

A Rising Trend of BSWI-promoted Women-led Social Entrepreneurship in Indian Rural Area of South Bengal.



SHG members fetching mangoes from the orchard for marketing

India is making rapid and relevant movements in the realm of women's empowerment. India's progressive policies have empowered women and reduced gender inequality. India is shifting from the concept of women's growth to women-led development.

Women are creating social enterprises to support other women. As G20 economies are leaving no stone unturned to lessen gender gaps and inequality as envisioned under the UN Sustainable Development Agenda, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi aptly mentioned at the G20 Summit in Bali that women's extensive participation is inevitably needed for international growth and development. The principle of gender equality is already treasured within the Constitution of India, and the Government of India has always been dedicated to encouraging gender equality across levels as well as sectors of governance.

Indian women know social enterprises, and will address a simple unmet need or resolve socio-economic and environmental challenges through a market-driven approach. With the government's abundance of support and offerings, women are now confidently creating a holistic framework that describes how an organisation creates, delivers, and captures value. They are aware that their business models will provide immediate benefits to the community and bring optimistic transitions into people's lives. In general, it has been observed that women-led social enterprises enjoy the highest degree of closeness in interpersonal relationships and social ties, and this embeddedness helps satisfy the specific needs of the local community.



Women social entrepreneurs identify the areas in which girls and women are deficient and then lead new developmental projects to manage those existing holes and gaps.

West Bengal: BSWI's women-led SHG for fruit cultivation promises better incomes for farmers disappointed with the uncertainties in the market prices of traditional vegetables, a women-led self-help group named *PROBODHAN* under the BSWI supported project *GAON CHALO (Let's Go to Villages)* in North Bengal has switched to cultivating mango, guava etc. The exotic fruits are sold almost thrice the price of the locally grown fruits and is promising a better livelihood for the rural women.



Chhilimpur, West Bengal: Till four years ago, for 58-year-old Ganga Sarkar, it was disheartening to see her ageing husband suffer losses despite toiling in the agricultural field throughout the year. "He grew vegetables like tomato, brinjal, cabbage but it was of no use because the input cost was rising every year while the profits were on a decline," Ganga, a resident of Chhilimpur village in West Bengal's Malda district, told us. "It was then in 2018 that I decided to organise the women in my village and do farming in a way which is profitable and requires less labour. A total of 10 women came forward and we launched a Swayam Siddha Dol [self help group or SHG]. We named it as *Notun Phool (New Flower)*," Ganga said.

The 10 women from the SHG, upon seeking advice from the district mission manager of the West Bengal State Rural Livelihood Mission [SRLM], decided to cultivate these fruits in September 2021, and almost a year later, their efforts have borne fruit and the women have begun making money from the sales.

"It is the first self help group which is cultivating hi-brid fruits in the district. We are trying to rope in more women SHGs to do the same," Ashok Kumar, district mission manager of SRLM, told us. "These women have also been trained to market their produce in an efficient manner. They know how to make jams, jelly and other packageable products from guavas," he added. Kumar has advised the women to cultivate important fruits, as according to him cultivation of the fruits was the easiest livelihood intervention as these women hail from agricultural backgrounds. Today, out of the total three bighas [almost quarter of a hectare] of the land owned by Ganga's husband, a bigha is dedicated to the cultivation of fruits - a variety of the tropical fruit which have recently become popular in the urban markets. These fruits are not only bigger in size as compared to the indigenous varieties of guava but also fetch almost thrice the market price. Locally grown guavas are sold at a price of Rs 40 - Rs 50 per kilogram while the mangoes fetches a wholesale price of Rs 70 - Rs 80 per kilogram.

Ganga informed that a sapling of hybrid guava and mango costs Rs 250 to Rs 300 each and a total of Rs 80,000 have been spent on the planting by the group. Also, the irrigation of the saplings cost Rs 40,000 which is economical. "We irrigated the plants using *tapak takneek* [drip irrigation]. It not only saves water but also ensures that the plants receive optimum water content," she said. Bhagwati Ray, a 60-year-old member of the SHG, proudly told that chemical fertilizer was not used in cultivating the fruits. "I, along with

nine other friends, have worked in a bigha of land. As soon as the monsoon season ended in September 2021, we planted the guava and mango plants. Initially, we dug pits separated at a distance of eight feet from each other and added cow dung in those pits. There was no use of urea or chemicals," Bhagwati said.



Guava orchard and Mango orchard of Gaon Chalo Project of BSWI



Organic fruit cultivation has brought better prices for the Entrepreneur SHG (BSWI)

