



# From Stigma to Strength: How Neelam Built an Enterprise on Menstrual Health



Have you heard of someone turning menstrual health into an engine for social change?

Meet Neelam Gupta, a quiet force from Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh, who's doing just that.

At 33, Neelam is a graduate, a former village head, and a deeply committed member of her Self-Help Group. Her journey mirrors the rising tide of rural women who are done surviving and ready to lead.

In 2020, as conversations in her SHG Pragati Samuh circled around menstrual health and the lack of decent livelihoods, Neelam began to connect the dots. In her village, most women either couldn't access affordable sanitary pads, or hesitated to buy them due to stigma. At the same time, work that offered dignity and fair income was hard to come by.

## **What if one enterprise could solve both problems?**

For Neelam, entrepreneurship was never just a way to earn, it was a way to uplift.

With support from Atma Nirbhar CLF and **Development Alternatives** through Swami Vivekanand Shiksha Samiti (SVSS), she launched Vanshika Lifecare, a women-led sanitary napkin enterprise. She sourced pads in bulk from a Delhi-based manufacturer and handled branding and packaging locally. The model was simple, cost-effective, and deeply rooted in the community.

But being a first-generation entrepreneur meant every step, raw material sourcing, customer outreach, packaging, logistics, was a steep climb. Still, Neelam showed up: to every peer learning session, every SHG meeting, every exposure visit. Her belief only got stronger.

By 2024, she had secured **₹10–12 lakh** in credit through Baroda UP Bank, thanks to financial linkages facilitated by SVSS. She began building a workforce, from women in the village who, like her, were hungry for change.

Today, Neelam **employs 7 full-time women** and up to 10 part-time workers during peak seasons.

Her team handles packaging, distribution, and awareness campaigns. Four women lead door-to-door sales. Two male staff supply retail stores. A menstrual health trainer conducts sessions across nearby villages and CLFs. Vanshika Lifecare earns between ₹40,000–₹60,000 in monthly profits, and the impact goes far beyond numbers.

Neelam is challenging taboos, creating jobs, and redefining what a rural enterprise can look like. She's what Development Alternatives calls a high-growth grassroots entrepreneur, someone building scalable, socially relevant solutions that emerge from within the community itself.

She's repaid her first loan without a single default. Her **CIBIL score is on the rise**. She mentors other women in her SHG and village organisation. And she's just getting started.

What's next? A line of reusable cotton cloth pads for women who can't afford disposables and a potential partnership with government schools to distribute hygiene kits.

Neelam's story is at the heart of our vision: transforming women from recipients of aid into producers of change. With the right support access to credit, skills, visibility, markets—women like Neelam are proving that innovation doesn't always come from metros or incubators.

Sometimes, it starts in a village, with a woman, a dream, and the courage to act.

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