

Women Entrepreneurship in Odisha : the Pathway to Women Empowerment

*Dr. Amrita Patel
Dr. Lenin Mohanty*



The state of Odisha has been pro active in adopting the Odisha State Policy for Girls and Women 2014 which is very holistic in nature with a life cycle approach to development and empowerment of women. Besides the survival, nutrition, health and education, there is emphasis on sustainable livelihood. On livelihood, the policy aims to enhance opportunities for participation of women in formal livelihood sector including skill development and facilitate an enabling environment for employment and entrepreneurship. The Policy has the objective to create supportive systems for women's groups and collectives to graduate as entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship is the capacity and willingness to develop, organize and manage a business venture along with any of its risks in order to make a profit. The most obvious example of entrepreneurship is the starting of a new business from the ground up and then coming up with an idea and later on turning it into a profitable business. Entrepreneurial spirit is characterized by innovation and risk-taking, and is an essential part of a nation's ability to succeed in an ever changing and increasingly competitive global marketplace.



Government of Odisha has been taking steps towards ensuring a congenial and supportive environment towards promoting and facilitating entrepreneurs. Various departments of the government have several schemes, programmes and initiatives for accelerating the growth of the entrepreneurs. While many of these policies are meant for both men and women entrepreneurs, there are specific/special provisions for women in many of the policies. Today in the state, women entrepreneurs are emerging in multiple trades and businesses and all across the state of Odisha. Whether as individuals or as groups, the potential of women entrepreneurs has been unleashed. The numbers and scale of individual women entrepreneurs may be small but it is increasing at a fast rate. On the other hand, the Mission Shakti, the platform of women self help groups has already emerged as a strong force of economic empowerment.

Going forward, for the first time, a session on Women's Entrepreneurship was conducted on November 14th during the Make in Odisha 2018 conclave. The Make in Odisha Conclave, a biennial event is aimed to attract investments for the state as well as show case the flagship schemes, policies and initiatives of the state in not only industrial and MSME sector but also in tourism, higher education, health, and other such sectors. Government of Odisha organized the second edition of the marquee event at Bhubaneswar during November 11th to 15th, 2018. The conclave showcased the policy and regulatory environment, investment opportunities across focus sectors and the manufacturing prowess of the State.

The objective of the session on women entrepreneurship was to learn from the esteemed guests their experience of building entrepreneurship on an individual basis as well as through women collectives. The expected outcome is to build alliances of women entrepreneurs from other parts of the country and attract investment in Odisha. The vibrant and enthusiastic women

groups in Odisha got an opportunity here and be inspired by the women speakers. The participants were mostly the women entrepreneurs and the WSHG members who have graduated to a higher level of enterprises. The breakout sessions were for discussions and floor participation.

The Hon'ble Chief Minister inaugurated the session and said "Economic empowerment of women is the game changer for any society". Digital empowerment will lead to social and technological development of the state and thus the Chief Minister announced that women self help groups of Mission Shakti would be provided with smart phones for their digital empowerment. This will facilitate their growth into entrepreneurs.

The inaugural session showcased the life, journey and the success of a woman self help group member. The journey of Smt Jayanti Ekka, President of Kalyani Women Self Help Group (WSHG) of Sundergarh district of Odisha is inspiring. In her address, she narrated her long experience in the formation and growth of the women self help group and how this has been instrumental in making her financially independent. Staring from contributing Rs. 50 per month, the group has



grown and been strengthened over the years with the help of micro credit support from Government and bank. Her personal experience since childhood was not very smooth but due to her resilience, hard work and belief in team work she was able to overcome the barriers. The journey of the Kalyani WSHG was also not without challenges, but through her managerial skills on crisis management, she as President was successful in tackling the problems.

Women have been able to create an identity of their own due to the women self help groups, was the opinion of Shri Prafulla Samal, Hon'ble Minister. In the inaugural plenary, Shri Subroto Bagchi, Chairman, Odisha Skill Development Authority, remarked that women inspire all - when women grow, families grow and society has a progressive mode for integrated development. Business and social entrepreneurship by the women is the thrust today. The inaugural session was set in motion by Smt Anu Garg, IAS, Principal Secretary of the Women & Child Development and Mission Shakti Department, who gave the welcome address.

The plenary invited speakers in the MIO Women entrepreneurship session reflected the gamut of work and productive enterprises that women have been able to establish and

achieve success. These women are role models for the country and indeed the participants were able to learn from their life experiences.

The plenary speakers on the occasion were Dr. Susmita Mohanty, CEO, Earth2Orbit; Smt Mirai Chatterjee, Chairperson, Gujarat State Women's SEWA cooperative federation; Smt Apurva Purohit, President of the Jagaran Group and Smt Harjinder Kaur, National Senior Vice President of FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO).

Susmita Mohanty emphasized on imagination, self-confidence, courage as the keys to success. A good dreamer is a better planner and best executor. She transported the audience for few minutes to space. Her deliberation was that to begin a start up one should be focused, creative and has perseverance. She shared her experiences as a designer in a commercial airline, international space station, and start up MOONFRONT.

The SEWA cooperative federation with 3 lakh members has been instrument in bringing an economic and social change in the lives of the women as well as in the society, said Mirai. Leadership and Entrepreneurship are the characteristics of an empowered woman. Initially women need hand holding support for establishing an entrepreneurship, cooperatives or small scale industries but over time they gain confidence and evolve as true entrepreneurs.

Apurva Purohit highlighted that in today's digital era, there is democratization of knowledge - online access for skill development and knowledge enhancement is available and accessible. Reciting the poem "Kosish Karne Valon ki har nehi hoti....". She explained the importance of work and constant effort and determination which yields positive results.

FLO is the women wing of Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FICCI). FLO has been promoting entrepreneurship and professional excellence in women through various workshops, seminars, conferences, talks, training and capacity building programmes etc. The plans of FLO to open an Odisha chapter were expressed by Harjinder Kaur.

Later there were 4 break out sessions – 2 on women entrepreneurship and 2 on women selfhelp groups.

The moderator of the women entrepreneurship session was Sri Pranab Jyoti Nath Sharma, IAS, Director, Industries, Govt of Odisha. Smt Archana Garodia Gupta, owner of Touchstone Jewellery and past President of FLO; Smt Apurva Purohit, President of Jagran Group and Smt Harjinder Kaur from FLO spoke in this break out session. The discussion was on how to do e-commerce; how to fulfill the needs of the customer and how to grow , plan and succeed in business. Women entrepreneurs were advised to utilize the platform of Amazon, Flipkart for making business and also the online purchase portal of Government. Women entrepreneurs need to be listed in the Government e Marketplace (*GeM*) because as per recent policy of Government, 3% of procurement will be from women and 25% from MSME.

The second break out session on women entrepreneurship was moderated by Smt Rashmi Sarita, Executive Director, FLO. The speakers of the session were Smt Lubeina Shapoorwala, Partner, Mustang Socks, Smt Kavitha Reddy, Chairperson & MD of Kriya Precast and Smt Revathi Roy, CEO, Hey Dee Dee. Kavitha Reddy is the Chairperson & MD of Kriya Precast, an infrastructure business, building precast affordable quality houses at just Rs. 3 lakhs per unit. Mustang Socks has expanded into a manufacturing unit in Palghar with 350 trained village women as staff and workers. The factory boasts of AC knitting rooms and a clean environment ensuring utmost comfort to the workers. Today socks are sold through 8000 retailers and 36 whole sellers not only in India, but the brand has been acclaimed internationally as well. Hey Dee Dee, is an unconventional business of instant parcel delivery



services employing women drivers only. Odisha government has invited Kavitha to share her low cost precast housing technology. Similarly, Revathi plans to start her venture in Odisha.

The speakers discussed the role of education and how hard work does pay. The concept of branding was also discussed and the role models narrated their own life story which was very inspiring.

The break out session on Women Self Help Groups was chaired by Dr Amrita Patel, State Project Coordinator, SPMU. Smt Praveena Kala, CGM, SBI, Bhubaneswar; Smt Sanchita Mitra, National Coordinator, SEWA and Smt Chitra Smita Behera, Member, Budheswar SHG from Bangiriposi, Mayurbhanj and Smt Sudesna Sahoo, Secretary, Debasis SHG, Ganjam were the speakers. The importance of SHGs and women collectives was shared and the learnings and challenges were discussed. The other breakout session on Women Self Help Groups was chaired by Mr. Reghu G, IAS, Director, ICDS and Social Welfare. The speakers Ms. Sarada Muraleedharan, IAS, Ex MD-Kudumbashree, DG, NIFT; Mr. Manoranjan Pani, Senior Manager, AMUL; Ms. Minakhi Prusty, President, Maa Bhagabati SHG, Puri; and Ms. Bishnupriya Das, Treasurer, Lokamata SHG, Mayurbhanj. The experience

of AMUL and Kudumbashree was shared while the women members of the SHG spoke about their journey of working with the women self help groups.

Around 1000 women entrepreneurs and WSHG members from across the state participated in the Make In Odisha Women entrepreneurship session.

On the occasion a coffee table book “Mission Shakti – a silent revolution” and brochure “State initiatives for women entrepreneurship” was released by the Hon’ble Chief Minister. A video film on the Mission Shakti was also unveiled and screened.

Some of the recommendations that were discussed are :-

- 30% of the directors in companies should be women.
- There should be reporting in companies balance sheet of the percentage and number of women employed at board, senior, middle and entry level management.
- Gender specific policy and gender budgeting in each Sector skill council should be introduced.
- Skilling of women in non traditional jobs should be encouraged.
- The government should incentivize the childcare industry.
- Designated and specially trained Woman loan counselling and Assistance officer for women in bank branches should be provided.
- Collateral Free Loans for women entrepreneurs should be given.
- Banks should create special product and marketing programs to lend to women.
- Women’s Industrial Parks need to be earmarked.
- Mahila haat (market) need to be established to provide space for the products of the women’s groups.
- Digital Literacy of women groups need to be taken up.
- Policy should be made for the government to purchase/ procure from women groups and entrepreneurs.

The women entrepreneurship Session in the Make In Odisha conclave of 2018 was historic in paving the way of development and empowerment of women of the state by way of forging new partnerships as well as providing an unique space and scope for learning.

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women”, (Jawaharlal Nehru).

*Dr. Amrita Patel, SPC, SPMU, W & CD and MS Department
Dr. Lenin Mohanty, Editor, Odisha Review*