

PRESS RELEASE

Nari Shakti: Winners of the CII Foundation Woman Exemplar Award 2023

24 May 2023, New Delhi: The CII Foundation announced the Woman Exemplar Award 2023 winners at the CII Annual Session held in New Delhi today. The Award, given in the categories of Health, Education and Micro-enterprise recognizes grassroots women leaders from rural and resource-poor backgrounds who are driving social change in their communities. The Award was presented by Smt Smriti Irani, Minister for Women and Child Development and Minority Affairs at a ceremony attended by senior leaders from the Government, Indian Industry, social development sector, and media.

The Awards were given to Pushpa Shukla from Raipur, Chhattisgarh in the Education category, Zohmangaihi from Aizawl, Mizoram in the Health category and Archana Gokul Mane from Osmanabad, Maharashtra in the Micro-enterprise category. Each winner received a trophy, a certificate, and a cash award of Rs 3 lakh.

Over 400 nominations were received for this award and after a multi-level selection process, 17 finalists were identified. In the Education category, the finalists were Bhawani Kanwar from Rajasthan, Meena Rani from Haryana, Pushpa Shukla from Chhattisgarh, Rekha Devi from Uttar Pradesh and Swati Sawant from Maharashtra; in the Health category, the finalists were Jaspreet Kaur from Punjab, P Anna Vilasini from Telangana, Razia Nasreen from West Bengal, Sapna Verma from Uttar Pradesh, Sunita Chauhan from Madhya Pradesh and Zohmangaihi from Mizoram and in the Micro Enterprise category, the finalists were Archana Gokul Mane from Maharashtra, Bishnupriya Swain from Odisha, Laxmi Rani from Rajasthan, Poonam Paul from Himachal Pradesh, Rita Devi from Bihar and Sonali More from Maharashtra. The 3 winners were selected by an eminent jury drawn from Indian industry, civil society, media, and the social development sector.

Pushpa Shukla from Raipur, Chhattisgarh, the winner in the Education Category grew up with a restrictive father. That, and other systemic challenges prevented her from becoming a doctor but she educated herself and was determined to provide equal opportunity to every tribal child, creating online tools and resources that benefited more than 10,000 students, 200 school headmasters, and over 1,600 assistant teachers. Her work in

"I want to help children who lack academic support at home. I use innovative student-centric techniques such as puppets to create a more interactive learning experience which will enable the children to learn and live in society with dignity and respect."

Pushpa Shukla

improving the foundational literacy levels of children has brought about a change in the Basic Education System of the state, benefiting close to 7.5 lakh beneficiaries directly and indirectly.

Zohmangaihi from Aizawl, Mizoram, winner in the Health Category battled depression and suicidal thoughts after being diagnosed with HIV. She found a new life with counselling and ART therapy. Widowed at a tender age

“I want to reduce stigma and discrimination and want to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV.”

Zohmangaihi

with an infant and a malignant disease, Zoh was ostracized from society because of revealing her HIV status. She resolved to help women like her – As a counsellor, community mobilizer and influencer, Zoh has transformed the lives of over 19000 HIV+ patients in the region. Her tireless work has brought medical care, counselling, and a newfound sense of dignity to thousands of people living with HIV (PLHIV) in the region.

Archana Gokul Mane from Osmanabad, Maharashtra, the winner in the Micro-enterprise category was forced to beg for money cementing her resolve to support her family and children. She bartered the clothes she stitched, for food. Deeply affected by the farmer suicides in the region,

“Today women sell their own farm produce and are taking their own decisions. I want to continue to make women financially independent.”

Archana Gokul Mane

she overcame poverty and hardship to become a trailblazer in empowering women and promoting sustainable farming practices. Training over 1.14L women farmers and securing over ₹37 lakhs as an interest-free loan she has formed a production company that ensures fair prices for their organic produce.

Smt. Smriti Irani emphasized the significance of celebrating the indomitable human spirit to triumph over sorrow, adversity, and obstacles, she said, “CII Foundation Woman Exemplar Awards highlight the need to do much more to inspire women at the grassroots level to bring about social change. Between the Government and Industry, let us resolve to build a society that is empathetic to the needs of the women”.

During the event, the Woman Exemplars sought Smt. Smriti Irani’s support in furthering their initiatives, which the Minister assured them of.

The 17 women comprising the 2023 cohort now becomes part of a nationwide network of more than 100 Woman Exemplars. These women are at the forefront of driving transformative social

change at the grassroots level, making a tangible difference in the lives of 2 million people every year.
