

WHEN LOCAL DREAMS REACHED NATIONAL MARKETS



The bustling aisles of the 12th Bengal Mango Mela and Handloom-Handicrafts Expo in New Delhi were far removed from Sonali Das's home in Murshidabad. Yet, as visitors stopped to admire and purchase her handcrafted jewellery, the distance between a rural enterprise and a national marketplace seemed much smaller. Supported under the Udyamini Rural Women Entrepreneurship Program, Sonali generated nearly ₹15,000 in sales at the exhibition. The opportunity was facilitated by her Sochnapreneur Business Mentor (SBM), who identified the exhibition as a potential market and guided her participation, enabling Sonali to take her products beyond local customers and showcase them before a much wider audience. It was not merely a successful exhibition, but a reminder that the right market exposure can unlock new possibilities for rural enterprises.

Behind this achievement lay months of capacity building and digital handholding by the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF). Along with strengthening her product presentation and market readiness, Sonali was introduced to digital business tools such as Mera Bill, allowing her to record sales and manage business transactions systematically. Combined with training on digital marketing, business formalisation and enterprise management, these interventions ensured that participation in a national exhibition translated into more than immediate sales. They equipped her with the confidence and systems needed to run a more organised enterprise and seize future market opportunities.

While Sonali's story represents one entrepreneur's journey, it also mirrors a wider transformation unfolding across the Udyamini Rural Women Entrepreneurship Programme. Over the last three years, the programme has supported women in moving beyond traditional livelihood activities to establish and strengthen sustainable enterprises rooted in local knowledge and connected to wider economic opportunities. Across the consortium, 33 new markets and marketing avenues have been facilitated, spanning producer collectives, institutional procurement, digital commerce, retail outlets, exhibitions and trade platforms. Together, these linkages have helped Rural Women Entrepreneurs build stronger businesses, reach diverse customer segments and participate more confidently in local, regional and national markets.



CAPACITY BUILDING & MARKET LINKAGES | FROM SKILLS TO SALES



Across the tea-growing landscapes of Karbi Anglong, Assam, the Tea Value Chain, implemented by Transform Trade with technical support from Grassroots Tea Corporation (GTC), continued to demonstrate how traditional knowledge and scientific practices can work together to improve both livelihoods and environmental sustainability. During June, the focus remained on strengthening regenerative agriculture, improving tea quality and helping women-led tea clusters move towards more organised and market-ready enterprises. 60 Rural Women Entrepreneurs from nine tea clusters across Rongmongve, Nilip and Bokajan prepared and applied natural bio-pesticides using locally available plant

such as neem, *Clerodendrum viscosum*, *Vitex negundo* and *Polygonum hydropiper*, fermented with cow dung and jaggery. Applied across tea gardens to manage common pests and promote healthier tea bushes, these practices supported climate-resilient cultivation while reinforcing a value chain that integrates sustainable production, quality improvement and enterprise formalisation. These interventions reflected a shift from production alone to building a value chain where cultivation, processing, quality assurance and enterprise formalisation reinforce one another.

In the Agri and Allied Value Chain, SwitchON Foundation enabled Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Bankura, West Bengal, to showcase hand-pounded rice, spices, edible oil and other locally produced goods at the PM-RKVY Store and Sales Centre at Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Sonamukhi, creating direct access to consumers and increasing the visibility of value-added rural products. Collective marketing also delivered encouraging results, with the Rangamatichar Akashchoya Producer Group marketing groundnuts worth ₹4.49 lakh, demonstrating the benefits of aggregation in improving market access and strengthening producers' bargaining power.



SwitchON Foundation also supported the Udyamini Store at Santipur, Nadia, West Bengal, which continued to connect women weavers with customers, generating ₹1.77 lakh in handloom saree sales during the month, while the Birshingha Nari Shakti Handloom Producer Group recorded silk saree sales worth ₹67,500, reflecting sustained demand for locally woven products. The programme also strengthened the sericulture value chain, where women associated with the Cocoon Hub generated business worth ₹52,530 through thread sales and the supply of tasar inputs for silk saree production, enabling entrepreneurs to participate in higher-value segments of the production chain rather than remaining confined to raw material supply. Together, these initiatives strengthened market access, diversified income opportunities and reinforced the importance of collective enterprises in improving the commercial viability of women-led businesses.

SwitchON Foundation also strengthened local resource systems through Bio Input Resource Centres established across Bankura, Nadia and Purulia, West Bengal. Supported by Krishi Vigyan Kendras, these centres trained women entrepreneurs in producing bio-fertilisers and bio-pesticides while encouraging them to become local resource persons who could promote climate-smart agriculture within their communities. Beyond supporting sustainable farming, the centres created opportunities for women to diversify their enterprises by producing and marketing eco-friendly agricultural inputs.



During the month, the Agriculture Department further recognised SwitchON Foundation as an Implementation Agency for Natural Farming, with fifty Rural Women Entrepreneurs adopting natural farming practices under the initiative.



ECOSYSTEM ENGAGEMENT | BUILDING CONVERGENCE FOR ENTERPRISE GROWTH

As part of its efforts to strengthen climate-resilient agriculture, SwitchON Foundation partnered with the Agriculture Department of West Bengal to organise the Khet Bachao Abhiyan on World Environment Day (5 June) at Kusumjuria village in Hura Block, Purulia. Twenty-five Rural Women Entrepreneurs participated in practical demonstrations on soil sample collection, seed selection, seed treatment, balanced nutrient management and the use of Bio Resource Centre (BRC) products. By promoting scientific farming practices alongside soil conservation, the initiative aimed to improve farm productivity while encouraging environmentally sustainable agriculture.



Strengthening institutional linkages within the Tea Value Chain, Transform Trade and its technical partner Grassroots Tea Corporation (GTC) met with Tea Board India at its Golaghat office to explore opportunities for linking Rural Women Entrepreneurs (RWEs) and Small Tea Growers (STGs) with government support schemes. During discussions, Tea Board Development Officer Ritupal Dutta outlined subsidies available for Self-Help Groups, including pruning machines, grass cutters, sprayers and other agricultural equipment, as well as scholarships and selected farm support for individual Small Tea Growers. The interaction helped identify pathways for connecting eligible women entrepreneurs with existing government schemes while informing the consortium's future efforts to strengthen support for regenerative and organic tea cultivation through alternative institutional partnerships.

Government partnerships in the Agri and Allied Value Chain continued to expand during June. The Agriculture Department, Government of West Bengal, officially empanelled SwitchON Foundation as an Implementation Agency for Natural Farming in the Chatumadar and Pokhariya clusters, recognising its work in promoting sustainable agriculture. As part of the initiative, 50 Rural Women Entrepreneurs adopted natural farming practices and began receiving technical guidance and capacity-building support. The recognition is expected to strengthen government convergence while expanding opportunities for women farmers to adopt climate-resilient agricultural practices.



Further strengthening convergence with government programmes, SwitchON Foundation facilitated the distribution of quality finger millet seeds worth ₹68,241 to 60 Rural Women Entrepreneurs under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) – Enhancement of Finger Millet (2026–27) scheme in Sonamukhi, Bankura. Implemented in partnership with the Assistant Director of Agriculture, the initiative improved farmers' access to quality agricultural inputs while encouraging millet cultivation as a sustainable livelihood option.



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BUILDING STRONGER SYSTEMS FOR GREATER IMPACT

Strong programs are built not only through field interventions but also through systems that enable collaboration, accountability and continuous learning. During June, **Vrutti**, the consortium's **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Partner**, played a key role in strengthening this foundation across the **Udyamini** program. A major milestone was the formalisation of the **Strategic Program Management Committee (SPMC) Charter**, which established a common governance framework outlining shared roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes for consortium partners. To further strengthen evidence-based programme management, Vrutti finalised and circulated a consortium-wide MEL Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), introducing common standards for indicator reporting, documentation, evidence management, validation and reporting timelines. The organisation also facilitated two meetings of the Collective Responsibility and Accountability Working Group, where partners identified shared priorities and agreed on practical actions to improve coordination and collective ownership. Together, these initiatives are strengthening governance, improving the quality and consistency of programme data, and creating a more coordinated framework for planning, monitoring and decision-making across the Udyamini consortium.



TAKING STORIES TO THE GROUND: COMMUNICATION THAT BUILDS VISIBILITY

The World Environment Day campaign became the program's largest digital outreach during the month, bringing together stories from the Digital, Handloom, Agri and Allied, and Tea Value Chains under a common narrative of **She Sustains the Earth**. Featuring themes such as regenerative tea cultivation, natural farming, non-violent silk and environmentally responsible enterprises, the campaign reached **7,876 people across social media** and generated **371 engagements, including 281 likes, 80 shares and 10 comments**. The strong engagement reflected growing public interest in stories that connect environmental stewardship with women-led entrepreneurship.



Beyond social media, the program strengthened its media presence through four feature stories published in **EastMojo** and **The Assam Tribune**. The stories highlighted climate-resilient tea growers in Karbi Anglong, the role of yarn banks in strengthening rural weaving economies, and **Kamini Nath's journey of transforming traditional weaving into an enterprise**. Together, these stories showcased how women are combining local knowledge with innovation to build sustainable livelihoods while preserving cultural traditions.



ATVi also sustained engagement throughout the month with regular content, including the 'Udyamini in May' recap, Partner Spotlight, Did You Know?, entrepreneur success stories, field interactions and updates from consortium partners. On **UN MSME Day**, the program celebrated the contribution of Rural Women Entrepreneurs to local economies through a dedicated digital campaign that reached **1,448 people** and recorded **93 engagements, including 79 likes, 11 shares and 3 comments**, reinforcing the growing visibility of women-led rural enterprises.



Together, these communication efforts ensured that the impact of the programme extended beyond field activities, creating wider public awareness of the resilience, innovation and entrepreneurial journeys of Rural Women Entrepreneurs while strengthening the visibility of the consortium's work across value chains.

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