

Connect

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Mr Sunil Misra

CEO
CII Foundation

“

We have made meaningful progress in our mission to build holistic, inclusive, and resilient communities, and have had the privilege of witnessing the social impact of our collaborative, multi-stakeholder initiatives.

”

We believe that sustainable development begins at the grassroots. By supporting the transformation of villages and empowering communities, we are strengthening an ecosystem that will accelerate India's progress towards becoming 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.

Our journey has been long, enriching, and deeply humbling. Over the years, we have made meaningful progress in our mission to build holistic, inclusive, and resilient communities, and have had the privilege of witnessing the social impact of our collaborative, multi-stakeholder initiatives.

I am happy to share that in the January-March quarter, we launched a few initiatives in villages focusing on building locally rooted, contextually relevant programs that address interlinked challenges in health, skilling, and livelihood basis a comprehensive scoping exercise. Pilot projects have been launched in Barabanki and Chandauli in Uttar Pradesh. These pilot interventions include health awareness and system strengthening programs, rural women livelihood initiatives and soft skills training for youth in villages. The pilots are an important step in co-creating long-term solutions with the communities we serve—listening, learning, and iterating to ensure real and lasting change.



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Parallely, our programs in thematic areas continue to drive social transformation. Our crop residue management initiative, running in Punjab and Haryana to mitigate farm stubble burning by supporting farmers to adopt viable alternatives, has delivered strong outcomes. According to latest data from the field, during the last harvesting season, our interventions contributed to preventing stubble burning on 87% of the farmland in the 793 villages we worked in. This translates to 8,73,835 acres of land and the engagement of over 1,47,000 farmers—a significant achievement in our ongoing battle against air pollution and land degradation in north India.

The Woman Exemplar Program, which identifies, recognizes, and empowers grassroots women leaders for their work in education, health, and microenterprise, has grown with the introduction of a new award category - community resilience - to honour women who are building resilient communities. The program entered a crucial phase between January and March this year with due diligence visits across the country to understand the challenges and the journey of the 20 finalists shortlisted for the Woman Exemplar Award 2025. Our team travelled across 12 states—through bustling cities and remote villages—meeting the 20 inspiring women who are changing the face of their communities through sheer determination, innovation, and empathy. Each story is a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of grassroots leadership.

Our waste management initiatives across Leh, Farukhknagar in Gurugram and Chellanam in Kerala are gathering pace and engagement. In February, a new Material Recovery Facility (MRF) was inaugurated. This will aggregate, sort, grade, and process plastic waste collected from households and market areas before it is sent to plastic recyclers.

In the January-March quarter, we have launched a few initiatives in villages focusing on building locally rooted, contextually relevant programs that address interlinked challenges in health, skilling, and livelihood basis a comprehensive scoping exercise. Pilot projects have been launched in Barabanki and Chandauli in Uttar Pradesh. These pilot interventions include health awareness and system strengthening programs, rural women livelihood initiatives and soft skills training for youth in villages.

As we look ahead, we are energised by the partnerships, stories, and opportunities that lie before us. Every time I meet with communities on the ground, I am moved by the quiet strength in their eyes—the unwavering resolve to shape a better future. There is so much untapped potential, so many dreams waiting just for a gentle nudge to take flight.

We remain committed to amplifying the voices of those who often go unheard, ensuring that development is not just about reaching the last mile—but walking alongside every step of the way.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement.



SKILLING AND LIVELIHOOD

To drive holistic rural development, a comprehensive scoping exercise was undertaken to design and pilot integrated village development initiatives focusing on education, health, skilling and livelihoods. The study was conducted across Barabanki and Chandauli (Uttar Pradesh), Gumla (Jharkhand), the Sundarbans (West Bengal), and

Gummidipoondi (Tamil Nadu) to identify key areas of intervention and tailor impactful programs for these communities.

Pilot interventions included a health awareness & system strengthening program, rural women livelihood initiatives, soft skills training for youth, and an eco-restoration initiative in the identified villages.

LAUNCH OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN UTTAR PRADESH

Reaffirming its commitment to inclusive development, the CII Foundation launched a series of social development initiatives focused on Uttar Pradesh at an event held on 21 February.

The launch event brought together NGOs, local stakeholders, and companies based in Uttar Pradesh to bolster collaborative partnerships aimed at implementing impactful, on-ground projects across the state.

Partner representatives and stakeholders presented their program plans at the event in the presence of senior government officials, including Mr. Partha Sarthi Sen Sharma, Principal Secretary, Department of Health & Family Welfare, and Mr. L Venkateshwarlu, Principal Secretary, Department of Social Welfare. During the event, medical equipment was handed over to the Combined Tuberculosis Hospital (Govt.), Thakurganj, Lucknow, further reinforcing its commitment to strengthening

healthcare infrastructure. Ms. Smita Agarwal, Chairperson, CII Uttar Pradesh and Director & CFO, PTC Industries, emphasized the industry's role as a development partner, highlighting the need for collaborative efforts to bridge gaps in health and livelihood opportunities while Mr. Sharma and Mr. Venkateshwarlu encouraged industry stakeholders to engage in long-term partnerships with sensitivity to address critical development challenges.



SOFT SKILLS TRAINING FOR YOUTH

In partnership with TaraSri Foundation, a soft skills and digital skills training initiative has been introduced for 42 girls from Satrikh village, Barabanki.

A 3-day capacity building workshop on '21st Century Skills' for adolescent girls was held from 18-20 February in Lucknow.

The sessions covered a range of essential skills, including communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

Day 1 focused on the importance of soft skills, highlighting their differences from hard skills. Through interactive activities, the participants enhanced their critical thinking, problem-solving, and storytelling abilities.

On Day 2, the focus shifted to creativity, imagination, and personality development. The participants learned about originality, phonics, and table manners, followed by an interactive session on life skills education, where they explored the significance of core life skills in personal and professional growth.



Day 3 emphasized mental health and stress management, providing the girls with tools to cope with challenges effectively. The day also included hands-on training in computer basics, from MS Word and Powerpoint to AI tools like ChatGPT. The workshop concluded with a feedback session, certificate distribution, and a closing ceremony led by the TaraSri and CII Foundation teams.

The sessions encouraged the participants to think critically, solve non-routine problems, develop self-awareness and refine their social skills, equipping them to navigate both professional and personal spaces with ease.

BEEKEEPING INITIATIVE FOR RURAL WOMEN

A beekeeping initiative has also been launched in partnership with Kayakalp Foundation to support women in Chainpurva village by providing training, beekeeping boxes, and market linkages for sustainable income. A transformative two-day beekeeping training for 70 women in Chainpurva, Barabanki, was conducted on 19 & 20 March.

With limited livelihood opportunities in the village, this initiative introduces beekeeping as a sustainable income source, leveraging the region's natural biodiversity. The training covered the basics of beekeeping techniques, hive management, honey harvesting, and market linkages—equipping the women with practical skills to turn beekeeping into a viable livelihood.

To inspire and encourage the participants, Sunil Misra, CEO, CII Foundation, joined the session online, sharing his words of motivation and emphasizing the long-term impact of this initiative.

With each bee box capable of producing up to 30 kg of honey per season, these women are now on the path to financial independence. The next step in this journey is the distribution of 70 beekeeping boxes, which will enable the women to apply their learning and begin honey production. With ongoing support and monitoring, this initiative aims to build a thriving beekeeping community in Chainpurva.





HEALTHCARE

To strengthen healthcare delivery, the CII Foundation has partnered with NGOs and has launched projects in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

HEALTH AWARENESS PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN

In collaboration with HOPE Initiative, a school-based Health Awareness Program has been launched across 50 government schools in rural Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. The intervention seeks to enhance students' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding health, covering important topics like menstrual health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), screen addiction, among others. At the launch event, BMI kits were distributed at the identified underprivileged government schools to support health monitoring of children in schools.

HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING PROGRAM FOR HEALTH WORKERS

In partnership with Digiswasthya Foundation, a Health Systems Strengthening Program has also been launched in Chandauli, an aspirational district of UP. The initiative will equip frontline health workers and local governance members with necessary tools and training to improve health and nutrition services while also mobilising communities to take an active role in the healthcare system. CII Foundation also handed over medical equipment to the Combined Tuberculosis Hospital (Govt.), Thakurganj, Lucknow, further reinforcing its commitment to strengthening healthcare infrastructure.





CLIMATE CHANGE

CROP RESIDUE MANAGEMENT

Air pollution is a major preventable cause of mortality in many countries, including India. Farm stubble burning at the onset of winter in Northwestern India, particularly in Punjab and Haryana, significantly aggravates air pollution, posing a serious threat to human health and the environment. Farmers mostly burn leftover crop stubble to quickly prepare fields for the next sowing cycle. This practice contributes to air pollution, deteriorates soil health by destroying beneficial microorganisms, and ultimately reduces farm productivity.

To address this issue, the CII Foundation launched its Crop Residue Management initiative in 2018, bringing

together government, industry and farming communities to devise and implement sustainable alternatives. Over the years, the initiative has expanded its reach, covering over 1,000 villages across Punjab and Haryana.

During the last season, project interventions helped prevent stubble burning on 87% of the farmland in the intervened 793 villages covering 8,73,835 acres of total farmland and 1,47,736 farmers. As the peak burning period concluded, efforts were intensified through on-ground initiatives and field visits to assess program impact and reinforce sustainable farming practices.

Key Components of the Program

Awareness Building

Machinery Support Through Community Tool Banks

Farmers' Training and Farm Demonstrations

Managing Biomass through Ex-situ Technology

EXPANDING GEOGRAPHIC FOOTPRINT



In the January-March quarter, the geographic footprint of the project was expanded with new supporters such as JSW Foundation.

On 29 March 2025, the CII Foundation, in partnership with JSW Foundation, conducted a Field Workshop at Gurudwara Sahib, Banawala Village, Mansa, Punjab.

This workshop marked the inauguration of the initiative under the Crop Residue Management Program, aimed at combating stubble burning by adopting a cluster of 50 villages, impacting 8,281 farmers across 67,195 acres of farmland.

The event was graced by Mr. Vishal from JSW Foundation, Mr. Chandrakant Pradhan, Programme Lead, Climate Resilience, CII Foundation, along with farmer cooperative society members and other stakeholders.

With 150 farmers in attendance, the workshop provided a platform for farmers to share their experiences and highlight the need for in-situ machinery to support marginal farmers. Mr. Resham Singh, Sarpanch of Banawala Village, concluded the session by appreciating the joint efforts of CII Foundation and JSW Foundation in driving sustainable change.



FIELD VISITS AND MEETINGS

As part of the ongoing efforts, a team from PTC India Financial Services Limited (PFS) visited multiple project villages to assess the impact of interventions, interact with farmers, and evaluate sustainable farming practices.

On the first day of the visit, Mr. Sitesh Sinha, Senior Vice President, PFS, engaged with farmers in Sanghol MPCs village (3534 acres; 325 farmers), where an impressive 98% non-burning rate had been achieved. The farmers' dedication to adopting sustainable practices was recognized through appreciation awards, and a live demonstration of Super Seeder and Smart Seeder technologies showcased their effectiveness in eliminating the need for stubble burning. Later in the day, the team travelled to Kotla Masood village, where farmers who had also maintained a 98% non-burning rate were acknowledged for their commitment to eco-friendly farming practices.

On the second day of the visit in Barwali Khurd and Bhari villages, Mr. Anil Singh, Mr. Deepak Kumar, Mr. Sunil Pokhriyal, and Mr. Rajveer Kumar from PFS met with farmers and local stakeholders. Barwali Khurd village (993 acres; 88 farmers), achieved a 95% non-burning rate. The team also visited a tool bank to ensure that necessary equipment was readily available. Later, at Bhari Cooperative Society, (2128 acres; 235 farmers) farmers who had successfully achieved a 98% non-burning rate were honoured for their efforts, reinforcing the project's impact on promoting sustainable agricultural practices.





Review Meeting by PTC India Financial Services Limited (PFS) Team

A review meeting was conducted to assess the effectiveness of machinery support and the overall implementation of non-burning practices. Farmers shared their insights on the operational efficiency of Super Seeders and Mulchers, discussing both benefits and challenges encountered in the field. Key topics included availability of machinery, post-harvest technical issues, and strategies to enhance community tool banks. Farmers appreciated the technical support and continuous engagement offered through the initiative, while also requesting improvements in repair and maintenance services for the machinery.



Farmer Meetings by HDFC Bank

Farmer meetings were organised at the society level to discuss post-sowing management and review the performance of in-situ machinery used for wheat sowing. The meetings were conducted in Village Bhunderwas, Village Burj, and Village Phull in Ratia, Fatehabad. These interactive sessions provided farmers with a platform to share their experiences, address challenges, and explore best practices for sustainable farming. Through these engagements, the initiative continues to empower farmers with knowledge and resources to promote sustainable agricultural practices.

Farmers' Appreciation Event with Apraava Energy

On 31 March, an appreciation event for farmers was held in Rania, Sirsa, Haryana, under the Crop Residue Management Initiative by CII Foundation and Apraava



Energy. The event recognized the dedication of farmers in adopting sustainable practices to curb stubble burning.

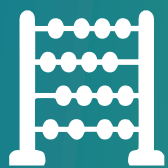
The event was graced by Chief Guests Sh. Shubham Sharma, Tehsildar of Rania; Sh. Ankur Garg, SDO of Panchayati Raj and Dr. Sukhdev Kamboj, Deputy Director of Agriculture (DDA) of Sirsa. Notable attendees from CII included Sh. Prashant A. N, Regional Director, CII Northern Region and Mr. Chandrakant Pradhan, Programme Lead, Climate Resilience, CII Foundation. Around 650 farmers participated in the event.

A vibrant cultural performance by students of Aarohi Model Senior Secondary School, Mohmmadpuria, added to the celebration. As a token of appreciation, 350 farmers from adopted villages were honoured with certificates, mementoes, and 50 kg of compost made from paddy stubble, showcasing the project's impact in promoting circular economy solutions.

HDFC STAFF VOLUNTEERING FOR KISAN DIWAS

Marking Kisan Diwas, staff members from HDFC Bank gathered in Cheema village, Jagraon block, Ludhiana, to actively participate in community-led activities. Around 37 HDFC Bank employees and their families engaged in awareness rallies, nukkad nataks (street plays), painting competitions, field demonstrations of machinery, interactive games, and a community lunch. The event strengthened the connection between stakeholders and the farming community, reinforcing the shared commitment to sustainable agricultural practices.





EDUCATION

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Access to quality early childhood education (ECE) along with proper nutrition plays a vital role in shaping a child's cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing. Recognizing this need, the CII Foundation has been working towards enhancing the quality of early childhood education in India by supporting Anganwadi Centres—key institutions that provide education and nutrition to pre-school children.

Through a collaborative approach involving government, industry and local NGOs, the Foundation is helping transform Anganwadi Centres into

stimulating learning environments. Many of these centres face infrastructure and resource constraints, limiting their ability to deliver effective education. The program addresses these gaps by equipping them with better facilities, relevant teaching aids, and enhanced learning methodologies.

Currently, the Anganwadi Strengthening Program is being implemented in Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, creating meaningful impact in communities by improving access to structured and engaging early learning experiences.

Key Components of the Program

Infrastructure Support to Develop Model Anganwadi Centres

Developing Age and Culturally Appropriate Curriculum

Promoting the use of Teaching Learning Material (TLM)

Capacity Building of Anganwadi Workers

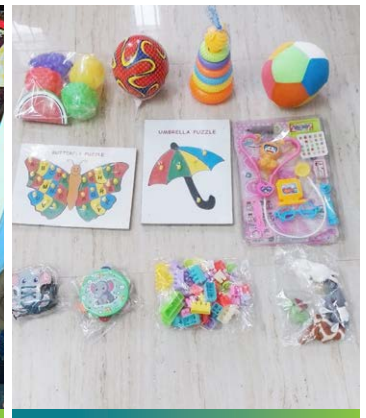
Involving and Engaging the Community

ANGANWADI STRENGTHENING PROGRAM, ANDHRA PRADESH

The CII Foundation, in partnership with BlueStar Limited, continues its efforts to transform the Anganwadi Centres in Andhra Pradesh, enhancing the quality of early childhood education and care (ECCE) provided through these centres.

In January, Teaching Learning Material (TLM) was distributed at an event further support the Anganwadi workers (AWWs) in initiating the play-way technique of teaching.

The event was graced by Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) officials, including Ms. Sharada, Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), Sullurupeta, supervisors, and Anganwadi Workers, along with the BlueStar team led by Mr. Stalin and Ms. Deepti, Mr. Chinna Huseni from CII Foundation, as well as local leaders and community members.



ANGANWADI STRENGTHENING PROGRAM, KARNATAKA

During the January to March quarter, the CII Foundation, in collaboration with Volvo Group Trust, continued its efforts to upgrade and renovate Anganwadi Centres in Chamarajanagar, Karnataka. This included water proofing services, roof patch works, fixing kitchens and water and electricity connections. Using the Building as a Learning Aid (BaLA) concept, interactive wall art and visual learning tools have been integrated into the physical infrastructure, making the learning process more engaging for children.

These centres have now been redesigned to create engaging and child-friendly learning environments, ensuring a strong foundation for early education.

Alongside infrastructure improvements, the initiative encourages active participation from the local community, bringing together various stakeholders to take ownership of the efficient delivery of ICDS services. By strengthening these early education centres, the program is enabling school-readiness of children in the region.





WASTE MANAGEMENT

With rapid urbanization and rising population densities, India's urban waste management challenges are becoming increasingly complex. In many areas, especially within dense urban clusters, existing waste collection and disposal systems struggle to keep pace, leading to environmental degradation and health concerns. Recognizing the challenges, CII Foundation has been working towards sustainable waste management solutions with ongoing projects in Farrukhnagar (Haryana), Leh (Ladakh), and Kochi (Kerala).

The initiative focuses on raising awareness by conducting cleanliness drives, engaging with school children, promoting waste segregation and recycling,

building capacity of waste workers as well as strengthening infrastructure.

Till now, three solid resource management centres have been set up in Chuchot and Kharu Block, Leh and Kerala to strengthen the waste management infrastructure in these regions. At two Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) set up under the project, waste is now systematically collected, sorted, shredded, and baled daily, ensuring more effective recycling and waste reduction. By combining awareness initiatives with infrastructure improvements, the project is contributing to cleaner, healthier communities and promoting long-term sustainability in waste management practices.

Key Components of the Program

**Creating
Awareness and
Catalysing Civic
Engagement**

**Strengthening
Waste
Management
Infrastructure**

**Building Skills of
Waste Workers
and Enhancing
their Safety**

WASTE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE IN LEH, LADAKH



As part of the Focused Rural Development Program (FRDP) project with HDFC Bank, aimed at strengthening waste management across 25 villages in Leh, Ladakh, a two-day training workshop was conducted for semi-skilled and unskilled workers employed at MRFs. This initiative focused on enhancing their skills, improving waste segregation practices, and promoting efficient resource recovery.

The training sessions, held at the MRF Centre in Chuchot, were led by Dr. Shafia Wani, a sanitation changemaker from Institute of Management, Public Administration & Rural Development (IMPARD) Kashmir, and facilitated by CII Foundation Team members Thinley Norbu, Namgail Angmo, Tsering Angdu, and Tsetan Dolker.

The first day of training focused on understanding the role of sanitation workers, different types of waste, and the process of converting waste into a resource. The sessions, conducted through audio-visual presentations, documentaries, and discussions, provided insights into waste handling techniques and the importance of segregation to maintain raw materials for industries engaged in recycling.

The team played a crucial role in translating the sessions into Ladakhi and engaging participants through interactive activities, including alertness

testing games and physical movement exercises, ensuring better engagement and retention of key learnings.

The second day of the workshop delved deeper into the technical and economic aspects of waste management. The session began with a presentation on the importance of using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits, emphasizing worker safety as a priority before engaging in waste segregation.

The discussions then moved on to the long-term benefits of waste segregation, detailing the journey of plastic bottles after being baled and the economic value of properly sorted waste when processed at scale. Participants gained a deeper understanding of how segregated waste can contribute to a revenue-generating model, sustaining waste management efforts in the long run.

A total of two supervisors, 15 waste workers, and two drivers from the Kharu and Chuchot Solid Resource Management Centre (SRMC) units participated in these sessions.

As the session concluded, participants shared their feedback and concerns: mixed waste from households, challenges in disposing of glass and sanitary napkin waste, and the need for additional economic opportunities. The discussions provided valuable insights for future program enhancements.

By equipping waste workers with essential skills and knowledge, the project is paving the way for a more efficient, sustainable, and community-driven waste management system in the region.



Clean-up Drive in Shashi Zampa, Leh

On 23 March, a clean-up drive was held at Shashi Zampa, Chushod Shamma, Leh.

The event saw over 20 enthusiastic participants including residents, students, airport employees and environmental activists who come together to clean the public space, remove waste, and spread awareness about responsible waste management.

Together, the team cleared 2.2 tonnes of inorganic waste, comprising 15 sacks of diapers, sanitary pads, glass, and clothes.

CII Foundation has identified more waste hotspots for future clean-ups.



Before



After



CHELODE CHELLANAM WASTE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE IN KOCHI, KERALA



As part of the 'Chelode Chellanam' waste management initiative in Kerala, implemented by CII Foundation in partnership with General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC Re), on 27 February Ernakulam District Collector N. S. K. Umesh inaugurated a new Material Recovery Facility (MRF). The MRF facility will aggregate, sort, grade, and process plastic waste collected from households and market areas before it is sent to plastic recyclers. Significantly, the MRF will be operated by members of the Haritha Karma Sena, a women-led self-help group.

The event was attended by key dignitaries including Mr. Vinod Manjila, Chairman, CII Kerala State Council; Mr. K.J. Maxi, MLA, Mr. K.L. Joseph, President, Chellanam Grama Panchayat, Mr. Aju Jacob, Former Chairman, CII Kerala State Council & Managing Director, Synthite



Industries; Mr. Sunil Misra, CEO, CII Foundation; Ms. Mary Simla, Vice-President, Chellanam Grama Panchayat; Mr. Baby Thampi, President, Block Panchayat; Ms. Ranjini S., District Coordinator, Haritha Kerala Mission; Simal Antony, Chairman, Health Standing Committee; Sreelatha, Secretary, Chellanam Grama Panchayat, and Mr. Zakariya Joy, Co-convenor, CII Clean Kerala and Waste Management Panel.

During the event, District Collector N. S. K. Umesh emphasized the significant role of CII Foundation in addressing Chellanam's waste management challenges through a long-term solution. CII Kerala Chairman, Mr. Vinod Manjila, highlighted the impact of the new MRF in improving waste segregation and processing, as well as the efficiency of the e-cart service, which has significantly enhanced waste collection.

The 'Chelode Chellanam' initiative has successfully curbed the indiscriminate dumping and burning of waste in open spaces, fostering responsible waste management practices. Out of 8,500 households, 7,800 households are currently participating in daily waste collection, and 450 households have adopted bio-bins, showcasing strong community acceptance of the project and reflecting a shift towards sustainable waste disposal practices.

The initiative has also empowered the Haritha Karma Sena, ensuring financial stability and medical support

for the workers. Their annual income has increased and the project has also ensured enhanced operational efficiency and medical support for sanitation workers' health and safety.

In a first-for-the region under the project, a Green Run for Chellanam was organised to boost awareness and inspire community participation in waste management. The 5-kilometre run saw participation from over 160 individuals, including members of the Haritha Karma Sena, Residents' Associations, and school children from the Chellanam Panchayat.



GLIMPSES OF MEDIA COVERAGE



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

WOMAN EXEMPLAR PROGRAM

This year's theme for International Women's Day—"For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment."—emphasizes the urgent need to secure equal rights, opportunities, and power for women and girls in shaping a more just and equitable future. Across India, countless grassroots women leaders are driving social change within their communities. Despite their significant contributions, their work often goes unrecognized.

To recognise grassroots women leaders for their significant contribution to social change, CII launched the Woman Exemplar Awards in 2005.

The initiative was integrated into the CII Foundation in 2011 and expanded in 2017 into the CII Foundation Woman Exemplar Program (WEP), evolving into a comprehensive women's empowerment initiative. The program serves as a catalyst for social transformation, by identifying, recognising and empowering grassroots women leaders for their work in Health, Education and Micro-enterprise.

Key Components of the Program



Scan the Ecosystem for Exemplars



Award and Recognize Women Leaders



Amplify the Impact of Work Through Leadership Trainings & Mentoring



On Ground Interventions to Create New Leaders



Broaden and Strengthen the Network

In 2025, a new category-Community Strengthening- to recognize women leaders who are transforming communities by addressing social protection, rights, and security for women and children was introduced under the Program.

These change makers focus on:

- Ensuring basic rights like land ownership, legal protection, and human rights awareness.
- Tackling gender-based violence and shifting harmful social norms.
- Rescuing and rehabilitating women and children at risk of trafficking, violence, or extreme abuse.
- Strengthening community infrastructure (roads, healthcare, schools, etc.) to improve overall quality of life.
- Enhancing environmental and disaster resilience for vulnerable populations.

IDENTIFYFYING THE EXEMPLARS

In August 2024, a Call for Nominations was made for the Woman Exemplar Award 2025. Over 400 nominations were received, underscoring the

increasing recognition of grassroots women's leadership. The rigorous selection process involved multiple evaluation stages, including in-depth form reviews and telephonic interviews, ensuring that the most deserving candidates advanced.

During January-March 2025, the program entered a crucial phase—due diligence visits. This step is essential for gaining firsthand insights into the work of these exceptional women and assessing the impact they have on their communities. Over a month, the CII Foundation team travelled extensively, using various modes of transport to visit all 20 nominees across 12 states of the country. These on-site visits provided an opportunity for direct engagement, allowing the team to witness the transformative change driven by these women leaders.

The insights gathered during these visits will play a key role in the final selection process, ensuring that the most impactful leaders receive the recognition they deserve. The winners will be announced and honoured at the CII Annual General Meeting in the upcoming quarter.

CII FOUNDATION WOMAN EXEMPLAR COHORT 2025



Community Resilience

Alamelu V
Anisfatima Jafar Shaikh
Anita Soni
Khushi Rajput
Monica Pekra
Parveennisa Shaikh



Education

Pooja Dixit
Priyanka
Reena Shakya
Varsha Patil



Health

Annapurana Dhure
Bulti Dey
Farheen Hussain
Lalki Mina
Payal Kakate



Micro-enterprise

Goutami Arika
Kashavva Dasharath Kurne
Narmada Jha
Revati Shivaji Kangule
Vimla Kharakwal

CELEBRATING THE POWER OF WOMEN ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

This year, International Women's Day resonated globally with the theme "For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment."

Through a special social media post, we showcased the milestones achieved by our Woman Exemplar program and the State-level program, Empowering Champions of Change in Assam.



EMPOWERING CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE, ASSAM

As part of the Empowering Champions of Change program in Assam, supported by Apraava Energy and implemented in partnership with Seven Sisters Development Assistance (SeSTA), our 15 grassroots women leaders participated in a three-day immersive learning experience from 4-6 January.

On 4 January, the women leaders visited Namoni Majuli Block, Kortipara Gram Panchayat, Assam. Guided by the dedicated Pragati Sakhis, our leaders explored various livelihood activities such as piggery, goat rearing, and the cultivation of garlic, mustard, and black gram. A traditional lunch at a Self-Help Group member's home added a personal touch, strengthening their bond with the local community.

The day concluded with an exchange of ideas and experiences between the visiting leaders and SeSTA Majuli staff, inspiring shared learning and action for community empowerment.

They continued their enriching learning journey in Ujani Majuli Block, covering the Phuloni and Jengraimukh areas on 5 and 6 January. The leaders

engaged with Pragati, Pokhu, Krishi, and Techno Sakhis to deepen their understanding of digital literacy and livelihood interventions. A highlight of their journey was the interaction with women entrepreneurs who have successfully built enterprises—from poultry farming to Common Service Centers (CSCs)—demonstrating the power of financial autonomy. These discussions reinforced the importance of business planning, resource management, and resilience in overcoming challenges.

A visit to the centralized kitchen of Akshaya Patra, a facility of Apraava Energy, offered the women leaders a valuable learning opportunity on large-scale food preparation and distribution methods. They gained firsthand insights into food quality maintenance procedures, hygiene standards, and the logistics of serving nutritious meals to school students.

These three days of transformative learning and interaction strengthened the women leaders' resolve to drive meaningful change in their communities.



REFLECTING ON A YEAR OF GROWTH AND LEADERSHIP

Over the last year, we have witnessed incredible growth, resilience, and leadership from the 15 inspiring women leaders of our 'Empowering Champions of Change, Assam' Project.

On March 26-27, we held the final closure training, bringing together reflections, future roadmaps, and engaging activities.

The two-day session focused on building a sustainable roadmap, where women leaders outlined their future plans, identified key challenges, and explored opportunities for collaboration. Each leader shared her experiences through stories, poems, and paintings, capturing the impact of this initiative in the most heartfelt way. The event was also filled with fun activities like musical chairs and tug of war.

The journey concluded with a meaningful visit to Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, where the women gained insights into biodiversity conservation and the role of local communities in protecting endangered species. They also explored rural trade and traditional crafts in nearby villages and markets, broadening their understanding of alternative income-generation opportunities.

A Cultural Night marked the farewell, where music, dance, and storytelling celebrated their achievements, cultural heritage, and future aspirations.

As the program came to a close, tokens of appreciation were presented, celebrating the dedication and hard work of these inspiring women. Each leader leaves with renewed purpose and a commitment to carrying forward the values they have embraced.



LAUNCH OF 'HER SKILL, HER FUTURE' INITIATIVE

The CII Foundation, in collaboration with The Loomba Foundation and the Women's Collective Forum, officially launched the 'Her Skill, Her Future' initiative on 10 January, in New Delhi. This initiative aims to support 1,00,000 widows by equipping them with the necessary skills, resources, and opportunities to establish sustainable livelihoods and achieve financial independence.

Present at the occasion were Ms. Cherie Blair, CBE, KC, Founder of the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women; Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani, Vice President of The Loomba Foundation; Lord Raj Loomba,

Founder and Chairman Trustee of The Loomba Foundation; and Mr. Sunil Kant Munjal, Past President, CII, Chairman, Hero Enterprise, and Co-Chairman, Leadership Pipeline Initiative, among others.

The program's launch was marked by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the CII Foundation and The Loomba Foundation, symbolizing a shared commitment to creating impactful, sustainable change.

Together, we are forging a path toward a future of dignity, opportunity, and empowerment for all women.



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For feedback and suggestions please contact Priya Shirali, Head - Communication at Priya.Shirali@cii.in

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