

WHERE EFFORT TURNS VISIBLE: STORIES THAT DEFINED THE MONTH

February is best understood through the journeys of individual Rural Women Entrepreneurs, where early signs of change are becoming visible. Across districts, women are not only participating in trainings but beginning to engage with markets, customers, and digital platforms more independently.

In Murshidabad, Renuka Khanam and Rina Khatun recorded sales of ₹1.63 lakh at the SARAS Aajeevika Mela, while Masuda Bibi generated around ₹72,000 at the Biswa Bangla Fair. In Birbhum, Fuli Das sold jewellery worth ₹12,000 at the Sriniketan Magh Mela, reflecting growing confidence in accessing public marketplaces. In Malda, Jinat Rehana combined offline sales with Facebook marketing to earn nearly ₹20,000, indicating a shift towards hybrid selling models.



For Masuda Bibi, participation in the Biswa Bangla Fair marked a shift from local selling to engaging with a wider customer base. With sales of around ₹72,000 during the event, she was able to directly interact with buyers, understand preferences, and position her products in a more competitive market space. The experience reflects how exposure to organised platforms is helping entrepreneurs test and expand their market reach.

Moushumi Biswas' journey reflects a different kind of progress—one shaped by gradual strengthening of enterprise skills. Through continued participation in trainings and local market engagement, she has been able to improve her approach to production and sales, building consistency in her work. Her experience highlights how regular handholding and access to opportunities at the local level are helping women move towards more stable and self-managed enterprises.

Taken together, these stories summarise the month more clearly than any single indicator. They show that while trainings, scheme linkages, and ecosystem engagements continue to build the foundation, it is at the level of individual entrepreneurs where change becomes visible—through sales made, markets accessed, and confidence built in engaging with customers and institutions.

CAPACITY BUILDING & MARKET LINKAGES | FROM SKILLS TO SALES

The month saw a steady focus on building enterprise capabilities across value chains, with interventions ranging from basic entrepreneurship to advanced technical exposure.

In the agri and allied value chain led by SwitchON Foundation, **Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs)** were conducted for over 200 RWEs across Nadia, Bankura, and Purulia. These sessions worked on helping women define business goals, understand markets, and think beyond subsistence-level production. What stood out was the shift from learning “how to produce” to understanding “how to sell and grow.”

In Haringhata, RWEs engaged with food safety experts and laboratories, **learning to identify adulteration in spices and understanding certification** systems such as AGMARK. These sessions directly linked product quality with market trust, a connection often missing in early-stage enterprises.



Further technical strengthening came through **post-harvest management and value addition trainings in Bankura**, where RWEs learned sorting, grading, and basic processing techniques to improve product value. In parallel, **solar drying training in Hanskhali** introduced women to converting surplus produce into dried products, addressing both income generation and post-harvest losses.



In the handloom value chain led by Grameen Sahara in Assam, **Product Development Programmes focused on improving design capabilities and introducing market-relevant products such as stoles, cushion covers, and table runners**. Technical inputs like draw-boy mechanisms and graph-based pattern reading helped RWEs move towards more complex and market-aligned production.



Financial literacy and digital transactions were taken forward through focused fintech workshops conducted under the digital value chain by Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF). These sessions introduced Rural Women Entrepreneurs (RWEs) to practical tools such as digital bookkeeping applications, Mera App, and Mera Bill, enabling them to record transactions, track income and expenses, and manage day-to-day finances more systematically. Participants were also oriented on digital payment systems and basic banking services, helping them move away from cash-only transactions. The workshops placed emphasis on hands-on usage, ensuring that RWEs could immediately apply the tools within their enterprises. This intervention is particularly relevant as it links financial management with digital adoption, allowing women entrepreneurs to maintain records, improve transparency, and prepare for formal financial linkages such as loans and credit access.

Market linkage outcomes reflected these efforts. In West Bengal, RWEs collectively achieved sales of ₹59.13 lakh, with agriculture contributing ₹35.85 lakh and handloom ₹24.79 lakh. Local market visits in Purulia also enabled RWEs to directly approach retailers and place products, showing early signs of independent market engagement.



ECOSYSTEM ENGAGEMENT | BUILDING CONVERGENCE FOR ENTERPRISE GROWTH

In West Bengal, meetings involving block-level officials, banks, and technical institutions focused on aligning training, financial access, and market support. These engagements aimed to ensure that RWEs are not operating in isolation but are linked to existing systems of credit, training, and certification.

Scheme convergence during the month translated into visible financial and institutional support for Rural Women Entrepreneurs across Bankura, Purulia, and Nadia. Linkages amounting to ₹4.05 lakh were facilitated through multiple government departments, connecting RWEs to schemes that directly support enterprise growth. In Sonamukhi block of Bankura, **support was extended under the Animal Resources Development Department through the scheme on strengthening micro-level goat husbandry units, enabling women to invest in livestock-based livelihoods.** Parallely, under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), **financial assistance was provided for the establishment of permanent vermicompost structures, along with work orders issued for additional units.** In Hura and Jhalda-II blocks, RWEs received agri-inputs, goats, and chicks through RKVY and allied departments. These interventions indicate a gradual shift where government schemes are not accessed in isolation but are being aligned with enterprise activities across agriculture and livestock value chains.



Alongside this, the digital value chain led by Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) focused on strengthening the enabling ecosystem required for enterprise formalisation and digital adoption. Across districts, **RWEs were supported in accessing certifications such as Udyam registration, FSSAI registration, and other basic documentation required to operate as formal enterprises.** Camps and field-level sessions helped women **understand not only the process of registration** but also its relevance in accessing government schemes, credit, and market opportunities.



FROM LOCAL TO LARGER PLATFORMS: EVENTS THAT OPEN MARKETS



In the handloom sector, the inauguration of Yarn Banks in Kamrup and Goalpara addressed a practical but critical challenge—access to raw materials. By creating a community-managed supply system with a revolving fund, the initiative aimed to stabilise production cycles and reduce dependence on external suppliers.

The Karbi Youth Festival served as a community-level platform where tea entrepreneurs introduced artisanal green tea to local audiences. The emphasis on storytelling and live tasting helped RWEs gather direct feedback from consumers and understand how their products are perceived.



At the 25th Agricultural & Horticultural Expo in Guwahati, RWEs participated alongside the Tea Board of India. The platform exposed them to a wider audience, including policymakers, agricultural institutions, and private players. Differences in consumer preferences between events also provided learning—while community platforms showed interest in artisanal tea, the expo audience leaned more towards herbal infusions.

Back in West Bengal, participation in the BCC&I Rural Connect & FPO-SHG Awards 2026 created a structured space for Producer Groups to move beyond local markets and engage directly with a wider ecosystem of buyers, institutions, and peer enterprises. Seven Producer Groups from Nadia, Bankura, and Purulia took part in the platform, where interactions were not limited to showcasing products but extended to discussions on pricing, quality expectations, and potential bulk linkages. The event also served as a recognition platform, with six SHG groups receiving awards across categories such as grassroots impact and collective enterprise, acknowledging their work at the community level. This combination of exposure and recognition is significant, as it places women-led enterprises within formal market conversations and opens up possibilities for sustained partnerships, repeat orders, and wider market access beyond district-level sales.



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MEL / LEARNING, EVIDENCE AND PROGRAM STRENGTHENING

The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) component, led by Vrutti, focused on strengthening the quality and consistency of programme data across value chains. During the month, a detailed review of partner submissions was undertaken to assess gaps in reporting, particularly around completeness, supporting documentation, and alignment with defined indicators. Early observations pointed to variations in field-level documentation practices, prompting the need for clearer processes and shared standards. In response, the team began working on practical improvements, including structured data review mechanisms, standardised documentation systems, and closer coordination with partner teams. The effort is aimed at ensuring that programme data not only captures outputs but also reflects the actual progress and challenges on the ground, making it more reliable for decision-making and future planning.



CLOSER TO THE GROUND: SECRETARIAT ENGAGE WITH RWES



A joint field visit by Ms. Vijayata Verma from the Udyamini Secretariat and Mr. Indranil Niyogi from the funding partner (SPF) during the month provided an opportunity to review programme implementation at the ground level. The visit covered interactions with Rural Women Entrepreneurs across clusters, focusing on enterprise operations, production challenges, and group coordination mechanisms. Discussions highlighted the need for strengthening financial awareness among RWEs, particularly in understanding costs, pricing, and income flows, along with improving record-keeping practices at the cluster level. The visit also brought attention to the importance of refresher trainings, especially for technical processes, to ensure continuity in enterprise activities across production cycles. These field insights are expected to inform upcoming programme planning, ensuring that interventions remain aligned with on-ground realities and evolving enterprise needs.



TAKING STORIES TO THE GROUND: COMMUNICATION THAT BUILDS VISIBILITY

Across districts in West Bengal, communication efforts during the month stayed closely tied to market visibility and local engagement. In Santipur, a simple but effective outreach activity—public announcements and miking—was carried out to introduce the Udyamini Store to the local community. The effort focused on informing residents about the products made by Rural Women Entrepreneurs (RWEs) and encouraging footfall at the store. This was not just about promotion, but about placing women-led enterprises within everyday local markets.



In the tea value chain, communication took a more experiential form. During participation in the Karbi Youth Festival, supported by Transform Trade and its technical partner Grassroots Tea Corporation, RWEs used live tea tasting as a way to communicate product quality and production processes. Instead of conventional selling, the interaction allowed visitors to understand artisanal processing and chemical-free cultivation practices. This approach helped translate technical work into a relatable consumer experience.

Communication efforts during the period reflected a focus on documenting and amplifying field-level momentum, particularly from the tea value chain in Assam. Through a series of social media posts and visual content, the Udyamini communication partner ATVi captured key moments from the state-level convention in Karbi Anglong, where rural women entrepreneurs came together to share experiences, showcase artisanal green tea, and discuss pathways for market-led growth. The content highlighted not only the scale of participation but also the shift towards collective enterprise models and women-led leadership within the tea sector. By combining event highlights, short videos, and photo documentation, these posts helped translate on-ground activities into accessible narratives, extending visibility beyond the immediate geography and positioning the initiative within a broader public conversation on rural entrepreneurship.



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