and is key for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. With merely 27 percent of women in its workforce, India cannot dream of a growth story without its women being economically independent.

Disha and its multi stakeholder partnerships with private sector and state governments sought to achieve exactly this - to positively impact the lives of women. During the initial stages, through our pilot programmes with rural women in India, we realized that awareness on career or work opportunities, access to formal financing, poor communication and management skills, lack of guidance and their own perspectives and outlook prevented them from taking up jobs and becoming entrepreneurs.

So, what can be counted as achievements? Is it merely through numbers? Or indicators? I think the vibrant stories of change, packed in this short story book and spoken by the women beneficiaries themselves, can be counted as actual achievements. Though including each story in a book would have meant millions of pages, we have chosen the best 25 stories from the lives of women in India. These are the stories of resilience, adaptability, smart thinking and determination to overcome challenges that are common to women across the country. Their transformation from ordinary farmers to Agriculture Business Accelerators and sourcing managers, from housewives to entrepreneurs or 'Shepreneurs' and from students to smart workers in big retail brands, is not just overwhelming, but inspiring as well.

The underlying stories will also give the audience an overview of how Disha's four models – transition from education to work, employment marketplace, micro-entrepreneurship and value chain, have been instrumental in establishing the programme. I would like to thank all the state governments and our implementing partners for supporting Disha throughout and touching lives of women, and to IKEA Foundation for not just investing in the programme but investing in the dreams of these women.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank India Development Foundation for being a knowledge partner of UNDP's Disha Project. Disha Project's efforts have borne fruit in the form of these inspiring stories of women, their journey through multiple challenges and most importantly, their vision towards a better future. I hope you enjoy reading it.



Clement Chauvet
Chief, Skills and Business Development
UNDP India

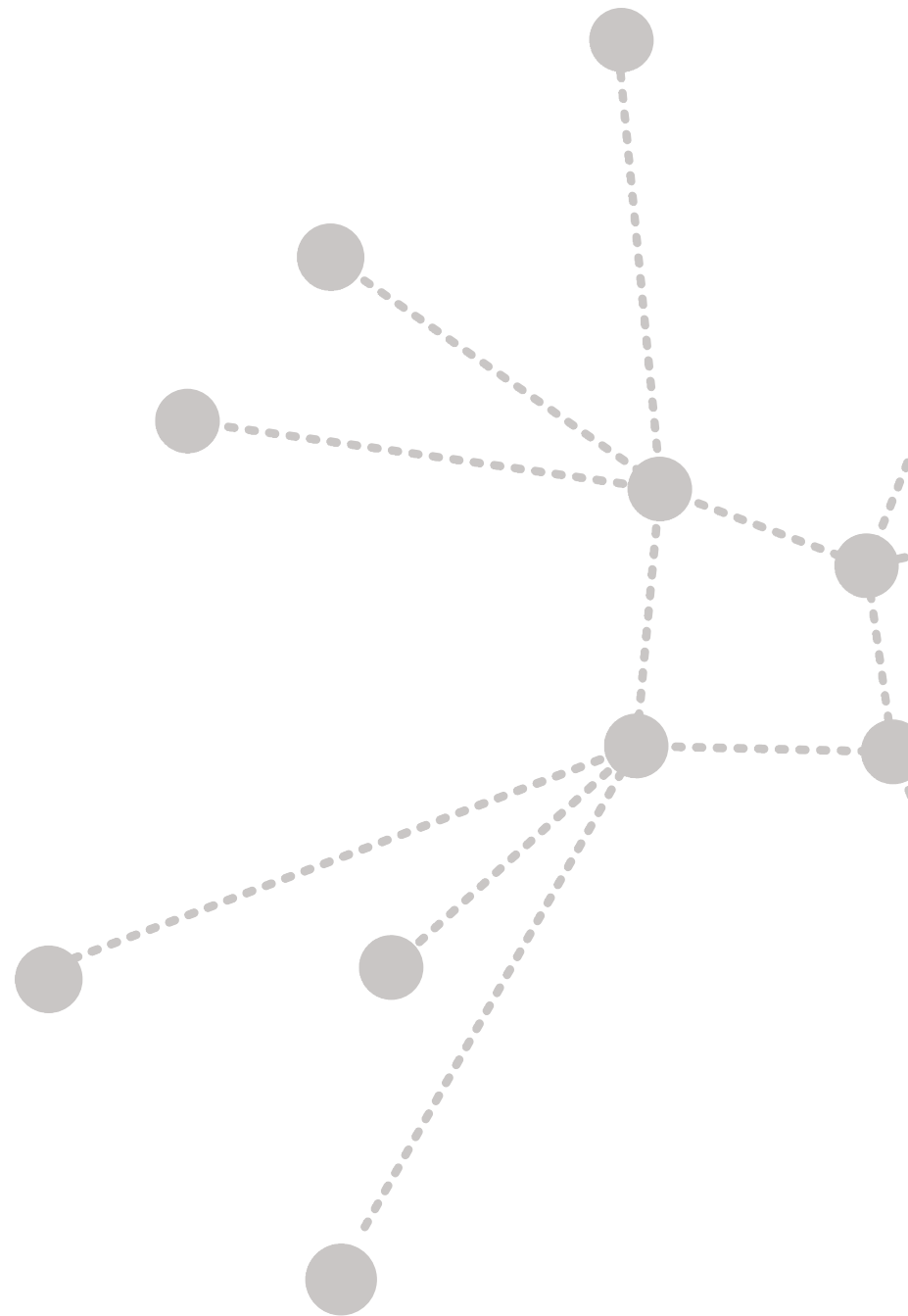
INDEX

A Journalist in the Making (Nisbud)	02
Paving the Way to Success (Gautami)	04
Cooking up the Recipe of her Dreams (Ekta)	06
Reliving her Entrepreneurial Journey (Vijaylakshmi)	08
Learning Farming Techniques, Enhancing Growth (Dandu Bhulaxmi)	10
Journey towards Entrepreneurship (Jyoti Ballam)	12
Breaking Social and Psychological Barriers (Lakshmi Baburao Kawade)	14
Joining Hands with Technology (Leelavati)	16
Becoming her own Boss (Nikki)	18
Aspiring to Bring Change in Education (Shubdha)	20
Choosing Career over Marriage (Pooja Kumari)	22
Using Embroidery to Weave a Colourful Future (Pinky Shalawas)	24
In Love with Graphics (Radha)	26
Bridging the Career Gap (Prasja)	28
Leading by Example (Surujuna)	30
Pearls of Pataudi (Maya Devi)	32
Following Passion (Puja Gedam)	34
Motivating others to Start Business (Renu)	36
Giving Back to the Society (Rathnamma)	38
Becoming Role Model (Shireen Begum)	40
Fulfilling Dreams and Responsibilities Together (Uma Devi)	42
Delivering Values to the Customers (Tulsi Devi)	44
Pursuing her Administerial Aspirations (Nirnitha)	46
Breaking Gender Stereotypes (Rihana)	48
Reaping the Fruits of Smart Work (Kontham Lavanya)	50

PREFACE

During its four years of implementation, Disha project has managed to reach over 8 lakh women in Delhi, Haryana, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telangana. In its 'Proof of Concept Phase' (Oct 2015- Dec 2019), over 70 pilots have been rolled out in these states in partnership with state governments and several implementation partners.

Over the course of these four years, inspiring stories of thousands of women who have broken gender norms, patriarchal boundaries and social conventions, have cropped up across districts where Disha project is being implemented. While it is difficult to capture each one of them and stitch them into a book, this little success story book aims to capture a few among those, throwing light on exceptional challenges that women face in our country, and their amazing ability to overcome those challenges.





NISBUD

Aspiring Journalist

A JOURNALIST IN THE MAKING...

While many students of her age are apprehensive about choosing the right career, Nisbud, a 12th standard student from Bangalore, is preparing to pursue her passion in the field of 'Journalism and Media'.

Thanks to the counselling provided at UNDP's Disha Skills Career Guidance and Counselling Centres (in partnership with iDream Careers, TTC, Dept. of pre-university Edu-Govt. of Karnataka), followed by several assessments, Nisbud could clearly define what she was looking for. "Today, I am aware of all the courses, academic streams, colleges and government schemes that I can avail. Once I complete my 12th boards, I am going to learn Malayalam and Tulu as well. I am fluent in English and Tamil though," says Nisbud.

Initially, her family wasn't supportive of her decision to pursue journalism, as it meant inflexible work timings and travelling far and wide. "I had to show them hundreds of documentaries, news clippings and movies on successful young women. Finally, they agreed," adds a delighted Nisbud.



PAVING THE WAY TO SUCCESS

20-year-old Gautami hails from a lesser-known village called Damarla, located in Warangal district of Telangana. Her family owns a small farm where they cultivate cotton. While pursuing her graduation, she got connected to UNDP's Disha Skills pilot project promoting women's participation in the retail sector through training and placement in jobs (in partnership with TRRAIN, Employment Guarantee & Marketing Missions (Govt. of Telangana)).

What followed was an intense 45-day training programme in the retail sector, which enabled Gautami to understand a wide array of job functions that the retail sector offers. Focused on her goals, she completed her training with flying colours and got selected for an interview at Shoppers Stop. As of today, she is about to complete 1 year of work at Shoppers Stop store, patiently smiling and handling customers at the extremely busy Kid's section.

Being financially independent has its own advantages. "Today, I can support my family with my income. Sometimes, even my younger brother asks for financial advice from me," says Gautami.





GAUTAMI

Customer Care Executive



EKTA

Aspiring Chef

COOKING UP THE RECIPE OF HER DREAMS

Ekta is a shy yet confident 19-year-old from Delhi. Her father is a storekeeper and mother is a homemaker. Although their financial position is not strong, Ekta's parents have always encouraged her to pursue her dreams in food industry.

"I loved to experience new dishes and always wanted to pursue a career in food industry. It was my father who encouraged me to join a course at the ITI," said Ekta. Once she began to pursue food production technology at her centre, she got connected to the UNDP's Disha Skills supported career guidance training (in partnership with Quest and ITI).

"I was glad that these classes were part of the course here and I found the classes quite interesting and informative. My communication skills and the level of confidence increased, which helped me prepare for interviews," she says. The placement assistance provided under the programme also helped her find a job with a popular brand as a Junior Executive.

"Today, I am able to take orders and manage everything at the café. I feel I am one step closer to my dream of becoming a chef!" said Ekta.



RELIVING HER ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY

Ten years ago, Vijaylakshmi started her own business of designing ornaments in silver and semi-precious stones. However, her aspirations took a back seat as she became a mother of two. Later, she came in touch with UNDP's Disha Skills' Ready, Steady, Go programme (in partnership with Dept. of Industry and Commerce (DIC), Dept. of Skill Development Entrepreneurship and Livelihood - CEDOK (Govt. of Karnataka)), that aims to support aspiring and existing entrepreneurs to start up their businesses.

Under this programme, Vijaylakshmi learnt more about entrepreneurship, market research, information and communications technology (ICT) which ignited back her passion for designing jewellery. Motivated, she reconnected with her past network of clients and workforce to re-launch her business while adopting a newer approach.

"Today, I can even draft a business plan, manage accounts, file GST and communicate effectively. As of now, my plan is to hire differently-abled personnel, to connect them with what I love to do," says a very passionate Vijaylakshmi.





VIJAYLAKSHMI

Jewellery Designer



**DANDU
BHULAXMI**

Farmer

LEARNING FARMING TECHNIQUES, ENHANCING GROWTH!

Meet Dandu Bhulaxmi, a woman farmer from Siddipet district (Telangana, India) who is often found strolling around her farm in broad daylight, proudly showing the red tomatoes that she has grown through sustainable farming.

“I was always worried due to persistent pest attacks, as we were suffering through financial losses,” says Dandu, recalling her condition 2 years ago.

Dandu came in contact with UNDP's Disha Skills training (in partnership with Tanager) on organic farming techniques for women farmers and soon after, learnt on how to prepare organic pesticide Jeevamrutham. “Thanks to the training, we were able to counter pest attacks. We were also taught other sustainable farming techniques, such as staking. The yield has gone up, so has the quality of tomatoes.”

Today, Dandu's farm supplies tomatoes to organized retailers such as Metro, Big Basket and Reliance Fresh in Telangana. “I feel recognized as a farmer. I can also support my family as this has helped increase my income,” says a smiling Dandu.



JOURNEY TOWARDS ENTREPRENEURSHIP

For Jyoti, an entrepreneur from Haryana who runs a beauty parlour-cum-cosmetics shop at her home's terrace, no time of the day is a free time. With wedding season at its peak, customers keep visiting her store throughout the day, keeping her extremely busy. "It has been a good season for my business. Everyone wants to look good," she says.

In 2018, local Anganwadi workers connected Jyoti to UNDP's Disha Skills programme (in partnership with Government of Haryana, Hero Moto Corp. and Humana People to People India) in Haryana, aimed at empowering women with entrepreneurial skill development. Already trained on beauty services, Jyoti chose to set up her own enterprise – a beauty parlour. Her little daughter helped in marketing, by bringing her friends along with their mothers to shop hairbands from her mother's store. Gradually, the business took off well.

Going forward, Jyoti plans to add women suits and children's clothes to the line-up as well, due to their high demand. Her message to other entrepreneurs is, "Stay focused, hardworking and be attentive towards your customers".





**JYOTI
BALLAMB**

Beautician



**LAKSHMI BABURAO
KAWADE**

Tailor

BREAKING SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS

Lakshmi Baburao Kawade's story is an inspiring example of how women, aided by Self-Help Groups (SHGs), can overcome social and psychological obstacles to achieve empowerment, which is a primary goal under UNDP's Disha Skills programme.

Back in 2017, UNDP's Disha imparted training (in partnership with MAVIM (Maharashtra State Women's Development Corporation, Govt. of Maharashtra)) to 120 SHG members. The trainers in turn trained another 3000 women in MAVIM SHGs across Amaravati and Yavatmal districts. What followed were inspiring stories of women like Lakshmi transforming into highly-confident entrepreneurs!

After receiving the training, Lakshmi, an agrarian labourer for most of her life, began a tailoring shop in her village. "I started earning more than my husband. This led to domestic altercations as he started becoming suspicious about my meetings with the SHGs quite often," adds Lakshmi. To resolve this matter, SHG members relocated their weekly meetings to Lakshmi's house. This enabled her husband to understand their work and later, he began assisting her in her business as well. "You can't find another husband in the village who can stitch a hook in a blouse and supports his wife in her business," says Lakshmi.



JOINING HANDS WITH TECHNOLOGY

Meet Leelavati from Karnataka, who is demonstrating leadership qualities by empowering lives of the local farmers as well as her own through modern farming techniques and technologies.

Leelavati is an Agriculture Business Accelerator (ABA) in 3 villages, and is associated with Janadhanya Farmer Producer Organization in Kanakapura, Karnataka. Not only does she educate farmers on growing local varieties of food grains, but she is also digitally aggregating orders through an online portal developed by Disha's Implementation (in partnership with Mindtree Foundation).

She has even helped her village acquire a full-fledged processing mill for cleaning grains, an important step towards aggregation. As a result, the transportation costs have reduced significantly. With plans to procure a flour milling machine for her village, Leelavati is quite optimistic about the future. "The Disha market linkage project has given us a great deal of confidence and internal satisfaction. I now feel that I am part of something much bigger and better," says Leelavati.





LEELAVATI

Agriculture Business Accelerator



NIKKI

Budding Designer

BECOMING HER OWN BOSS

At the age of only 19, Nikki is driven and passionate to achieve her goals of becoming a designer. She is already an entrepreneur running her own tailoring enterprise in Rohtak, Haryana.

“I had previously attended a six-month training course in tailoring and parlour services. After completing my start-up training under UNDP's Disha Skills (in partnership with Government of Haryana, Hero Moto Corp. and Humana People to People India), I decided to act upon it and invest in my goal.” Once she completed her training, she began providing services at a customer's home and gradually, her business grew manifold.

What separates her from the rest is her zeal to follow the latest fashion trends. “There can be other tailors in my village, but I design suits following the latest fashion trends”, says an enthusiastic Nikki.

“I get paid every day and complete my work as per my own hours. I can also help my family whenever they are in need. That is the upside of being your own boss,” says Nikki with a glint in her eyes. With an aim to open a boutique in the city with 5-7 people working under her, Nikki is well on her path.



ASPIRING TO BRING CHANGE IN EDUCATION

For Shubdha, new technologies like data interpretation and analytics sounded more interesting than being a lecturer. Soon, she decided to venture into the entrepreneurial world by starting her own company on data interpretation and analytics.

Lack of knowledge and vision about her business, Shubdha visited the local MSME Institute in Bangalore where she was connected to the UNDP's Disha Skills Entrepreneurship Cell (in partnership with Dept. of Industry and Commerce (DIC), Dept. of Skill Development, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood - CEDOK (Govt. of Karnataka)).

"There, I interacted with industry experts and discussed many ideas with peers. This helped me chart a path for my business. My long-term goal is to inform schooling systems in rural areas on quality of education of school children," said Shubdha.

Shubdha strongly believes that owning a business will give her financial independence and is hopeful that she can take forward her vision into a successful business over the next couple of years. "I hope that my business in such a unique field will allow for positive change in rural education systems in Karnataka," said Shubdha.





SHUBDHA

Aspiring Entrepreneur



**POOJA
KUMARI**

Cook

CHOOSING CAREER OVER MARRIAGE

22-year-old Pooja Kumari is a graduate from a Government College in Hyderabad and belongs to a family of five. Her parents had decided to marry her off immediately after she had completed her graduation. However, determined to work, earn and make a living for herself, Pooja chose career over marriage and other things.

Pooja got connected to UNDP's Disha Skills supported project on promoting women's participation in retail sector through training and placement in jobs (in partnership with TRRAIN and IKEA Retail). Despite of her mother suffering through a paralytic attack, Pooja took care of her home, cooked for her family and also excelled in the retail training. She qualified for her initial interview with IKEA store in Hyderabad, India and got her first job.

A passionate cook herself, she chose IKEA Kitchen as her area of work. Becoming financially independent has enabled her to look after her mother better, support her siblings and save money to fund her dreams of pursuing a post-graduation course in Science. "I have come to realise that the world is not confined to the four walls of home, kitchen and books," says an ambitious Pooja who dreams to become a famous chef one day!



USING EMBROIDERY TO WEAVE A COLOURFUL FUTURE

Pinky's father lovingly gifted her sewing machine for her marriage, as she was always passionate about stitching. But the sewing machine sat rusting in a cowshed for the next eight years.

After signing up for the entrepreneurial start-up training with UNDP's Disha Skills (in partnership with Government of Haryana, Hero Moto Corp. and Humana People to People India), Pinky eventually decided to remove the dirt off her old sewing machine, and started her own enterprise.

"I began taking orders of sarees for embroidery and stitching. I priced it according to the number of beads. Later on, I began selling laces and fabrics, the profits of which I invested in setting up a cosmetics shop," recounts Pinky.

Her family doubted her potential, since she had studied only till class 10th. Today, not only does she provide financial support to her family, she inspires other women to resume stitching and embroidery as well. "I have only just begun. My end goal is to employ other women from the village and enable my children to get good education," says a glittery-eyed Pinky.





**PINKY
SAHLAWAS**

Embroiderer



LOTS WHOLESALE SOLUTIONS

RADHA

Graphic Designer

IN LOVE WITH GRAPHICS!

20-year-old Radha comes from a conservative middle-class family from Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh. Her parents migrated to Delhi looking for better prospects while she was young. "We weren't allowed to go out after 7.00 pm," she recounts.

After completing her 12th standard, she decided to join ITI in Delhi to pursue a course in graphic designing, as she was always passionate about creating graphics. However, she had no idea on how to make her career in the field.

Her teacher advised her to join UNDP's Disha Skills supported training on career guidance (in partnership with Quest and ITI). "The classes helped me improve my communication skills. The best thing about the classes was how it introduced us to topics related to gender, the importance of women in the workforce and how to negotiate with your parents to achieve your dreams," recalls Radha, who later cracked an interview.

With her learnings, she was able to convince her family, especially her father. "Today my father stands up for me and supports my decisions. He treats me as an equal. I never thought it was possible," said Radha.

She aims to invest her savings to further increase her knowledge in the field of graphics.



BRIDGING THE CAREER GAP

"Ours is a family of labourers. Even my siblings do not know of any opportunity beyond labour work." A year ago, 19-year-old Prasja had very little knowledge of the range of career options available primarily due to lack of information and opportunities. This lack of information kept her away from devising a career graph for herself.

Determined not to give up, she decided to pursue her education and make the most for herself. It was only after she enrolled herself in a Government College in Hyderabad, India, that things began to take shape.

She was introduced to UNDP's Disha Skills career guidance and counselling programme (in partnership with COIGN, Govt. Commissionerate of collegiate education) in her college through a career fair. "Before Disha, my knowledge was limited to common careers such as teacher, doctor or engineer. After assessments and counselling sessions, I came to realize that I am good with keeping accounts and management."

Today, with a career path clearly embedded in her mind, Prasja is ready to take over the world. "It took time to convince my parents. But now that I have managed to earn their trust, I will advise other girls to keep trying and not give up," says Prasja with a smile.





PRASJA

Student



SURUJUNA

Weaver

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Every day, Surujuna travels 8 km from her village to the Microsoft supported ReWeave centre located in Narayanpet district, Telangana, and spends 2 hours dedicatedly working on Computer-Aided Design software (CAD). She creates designs to weave sarees at her home and sells them in neighbouring villages.

Surujuna, who belongs to a weaver's family, recalls her life before CAD-training, which was provided under UNDP's Disha Skills 'Reviving Handloom Ecosystem through Digital Empowerment of Women Weavers in Telangana' project (in partnership with Chaitanya Bharathi and ReWeave project of Microsoft). "Initially, we used to create designs on graph sheets. A single error while sewing thread into a graph sheet meant we had to rework on a new sheet all over again. Thanks to the training, the scope of error is low as everything is now computer-based."

Under the project, around 1000 women were provided 2 months of basic computer training to familiarize them with computers, followed by CAD training. Today, Surujuna is not just enabling revival of traditional art of Narayanpet, she also stands as a powerful example of what women can do when provided with the right kind of guidance based on skills.



PEARLS OF PATAUDI

Maya Devi from Haryana has a penchant to do things differently. She planned to start her entrepreneurial journey with a pearl farm, a concept practically unheard of in the landlocked Haryana. “Traditional farming methods are at the mercy of weather. We always wanted to try something to ensure financial security even in the event of crop failure,” says Maya Devi.

It was around this stage that she got connected to UNDP's Disha Skills three-day start-up training (in partnership with Government of Haryana, Hero Moto Corp. and Humana People to People India) on setting up and running enterprises successfully. “The thorough information about starting businesses and running them successfully motivated me to give pearl farming a serious thought,” recalls Maya Devi. The trainers supported her to prepare a budget plan and helped her identify schemes she could apply to, for loans.

Determined, she began with the construction of a freshwater tank, procured oysters and the relevant tools for extracting pearls from oysters. As of today, she is anxiously awaiting the formation of pearls which will take a few months more. “The best part is that our trainers still follow up with our activities, even after the training is over by guiding us on various aspects. That really helps,” says a delighted Maya Devi.





MAYA DEVI

Pearl Farmer



POOJA GEDAM

Beautician

FOLLOWING PASSION

Pooja Gedam, a graduate from a poor family in the Chandrapur district, Maharashtra, had always dreamt of starting something of her own. Trained as a beautician, Pooja was skilled and employed but continued to wish for her own enterprise.

On taking advice of her friend, Pooja approached the UNDP's Disha Skills programme (in partnership with YES Centre, Maharashtra), where she was provided guidance about the self-employment process.

With a loan of INR 30,000, she began her entrepreneurial journey by setting up a beauty parlour at her home. Her passion and expertise in beauty services started bringing more footfalls from her local area and the business grew.

Today, she can support herself and her family with her income and pursue her passion as well.

"I am enjoying my work. I have even hired an assistant, Pallavi to help me run the parlour!" says Pooja, who is now a registered employer with the YES Centre.



MOTIVATING OTHERS TO START BUSINESS

Renu is a graduate from a lesser-known village called Dani Sankar in Bhiwani, Haryana. She was always looking for opportunities to contribute to her family's income, which consisted of her husband and two children.

The spark in her entrepreneurial journey came in the form of UNDP's Disha Skills' Bridging the Information Gap (BIG) training (in partnership with Government of Haryana, Hero Moto Corp. and Humana People to People India) at an Anganwadi centre in her village, that she attended along with several others from her community. "I was really motivated by the information that the training provided on setting up a business. I felt like I can do it. So, I decided to attend the three days long Start-and-Improve-Your-Business (SIYB) training as well," recalls Renu. Her idea was to start a cosmetics and bangle shop in her village.

A year later into 2019, Renu is not just making profits from her shop, she is also working as a Biz-Sakhi, mentoring many other women from her village and helping them start their own businesses. "I am proud to say that, out of the women that I have trained, 14 have started their own businesses," says Renu.





RENU

Business Woman



RATHNAMMA

Agricultural Business Accelerators

GIVING BACK TO THE SOCIETY

A few months ago, 35-year-old Rathnamma, from Bevinamaradoddi, Karnataka, began (and ended) her day doing household chores. Today, she is bringing a monumental change in agricultural practices in her village, preparing compost manure and helping local farmers to explore markets in the cities.

One of the 97 Agricultural Business Accelerators (ABAs) trained in procurement, microbusiness processes and supply chain through Disha interventions, Rathnamma received training (in partnership with Mindtree Foundation) on organic millet cultivation, composting techniques and their application processes.

She imparted the same training to farmers in her village, who are reaping its benefits. Rathnamma admits enthusiastically, "Now we are aware of the market opportunities available in the cities. With no middlemen to obstruct our path, we are selling our produce directly through Janadhanya FPO."

Another part of the produce is sold directly to end customers through brands that have been created under Disha Project. "60% of the price paid by the customer now goes directly into our (farmers') kitty," adds Rathnamma, with pride.



BECOMING ROLE MODEL

21-year-old Shireen Begum is the third child among seven siblings. A year ago, when Disha team visited the Government Degree College for Women, Hussaini Alam in old city of Hyderabad where Shireen was pursuing her undergraduate course, she had almost given up on her dreams of being able to work after her graduation.

“I wanted to work and help my parents. However, being a girl, my parents didn't expect me to have a career.” said Shireen. A few months later, she came to know about the forthcoming Disha Skills' 45 days retail training (in partnership with TRRAIN and IKEA Retail). “I was sure I wanted this. But convincing my parents was not easy. They were concerned about my safety,” said Shireen.

Once Shireen got selected for the training, the counsellor spoke to her mother and managed to convince her. Together, the mother-daughter duo succeeded in convincing her father. This made Shireen's elder sister Samreen too show interest and both joined the training. Later, the sisters successfully got selected by IKEA as co-workers to work in the Café and the restaurant, respectively. “Now, our parents are very proud of me and my sister Samreen. We have become role models for other girls and young women in our community.” Shireen shares, “I am very clear about my ambition. I see myself working in a managerial position in future. I also hope to travel to other countries.”





SHIREEN BEGUM

Aspiring Entrepreneur



UMA DEVI

Accounts Assistant

FULFILLING DREAMS AND RESPONSIBILITIES TOGETHER

25-year-old Uma Devi from Karnataka got married when she was just 19. To support her family's finances, Uma began to work as a part time sales executive for an insurance company. However, her dream was to return to college to complete her education and start a career in finance and accounting.

Uma soon began to pursue a course in B.Com, despite of a hectic family and work life. Thanks to soft skills training and placement assistance provided under UNDP's Disha Skills (in partnership with CII, Skills and Development Alternatives), she found a job with a reputed firm as an Account Assistant.

"The programme gave me the much-required direction. I could hone my communication skills and create a strong resume, which helped me crack the job," shares Uma.

Her family's support at every stage of her career has kept her motivated. "Having a child and looking after her does not hold me back from having a job, because my family is here for me. With my new job, I can support them even better than I did previously," says a proud Uma.



DELIVERING VALUE TO THE CUSTOMERS

42-year-old Tulsi Devi is the co-owner of Matti, a handmade biscuit and namkeen enterprise in Badhani, Jhajjar in Haryana. Started around January 2018, Matti has quickly found popularity among customers in and around her village.

The idea to use indigenous ingredients (pearl millet, lotus seeds) and turn them into mouth-watering snacks struck Tulsi and her friends once they got connected to UNDP's Disha Skills programme (in partnership with Government of Haryana, Hero Moto Corp., Humana People to People India and IIT Delhi) in Haryana.

"I am really grateful for the workshops and trainings we got to attend. Apart from knowledge on manufacturing, we also learned about hygiene," says Tulsi, as she packs the order for an event.

She also admits that the real challenge is to combine culinary skills with flavours that suits the taste buds of both rural and urban customers and that is what Matti delivers. But why chose the name Matti? "We are all connected to the soil, aren't we? Hence the name," says Tulsi with a smile.





TULSI DEVI

Entrepreneur



NIRNITHA

IAS Aspirant

PURSUING HER ADMINISTERIAL ASPIRATIONS

21-year-old Nirnitha from Hyderabad cannot conceal her excitement to complete her last year of graduation in Microbiology. She is getting ready to pursue an MBA programme in Human Resources.

Two years ago, Nirnitha wasn't sure on how her career path would unfold. Curious to devise a path for herself, she got connected to UNDP's Disha Skills Career Guidance and Counselling programme (in partnership with COIGN, Govt. Commissionerate of collegiate education) in her college. "It was interesting to know how our social life, interests and our ability to understand and react to a situation can reflect on the right career choices for us," she said.

An analysis of her counselling sessions threw light on Nirnitha's own strength – administrative skills. Armed with knowledge, she has chosen UPSC or IAS as her final destination. "Once I complete my graduation, I will begin with an MBA course while preparing for Administrative exams. I want to make my parents proud by becoming an administrative officer in the future," she added.



BREAKING GENDER STEREOTYPES

Rihana Talafdar lives in the slums of Bhim Kranti Nagar, Pune with her husband and three children. She comes from an underprivileged family, who got married at an early age of 14 due to financial constraints.

“I thought marriage would improve my financial situation, but it didn't. I was worried about the safety and security of my children, so I decided to take ownership of my life and started looking for a job to look after my children's education,” said Rihana. She started working as a domestic helper and later, joined a school as a caretaker.

In February 2018, Rihana met a representative from LIFT Academy who took her through the “Kraftsmala Project” – a women empowerment programme (in partnership with Swedish Chamber of Commerce, MSSDS, LIFT Academy, and NSDC). Under this project, Rihana was shortlisted for forklift training programme. She quit her school job and attended a one-month training course. As of today, she has received a certificate by NSDC (National Skill Development Corporation) and has now started her career as a forklift operator, a job previously stereotyped as a male's job. With a good income at her disposal, Rihana's life is finally on the right track.





RIHANA

Forklift Operator



**KONTHAM
LAVANYA**

Farmer

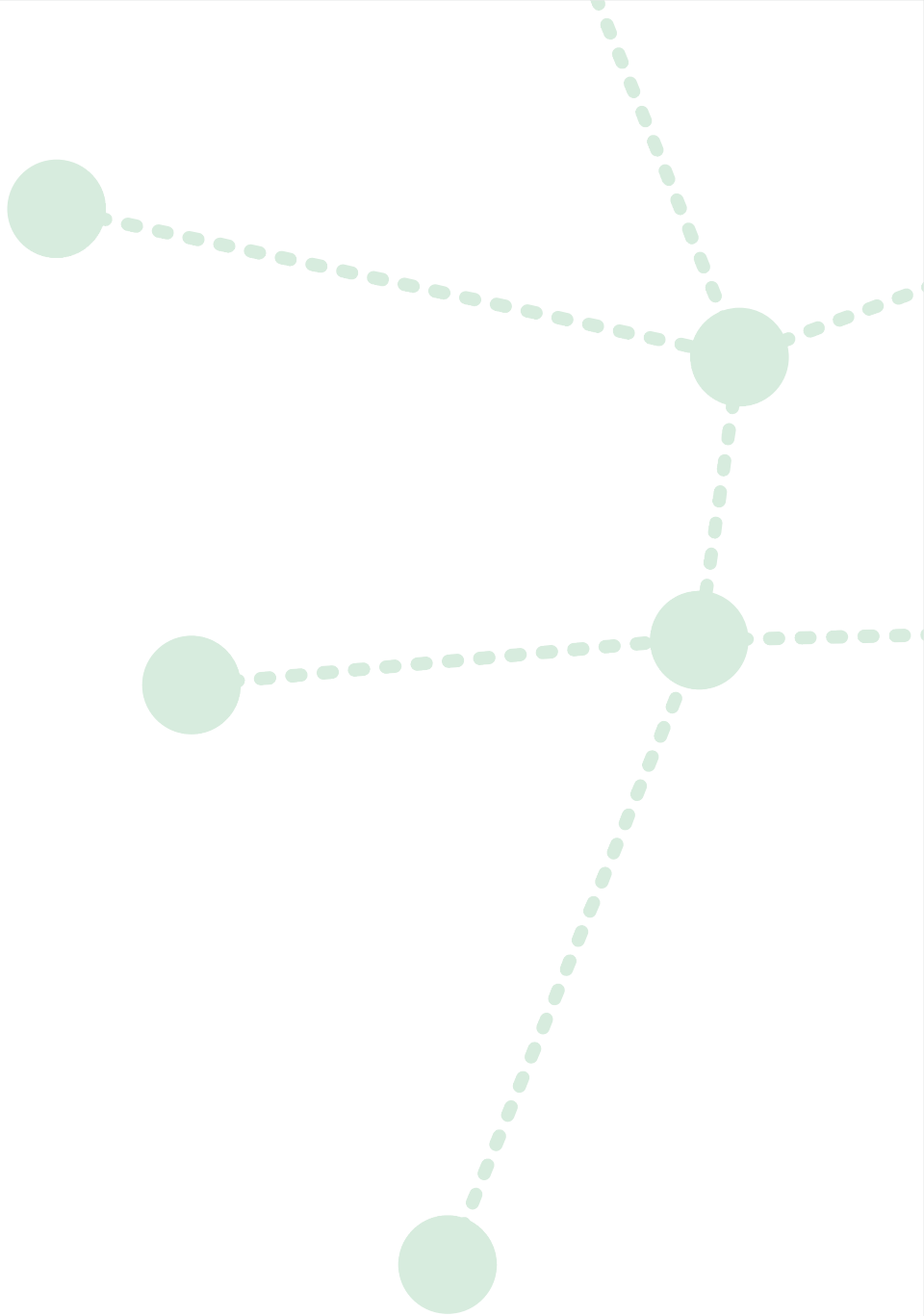
REAPING THE FRUITS OF SMART WORK

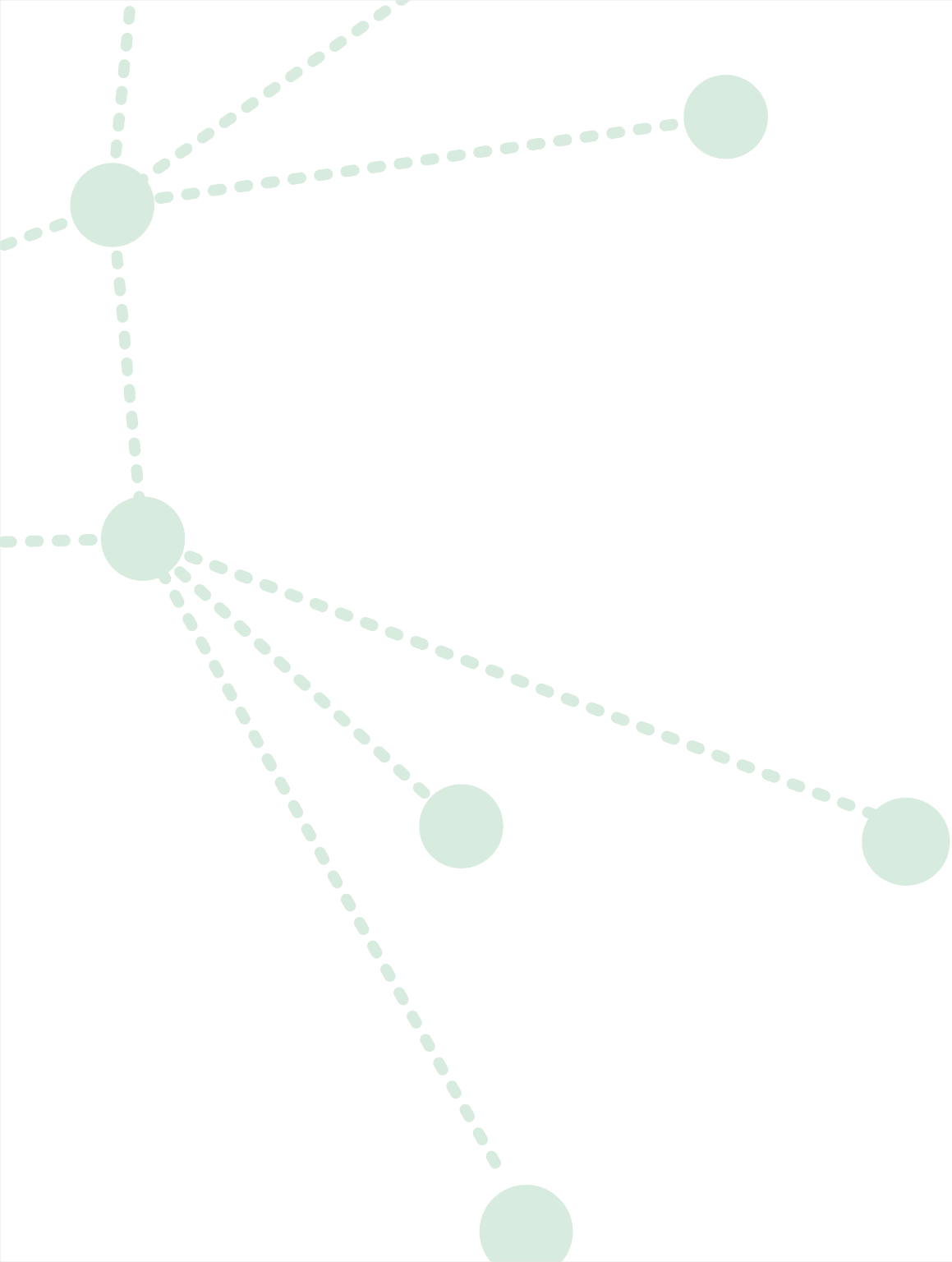
A couple of years ago, young Kontham Lavanya was a worried farmer. Regular pest attacks, high cost of fertilizers and pesticides and a depleting soil quality kept her away from attaining a good yield from her 3-acre farm situated in a far-off village of Thimmapur, Siddipet district, Telangana.

Today, she is growing tomatoes, chillies and brinjal by implementing the organic farming techniques that she had learnt when she met with a small group of 19 women farmers who had adopted organic farming on their farms. She says, "What amazed me was that their crops grew so well and pest attacks were quite minimal. I decided to join the group and adopt the same farming methods on my farm."

Trained under UNDP's Disha Skills training (in partnership with Tanager) for women farmers, these smaller groups of women farmers are re-shaping the agricultural narrative in Telangana, by becoming pioneers for women farmers like Kontham. Currently, about 1120 women farmers are members of Mutually Aided Cooperative Society 'Bhulaxmi', and earn their livelihood by supplying organic vegetables to many organized buyers such as Big Basket, Metro and Reliance.









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