

Rural entrepreneurship schemes give fillip to women empowerment in Goa

The Government of Goa is expanding the scope of women empowerment by helping tribal women in becoming rural entrepreneurs. They will make and sell traditional handicrafts. One such location is Cotigao village in South Goa's Canacona sub-district, where tribal women have been trained in coir making, reports **NIBEDITA SEN**.

The womenfolk of Cotigao are extremely upbeat about their future. With the help of State government, they are building their future with one of the strongest threads in the world - coir.

The department has recently framed a scheme viz 'Goa Integrated Skill Development Scheme-2014' under which loyal youths, young widowed women, school dropouts and segment from rural areas will be trained in various Handicrafts Textile & Coir trades so as to make them self-sufficient to earn their daily livelihood.

Under this programme, the Government is supporting women in Cotigao by providing them with manually operated weaving machines for making different commercially saleable products like coir mats. These will be sold by them in the open market. This step in the long run will not only help in boosting self-sufficiency amongst women, but also help promote local rural handicraft.

"We get a stipend of Rs 750 per month. I have started developing self-confidence undergoing coir weaving training programme arranged by Cotigao panchayat for the village women. This has encouraged me to think in-



Women in Cotigao getting trained to use coir weaving machine for making products like mats and sell them in open market. This will help in making rural women self sufficient and promote rural handicraft. Pics by Atish Naik



dependently. Once I achieve perfection in my work, I plan to start my own business," said Sukanya Desai.

Soon after class 12, Desai took up weaving as her co-curricular activity. She said, "I am doing this as a hobby, but it will be also there as a future career option. I like to make soft toys. The villagers make mosquito nets and quilts too. Pillows are made of buckwheat husk."

In the hands of master craftswomen, this raw and rough coir is given magical textures and are turned into a number of products. Traditionally it has been used to make rope, twine, brooms and brushes, doormats, rugs, mattresses and other upholstery. Among the innumerable products made of the resilient and durable coir fibre, the most sought-after products are mat and bed.

"We have ten weaving machines and twelve women working under this scheme. The young women, teenagers, widows, school dropouts, everyone can make use of this scheme and earn their living. I am training here for one month. After making the products we sell them in the market. For example we sell the coir mats at cost ranging between Rs 75 to Rs 100 per piece. We purchase the raw coir bundles from Kundai coir factory," said 43-year-old Neeta Biku Pagi.

This ensures that the wheels of local economy continue to move. Raw material gets used up and the company gets paid for it. The material is then made into finished product which then fetches income for the villagers.

Savita Chari considers herself to be fortunate to have been trained in the art of making handicrafts as women in tribal villages get

married at a very early age. Citing the example of few colleagues who inspire her she said, "Despite living in a tribal area, we are getting trained and in future, I want to be perfect and build our own business."

"The women here are allowed to take a loan and produce coir based products in bulk. The spinning wheels cost around Rs 10,000 but 25 per cent subsidy is given for buying the machine. The training sessions are provided to make the women self-sufficient," said Chandrakant Kudtarkar, trainer for the project.

Stressing the local employment generation, project in-charge at Cotigao, Umesh Tolu Gaonkar proudly said, "We trained around 15 ladies trained in the first batch. There are 12 women undergoing training in the fresh batch. We also have other ladies working in Kundai coir industry."

"The raw materials are brought from Kundailim Industrial Estate and finished goods are sold in government sponsored fairs. Nav Nirman village organization has already trained over 100 villagers and is willing to train more people," Sarpanch of Cotigao, Umesh Gaonkar said.

Tribal Welfare Minister Govind Gaude informed that there are many more short-term skill development programs are going to be launched in Goa.

"We have initiated the spinning and weaving program in Cotigao with a vision and already 100 women are trained from that village. We have sent over 100 trainers to Hubli for learning the craft and teaching the women in interior villagers of Goa. The holistic approach of this handicraft program makes it special and I am planning to do more of it," he said.

WHAT THEY SAY

“Once I achieve perfection in my work, I plan to start my own business.”
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Cotigao resident

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- **GOVIND GAUDE,**
State Tribal Welfare Minister

We are coming up with Goa Bazar: Jayesh Salgaonkar

As Minister of Rural Development (RD), Goa State, Jayesh Salgaonkar aims to give the women living in rural areas appropriate platform to voice their needs and showcase their capabilities. Speaking with **GT** scribe **NIBEDITA SEN**, the RD minister spells out his plans for strengthening Goa's rural economy. Following are the excerpts of the interview:

NS: What are the RD projects initiated by you and what is their status?

JS: Various schemes are implemented in Goa for development of rural people. Firstly, we provide housing facility through Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (PMAY). Secondly, we are trying to provide gas connections through Goa Grameen Urja Yojana (GGUY). Through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), we have provided guaranteed jobs to 100 skilled labours and presently they are cardholders. We are also empowering women through National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM). This scheme provides livelihood to a woman through Self Help Groups (SHGs).

NS: Can you elaborate more on NRLM project?

JS: It is a major scheme implemented by the department in eight out of 12 existing blocks in the State viz Tiswadi, Bardez, Pernem and Bicholim in North Goa District and Canacona, Quepem, Ponda and Dharbandora in South Goa District. There are around 2800 SHGs consisting of 10-15 SHG skippered by women members in 60 village panchayats. Village level federation is formed and 37000 families are connected with this programme.

NS: How much money is government spending on these kinds of projects?

JS: The programme started from December 2015 onwards. Around Rs 5 crore has been spent on SHGs, Village Organisations for capacity building. The members of SHGs have been provided with a revolving fund of Rs 15,000 and Rs 1 lakh to each village organization as Community Investment Fund.

NS: What is the impact of these projects? Are they really helping the Goans?

JS: The programme is still young and crawling, hence immediate results cannot be assessed. However, the kind of initiatives taken up by the Department for the empowerment of women is marvellous and cannot be compared with any previous government project. The women in Goa are getting appropriate platform to voice their needs and showcase their capabilities.

NS: How are you looking at handicrafts industry in Goa? How are you planning to boost it?

JS: Rural development is an agency and I have initiated steps to make it a full-fledged department, which will help Goa to get more schemes from the central government as there are a lot of limitations being an agency. I have explored the possibilities of having satellite market to encourage self-help groups and stop vendors selling their produce on national highways and roads causing hindrance to traffic. I am trying to provide free shops to self-help groups in every new government building. Also I want that all government canteens be run by self-help groups. With an aim to eradicate use of plastic carry bags, we have tied up women's Self Help Group (SHG) which will stitch and sell cloth bags.

NS: What are your plans for providing tourists access to rural handicraft?

JS: We are coming up with Goa Bazar on the lines of Delhi Haat to provide 180 shops 80 food stalls and amphitheatre to encourage self-help groups, artisans and folk artists. Under Rural Development Mission, Goa is getting more than Rs 60 crore to upgrade the village infrastructures.

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