

Felicitation of *Vidyut Sakhis* in Kosi Kalan, Mathura

On 04 November, 2022 an event was organised under the Uttar Pradesh Power Distribution Network Rehabilitation Project to interact with and recognise the contribution of *Vidyut Sakhis* working as Bill Collection agents in Electricity Distribution Division II – Kosi Kalan in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh.

The Uttar Pradesh Power Distribution Network Rehabilitation Project supported by Asian Development Bank (ADB), implemented by CRISIL, and supported by Development Alternatives (DA) aims to improve the quality and financial cost recovery in the power supply in Uttar Pradesh thereby, leading to 24X7 power for all. In this project, four model divisions have been chosen to pilot the new replicable strategies. For this purpose, four divisions have been selected, namely, **Electricity Distribution Division-II Barabanki, Electricity Distribution Division-II Kosi, Electricity Distribution Division-II Meerut, and Electricity Distribution Division-II Varanasi.**

The project is categorised as Effective Gender Mainstreaming (EGM) and includes a Gender Action Plan (GAP) with affirmative actions for encouraging the participation as workforce in the electricity sector through their capacity development as meter readers and bill collectors. Hence, Self-Help Groups (SHG) are involved in this project from the aspect of building an effective channel for the last-mile delivery of the relevant services (bill collection) and equipping SHG members with income-generating opportunities.

The SHG women working as bill collection agents also known as *Vidyut Sakhis* have been involved in the project since April, 2022. Since then, they have been provided multiple trainings on the application being used by them to collect bills, life skills, aspiration building, financial literacy, Sakhsham Application, consumer handling, etc. to help build their capacities to increase the collection in their areas.

The event organised on 04 November, 2022 was attended by the Senior Board Members from the Asian Development Bank including Ms Chantale Wong, Executive Director, United States of America; Mr Takeo Konishi, Country Director, India Resident Mission; Mr Keerthi Kumar Challa, Energy Specialist, India Resident Mission; Ms Deepa Ahluwalia, Senior Social Development Officer.

The event was also graced by the presence of Mr Pulkit Khare, District Magistrate; Mr Sameer Kumar Khare, Executive Director for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Lao PDR, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan; Mr Amit Kishore, Managing Director – DVVNL, UPPCL; Mr Dushyant Kumar, DC, NRLM, Mathura and Mr Manish Meena, Chief Development Officer.



Ms Wong and Mr Khare presenting the award to Harvati Devi who has made the highest bill collections amounting to over INR 21 Lakhs in Kosi Kalan District

The event started with the *Vidyut Sakhis* welcoming the guests followed by Mr Suman Ghorai, Director, Global Utility and Regulatory Practices, CRISIL Limited providing an update on the progress of the project till date including the showcasing of a programme film.

After the presentations, the *Vidyut Sakhis* who have gained support under the project introduced themselves and spoke about the changes that they have seen in their socio-economic status since being involved with the project. They told the team how their confidence has increased, that now they do not hesitate to speak their minds, and how they have become economically empowered owing to the income generated in the form of commission from the state. Finally, Ms Wong spoke to the women to understand their experiences as well as the challenges faced by them. She appreciated the work being done on the ground and was excited by the way the project is progressing.



The Vidyut Sakhis involved in the programme with the ABD Board members

The programme ended with the felicitation of the two highest bill-collecting agents, Harvati Devi from Chhata Block, who has made collections worth INR 21 Lacs and Nisha from Nandgaon Block, who collected bills worth INR 16 Lacs. Mr Sameer Khare and Ms Chantale Wong presented the trophies to the Vidyut Sakhis, appreciated their efforts and motivated them to make higher collections.