



Hope and Resilience in Times of a Pandemic

Heggodu village in Karnataka is home to 380 households. It is located in Sagara Block, famous for the Jog Waterfalls. It is also the base for the Charaka Natural Dye Cluster of DESI Trust and Indian Micro Enterprises Development Foundation (IMEDF). IMEDF is a special purpose vehicle of the Development Alternatives (DA) Group that accelerates the development of micro-enterprises at scale and is also the Nodal Agency (NA) for the SFURTI programme of Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME). This cluster deals with producing designer men, women and kids wear from natural dyes. The waste coming out of the process is also used for making Quilt Covers and sold through retail outlets across India.

Heggodu is a happy place; one can probably make that out from the sound of it. Meet Anita, the sole breadwinner for her family of five. Anita and her younger sister have been working with the cluster since it started in 2018; while Anita works with the tailoring unit, her younger sister supports other sampling units. Their younger brother is a daily wage labourer and their mother helps with casual work in the fields around the village. With the lockdown, their work had stopped. While Anita and her sister were receiving the salary for the last two months, it wasn't enough for a family of five.

During the lockdown, imposed due to the spread of COVID-19 in India, she saw a post by DESI Trust on Facebook, which was promoting the work Anita and her fellow colleagues have been doing in tailoring. She continued swiping her phone that night, not thinking much of it. With no routine, their day revolved around household chores, and occasional chit chats with their neighbors.

On 17 April 2020, around noon, Anita's supervisor, Padmashri visited her. She told her about a bulk order for making masks that the Cluster received. She asked Anita join in and if she can make around 50-60 masks every day from home? Anita did not think twice and said yes. And since then she has been making masks day in and day out to help her community deal with the pandemic and also has been able to make an additional income of INR 5000 for her family. The slow hum of Anita's sewing machine is a reminder of near normalcy in village Heggodu.