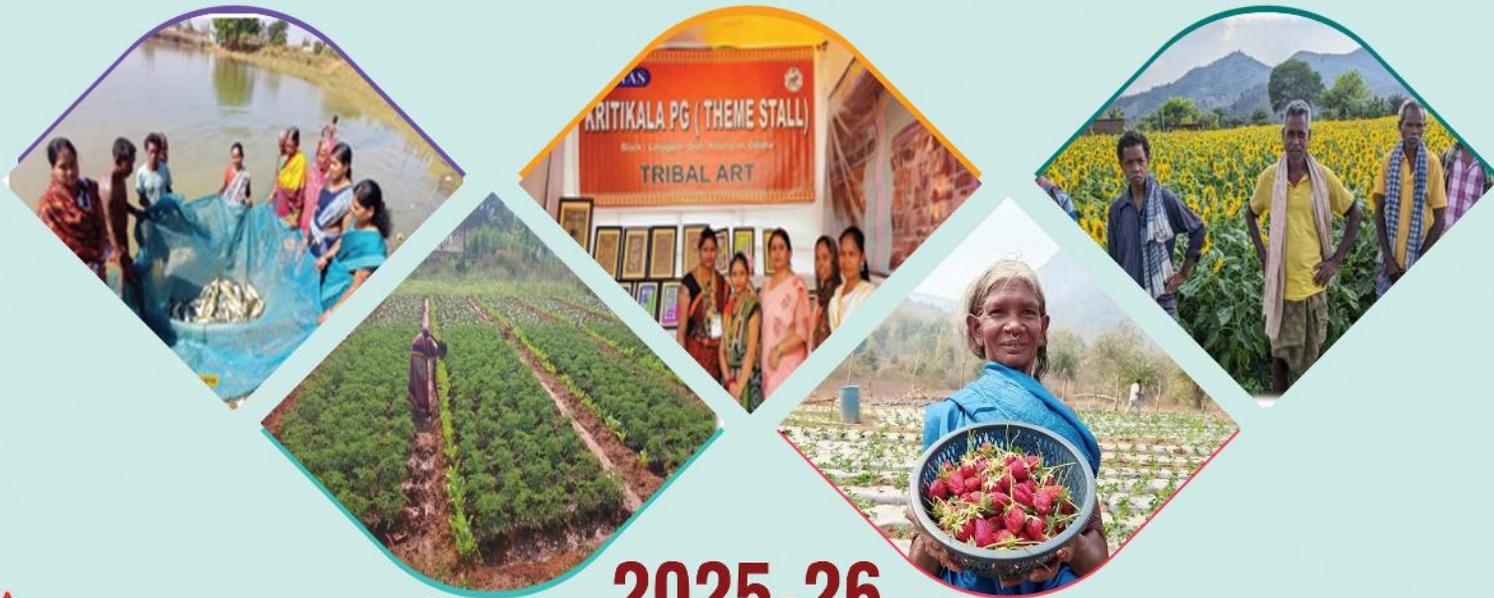


*The Livelihood Effect :*  
**Empowered Success Stories  
from the Land of Kalahandi**



**2025-26**

**District Planning & Monitoring Unit (DPMU)  
Kalahandi**





**Sri Pawar Sachin Prakash, IAS**  
**Collector, Kalahandi**



## **FOREWORD**

Over the years, Kalahandi District has witnessed a remarkable transformation driven by the resilience and determination of its people. Among the most powerful indicators of this change are the individual stories of those who have harnessed opportunities, overcome hardships, and created sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families.

This booklet is a humble compilation of such success stories-real-life narratives of perseverance, innovation, and empowerment. These stories are not just about income generation; they represent journeys of self-discovery, dignity, and social inclusion. Each one reminds us that lasting change is indeed possible with the right support systems, timely interventions, and community participation.

The efforts highlighted here reflect the commitment of the District Administration, partner organizations, and community stakeholders in enabling inclusive development. From skill development and self-employment to women-led enterprises and farmer innovations, the experiences documented serve as both inspiration and evidence of what can be achieved through well-planned livelihood initiatives.

I commend all those who have contributed to this publication and, more importantly, to the success of the individuals featured within its pages. May these stories inspire further action, deeper partnerships, and a collective vision for a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

**(Pawar Sachin Prakash)**



**Sri Srikanta Dalei, OS&ES**  
**Deputy Director (Planning & Statistics)**  
**DPMU, Kalahandi**



## **Preface**

Livelihood is more than a means to earn a living — it is a foundation for dignity, independence, and resilience. In every corner of our communities, individuals and families strive each day not just to survive, but to thrive. It is their determination, creativity, and courage that shape the soul of our shared progress.

This booklet presents a collection of inspiring success stories of individuals (men and women), WSHGs, PGs, and FPOs whose lives have been transformed through sustainable livelihood initiatives. These narratives speak of challenges overcome, skills acquired, and dreams realized. They reflect the power of opportunity, the impact of timely support, and most importantly, the unwavering spirit of those who refused to give up.

Each story is a testament to the effectiveness of collaborative efforts between communities, organizations, and institutions in creating pathways to economic self-reliance. These accounts are not only uplifting but also serve as valuable case studies for practitioners, policymakers, and development professionals committed to inclusive growth.

We hope this compilation encourages further innovation, deeper engagement, and a renewed commitment to livelihood development as a vital tool for social change. May these stories ignite hope and serve as a source of inspiration for many more journeys toward empowerment and prosperity.

I appreciate the valuable help and cooperation of various Government officers, NGOs/CSOs of Kalahandi district. I also place on record my deep appreciation for the dedicated and painstaking efforts made by Dr. Kumudini Mishra, Micro Planning & Livelihood Expert, for bringing out this publication.

**(Srikanta Dalei)**



**Dr. Kumudini Mishra**  
**Micro Planning & Livelihood Expert**  
**DPMU, Kalahandi**



## **Acknowledgement**

Compiling this booklet of success stories has been a deeply enriching experience. Each story shared within these pages reflects the strength, determination, and hope of individuals who have overcome challenges to build sustainable livelihoods and brighter futures.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Deputy Director (P&S), DPMU, Kalahandi, and the District Administration for their vision and support in bringing this initiative to life. Special thanks to the District Collector for his unwavering encouragement and leadership in promoting inclusive and impactful development in Kalahandi.

I am also thankful to all the departments, field functionaries, and partner organizations whose dedication and grassroots efforts have helped enable these inspiring transformations. Your commitment has made a real difference in people's lives.

A heartfelt thank you goes to the members of the WSHGs, PGs, and FPOs who so generously shared their stories. Your journeys are a source of inspiration, and your voices give this booklet its true meaning.

Lastly, I am grateful to everyone who contributed to the documentation, editing, and production of this booklet. Your support made this possible.

I hope these stories will inspire more such journeys and remind us of the potential that lies within every individual when given the right opportunity.

**(Dr. Kumudini Mishra)**

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>APC</b>	Agriculture Production Cluster
<b>BMMU</b>	Block Mission Management Unit
<b>CIF</b>	Community Investment Fund
<b>CRP</b>	Community Resource Person
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>DMC</b>	District Monitoring Committee
<b>DPMU</b>	District Planning & Monitoring Unit
<b>F&amp; ARD</b>	Fisheries and Animal Resources Development Department
<b>FNGO</b>	Facilitating Non-Government Organization
<b>FPO</b>	Farmer Producer Organization
<b>GI</b>	Geographical Indication
<b>GP</b>	Gram Panchayat
<b>GPLF</b>	Gram Panchayat level Federation
<b>IIT</b>	Indian Institute of Technology
<b>ITDA</b>	Integrated Tribal Development Agency
<b>MCP</b>	Master Crafts Person
<b>MMJM</b>	Mukhya Mantri Janajati Jeevika Mission
<b>MRLP</b>	Micro River Lift Project
<b>NABARD</b>	National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Government Organization
<b>NRLM</b>	National Rural Livelihoods Mission
<b>NTFP</b>	Non-Timber Forest Produce
<b>OAIC</b>	Odisha Agro Industries Corporation
<b>ORMAS</b>	Odisha Rural Development & Marketing Society
<b>PG</b>	Producer Group
<b>PMEGP</b>	Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme
<b>PVTG</b>	Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Group
<b>SC</b>	Scheduled Caste
<b>SPPIF</b>	Special Programme for Promotion of Integrated Farming
<b>ST</b>	Scheduled Tribe
<b>TSP</b>	Tribal-Sub-Plan
<b>WASSAN</b>	Watershed Support Services and Activities Network
<b>WCD</b>	Women & Child Development
<b>WCS</b>	Weaver Cooperative Society
<b>WODC</b>	Western Odisha Development Council
<b>WSHG</b>	Women Self-Help Group

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## Prologue

In every village, every town, and every corner of our country, there are silent stories of determination, resilience, and transformation. This booklet sheds light on some of those stories—real-life journeys of individuals who, despite adversity, carved paths to a better life through sustainable livelihoods.

Livelihood promotion lies at the heart of inclusive development. It is not merely about economic progress but about restoring dignity, building confidence, and enabling people to take control of their future. Whether it is a woman starting a small enterprise, a youth gaining employment through skill training, or a family enhancing their income through collective effort, these stories reflect the impact of well-designed interventions and the human spirit that drives them.

This booklet is a humble yet powerful compilation of success stories from the livelihood sector. Each narrative is a reflection of human resilience and the potential unlocked when opportunity, support, and determination converge. Whether through Skill Development, Entrepreneurship, Self-Help Producer Groups, Farmer Producer Organizations, or Community-based Enterprises, these stories demonstrate how lives can be changed when people are empowered to shape their futures.

These accounts are more than individual achievements—they are symbols of the larger progress being made under various Government Livelihood Promotion Schemes and Programs. They reflect the success of inclusive development models that prioritize capacity building, self-reliance, and participatory growth.

We hope this compilation serves as both a record and a source of inspiration for policymakers, practitioners, and above all, the countless individuals who aspire to walk a similar path toward economic independence and social upliftment.

Let these stories remind us that real change begins at the grassroots—and that every success, no matter how small, contributes to the larger vision of a self-reliant and empowered society.

## **From Field to Feast: How Uma Thakur Turned Maize into a Thriving Business**

This is the success story of Smt. Uma Thakur, a member of the Women Self-Help Group (WSHG). During the year 2017-18, she enrolled herself as a common group member in Padar Ghasen WSHG. She was a poor woman, completely dependent on the sole income of her husband. The total family income was not enough to meet the daily household needs. In such a situation, the Community Resource Person (CRP) met Uma Thakur during her visit and counseled her to join the WSHG platform. From then on, the fate of Uma has taken a twist as she devoted her time to the WSHG activities to become a successful entrepreneur. As the climatic conditions of Kalahandi are most suited for Kharif maize cultivation, Uma Thakur initially took up an internal WSHG loan and started maize cultivation. Encouraged by the profit she got during that season, she consulted her WSHG and GPLF to get more financial assistance to scale up the activity. This very WSHG was then graded and provided with financial assistance from the Community Investment Fund (CIF) and also with a bank linkage of ₹ 50,000/- by the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). Further, the WSHG members were trained on improved maize cultivation practices. Now, Uma has all kinds of backward linkage support, and her productivity under maize cultivation has increased drastically, as well as her income. She has also made a temporary storehouse to keep the corn seeds for a longer period and sells them at higher prices to generate more profit. Hence, due to on-time intervention and adequate follow-up by block officials, Smt. Uma Thakur, a common woman of Tentuli Pada village under Koksara block, has become a Lakhpati Didi, making a monthly income of ₹15000/-. She has become a source of inspiration for others.



## From Struggle to Success: Kamini and the Power of Vegetable Farming

Once known for poverty and drought, Kalahandi has seen a silent revolution in agriculture, especially in vegetable farming. One inspiring story is that of Smt. Kamini Patel, a small farmer from a remote village near Bhawanipatna.

Kamini Patel, a 41-year-old woman and resident of Sarlanji village in Bhawanipatna tehsil, is involved in vegetable farming. She has completed 10<sup>th</sup> grade, while her spouse has education up to 7<sup>th</sup> grade. She owns 1.5 acres of land. During the Kharif season, her husband cultivated paddy on 1 acre of land, which is very limited for the family's survival. As a result, Kamini constantly thought about finding an additional source of income for her children and their future. However, she could not find any opportunities for extra income. The only resource she had was 50 decimals of land



where she grows vegetables such as tomatoes, brinjals, lady's fingers, beans, pumpkins, and bitter gourds, but her farm income was very limited due to a lack of knowledge and skills in improving agricultural practices. She was unaware of systematic agriculture practices like line transplanting, seed treatment, cash crop cultivation, off-season vegetable cultivation, and the use of various technologies in vegetable farming.

In such a situation, she had the opportunity to participate in a training program focused on improving agricultural practices in Sarlanji village, organized by a team from the NGO named Dapta with the support of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Bhawanipatna, and the Horticulture Department, Government of Odisha. Through this program, she learned various methods, such as seed treatment, line transplanting, off-season farming, and the use of



organic manure like compost, peat, Jibambruta, and organic nitrogen growth promoters, as well as the mixed farming technique. She also learned about using yellow sticky traps, light traps, and fireman traps in vegetable farming for disease and pest control. Ultimately, this training and skill development helped her achieve good returns and make profits in vegetable farming. She could earn ₹ 40,000/- from her 50 decimals of land. However, due to the unavailability of additional land, she was unable to expand her vegetable farming. She always sought to cultivate vegetables using new techniques and methods that would yield higher profits.

Under the guidance and support of the Horticulture Department and Dapta Team, she leased an additional 50 decimal plot from her neighbourhood for vegetable cultivation. She received support for constructing poles and trellises for bitter gourd farming on a 10 decimal plot, where she cultivated bitter gourd, achieving higher production and protection against various diseases. Before using the trellis method, she traditionally cultivated bitter gourd but experienced lower production and profit. After adopting the trellis farming method, she reported significantly higher profits from the same area of land. In response to market demands, she cultivated vegetable climbers like bitter gourd, retch, and snake gourd using trellis methods.

Kamini is now earning around ₹ 2 lakhs yearly from vegetable cultivation. She is recognized as the Managing Director of Matiputra Women's Farmers Producer Company, formed in the year 2018, supported by NABARD. This company, under her leadership, has achieved a turnover of around ₹1 Crore and 22 lakhs through vegetable cultivation. For her outstanding contribution, she was felicitated for her achievements as the best woman entrepreneur by the Vikash Group of Institutions on the eve of International Women's Day in Bhawanipatna. Now, she serves as an example for many women in the area.

Kamini Patel's journey proves that with knowledge, support, and determination, even a small farmer from an Aspirational District like Kalahandi can achieve great success. Her story is a beacon of hope and a model for sustainable livelihood development in Odisha and beyond.

## **From Household to Entrepreneur: Anjali's Journey to Financial**

### **Independence**

The case study of Smt. Anjali Singh is an incredible story of women's empowerment. She was once struggling to meet the financial needs of her family of four, which includes two school-going children. Her husband used to work as an agricultural labourer; the entire family depended on a single income. It was only six years back that Anjali had decided to come out of the house and join the Kalikrushna WSHG of



Chiliguda. With time, she had developed her skills due to the capacity-building programs of NRLM. Gradually, the WSHG members gained confidence and ventured into fish cultivation. Under the supervision of the Block Mission Management Unit (BMMU), Koksara, and the Fisheries Department, this WSHG flourished as a team to gain substantial benefits from the fish business, and thereby Smt. Anjali Singh uplifted her income level.

Meanwhile, with the help of WSHG bank linkage and CIF loan, Anjali started a separate Kirana shop of her own in her village. This WSHG is also engaged in providing Mid-Day Meals at a nearby Government-run school. Their involvement in making snack items has a great demand in the market.



Diversification and trying hand in various income-generating activities gives an edge over others to Anjali. She has become the leader of Kalikrushna WSHG. The net income of Anjali has now reached ₹18,000/ a month. She is considered a Lakhpati Didi and has become a source of inspiration for others.



## **Mulch Boosts Crops: A Farmer's Tale of Increased Yields**

Shri Suresh Prasad Rana is an active farmer from Sagarpali village in Alatara Gram Panchayat, M. Rampur block, Kalahandi. He has 6 acres of unirrigated land. In 20 decimals of land, he cultivates various vegetable crops such as brinjal, tomato, chili, and ladyfinger using traditional methods during the



rainy season. Before the intervention, he relied on local seed varieties, had no spacing, and did not treat his seeds, which led to many challenges to sustain his livelihood.

It was during the selection of villages by the Special Programme for Promotion of Integrated Farming (SPPIF) team in M. Rampur block, Suresh came into contact with the SPPIF Block team and shared his agricultural problems. The team studied the profile of his field and advised him to adopt a vegetable production method for climber crops, such as beans, cucumbers, bitter gourd, ridge gourd, and pointed gourds, in a 10-cent model. They also suggested cultivating mixed vegetable crops, including tomatoes, brinjal, chili, and ladyfinger, in the spacing gaps.

After completing the training courses, Suresh implemented a trellis system for vegetable cultivation. He had prior knowledge of vegetable cultivation, making the trellis system particularly proved beneficial for him. In 2023, he earned more than ₹ 60,000/- from this vegetable crop using the trellis system. With this income, he constructed a deep borewell system on his land and installed a motor system for irrigation purposes.

From the Special Programme for Promotion of Integrated Farming (SPPIF) Scheme, he received 16 RCC poles, 65 bamboo pillars, GI wire, and plastic wire for the trellis system. In the year 2023-24, the Chief District Agriculture Officer cum Project Director, ATMA, the Scheme Officer, Assistant Agriculture Officer of the Block Agriculture Office, the District Project Coordinator of Watershed Support Services and Activities Network (WASSAN) made a joint visit to his field and motivated him to scale up the production using mulching paper.

In 2024, Suresh built an extra trellis system at his own expense and grew climbing crops like beans, cucumbers, bitter gourd, ridge gourd, pointed gourd, and high-yield varieties of tomato, chili, ladyfinger, and eggplant in gaps across 30 decimal of land. He also used mulching paper on-site, which helped the plants grow healthily, cut weed growth by up to 90%, lowered labour costs, reduced the expenses of buying and applying herbicides, and minimized the need for trimming grass around trees and poles.

The growth of the plants has improved drastically and there is an increase in production. The use of Handi Khata and hormone sprays, with three mulching papers (each measuring 1 meter in width and 400 meters in length), and the implementation of drip irrigation in the field have provided benefits such as maintaining soil fertility, protecting the soil from water and wind erosion, preserving soil moisture, and enhancing landscape plantings. It has also helped produce clean, quality products, protected the plants and their produce from pests and diseases, regulated the soil's temperature throughout the cropping season, prevented weed growth, and increased overall crop yield.

Suresh has achieved significant success using innovative mulching techniques. He's developed an Integrated Farming System (IFS) model incorporating techniques like mulching, which has boosted his income from vegetable crops to ₹ 70,000/- per acre and above within four months. In peak seasons, he's even earned up to ₹ 3-4 lakhs per acre in just 90 days. His methods have not only enhanced his financial stability but also contributed to healthier soil and a cleaner environment.

## **Agrahichasi FPO: A Model for Sustainable Agricultural Development**

In Golamunda block, the Agrahichasi Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) has revolutionized Agriculture. The FPO was established as a direct response to the hardships faced by the local farming community. What began in the year 2022 with just 10 members has grown to over 200 farmers, including 45 women. The FPO cultivates tomatoes (200 acres) and bitter gourd (150 acres), with an annual turnover exceeding ₹1.5 crore. The initiative was started by a 51-year-old farmer named Krushna Nag. The FPO produce now reaches markets across Odisha and neighbouring States. Honourable Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi highlighted their success in his 'Mann Ki Baat' program, praising the FPO members' resilience and collective effort.

For decades, farmers in the region relied on rain-fed paddy cultivation during the Kharif season due to the lack of irrigation facilities. This limited their agricultural output, forcing many to migrate to other states in search of better livelihood opportunities. While a few progressive farmers experimented with vegetable cultivation, growing tomatoes, chilli, and bitter gourd on small plots. Their efforts were hindered by distressed sales, disorganized marketing practices, and a lack of technical expertise in advanced farming methods. These persistent challenges underscore the need for an organized and collaborative approach to improving agriculture in the region.



Recognizing the dire need for change, NABARD initiated the formation of the Agrahichasi FPO in the month of December 2022 under the Central Sector Scheme for the Formation and Promotion of 10,000 FPOs, partnering with the Mahashakti Foundation as a Cluster-Based Business Organization. The initiative adopted a cluster-focused strategy to support the

cultivation of high-demand crops such as tomatoes, bitter gourd, and chilies. The farmers were provided with extensive training on modern agricultural practices, post-harvest management, and market engagement strategies. Additionally, licenses for the distribution of essential agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides were obtained, ensuring that farmers had access to quality resources at their doorstep.

The intervention also prioritized building market linkages to secure fair prices for farmers'



produce. With financial backing from NABARD, which sanctioned ₹18 lakh to cover management costs, the FPO expanded its reach across 23 villages in 8 Gram Panchayats, attracting 260 shareholders. Through the sustained guidance of district-level experts, the FPO not only bolstered local agricultural practices but also established trade relationships extending beyond Odisha to states like Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, and Jharkhand. The

establishment of the Agrahichasi FPO has profoundly transformed the agricultural landscape of Golamunda.

The turnover of the FPO saw a meteoric rise, growing from ₹11.03 lakh in 2023-24 to ₹ 73 lakh by the end of 2024. This dramatic increase in revenue reflects the improved production and sales infrastructure developed under the FPO's guidance. Farmers reported a 50% increase in income, significantly reducing migration rates as agriculture became a more viable livelihood option. The expanded scale of vegetable cultivation also generated employment opportunities, with farmers hiring local labourers to meet the demands of increased productivity. Women's participation in the FPO strengthened their socio-economic standing, promoting inclusivity within the community. Training programs and exposure visits supported by Government schemes and Krishi Vigyan Kendras further equipped farmers with cutting-edge agricultural techniques, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Looking ahead, the Agrahichasi FPO aims to expand its operations and impact. The organization plans to increase its membership base to 750 farmers, emphasizing inclusivity and wider community participation. Diversification is a key focus, with plans to introduce potato and onion cultivation, leveraging modern technologies to ensure higher yields. The FPO is also exploring opportunities to enhance its market presence through improved infrastructure, such as storage and distribution facilities, and by forming partnerships with digital marketing platforms. With a target turnover of over ₹ 1.5 crore annually, the FPO aspires to solidify its position as a leading agricultural collective in the region.



The journey of Agrahichasi Producer Company Limited demonstrates the strength of collective effort and innovation in rural development. With strong institutional backing and a steady commitment to growth, Agrahichasi FPO is ready to keep making a lasting difference in the lives of farmers in Kalahandi and beyond.

## Goat Farming Contributing to Enhance Household Income & Women's Empowerment

Pandakamal is a remote village where women had limited livelihood options beyond seasonal labour and subsistence farming. Income was irregular, and families often migrated for work. In 2017, the Maa Parvati WSHG was formed with ten members and selected under the Mission Shakti Livelihood program.

The group was initially involved in mushroom cultivation. But due to the adoption of conventional methods and in the absence of any technical support, they were not getting much profit after repaying the loan. In the year 2023-24, the group decided to start commercial broiler poultry farming after knowing about the Goat Farming through WSHG (30+2) scheme of the Odisha Government, implemented by the convergence of both the Fisheries and Animal Resources Development Department (F&ARD), Odisha, and the Mission Shakti Department.

The WSHG members received training on scientific goat rearing and breeding, vaccination, deworming, disease management, and fodder cultivation using available land. A para-vet from the WSHG was trained and certified to provide basic animal healthcare. In two years, the group's total herd grew from 23 to over 80 goats. The group sold 36 goats, earning over ₹1.98 lakh. This year, the WSHG has 81 kids, and they have sold five male kids @ ₹ 5000/- per kid.

The group members have opened individual bank accounts. They participate actively in Gram Sabha meetings. One member, Rukmini Majhi, now represents the WSHG in the Panchayat-level federation. The group is encouraged by the low cost of input and high returns from goat farming and aims to expand the farm capacity. Its low investment cost, adaptability to various climates, and quick returns make it an ideal income-generating activity. More importantly, goat farming has played a pivotal role in enhancing household income and empowering women, especially in areas where women's access to formal employment or land ownership is limited.



## Strawberry Cultivation: A Sweet Success

Strawberry cultivation is transforming the agricultural landscape in Odisha, empowering farmers across various districts with new opportunities and substantial profits. In Kalahandi, Strawberry cultivation has emerged as a beacon of hope and prosperity for local farmers, particularly in the tribal-dominated regions.

The journey began in 2009 when 13 farmers in Lanjigarh Block experimented with strawberry cultivation on 3.5 acres, planting 70,000 runners. Supported by the Horticulture Department and Vedanta's CSR initiatives, these farmers received training and inputs like organic manure. The pilot project yielded profits ranging from ₹ 50,000/- to ₹ 75,000/- per acre, sparking interest among other farmers.



Slowly, this initiative is transforming rural livelihoods through crop diversification and scientific farming practices. The Department of Horticulture introduced strawberry cultivation under the Sub Scheme -Special fruit specific Scheme covered under the State Plan in the different villages, namely Niali and Mukundpur villages of Pokharbandha and Champadeipur Gram Panchayats of Lanjigarh block, offering local farmers a lucrative alternative to traditional crops.



This pioneering initiative equips farmers like Sheshadeba, Khirasindhu, Bijaya, and Krishna with training and resources to grow strawberries, a high-value crop with strong market potential. Strawberry, being a cash crop, the profits earned from it are much higher compared to any other fruit. It has increased the earnings of Sheshadeba Padan, a farmer who shifted from paddy and vegetables to strawberries, earning around ₹ 4 lakh in one year, compared to ₹ 70,000/- ₹ 80,000/- from

traditional crops. The initiative not only increases farmers' incomes but also enhances soil health by promoting diverse agricultural practices. The farmers have also been supported in marketing the fruits through stalls and exhibitions by ORMAS.

The success of strawberry farming in Kalahandi exemplifies how targeted initiatives and community engagement can transform agricultural landscapes, offering sustainable livelihoods and economic growth.



## **The Vibrant Yellow Fields of Sunflowers Became a Source of Income for the Tribal Community**

In a remote tribal village, namely Merdikupa, which comes under Bhurtigarh G.P. of Lanjigarh Block nestled in the hills, a group of 60 tribal farmers embarked on a journey to diversify their agricultural practices by introducing sunflower cultivation. Sunflower cultivation among tribal farmers has gained significant attention due to its potential to improve livelihoods and enhance food security in tribal communities.

This story highlights the experiences and outcomes of sunflower cultivation among tribal farmers under the Mukhya Mantri Janajati Jeevika Mission (MMJM) implemented by the Government of Odisha. The primary objective of the scheme is to promote tribal development and improve the livelihoods of tribal communities in the State.

The tribal communities traditionally relied on subsistence farming often face socio-economic challenges, including limited access to resources and markets. Sunflower cultivation offered a promising alternative crop due to its adaptability to diverse agro-climatic conditions and high market demand for its oil and seeds. Despite initial challenges faced by the farmers of Bhutigarh, such as limited access to water and a lack of modern farming equipment, the tribal farmers persevered with determination. They implemented innovative solutions such as rainwater harvesting and community-managed irrigation systems to overcome water scarcity.



Despite its benefits, sunflower cultivation among tribal farmers faces several challenges, including limited access to credit, market fluctuations, and many tribal farmers lack access to modern agricultural techniques and modern farming equipment. Climate change poses a threat to sunflower cultivation, with unpredictable weather patterns impacting yields. Collective marketing of the product is

the main challenge for ensuring fair and better prices for the farmers.

Interventions by the team, through regular meetings and dialogue with the community, helped people identify the main challenges emerging from the issue and facilitated the supply of quality seeds, inputs, and equipment. Training programs and extension services built their capacity and enhanced productivity. Research on climate-resilient varieties and water management practices was conducted to mitigate risks and sustain production. Initiatives,



such as strengthening farmer and producer groups to collectively negotiate prices and access markets to ensure fair returns to farmers, were organized. With the guidance of the Block Agriculture Officer, ITDA staff, agricultural SMS, and Livelihood Expert, these farmers learned modern techniques and best practices for sunflower cultivation and post-harvest management systems. Through their hard work and dedication, the tribal farmers of Merdikupa

village achieved successful sunflower cultivation and a better yield, which resulted in improving their socio-economic conditions. The high-quality oil content of sunflower seeds produced by these farmers generates attention from local markets and attracts higher prices, providing them with a steady and sustainable source of income.

Additionally, the cultivation of sunflowers provided environmental benefits to the region, such as soil conservation and enhanced biodiversity to support apiculture. The vibrant yellow fields of sunflowers became a source of pride for the tribal community, boosting their morale and sense of achievement. The nearby tribal farmers are eager to cultivate sunflowers in the coming season.

Over the last three decades, Kalahandi has seen sunflower evolve from a niche experiment in tribal zones to a recognized, income-enhancing crop. Early adopters demonstrated strong profitability of ₹ 10,000/- per acre, and recent institutional efforts aim to amplify scale with improved seeds, technical support, and marketing channels.

The Tribal farmer families of Merdikupa village had initiated Sunflower cultivation of 0.5 acres each during the Rabi season for the financial year 2023-24. The farmers have made an additional income from a 0.5-acre plot, ₹ 14000/-, with a short duration of 100 to 120 days of cultivation. This success story serves as an inspiring example of how empowerment through knowledge and sustainable agricultural practices can transform the lives of marginalized communities, empowering them to thrive in harmony with nature.

Thus, Sunflower cultivation has emerged as a promising avenue for socio-economic development among tribal farmers in Merdikupa village of Bhurtigarh G.P of Lanjigarh Block. By addressing key challenges and leveraging opportunities for innovation and collaboration, sustainable sunflower farming can contribute to poverty alleviation, food security, and community resilience in tribal regions.

## **From Small Farms to Big Market: How a Banana FPO Boosted Incomes and Empowered Farmers**

The project was executed as part of a Central Sector Scheme launched by the Government of India, with financial backing and oversight provided by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). The Trilokeswar Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) was set up in Kalampur Block under CSS-NABARD to raise the living standards of small and marginal farmers by introducing, multiplying, and distributing superior banana varieties that are resistant to weevils, fusarium wilt, nematodes, low fertility, and drought, either individually or in combination. For the 2023-24 year, the promotion of banana cultivation across 150 acres involved implementing a range of strategic actions focused on boosting production and ensuring sustainability for the Farmer Producer Organization (FPO). The project incorporated technical support, infrastructure enhancement, financial aid, and market connections to establish a strong banana cultivation initiative.



In the area, the existing 40 acres of banana cultivation faced issues with production, volume, and size. The output was insufficient, leading to the need for a strategic enhancement in banana farming to ensure sustainable production levels and economic viability for the FPO.

The project area is perennially irrigated; the Indrāvati irrigation canal crosses through the cropped lands. Even though irrigation is available, farmers are cultivating only paddy in both Kharif and Rabi seasons. There is also no scope for commercial crops like pulses, cereals, tuber crops, and vegetables. Banana cropping was limited to 40-50 farmers, and it was not up-scaled due to a lack of financial, technical, and institutional coordination. Hence, the District Monitoring Committee (DMC) recommended for promotion of improved banana cropping through FPO. Trilokeswar FPO came forward to support the small farmers. The FPO consolidated institutional capacities and networking with Balaram Kissan Pathasala for technology transfer, innovation, and marketing support. The FPC signed a MoU with B-Kishan Smart Farming to provide technical support for the banana plantation and committed to buying back the produce from the FPC, ensuring a guaranteed market for the bananas.



Apart from this, in collaboration with the Horticulture Department, Trilokeswar FPO installed the Solar Drip for all Banana Farmers and processed the farmers' documents to avail the subsidy amount through the Horticulture Department. The Departmental Officials provided technical guidance to the Farmers. Most of the farmers are getting Drip, Pack house, and capacity-building training from the Horticulture departments. In the Year 2023-24, the company's turnover was around ₹ 40 lakhs, and in 2024-25, the turnover was around ₹ 60 lakhs.

The expansion of 150 acres aims to increase the volume and quality of banana production. The drip irrigation system and technical support from the Horticulture Department have enhanced the efficiency and productivity of banana cultivation. The subsidy and financial assistance have provided critical support to farmers and the FPO, ensuring better financial stability. The buy-back agreement with B-Kisan Smart Farming and Marketing Linkages through the Horticulture Department ensures that the produce has a guaranteed market, mitigating risks



associated with unsold produce. The establishment of essential infrastructure by the Horticulture Department improves the handling and ripening processes, leading to better quality and market readiness of the bananas.

The comprehensive approach to promoting 150 acres of banana cultivation in 2023-24, involving technical partnerships, financial support, and infrastructure development, exemplifies a well-rounded strategy to enhance agricultural productivity and sustainability. By integrating these elements, the FPO is well-positioned to achieve its goals of increased production, financial stability, and market success. The integration of technical support and market linkages is a model example of how Farmer Producer Companies can achieve growth and sustainability through collaborative efforts and targeted interventions. It has given an opportunity to the farmers to boost their income and become empowered.



## **From Humble Beginnings: The Dhokra Revival of Uanshu Kansari**

Sri. Uanshu Kansari, a 45-year-old artisan, hails from a family deeply rooted in the tradition of Dhokra Art. Raised in an environment where his grandparents initiated the practice of this ancient tribal art form, predominantly embraced by the tribal communities of Odisha, Uanshu found himself drawn to this handcrafted legacy. Passed down through generations, this art form became a familial inheritance from his parents, who struggled to sustain it due to limited market access. Despite their special affinity for Dhokra, the family faced financial challenges, relying on middlemen who often exploited them, leaving little profit and not helping much in making ends meet.



Growing up immersed in the practice of Dhokra, Uanshu, lacking formal education opportunities due to his family background, embraced the art form as his primary livelihood. Marriage and increased responsibilities brought further financial strain, compounded by the loss of his parents. Uanshu, however, passed his knowledge to his wife and children, ensuring the continuity of the ancestral craft.

Facing the daily struggle to make ends meet, the family's fortune changed when the Livelihood Expert of DPMU, Kalahandi, initiated convergence meetings and field visits involving the District Administration to Kankeri Village in the year 2015. District officials and the CSR team of Vedanta interacted with the artisans in the village. Vedanta initiated a project to revive and promote Dhokra, providing training in new designs and essential skills. With the growing recognition, the village of Kankeri saw improvements such as electricity and access to a piped water supply, road infrastructure, and other Government provisions. Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society (ORMAS) also helped the artisans secure

a grant of two lakhs and provided them with platforms in regional exhibitions to showcase their artwork.



Today, Uanshu, along with a group of 25 artisans, is a part of the 'Dhokra Producer Group,' practicing the art with ORMAS. His products are showcased in the Kalahandi Kraft outlet in Bhawanipatna. His children are now receiving formal education, and the family's income has increased substantially from ₹ 5,000/-per month to ₹ 15,000/- per month. Uanshu, today, is grateful for the support he got in revitalizing their tribal art and culture. He looks forward to providing more for his family and passing on the Dhokra craft legacy to his children. He is proudly contributing to the revival of their tribal heritage.



## From Clay to Canvas: A Terracotta Artist's Journey

Odisha has a rich tradition of terracotta art—beautiful clay creations shaped by hand and fired in kilns. Among the many unsung heroes preserving this heritage is Sri Kaibalya Rana, a multi-talented artisan from the terracotta village of Karlasoda, Bhawanipatna Block.

Born into a potter's family, Kaibalya learned the art of terracotta from his parents. But for years, the craft brought little income and few opportunities. He often struggled to support his children and faced social challenges for trying to earn independently. He faced numerous challenges owing to a lack of access to electricity in his remote village, poor working conditions due to inadequate infrastructure and extreme weather, limited productivity due to manual processes, unsuitable training space for community engagement, and dependency on an erratic power supply, limiting the scope for mechanization.

Everything changed when he joined a government-sponsored Master Craftsman Training



Program conducted by the Handicrafts Department. There, he learned new designs, product diversification, and market skills. He was a traditional terracotta artisan, but with the facilitation of the Government of Odisha, i.e., the Department of Handloom Textiles & Handicrafts Department, Government, he greatly improved.

Kaibalya began creating decorative terracotta items—jewellery, wall hangings, lamps, Ganesha idols, and tribal figures—that appealed to urban buyers. His products gained attention in exhibitions across Odisha. He is also empanelled as a Master Crafts Person (MCP) and has trained more than 45 trainees under his guidance.

Kaibalya persevered relentlessly, and he set up his terracotta unit at Karlasoda with the finance of the Bank under the scheme, Prime Minister's Employment Guarantee Programme (PMEGP). In collaboration with the Handicrafts Department and financial institutions, Selco Foundation facilitated the establishment of Kaibalya Kumbhar Studio - a dedicated pottery production and training center. As part of the initiative, a 700 sq. ft. energy-efficient and thermally comfortable pottery shed was constructed. The structure was specifically designed

to enhance natural lighting, ventilation, ergonomics, and storage capacity, thereby creating a conducive environment for artisans.

To further support sustainable production, the studio was equipped with energy-efficient, solar-powered machinery, including blungers, pug mills, pottery wheels, and kulhad-making machines. These interventions have collectively contributed to improved productivity, reduced physical strain, and enhanced the overall livelihood potential for the pottery community.

Kaibalya has engaged more than six artisans under him as wage artisans, helping them earn a livelihood. He earns over ₹3 lakhs annually through craft sales and workshops. He receives regular orders through online platforms and handicraft fairs. His products, including pots, diyas, terracotta glasses, and artistic pieces, are marketed at District and State-level exhibitions through ORMAS.



Kaibalya's journey from a struggling potter to a celebrated terracotta entrepreneur shows the transformative power of skill, courage, and community support. He has not only revived a fading tradition but also become a symbol of self-reliance and empowerment in rural Odisha.

## **Unveiling the Power of Saura Art: The Story of Nimanti Majhi**

Nimanti Majhi, a tribal girl from a remote village, defied norms to become a successful Saura artist. Born in a community with limited resources, Nimanti faced challenges but showcased artistic talent from a young age. She painted her surroundings, earning accolades nationwide.

Despite challenges, Nimanti, fueled by a desire for artistic expression, sought guidance from local artisans and accessed online resources. Vedanta's mentorship and support from the District Administration, especially the Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society (ORMAS), played a pivotal role. Coordination by the Planning Department and involvement of the Livelihood Expert for addressing the issues of marketing through ORMAS helped form the "Kritikala Producer Group," securing grants for raw materials and skill upgrading in Saura Art, an ancient tribal art form.

Nimanti found inspiration in her tribal roots, incorporating elements of her cultural heritage into her artwork. This unique fusion of tradition and modern expression became her signature style, setting her apart in the art world. As Nimanti's skill and portfolio grew, local art enthusiasts and organizations began to take notice. She participated in National, International, and Regional Exhibitions, showcasing her distinctive artwork, which garnered praise for its cultural richness and artistic depth.

Saura art has become a source of income for Nimanti and many other artisans, particularly as it gains recognition outside the traditional community. She started working on the craft in the year 2018, and over the years, she was able to earn an income of ₹ 1000/- to ₹ 2,000/- per month. Post-intervention and the subsequent exposure, her income increased to ₹ 8,000/- to ₹10,000/- per month.

With an experience of over seven years with the craft, Nimanti has witnessed an exponential change in her life since December 2022. She participated in the Make in Odisha Conclave held at Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Nimanti was a part of the Vedanta contingent, where she got to showcase her exceptional talent of Saura Art as she was tattooing tribal motifs across the various attendants' hands with a wide smile. Her artwork was duly appreciated by everyone, carrying hand-imprints. Along with the due recognition, she also got a chance to interact with various eminent business personalities of India, like Chairman Vedanta and Jindal Steel. This proved to be the start of her journey. Her talent grew like a wild forest fire, and she was given the opportunity to participate in the Kalahandi Utsav Ghumura. She also participated in the International Aluminium Conference held in the year 2023. With each exhibition, Nimanti's

reputation grew, eventually earning her national and international recognition. Her art, deeply rooted in her tribal identity, resonated with audiences worldwide, highlighting the universal language of creativity.



Nimanti gained recognition beyond her community with her work featured in urban exhibitions, establishing her as a rising talent. Her journey from a tribal village to the global art scene inspires aspiring artists, showcasing the transformative power of determination.

Nimanti's success defies societal expectations, contributing to the appreciation and preservation of tribal art and culture on a broader scale. Reflecting on her journey, she cherishes the support and appreciation from business personalities and public leaders, finding hope and belief in pursuing Saura Art.

## **Weaving a Future: Nabin Meher's Story of Revival of Habaspuri Design**

The handloom industry is the second largest employer in India and Odisha, next to agriculture. Handloom is a caste-based and tradition-oriented cottage industry in our State and plays a vital role in the rural economy. Weaving activities are performed by weaver families who earn their livelihood through self-employment. Weavers' skills differ from place to place, man to man, and product to product.

Kalahandi is famous for its unique design, “Habaspuri” saree. Mostly woven with cotton and silk, these sarees were originally produced by the members of the Kandha tribe in Habaspur village of the district during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When the dynastical rule declined, the tribals stopped weaving sarees, but later on, the saree was revived by master weaver Ugrasen Meher in Chicheiguda. It is unique in the textile tradition of the State because of designs like Kumbha (temple), fish, and flowers that are woven into the sarees. The Habaspuri saree and fabrics got a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in the year 2012-13 by the IIT, Kharagpur.



But in the current scenario, very few weavers are into weaving Habaspuri sarees. The creativity urge has gone down among the younger generation. The younger generation who are educated have taken up jobs or keep on moving to urban areas searching for jobs like security guards, hotel boys, construction supervisors, or similar jobs, but are not inclined to handloom weaving. This is likely to push this glorious hand weaving to the doom, making it a history for the District. Weavers have now transitioned to nuclear households, with a few continuing with the joint families. On the other hand, the average income for Habaspuri weavers is not sufficient to maintain their families. They earn around ₹8000/- to 10,000/- per month. This compels them to take up other means of livelihood. Expenditure pattern exhibits

that the weavers spend more on their physical existence and social survival. Thus, there was a need for the revival of Habaspuri weaving. To provide regular and sustainable employment for day-to-day livelihood of the weavers as well as to develop their socio-economic status and bring the youngsters in their traditional works, one Skill up gradation in “Weaving with Jalla & doobby” (Habaspuri design) was imparted to the weavers of Chicheiguda and Neherunagarpada villages of Junagarh Block in Kalahandi under Western Odisha Development Council fund in the year 2021-22.

The District Administration involved the DPMU Kalahandi office in the efforts. The Deputy Director (P&S) and Livelihood Expert of DPMU Kalahandi, along with textile department officials, conducted field visits to the Weavers’ Co-operative Societies of Junagarh Block and interacted with the weavers. A fund of ₹8 Lakhs for skill upgradation training on Habaspuri design was sanctioned. The training was imparted to 40 numbers of weavers in the two co-operative societies, i.e., Neherunagarpada and Chicheiguda WCS of Junagarh Block. The main objective of the training was to increase more and more working weavers and increase production, especially in “Habaspuri” design, which has high demand in the present market.

Apart from the WODC fund, efforts to provide solar energy solutions in the Neherunagar WCS were also planned and initiated. Solar energy solutions were provided by the Selco foundation to the WCS so that the weavers can work without issues of electricity. For marketing support, ORMAS supported the weavers through Kalahandi Kraft and formed a Handloom Weavers Producer Group. The DPMU office played a vital role in coordinating with the Textile Department, ORMAS, and the Selco Foundation.

With all these efforts, among the young weavers who were trained on Habaspuri Design, Nabin Meher is a skilled weaver, a proud member of the Radhakrushna Handloom Producers Group, supported by ORMAS. The producer group consists of 30 members, and all members are actively involved in weaving Habaspuri silk and cotton sarees. Nabin is habituated to weaving Habaspuri Buti saree with new colour variants and new designs.

Born into a family of weavers, Nabin witnessed the harsh realities of the handloom industry: limited income, meagre resources, and a constant battle for sustenance. This pushed many artisans, like his peers, to abandon weaving for other trades or seek better opportunities in larger cities. Before the Skill-upgradation training, Nabin was struggling for existence along with his family members, and it was extremely difficult for him to make ends meet with a

meagre income of ₹ 6,000/- to ₹ 7,500/- per month from weaving. It was a tough task for him to look after his family's requirements. But Nabin, driven by a passion for design and a desire to preserve his family legacy, persevered. He honed his weaving skills, adding his artistic flair to the traditional craft. When the WODC capacity-building programme arrived in 2021, Nabin saw a light at the end of the loom. This initiative equipped him with crucial skills, design development, marketing, building connections, and essential business acumen.



Nabin actively participated in the two-month Habaspuri Design Training and gained deep knowledge of weaving Habaspuri design sarees. As a result, the training transformed Nabin with a new look, and he now earns between ₹ 30,000/- to ₹ 40,000/- per month by using the new colour variants of both silk and cotton in weaving Habaspuri design sarees. He was previously weaving plain lungis and gamuchha, but after the training, he started weaving Habaspuri design sarees and dupattas. His exceptional improvement in weaving skills has enhanced his financial status. His significant achievement in the weaving trade has improved his family life, and he serves as a role model for other weavers in the area.



The story of Habaspuri weaving is one of resilience, cultural pride, and collective effort to preserve a unique art form for future generations. The District Administration's efforts to channel funds from the Western Odisha Development Council (WODC) have brought hope to the younger weaving community. The two-month skill-upgradation training has helped weavers like Nabin and many others improve their skills and revive their livelihoods. Trainings have also been organized in the Habaspur village of Junagarh Block. The younger generation is beginning to understand the opportunities available in the textile sector, and new entrants are joining the weaving profession of Habaspuri sarees and fabrics.



## **From Grassroots to Green: How A Bamboo Artisan Transforms Her Livelihood**

Bamboo cultivation and innovation have become transformative forces in Odisha, empowering communities, enhancing livelihoods, and promoting ecological sustainability. Kalahandi is renowned for its skilled bamboo artisans, particularly in the Narla and Karlapat forest regions. Baladini Sahu, an adroit bamboo craft artisan and MCP (Master Crafts Person), was born in the lap of the village Karlagudain, Golamunda Block. She learned the aforesaid craft from her venerable father and started her artisan life. On account of the Government support, she has gradually become an expert in this field.

Baladini got married in Chhenagaon village of Kesinga Block. In this village, she has set up a bamboo craft unit and is earning handsome money annually, ₹ 3.6 lakh, and living a hassle-free life. She has availed Workshed amounting to ₹ 1,30,000/- funded by the Directorate of Handicrafts, Government of Odisha, and implemented by the District Handicrafts Office, Kalahandi.

Currently, she is training 15 women at Makripada in Bhawanipatna block under the Master Crafts Person (MCP) training scheme. These women artisans have learned to create durable mats, baskets, and household items from locally sourced bamboo, blending functionality with artistic expression. Baladini is also conducting training at Sanchergaon village in Golamunda block under the Craft Village Programme by the Handlooms, Textiles, and Handicrafts Department of the Government of Odisha, organized by the District Handicrafts office in Kalahandi and sponsored by the Directorate of Handicrafts in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.



The District Administration, recognizing the potential of these crafts, has initiated efforts to market them under the brand "Kalahandi Kraft," aiming to connect artisans directly with broader markets and reduce reliance on intermediaries.



Baladini's efforts and initiatives by the Government underscore the transformative impact of bamboo craftsmanship in Kalahandi, fostering economic empowerment and preserving cultural heritage.



## Whittling Dreams: The Rise of a Woodcarving Artist

Kalahandi is known for its traditional woodcraft, particularly Woodcarving. The story of Arun Maharana, a wood handicraft artist from a small village in the Dharamgarh block, is bucking this trend. He has not only earned a name for himself but also employed many youths by training them across the state. Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Arun crafts versatile wooden idols by hand, without using any machines. The art has become the source of livelihood for thousands of people in the nearby villages. His art gained immense popularity in pan-India when his idols were gifted to the former American President Barack Obama by the Indian Government. Since then, Arun has not looked back. He sends his wooden idols to places as far as Chennai, Kolkata, and Goa. Demand for his idols abroad is a new first for this Kalahandi-based artist.





He is making carved wooden handicraft products by using Teak Wood, Gambhari, Sishu, and some specialized hand tools. He creates statues of deities like Lord Ganesh, Jagannath, Laxmi, the Elephant, and utility items, customized to buyer preference. His ability to blend traditional motifs with modern designs has made his work popular in both local and global markets. He has participated in several District-level as well as State-level Handicraft Exhibitions conducted by the Handloom Textile and Handicrafts Department, Government of Odisha.

He was empanelled as MCM (Master Crafts Person) during the year 2010-11 and has imparted training to more than 100 artisans under the scheme MCP Training Programme and the Craft Village programme, by the Handlooms, Textiles, and Handicrafts Department of the Government of Odisha, organized by the District Handicrafts office in Kalahandi and sponsored by the Directorate of Handicrafts in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. He has availed the Workshed of financial assistance of Rs.1,30,000/- under the scheme Construction of Workshed for Handicrafts artisans sponsored by District Handicrafts Office, Kalahandi, and supported by Directorate of Handicrafts, Odisha, Bhubaneswar.

His work fetches him as high as ₹ 50,000/- for an idol. One big idol, which is sold in the range of ₹ 8,000/- to ₹ 50,000/-, takes a week. In a month, he makes around 15 big and 200 small idols. Arun Maharana's art has gained immense popularity pan-India and encouraged others to take up woodcarving as a full-time profession.

## EPILOGUE

As we reach the end of this booklet, we are reminded that the stories shared within these pages are more than just accounts of success—they are testimonies to the strength of the human spirit and the power of opportunity. Each individual featured here embarked on a journey that was not without its challenges, but through resilience, resourcefulness, and determination, they have transformed their lives and livelihoods.

In each story, we see how perseverance and hope can turn obstacles into stepping stones. Whether it was overcoming financial hardships, adapting to new skills, or finding creative ways to make a living, these stories showcase the remarkable ability to rise above adversity. They remind us that livelihood is not merely about earning an income, but about finding dignity, purpose, and fulfillment through meaningful work.

These success stories are also a testament to the importance of community, support, and access to resources. They highlight that when individuals are given the right tools—whether through education, mentorship, or opportunity—they can break free from the cycle of poverty and create sustainable futures for themselves and their families.

As we reflect on these journeys, we are reminded that success is not defined by grand achievements alone. It is often found in the small victories—the ability to stand on one's own feet, to build something lasting, and to inspire others along the way. Each success, no matter how big or small, contributes to a larger movement of change and progress.

Let these stories inspire us all to keep pushing forward, to continue seeking new opportunities, and to support those who are striving to create better livelihoods for themselves. The road ahead may be long, but with resilience, determination, and the right support, the possibilities are endless.

There are many more stories across all thirteen blocks of the district, which have not been covered in this compilation due to a lack of space.

The journey is ongoing. As we look to the future, may these stories remind us that every step toward improving our livelihoods is a step toward a brighter, more hopeful tomorrow.

## Livelihoods that Lift Lives



## Livelihoods that Lift Lives





**District Planning & Monitoring Unit (DPMU)  
Kalahandi**