

UDYAMINI CHRONICLES

DECEMBER 2025

Highlight of the Month

2nd RURAL UDYAMITA CONFERENCE 2025

December was shaped decisively by the Rural Udyamita Conference 2025, held on December 12 at the NEDFi premises in Guwahati. The conference brought together policymakers, government officials, development agencies, corporates, financial institutions, technical experts and rural women entrepreneurs to examine what it truly takes to build women-led enterprises in Assam and West Bengal.

The conference positioned Rural Women Entrepreneurs as an economic pathway that demands structural reform, long-term institutional partnerships and market-linked strategies. Co-organised by the Udyamini RWEPC Collaborative, the event reflected the collective work of partners across digital, handloom, agri and allied, livestock and tea value chains.



The day-long engagement moved from policy dialogue to enterprise voices. Senior representatives from UNDP, DAY-NRLM, NABARD, UN Women, ASRLM and corporate CSR spoke alongside rural women entrepreneurs who shared what it takes to sustain businesses amid climate risks, seasonal incomes and fragmented markets. The conference reinforced that women in Assam and West Bengal are already building enterprises. The question now is whether ecosystems can keep pace with their ambitions.

The exhibition held alongside Rural Udyamita served as a practical extension of the conference conversations, allowing rural women entrepreneurs to place their products directly in front of policymakers,

institutions and market actors. Stalls representing handloom, agri and allied, livestock, digital and tea value chains became spaces of interaction rather than display, where women explained production processes, pricing and challenges in their own words.

Together, these modest but meaningful sales reflected how women-led enterprises across value chains are beginning to convert skills and visibility into market participation.



Capacity Building and Market Linkage Strengthening Enterprise Foundations



In the **Handloom Value Chain**, partners in Assam continued Product Development Programmes across multiple villages in Goalpara and Kamrup districts. Rural women weavers engaged deeply with design interpretation, loom enhancement and technical improvements such as **draw-boy mechanisms**. The focus remained on translating traditional skills into market-responsive products, including stoles, yardage, cushion covers and table runners. Confidence grew as women began experimenting with patterns and understanding quality expectations tied to pricing and repeat orders.

Entrepreneurship Development Programmes and CRP-led handholding strengthened group functioning, record keeping and production planning. Initiatives such as yarn banks began addressing structural bottlenecks related to raw material access, helping reduce dependence on intermediaries and stabilise production cycles. Exposure through exhibitions and stakeholder meets added market feedback to technical learning.



In **West Bengal's Handloom, Agri and Allied Value Chains**, capacity building focused on enterprise sustainability. **Financial literacy trainings enabled women to understand profit and loss, pricing, break-even points and daily bookkeeping.** Quality maintenance sessions addressed hygiene, processing standards and packaging across spices, oil, millet-based products and handloom outputs

Market linkage activities translated these skills into income. Women participated in **Saras Melas, district-level fairs, buyer-seller meets and exhibitions across the state.** While sales varied across events, the deeper value lay in exposure to buyers, negotiation experiences and insights into consumer expectations. Women returned with clearer understanding of branding, consistency and volume requirements.



Highlight of the Month



The **Tea Value Chain in Karbi Anglong** continued its transition from raw leaf selling to value-added production. Rural women entrepreneurs sustained household-level processing of chemical-free artisanal green tea despite winter dormancy affecting leaf availability. December marked a milestone when **Premium Karbi Artisanal Green Tea was formally launched at the Rural Udyamita Conference.** A key breakthrough during Rural Udyamita came from **Dinamoni Kakati, Chairperson of the Assam Tea Board**, whose intervention offered an immediate pathway for women-led tea enterprises. Rather than limiting support to advisory commitments, Kakati responded on the spot by opening doors to institutional market access, signalling readiness to integrate women-produced artisanal green tea into formal tea marketing channels. This moment stood out for translating dialogue into action, reinforcing confidence among Rural Women Entrepreneurs and demonstrating how responsive institutional engagement can accelerate value-chain inclusion without long gestation periods.



In the **Livestock Value Chain**, regular video shows, business promotion programmes, health camps and meetings strengthened women's roles as service providers. Livestock Business Centres generated income through input sales and paid services such as deworming, vaccination and treatment. The establishment and operationalisation of Demo Retail Centres and Cluster Level Trade Centres strengthened local market presence and service delivery.



In Daulashal village of Nalbari district, Mira Nath Choudhary's journey reflects how sustained capacity building and market exposure can turn a skilled artisan into an enterprise leader. Mira began weaving in 2016 with a single loom, working largely on custom orders with limited market visibility. Over time, through continuous engagement under the handloom value chain, she strengthened her skills in design adaptation, dyeing techniques and production planning.



Ecosystem Engagement **Bringing Institutions Closer to the Field**

In Assam, discussions with NABARD explored regenerative agriculture practices and potential financial support for tea enterprises. Engagements with the Tea Board of India focused on recognising women-led tea enterprises and supporting their transition from informal producers to formal market actors. Interactions with ASRLM examined pathways for scaling women's participation across tea clusters.



In West Bengal, convergence with agriculture, horticulture, MSME and rural livelihoods departments facilitated scheme linkages, machinery support, enterprise registrations and market access. These engagements strengthened formal identity and reduced the vulnerability of women-led enterprises operating in informal spaces.



Events **Spaces for Visibility, Learning and Validation**



Beyond the conference, December was marked by multiple events that combined learning with exposure. District and state-level melas in West Bengal provided women opportunities to sell, observe market trends and interact with peers. Buyer-seller meets enabled direct negotiation and feedback, helping women refine pricing and product presentation.

In Assam, the opening of Demo Retail Centres and preparation for funder visits created structured spaces for showcasing livestock products and services. These centres also functioned as training and coordination hubs, strengthening enterprise organisation at the cluster level.

Funder and audit visits during the month added accountability, focusing on documentation, pricing clarity and operational systems. These interactions helped align enterprise growth with sustainability and transparency.



Jarjina Begum, an SBM from Nalbari district, has emerged as a key grassroots leader within the handloom ecosystem. She currently leads a women's cooperative comprising nearly 300 members. While the collective had scale, December marked a step towards strengthening its internal systems and market readiness. Jarjina was selected for a seven-day advanced training programme under the Creative Dignity Initiative of Axis Bank Foundation in Kolkata. The training focused on bookkeeping, quality maintenance, product testing, branding and enterprise development. This exposure equipped her with tools to improve quality standards and documentation within the cooperative, areas that often limit access to larger markets.

For the cooperative, Jarjina's training translates into better coordination, clearer pricing structures and improved buyer confidence. Her journey highlights how investing in individual leadership can have multiplier effects across large women-led collectives.



MEL Highlight | Learning from the Ground (Vrutti)

During December, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning work under Udyamini, led by Vrutti as the MEL and learning partner, focused on strengthening the programme's evidence base and sharpening its longitudinal insights. The first draft of the Longitudinal Mid-Term Evaluation Report was shared and revised after detailed feedback, ensuring stronger representation of voices across value chains, improved triangulation between qualitative insights, MIS data and field observations, and deeper analysis of why some enterprises progress faster than others



Communications

Building Shared Understanding Around Rural Enterprise

The Rural Udyamita Conference itself became a central communication moment. Exhibition spaces allowed rural women entrepreneurs from the tea, handloom, livestock and agri value chains to directly interact with policymakers and institutions. Their presence shifted the tone of the conversation from planning for women to listening to women. The relevance of these communications lay in grounding policy and programme discussions in lived experience rather than abstractions.



The communication partner, ATVI, actively shared updates before the event, live during the conference, and after the Rural Udyamita Conference. The sessions were also streamed live on the Udyamini Facebook page, helping reach a wider audience beyond the venue.

In addition, ATVI published a detailed news article in The Assam Tribune, bringing the conference outcomes to a broader readership. The article can be accessed here: <https://assamtribune.com/article/rural-udyamita-conference-2025-charts-roadmap-for-sustainable-women-led-enterprises-in-assam-and-west-bengal-1601113>

In the seventh episode of Udyamini Speaks, host Sangeeta Bhattacharjee speaks with Ms Niranjali Kakati, Principal of the Sualkuchi Institute of Fashion Technology, on Assam's handloom sector and the role of rural women entrepreneurs in sustaining and shaping it. Drawing from her experience with weavers and artisans across the handloom value chain, Ms Kakati highlights the need to strengthen every stage, from raw material sourcing and weaving to design, quality, and market access, while keeping indigenous skills and cultural knowledge at the centre.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rulgroMfJjY>



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