

Women Empowerment & Entrepreneurship

Angul, Dhenkanal project

News Letter

April - June 2020



A Joint Initiative of ACCESS Development Services and TATA Steel BSL

*“WEE- Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurship” is an initiative of TATA Steel BSL, partnering with ACCESS Development Services for strengthening the livelihoods and empowering more than 2000 women in Angul and Dhenkanal Districts of Odisha. The project is spread over 12 villages in three panchayats. i.e. 2 in Dhenkanal and 1 in Angul district. This project was initiated in July' 2019 for a period of three years with the objectives of incubating and capacitating a community owned and controlled multi-purpose cooperative that offers livelihoods support to its members; enhancing income of the households by enabling women to set up sustainable micro enterprises; reducing the vulnerabilities of poor households and building their financial resilience to deal with risks through establishing access to financial services; enhancing household productivity and well-being by creating awareness for improving health & hygiene, safe drinking water and sanitation. The project aims at developing strong and sustainable women enterprises both individually and in group.*

Introduction:

The quarter from April to June 2020 was not only challenging for implementation of WEE project, but also it was a very critical juncture for the entire country. With increasing number of COVID-19 positive cases identified on a daily basis, the lockdown rules went on getting stringent every passing day. While the earlier implementation framework of the project became almost redundant, new ways emerged to use the time and resources most effectively for the benefits of the women. One of the most important aspects of the project, viz; vision mapping, goal setting and leadership development process were already initiated. The leaders of the Cooperative had learnt to take ownership of the project, which made the operation and progress of the project smooth.

Despite the lockdown, the project team with cooperation from the Cooperative's leaders and members were able to move strategically towards the larger goal of the project. During this quarter steps were taken to enrol more members in the Cooperative to enhance the membership base. The tailoring units were completely dedicated to prepare face masks so as to provide continuous supply to the local market. As sanitation and hygiene became the most important aspect in people's daily lifestyle, Phenyl unit utilised its scope to prepare this solution in large quantity and reach out to its clients. Mushroom training imparted in the earlier quarter came in handy for many women to continue their home based enterprise by meeting their own household needs as well as selling in the village and nearby areas. While the SPARC team was trying to chalk out new plans for establishing linkages with market and financial institutions, the Cooperative members were busy in expanding their membership base. They were trying to reach as many women, opinion leaders, important influencers at village level.





## Enrolment of Members in Gruhalaxmi:

After registration of the Gruhalaxmi Cooperative, the membership drive had taken up speed. Women in the project village were very keen to be part of the Cooperative as they were witnessing the entrepreneurial initiatives taken up by the project. They were also motivated to see the emerging leadership among women from their own community. The prospect of increasing income among the members who were taking part in the mushroom cultivation, tailoring training programme and phenyl unit other women were starting to enquire about the procedures of joining in the cooperative. The project team along with the Cooperative leaders were visiting village to village and explaining women about the function and prospects of the Cooperative. During these meetings many women became members of the Cooperative. Till 31st March 2020, 399 members were enrolled in the Cooperative and deposited their Share Capital and

Registration Fees in Gruhalaxmi Cooperative amounting to Rs 99, 750. But during the lockdown it was impossible for the project team to organise such meetings. Interestingly, the leaders of the Cooperative took the baton in their hands and started mobilising members. Even during the lockdown period, the team members of the WEE Project worked relentlessly towards enrolment of members in the Cooperative. The team coordinated over phone and utilised whatever mobility options were available. In this period, 416 new members were enrolled in the Cooperative. An amount of Rs 1,04,000 was collected towards share capital and registration fees.

Now, by end of June 2020 there are 815 members in the cooperative who have contributed Rs 2,03,750/- as share capital and registration fees. It has been planned that, by the end of the Financial Year 2020-2021, there would be around 2000 women members enrolled in the Cooperative.

New strategies are being planned to make the membership process more effective.

Enrolment of members is one of the major activities of Gruhalaxmi Cooperative. It is observed that even though there are restrictions in organising meeting, people have financial constraint, mobility is restricted, there is a wave of support for the Cooperative movement in the area. The major reason being involvement of the existing members, the successful income generating initiatives and seriousness of the SPARC team in taking up various new initiatives. While the quarter April to June was most challenging, there was not much adverse effect in mobilising the women to get enrolled in the Cooperative. Hence the team is now confident that they can convince more members to join the Cooperative. The Board of Directors and other active members have set a target to ensure more women join the movement in coming days.





## Thinking long term for social and economic empowerment: A whole new way of bringing women together during the pandemic time



**Pranati Nayak,  
Kusupanga, Dhenkanal**

Ms Pranati Nayak, 46, wife of Nimain Charan Nayak and mother of 2 children is one of the Directors of Gruhalaxmi Samabaya Samiti. She is from Kusupanga village. Pranati is one of the most active and vibrant directors of the Cooperative. She has contributed substantially to strengthen Gruhalaxmi by bringing in more women as members under the fold of the newly formed Cooperative. During the initial membership drive, she spent a lot of time in motivating

the women of Kusupanga village to take membership in Gruhalaxmi Cooperative. She used to make the women members understand about the Cooperative and how it can bring positive changes in their lives. She was not only instrumental in making women members understand about Cooperative but also convince the village opinion leaders to join hands to extend all possible support. The most important aspect was, the way she continued the drive during the time of COVID lock down and amidst strict restrictions. The lockdown restrictions did not stop her endeavour. She managed the task over phone or one to one conversations. For this she had to plan strategically but soon she found her way to reach maximum number of women and convince them. Through her relentless efforts, till date she has successfully enrolled more than 200 members in Gruhalaxmi. Pranati expressed her satisfaction of doing this work and

said, "I don't have any vested interest in doing this work but this is for the interest of all my fellow women and our village at large. One day we will be living a very different life, free from poverty and misery." Today Pranati is respected by all the villagers. Everyone is aware about her good intention.

For Pranati, enrolment of new members indicates that more number of women are getting ready to have their financial freedom. That shows, more families will lead better lives. There will be improvement in standard of living of people in the area. Besides, with more women joining the Cooperative will create possibility of more self-employment for the upcoming enterprises to be initiated by them. Pranati ensures that when a woman becomes a member in the Cooperative she is well aware about the purpose of her being part of the movement and she is well motivated to drive an enterprise.

*Pranati did not wait for the pandemic to get over, for other women to join the cooperative movement. She facilitated the process of their easy enrolment by reaching out to them at their door steps.*





## Enterprise of Phenyl making:

After registration of Gruhalaxmi Cooperative, it was resolved by the Board that, in the month of March 2020, at least 1000 women should join the Cooperative. In order to achieve this target, the SPARC Team organised a series of Sensitization Meetings with the objectives of making the SHG members aware about the mission and vision of cooperative and its management; need of Cooperative; services which will be provided by the Cooperative; criteria for Cooperative membership; amount of share capital and registration fees and their requirements etc.

In these meetings, the SPARC team comprehensively explained the SHG members about the rationale for setting up of the Cooperative and how it will benefit its members through a bouquet of services. During the meetings the potential members were also sensitised on various strategies and interventions that will be undertaken by Gruhalaxmi, Cooperative.

Soon after these sensitisation meeting started to take off in full fledged, the lockdown due to COVID-19 outbreak started. The project team had to stop holding these meetings with immediate effect. But the communication did not stop. The BoD member took up the responsibility and started explaining the above components to the women folks in their respective villages. The project team communicated with the BoDs as well as the women of the villages over phone as and when required. In the previous quarters, two SHGs from village Kusupanga and Talbahal namely Shakti Maa Annapurna SHG and Maa Tarini SHG received training on Phenyl making. During the training both the

SHGs prepared 915 litres of Phenyl. Maa Tarini SHG of village Talbahal purchased raw materials for 1000 litres of phenyl from their own SHG fund. In the quarter ending June 2020, Maa Tarini Self Help Group prepared 400 litres of phenyl using its own resources. 300 litres of Phenyl were sold to Gruhalaxmi by the Self Help Group and Gruhalaxmi sold the same to TATA Steel BSL. Apart from TATA Steel BSL, Gruhalaxmi also supplied Phenyl to the local market. The phenyl was sold in the brand name of Pheno Fresh.





## Gearing up entrepreneurial skills to pedal new change



**Seemanchal Naik,**  
Talbahal, Dhenkanal

Seemanchal Naik, 30, wife of Bikal Naik from village Talbahal is an active member of Gruhalaxmi Cooperative. Leading the self help group of her village as President, Seema was always in the lookout for a viable opportunity of setting up a new enterprise. While discussing different entrepreneurial initiatives in Gruhalaxmi Cooperative in the presence of other members and experts from ACCESS team, Seema was enthused with the idea of setting up a phenyl unit. She further discussed the idea in her group and all

other group members also came to consensus. Seema requested ACCESS team members to organise a training programme for her group members where they can learn the process of production and packaging of phenyl. With immediate effect a trainer was deployed for the Group in Talbahal. Within a month, the group was ready to prepare phenyl. Initially they prepared 1000 litres of phenyl, bottled it properly and labelled it with the logo and name of Gruhalaxmi Cooperative. "We learnt a new skill which has a tremendous market potential. This is true that our marketing opportunities are somewhat restricted due to this pandemic time. But once the institutions, hostels and other facilities are opened, we will be selling our products in full swing," said Seema with lots of hope in her eyes. She further informed, "Despite the limitations we are trying our best to sell our products in the market." This

is for Seema, all the women in her village are now self reliant and are earning an income of Rs 2000-Rs 3,000 per month. This income will surely enhance in coming days.

Seemanchal alongwith her group members are all set to meet bigger order to carry out their production. They are looking for a larger space where they can carry out the production at a bigger scale and store the final products. They also need space for bottling, levelling and packaging of phenyl. "We are confident that our business is going to expand very fast. We have started to meet the needs of only a small section. With the help of the project team we will be able to connect to more buyers who will take our products on a regular basis. The quality of our product is very good. That is the reason why we will be getting repeated orders from the same buyers." Said Seemanchal confidently.

*Phenyl making is just not an income generating activity. In this hour of health consciousness, this works as a major solution for sanitation. We have a big task ahead.*





## Enterprise for face mask making:

Mask making was one of the major activities which was undertaken during the current quarter.

Gruhalaxmi Cooperative was able to successfully cater to the demand of the local market as the quality of the masks was good and price was reasonable. The Cooperative expanded its production base of mask production and involved women from different parts of the State to prepare masks. Along with members of the Cooperative, women from the nearby

villages and other places such as Bhubaneswar, Puri and Jharusguda were coordinated and they joined in this production drive. All the women together produced more than 68,700 masks. The masks produced in other locations were collected in Gruhalaxmi's Office for bulk sale.

In the current quarter, Gruhalaxmi was successful in selling approximately 26,000 masks both at TATA Steel BSL and local market. After the sale of masks, on an average

each women member earned more than Rs 4000/-. Now, Gruhalaxmi is in the process of selling the balance stocks of masks. The CSR Dept of TATA Steel BSL has extended its helping hand in the process of selling the masks. They have provided Gruhalaxmi the list of their empanelled vendors. These empanelled vendors of TATA Steel BSL were contacted by Gruhalaxmi for selling of masks. Positive responses have been received from the vendors.





## Welcome initiative for building enterprise around safety and wellbeing



### Narmada Samal, Nuagaon, Dhenkanal

Narmada Samal, 36 is wife of Amulya Kumar Dehury of Nuagaon village. Despite her being a mother of 4 kids and an extended family to take care of, Narmada has always nurtured the ambition to do something for her fellow group members which will make them financially independent. A true entrepreneur by spirit and practice, Narmada is one of the most promising members of Gruhalaxmi Cooperative. During the visit of ACCESS team to her village Nuagaon to sensitise the women

about the cooperative model, she was the one who showed lot of interest and enthusiasm for this initiative. Eventually, after the formation of the Cooperative she became one of the Board of Directors of the Cooperative. After the outbreak of COVID 19 pandemic, one of the major problems faced by the local people was non availability of masks in the locality. The local market ran out of the masks due to its huge demand and those who were having it were charging exorbitant price. Looking at the severity of the situation, Narmada took up the job of organising women having basic skill and training of sewing and tailoring so that they can produce masks in large scale. Narmada, not only managed her household chores but also relentlessly ensured production of huge quantity of masks. In a week's time she alone produced more than 500 masks. "I am not doing this only to earn money, but I understand, how important a mask is to safeguard

one's life.", she said with utmost satisfaction, "I may not be the sun who lights the entire world but definitely I can be a lamp who can light a small corner of a house". Her efforts were not only appreciated by her husband but also by her fellow villagers.

"Masks are here to stay for long time. Now we have to add value to this. The young girls, office going people are using it as an accessory." Narmada thinks over it and continues, " We must include painting, embroidery etc to give the masks a new look. We will also supply masks to other towns." Narmada realises that by making masks and selling them in appropriate markets her cooperative can earn good income. So she requested the SPARC team to organise a training programme on design development of masks. However they have started learning new designs by using internet and these masks are being appreciated by the buyers.

*Narmada emphasises on people's lives and health before earning a fat margin of profit. Beginning mask making in an entrepreneurial mode is to make this life a saving tool available to all.*





## Growing Mushroom

Looking at the market potential of mushroom, the SPARC team initiated discussion with the women members of the cooperative and started to explore possibilities to take up this enterprise in large scale. As a result, many women came forward and showed their interest to start mushroom cultivation. Training programme was organised for them to learn all about growing mushroom at their household level. After the

training many women started growing Oyester mushroom in their houses and harvested good amount of mushroom which brought them quite attractive income. This process was initiated during the quarter January to March. They consumed the mushroom in their own houses, sold in the village and planned to send to outside market. But they had started in a small scale. While the women were getting prepared to expand their

production base, that was the time when COVID-19 pandemic broke out. However they continued producing mushroom which met their household consumption need and the remaining were being sold in the village, among the neighbours. However they were all determined. Once the lockdown norms is eased, they would learn new ways and varieties of mushroom cultivation and get linked with the market

### At-Home Mushroom growing basics made Kaikeyi self reliant



**Kaikeyi Rout,**  
Raghunathpur, Dhenkanal

Kaikeyi joined Gruhalaxmi Cooperative because all other women of her group joined. She struggled to arrange the share capital money and registration fee because she knew there is a purpose behind getting organized under an institution. Kaikeyi is 50 years old and she does not have any steady source of income. However she does petty businesses to earn some income. Her husband Babula Rout works as daily wage

labourer. They have four children to look after. Getting nutritious food for all members of the family is also a challenge for them. Kaikeyi always looks for opportunities where she can earn and support her family. As a member in the self help group, she has always taken active part in the small business activities taken up by the group. But nothing has lasted for long. But Kaikeyi's hope has never faded away.

Kaikeyi jumped in and grabbed the idea of laying mushroom bed in her house. The first reason was there will always be a supply of nutritious food for her family. Secondly she can have a constant source of income from the yield. She took part in the training. Learnt all aspects minutely and implemented the skill diligently. As soon as the first bed was ready to be harvested, Kaikeyi knew her produce will be sold for a very good price. She told " I kept sufficient mushroom for my family consumption and sold the remaining in our village. During the lock down period, growing mushroom and selling them in the village fetched us sufficient income to meet our day to day household needs." Her husband who was at home due to non availability of work, joined her in growing mushroom beds and helped her selling them in the nearby market.



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