



ASPEN NETWORK  
OF DEVELOPMENT  
ENTREPRENEURS  
SOUTH ASIA



# ANDE MEMBER SHOWCASE

## AUGUST 2024

Featuring highlights from:



# Upaya Social Ventures



Upaya Social Ventures is building an inclusive economy by providing investment and support to early-stage businesses creating dignified jobs for people living in the most extreme poverty.

Upaya's award-winning, impact-first model seeks out and supports often overlooked companies creating work that is safe, stable, inclusive, and rewarding — generating a transformative impact on families, communities, and economies.

Since its founding in 2011, Upaya's portfolio companies have created over 42,000 dignified jobs across India.



## Main Approach

At Upaya, we believe in the power of dignified jobs to fight poverty. Dignified jobs have a catalytic impact on families, communities, and economies.

That's why Upaya focuses on the early-stage companies creating dignified jobs that are safe, stable, inclusive, and rewarding. With investment and advisory support, we believe these companies can enable this impact at scale. When these jobs are created en masse in specific communities, even those without a direct connection to the company feel the impact.

Because of the multiplying effect in the impact of dignified work, we believe that —

- Dignified work must be part of the movement for a more just and sustainable future. Vulnerable people are bearing the brunt of climate change and systemic inequities. Investing in dignified job creation in their communities ensures that they have the power to be part of the solution. We work to ensure that dignified jobs for the most vulnerable communities are part of the global agenda.
- An impact-first investment strategy centered on job dignity generates long-term impactful economic growth. We invest in early-stage entrepreneurs with the greatest potential for job creation in vulnerable communities because we see how that can transform entire communities. Our model still generates solid financial returns, which can have a catalytic effect on impact through our recycled philanthropy model.

# What are we working on?

**Impact Investing:** Upaya invests in mission-aligned, early-stage, for-profit companies creating jobs for people living in extreme poverty. These are businesses that fall in the “missing middle” — too large for micro finance and too small for traditional bank financing. We are often the company’s first institutional investor and we provide advisory support in critical areas. Till date, we have directly invested in 40 companies and our portfolio partners go on to receive an average of 17x more than our initial investment in follow-on funding.

**Dignified Jobs Accelerator:** The Dignified Jobs Accelerator aims to build an ecosystem for high-impact SGBs to thrive. We provide stage-relevant, customized support to build capacity for business growth and investment readiness. With thematic cohorts, we carefully curate mission-aligned SGBs to provide them with access to knowledge, resources, and capital. Till date, we have accelerated 73 businesses with a track record of 4.1x revenue growth and 2x funds raised post the program. Upaya has invested in 15 of our accelerated businesses.

**Dignified Jobs Collaborative (DJC):** Led by Upaya, the Dignified Jobs Collaborative is a coalition of impact organizations driving investment in dignified employment opportunities for those living in extreme poverty in emerging markets. Rooted in the Global South, the DJC focuses on improving job quality in the predominantly informal jobs created through early-stage businesses. In 2023, in partnership with 60 Decibels, we conducted a survey of nearly 1,000 direct and indirect jobholders of small and growing businesses in India to assess job quality.

**Textile Waste Management Technical Assistance Facility (TAF):** The Textile Waste Management TAF was launched by Upaya in March 2024 with a goal of building the ecosystem for textile waste management in India. The TAF supports sanitation worker-first waste management enterprises to meaningfully engage with textile waste and promote circularity in fashion.

## Asks

**Partnerships:** We are looking to collaborate with organizations for our thematic programs, specifically the Dignified Jobs Accelerator and Impact-Linked Outcome Financing for small and growing businesses. These programs focus on enterprises that operate at the intersection of SDG 1, 5, 8, and 13. Interested sectors include: food, agriculture and allied, waste management and circularity, and handicrafts.

**Co-Investing:** We often look for co-investors to invest in social business in our pipeline, to enhance their impact and reach.

**Technical Assistance:** We seek technical assistance to support social businesses in our portfolio in scaling their operations.

## Offers

**Accelerator Programs:** We organize accelerator programs to provide an investor lens to help early-stage social businesses become investment-ready.

**Impact Measurement:** Through the Dignified Jobs Collaborative, we offer impact measurement support to measure the quality of jobs created by social businesses.

**Co-Investing:** We are always also open to investing or co-investing in early-stage social businesses that align with our selection criteria and values.

# Unlock Impact

At Unlock Impact, our mission is simple and clear - we help purpose-driven organizations succeed. Comms Ninja, an initiative from Unlock Impact, is a communications and marketing service dedicated to telling compelling stories for NGOs and other mission-driven organisations. We offer simple, flexible, and affordable solutions to address the complex and time-consuming challenges of effective storytelling.

Every organisation needs to tell good stories, but it can be time-consuming, complicated, and expensive. Comms Ninja is the simple, flexible, affordable answer to your woes. Our model is designed to keep women in the workforce by offering virtual work with purpose to those who seek it.



## Comms Ninja

# Main Approach

Comms Ninja's approach is centred around flexibility and purpose. We are dedicated to addressing the gender work gap by providing virtual work opportunities to women who are traditionally excluded from the workforce due their need to balance care or health and work.

We ensure that talented, experienced, and self-driven female professionals can contribute to meaningful change without being constrained by traditional work environments. Since our inception in 2018, over 30 women, including 30% from small towns in India, have joined our team, experiencing a 40% growth in their income over 2.5 years. Over 90% of our clients directly impact the Sustainable Development Goals through their work.



9000+

Social media posts



17k+

Comms support hours



400+

Videos



150+

Blogs



50+

Reports

# What are we working on?

## Initiatives or Programmes to Focus On:

- **Storytelling for Impact:** We assist NGOs, social enterprises, foundations and other impact-first organisations in crafting and sharing their impact stories effectively, helping them to engage with donors and stakeholders. We provide communications strategy, content marketing, digital marketing, SEO, and more to help small and growing organisations build their digital presence and grow their brand.
- **Capacity Building for Professionals :** We provide training and skill development opportunities to enhance the skills of communications professionals through custom workshops, curated learning curriculum and coaching, ensuring they stay at the forefront of communications and marketing trends.
- **Flexible Jobs for Women:** We are determined to attract more women across India back into the workforce by expanding our highly flexible, 100% remote work model. Our target is to provide exciting job opportunities for those who have care responsibilities, or left behind due to cultural taboos or geographic limitations.

## Asks

- **Partnership Opportunities:** We are looking to collaborate with organisations within the ANDE network for their strategy, design, content & marketing needs.
- **Learning and Knowledge Sharing:** Seeking opportunities to participate in workshops, roundtable discussions, and webinars to gain and share insights on effective communications strategies for NGOs.
- **Mentorship and Support:** We welcome mentors and advisors from the ANDE network to support our team in enhancing their skills and expanding their impact.

## Offers

- **Impact Storytelling Services:** Providing expert storytelling services to help organisations effectively communicate their impact and engage with their audiences.
- **Training Programmes:** Offering training sessions on communications, marketing, and impact measurement to other ANDE members.
- **Collaborative Projects:** Partnering on initiatives that promote gender equality and support women in the workforce, leveraging our flexible work model to provide opportunities for women across various regions.

# SEWA Bharat



In 1972, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) was founded by Ela Bhatt as a trade union in India, and soon developed into a movement and a family of organisations that seek to empower poor women in the informal economy, equipping them with access to social security, awareness of their rights and entitlements, livelihood opportunities and independent income. SEWA Bharat, the federation of SEWA organisations, was made with the mission to promote new state SEWA organisations across India; build a national identity for the SEWA movement to advocate for the rights of women workers; and to run programmes which would add to women's economic and social security.

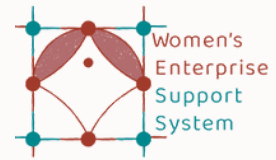


## Main Approach

Women's economic participation and the LFPR (Labour Force Participation Rate) of women has declined over the last two decades in India. Among many other factors, SEWA Bharat identifies the lack of women as business owners, managers, and as active entrepreneurial agents in the formal economy as a key reason for low participation. Drawing on a long history of collectivisation and collective strength, SEWA Bharat has been experimenting with collective entrepreneurship models for women at the grassroots, where it identifies women owned, women run collective enterprises that are small and growing businesses (SGBs) as catalysts and levers for change for the women, their households and communities. Grassroots women come together, pool in resources to work together, and when the entrepreneurial work increases, women register themselves as a company or cooperative, and enter the formal economy. We find that as more and more women from the informal economy become a part of these collectively owned enterprises and enter the formal economy, these enterprises act as an impactful lever for women's economic empowerment.



# What are we working on?



To support the growth of grassroots women's collective enterprises, SEWA Bharat started a programme called the Women Enterprise Support System (WESS) which aims to nurture and build the capacity of women's collective enterprises and provides a variety of services including business planning, finance and compliance, mentor matching, market linkages, access to finance, capacity building of the governing body comprised of grassroots women and that of the management team. In the last 2 years, the WESS has supported 10 women's collective enterprises through high touch and low touch services, resulting in significant improvements across business indicators such as an increase in the net profit of the enterprises, net revenue and member outreach

From the lessons thus generated, WESS is developing services that can be scaled, ultimately strengthening and growing more women's collective enterprises. Additionally, it also aims to advocate for the need to recognise these collective enterprises as businesses and the women workers/producers as business owners. Moreover, in order to tackle numerous systemic barriers that prevent such enterprises from growing and scaling, WESS also aims to forge partnerships and initiate dialogues with government and private stakeholders to enable the same.

## Asks

We would like to learn and strengthen our own work and approach towards supporting grassroots women's collective enterprises. By way of this membership, SEWA Bharat aims to:

- Scope funding opportunities for WESS and its cohort of grassroots women's SGBs.
- Leverage the network to conduct relevant research studies and amplify advocacy for grassroots women SGBs on the themes of access to finance, grassroots women's leadership, impact of social security for women shareholders in such enterprises etc.
- Leverage on existing capacity building programs and help build capacities within grassroots women SGBs.

## Offers

Grassroots women's collective enterprises further six of the UN Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 1, 5, 8, 10, 11 and 12. Therefore, it would be useful for the larger SGB ecosystem to know about the grassroots women collective enterprises, which can be done by:

- Sharing SEWA Bharat's WESS learnings with network organisations interested in supporting women's SGBs.
- Generating awareness about the WESS model of strengthening women collective SGBs as a pathway to women's economic empowerment.
- Developing an ecosystem/network of institutions supporting the worker collective enterprises across the globe within the larger SGB ecosystem.

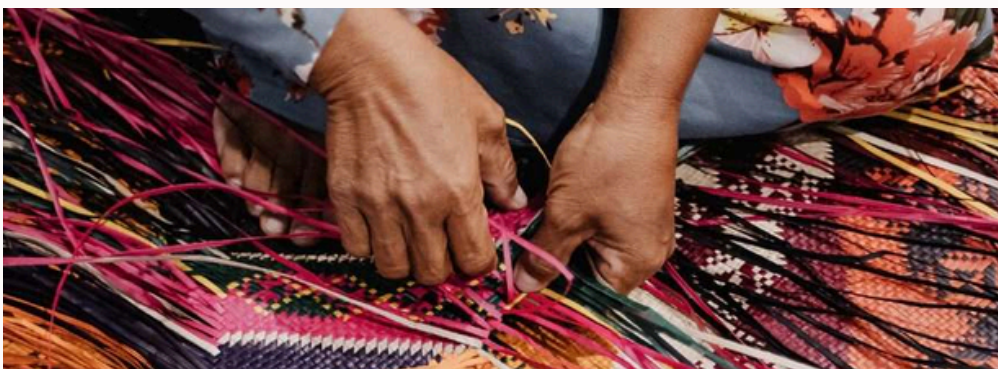
# LEAD at Krea University

LEAD at Krea University is an action-oriented research centre dedicated to enhancing the socio-economic prosperity of vulnerable and marginalized communities and enterprises. We create 'knowledge for impact' by leveraging the power of data, aspiration, innovation, and co-creation to tackle complex development challenges. Housed at the IFMR Society (a not-for-profit organization) with strategic oversight from Krea University, LEAD benefits from the rich legacy and cross-disciplinary expertise of the IFMR/Krea ecosystem. With a cumulative portfolio of over 350 research and impact measurement projects, we offer strategic expertise to CSR and philanthropic organizations across critical areas such as impact measurement and management and provide technical assistance in piloting new solutions to improve program targeting and delivery. Some of the sectors we have deep expertise in include advancing financial well-being and social protection, nano and women's entrepreneurship development, understanding barriers to MSME growth and testing innovative solutions to address these barriers along with ecosystem partners.



## Main Approach

Our thematic expertise, coupled with our in-house data gathering and analytics capabilities, serves as a robust engine for collecting user data and harvesting insights for both scale and depth. We have a proven track record of supporting CSR and philanthropic organizations to optimize their strategies and resources, effectively bridging the gap between philanthropic aspirations and ground realities.





# What are we working on?

## Impact of Access to Finance for Nano Enterprises

Many nano entrepreneurs struggle to access formal finance due to a lack of credit history and inadequate financial infrastructure. To bridge this gap, researchers at LEAD are collaborating with the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and its portfolio companies on a three-year longitudinal study with over 2,250 nano enterprises across the country. Interim insights emerging from this study indicate that tailored financial solutions have led to increased turnover and profitability, reinvestment of profits and raising female employment.

## Catalyst Atal Incubation Centre

The LEAD ecosystem also houses the Catalyst Atal Incubation Center, an innovation center set up under NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission, now in its fourth year. The incubator support and accelerate innovative startups in the inclusive tech domain, building digital products for the last mile, and ultimately enhancing rural/semi-urban livelihoods.

## Solutions for Transformative Rural Enterprises and Empowerment - STREE

Under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) of the Government of India, women-led enterprises are engaging in a range of business activities. Despite increased smartphone in India in recent years, there is a large gender gap in access and usage, and an untapped opportunity to catalyse the adoption of digital business solutions. The STREE programme, anchored by LEAD at Krea, has worked closely with the NRLM's non-farm division to identify and test a suite of innovative digital interventions for enabling growth-oriented rural entrepreneurs.

## Udyogini

LEAD's Udyogini initiative is a curated platform for sharing lessons and findings from our work on women's entrepreneurship. The intent is to build evidence to inform policies and accelerate growth.

## Asks

We seek to partner with organizations that share our vision of creating sustainable development solutions for the small business ecosystem.

- Establish partnerships with philanthropic organizations and impact funds that are committed to rigorous impact measurement practices. By joining forces, we can ensure that our interventions are effective, scalable, and sustainable.
- Developing stakeholder engagements within the SGB ecosystem to drive impactful change, especially in areas such as access to credit and markets, decent work, employment and skilling, gender, digitization etc.

## Offers

- Impact Measurement and Adaptive Management of Social Impact Programs: Collaborate with ecosystem partners to develop and implement robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks and tailored metrics.
- Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building
- Leveraging our data gathering and analytics capabilities to improve the targeting of programs and identifying segments within the SGB/startup ecosystem that are relatively underserved.
- Anchoring collaborative hubs that bring together stakeholders to solve critical issues at scale across the solution lifecycle - from problem identification to piloting, iterative design and scaling.