



Enabling Self-Actualisation in Women for Economic Empowerment

Community Meetings were held under the 'Women's Empowerment through Livelihoods, Entrepreneurship, and Access through Digitalisation' (WE-LEAD) project in the month of November. This project began in mid-2020 with the support of D B Schenker amidst the lockdown and the rising pandemic. It aims to improve the quality of life of women and youth and build sustainable communities around the warehouses of DB Schenker at Badli (Bahadurgarh Block, Jhajjar District) and Jamalpur (Farrukhnagar Block, Gurgaon District) in Haryana. As the situation improved gradually, the field activities were kicked off in July-August. The month of November ended with the completion of community meetings which is the first phase of community interaction.

The project aims to enable self-actualisation in women and build a resilient local economy. Dialogue constitutes an important part of the project, therefore, community interaction plays a detrimental role. The project focuses on creating sustainable livelihood for women through entrepreneurship, skill training, and providing them access through digitisation. It aims to work with women across all age groups and empower them.

The community meetings were held with various groups of school and college female students, young women, women who are members of Self Help Groups, and young men as well. Each interaction was designed for a specific persona with a purpose to understand them and build rapport with them. While interacting with older women, the emphasis was placed on understanding and outlining the source of their happiness and then bringing out the role played by economic welfare and financial independence in their lives. Although the majority of the responses were around their family's welfare, some women surprised us with their answers. A woman at Bamdola village said, "*Good health gives me happiness, because if my body is not functioning well then no one can give me happiness*". Likewise, there were responses about how their friends mean a lot to them, reflecting the strong camaraderie between women.

Community Interaction ended with Nimana village on 20 November, and the preliminary exercise gave us several insights into the women of Badli block. It is surprising how even though these villages are

adjacent to each other, the status of women and their decision-making power varies across villages. While in Bamdola, women were more outspoken and ready to take up different enterprises/skills training, the women from Majri were weighed down by the highly patriarchal mindset and surroundings. When we posed the same question to the women in Majri village – “What are the three things that make you happy”, many younger women confided in us and mentioned how their dreams and aspirations had been throttled down by the highly conservative and patriarchal families. One woman also said – *“Our household responsibilities have weighed us down so much that we have forgotten how to dream”*. The two villages separated by a few kilometers, present a different picture of womanhood.

Our interaction with school and college students revealed how they see their future and most of them mentioned the need for career guidance and mentorship. Although many students had plenty of exposure and had been performing well in academics, they still lacked guidance in the pursuit of their careers. Many of them are also engaged in sports like athletics, wrestling, and boxing among others. Our rapport building with the community ended in November, and we are hoping to further the dialogue with our Focus Group Discussions in the next month