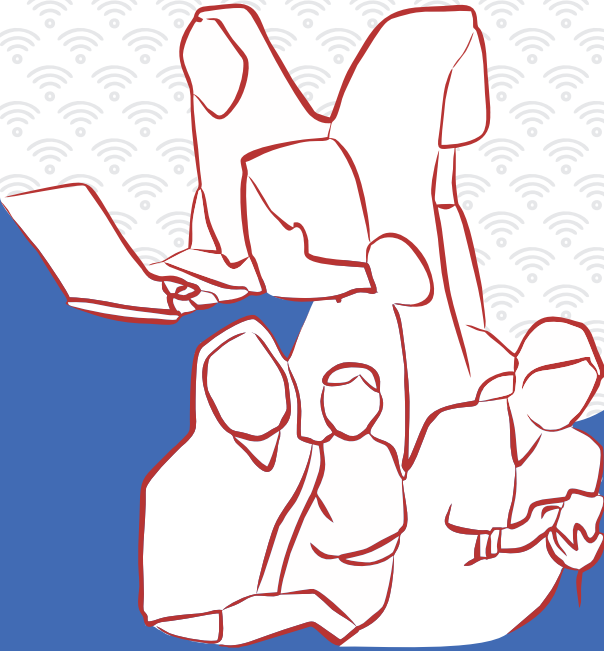


#DEF20Years



# Women Empowering Women

Stories of women leadership and  
local entrepreneurship





# Women Empowering Women

Stories of women leadership and  
local entrepreneurship integrating  
socio- behavioral attributes into  
digital adaption.

*by Disha*

## Women Empowering Women

Year of Publication: **2023**

Written By: **Disha**

Edited By: **Malavika**

Design by: **Sandipa Mudi**



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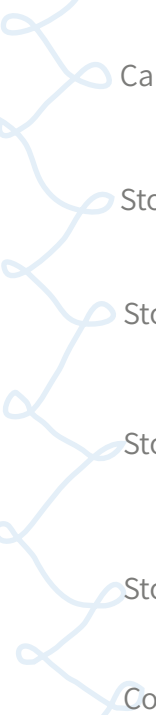
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## *Author's note*

“In order to understand the women’s perspectives, I initiated detailed conversations with them and was inspired by what they had to say. We talked about their struggles, support systems, what they did for a living and what restricted them from following their passion and dreams. There was so much to their stories that mere words cannot put it all together. While documenting their journeys, I tried bringing their emotions to the table along with their process of learning about the knowledge of digital literacy.”



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# Introduction

The core of the *Digital Empowerment Foundation's* initiatives revolve around providing access to needs, opportunities and social changes. By reaching out to those at the edge of information, the Foundation has filled in the gaps of digital exclusion at various fronts by recognising key role players and change makers from all classes of society over 21 years. Training women entrepreneurs from rural areas on various apps that enables them sensitize their business has ensured that digital skills are keyed into the entrepreneurial skills that the rural women inherently possess owing to their multi-tasking abilities and social identities. The outcome has not just been reflected in the thriving enterprises that these women have been nurturing, but also in the changes observed among the localities in terms of the social stigmas and patriarchy that still prevails in most rural parts of India.

'*Women Empowering Women*' documents the journey of several women who've fought against struggles and built their own enterprise from scratch. Their process of personal and social change along with gaining power and control over their life's choices, is what makes their stories of empowerment worth giving a read. Digital empowerment for these women was like a multi-dimensional process which enabled them to unlock their true potential and identities. They developed businesses and were financially independent, which for them was a turning point in life. *Digital Empowerment Foundation* has helped them provide a platform for achieving functional digital literacy and is extremely delighted to see their growth as important individuals in society. On the basis of patriarchal views, women have suffered, but now they have the opportunity to succeed in all spheres of life and this is a testimony of such transformations.



# DIGITAL SARTHAK



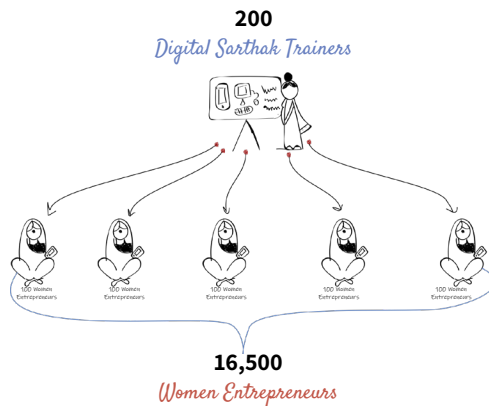
# DIGITAL SARTHAK

## *Canvas of Stories*

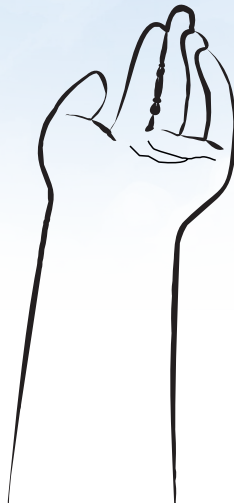
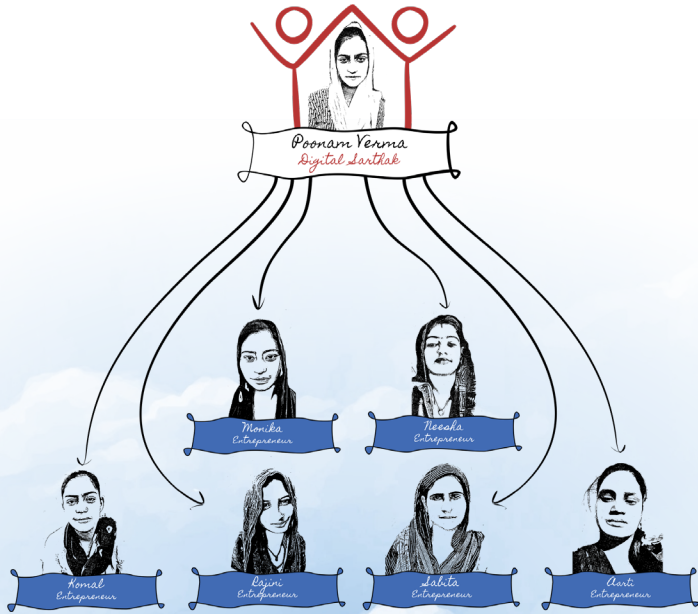
Sarthak in Hindi is meaningful, capable, important. Digital Sarthak means a person who is equipped with the digital know how and is an important and meaningful person who provide all kind of digital solutions for the people. Digital Sarthak is a national digital entrepreneurship and empowerment programme of Digital Empowerment Foundation supported by USAID and DAI. It is built on the well spread and awarded program called “Soochnapreneur” which is spread across 2000 location across India. The main objective of the project is to increase the digital capacity of the Women entrepreneurs and community development organisations in marginalised/ and underserved regions in India by providing them with digital up-skilling support and strengthening their ability to engage on digital and ICT policy issues.

The project will strengthen and build their organisation and management capacities in social and economic activities, services, transactions, trade and commerce with basic and value-added digital skills and training towards better access, use and benefit from digital resources and opportunities.

There are 200 Digital Sarthaks across 25 districts 13 states who have taken the responsibility of training Women Entrepreneurs in digital tools. Each has taken the responsibility of training 100 women



# Limitless Skies



*“I am just another ‘traditional woman’ with dreams as big as the state’s forts!”*



From looking at my intentions of grabbing every opportunity that comes my way, flying higher each time, in the rural locality I come from, many people think I am out of place. In the midst of this village in Rajasthan, I am just another ‘traditional woman’ with dreams as big as the state’s forts! I completed my graduation in the field of education which has always piqued my interest. After a successful endeavour, I decided to never stop. Hence, while I was searching for prospective jobs, one of my relatives approached me and told me about DEF. I didn’t give a second thought to the opportunity and immediately registered. A few days later, I was given a structured training on digital literacy, marketing, banking, etc. using a smartphone. My role as a DEF trainer was to educate other women of Bharatpur about the benefits of those mobile phones which they already had.



Name: **Poonam Verma**  
Designation: **Mentor, Entrepreneur**  
District: **Bharatpur**  
State: **Rajasthan**

In expressing this idea of educating fellow women and spreading awareness about the digital tools, my energy and intensity are at their peak. Initially, I went door-to-door, convincing women about why DEF campaigns were beneficial for them and how they could transform their lives. At first it was difficult, but gradually women became interested and started approaching me. I remember them saying, “Ma’am, we want to learn!”. That was the first time someone addressed me as ‘ma’am’. I started believing then that such a level of engagement was necessary to instil a very simple but profound quality: the quality of positive encouragement. Today, the women I work with, are not the ‘conventional women’ society thinks they are. Instead, they are women entrepreneurs who use YouTube to teach themselves sewing and sell their products for money. They are entrepreneurs who stand up for themselves and are equally motivated to pass this knowledge to their future generations. Most importantly, they are independent women entrepreneurs who very well juggle the responsibilities of being a mother, a wife, a daughter, a student and a businesswoman.

If it were not for DEF, I might have had a good or a bad career, I am not sure. But with DEF, I have had the chance to open multitude doors of opportunities and I cherish every single one of them. I am proud to have made such a considerate choice. But, out of all this, what matters the most to me is the fact that when I look back, I see this shy, timid Poonam and on the other hand, today, I see a confident and diligent trainer within me. This makes me proud and motivates me to achieve several other milestones in life because I like soaring the skies.



*“I like soaring the skies.”*

*"In a patriarchal society that we live in, the change that I was bringing was generally not accepted"*



I feel like I have been a mild mannered person as far as my memory can recall. I have generally helped along with everything and kept myself quiet on topics that did not concern me. I have had a hobby of sewing since I was young. This hobby has had a calming effect on me, often taking me away to a space of stillness. DEF has now made me realise that I could sew away much more creatively and freely while using it as an opportunity to change my world. DEF educated me to create a business opportunity for myself by earning money doing what I love and not 'just' being a housewife who pursues her hobby of sewing.



Name: **Monika**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Bharatpur**

State: **Rajasthan**

Having a sound mind and a clear conscience has always helped me prevail in all the endeavours that I have taken so far. I have had a clear vision of what my business would look like every step of the way and while thinking about each and every decision of mine. When I started this business there was a lot of backlash from the people that I knew who said that I should not pursue this. In a patriarchal society that we live in, the change that I was bringing was generally not accepted, not even by other women from my village.

Nevertheless I pressed on to set forth an example of what a woman can do when she sets her mind on anything that she wants to. I want to lead by example and teach them that they are just as good at doing things that men can do.

I remember some people speaking to me in a harsh tone and demeaning me, privately as well as publicly, probably to break my spirit. Some people even said I was not right in the head. But I have now proved myself over and over again and slowly those voices are heard no more. I have strived and succeeded in building a life that was completely for myself and no else.

I wouldn't want to change people's mind set as it seems like a very tedious job to accomplish. Not to mention it would take up a heavy part of my resources as well as my time which I have found to be invaluable. Instead I can change myself and choose to ignore the mockery that is flung towards women, who want to grow. I won't be affected by their actions as I know that they will cease soon enough. All I want to do now is look ahead at the bright sky patiently awaiting me to fly.



*"All I want to do now is look ahead at the bright sky patiently awaiting me to fly."*

*“I have a place as a individual in this society.”*



I was a mother, a housewife and someone who was trying to achieve more than what was expected of me. DEF gave me the opportunity to fill that hunger to do more than just be a wife. Now I'm an entrepreneur and confidently juggling it with living a happy and satisfied life. Some people would say that they would get tired but not me because it is my passion. This is something that I chose for myself, which excites me more than it tires me.

Willingness to do anything is the first thing that a woman should start from. People are riddled with the mentality that a woman should stay at home, look after the kids, look after the husband and the family and keep the house clean. These stereotypes are what we have to break to achieve something more valuable in life. I am a mother and I never thought that the duties I have as a mother and the duties I have as a wife have hindered any of my ventures and I am confident in saying that they never will. I think that if one feels burdened, one must set to become stronger, faster and efficient to achieve what they have set out for.



Name: **Neesha**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Bharatpur**  
State: **Rajasthan**

I strive to create a personality not only for my peace of mind but to also show that I have a place as an individual in this society. I don't get identified with my husband as I have my own identity. Most people refer to a woman as the wife of the husband that they are married to. I want people to know me by my business as well as my achievements.

Life is one big challenge with a lot of small components working together to form every detail that makes it liveable. Getting tired, putting your hands up and surrendering to these challenges is not going to change anything. Not now or even for the future generation to come. That is the way in which life works. The principle of survival of the fittest is at play each time with life giving you every opportunity to better yourself. Each scar that you take home today makes you a stronger person tomorrow.

It does not take much thinking after you plan your actions out thoroughly. All you need to do is constantly strive to reach your goals and work hard until you can sit down and take a breath of satisfaction at your work. You have to believe in yourself.”

*“You have to believe in yourself.”*



*“Self-confidence, to me, is one of the pillars that support a healthy and successful life.”*



“From knowing pretty much nothing about anything and having a lacklustre life to being a self-empowered working woman, my life has been full of exhilaration that I strive to get more of every single day now. I had a monotonous, boring life doing nothing but being a housewife. Nobody expected anything more of me. My family and friends were never able to see the big picture, it’s not that I didn’t try to make them understand, I did. But they were stuck amidst the darkness of that tunnel of narrow mindedness that the society had built for them and could not see the light at the end of that tunnel. Tired of being subpar, I decided to just go for it. I crossed the tunnel, by joining DEF. The plethora of knowledge I received from the program gave me a personality of my own.

Name: **Komal**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Bharatpur**  
State: **Rajasthan**

I learnt the skill of sewing on the mechanical sewing machine system. Having DEF’s support at every step provided me with the information and the process of what product to make, how to make and the current market demand. With this knowledge came the self-confidence that I had been looking for before. Self-

confidence, to me, is one of the pillars that support a healthy and successful life.

Self-confidence teaches a woman that she can learn and do anything that she sets her mind on and overcomes any and every hardship that she faces. She can learn to resist the market changes and keep a level head to make her business blossom to a competitive level and beyond. A woman can break the norms set on to her by society with the help of self-confidence. Throughout this journey and by what I have learnt and seen, I personally believe that the inner strength that a woman possesses can push her to face any adversity that may come her way and sail through the waves of hardship, struggles with the society, fights within her own house and above all the fight with herself with a positive attitude.

A woman can choose a life that she wants to live as well as keep an open mind on the choices she makes for the sake of her own self-made enterprise.

I believe that every woman needs to strive hard to gain confidence and momentum in doing what she aspires to. She will make herself more confident this way, and will also then possess the power to go against the norms of the society, speak for herself thereby making her presence known to the world.”



*“A woman can choose a life that she wants to live as well as keep an open mind on the choices she makes for the sake of her own self-made enterprise.”*

*"The biggest battle that a woman fights is with time."*



"I had a smartphone for quite a while and I didn't know how to use it. The only thing that I was taught by my friends and family was how to call when my husband was late getting back home from work, reply to messages from my family and send some basic messages such as yes, no, thank you, happy birthday, etc. I only thought it was for these two things until I joined DEF where I was taught how to use my phone in a better way than to simply text or call and use it as one of the greatest assets that one could ever ask for. It's a powerful tool.

I set my personal goals for business on my phone along with communicating with my fellow companions in this venture. The one thing that I have found to be the most important while setting up your business is to have a clear goal of what you want to achieve, a clear idea of how you want to achieve it and the means required to achieve it. With everything that I did, I still continued to prioritise my family's responsibilities. I feel when one has a clear goal

of what they want to accomplish, they work harder to achieve it. Women are goal oriented which is the reason why they work harder and are perfectly capable of making a business succeed.

The biggest battle that a woman fights is with time. After fulfilling the duties of the household, I would have very little time to spend on myself and the work that I am inspired to do. To get over this I have made it a point to prioritise each and every one of my activities according to the time I have at hand. My priorities change according to the time I have to complete them along with my willingness to do it .

I made a new priority list recently. I make a priority list at regular intervals of time. This time while making the list, I made it a point to keep myself on the top of the list and no one else. This is my new way of showing that I have completely devoted myself to my work. I think this reflects upon my personality, enjoying what I am doing right now. I have recently started to feel free, without limits as well as acknowledged and accepted by my fellow friends and family. I finally feel at ease with my place in society."



Name: **Rajini**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Bharatpur**

State: **Rajasthan**

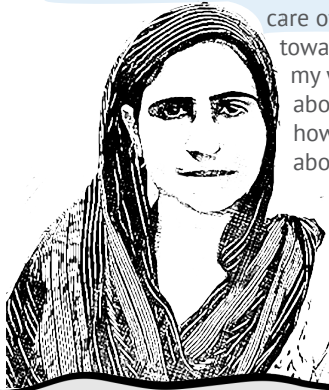


*"I had a smartphone for quite a while and I didn't know how to use it."*

*“Soon I began my research online.”*



“Learning and feeding myself with knowledge has always been something I have loved to do. But my education was short lived because I had to take up my family’s responsibilities at a very young age which meant I had to marry and take



care of the household. But I never wanted to stop this road towards learning so whatever piece of information came my way I made sure to look it up in detail and be aware about other such current affairs. Some of my friends knew how much I loved to learn which is why they told me about DEF. Soon my current mentor approached me and requested me to be a part of that learning initiative. I said yes, because I thought why not?

I didn’t take much time to learn the basics, and all I wanted to do was gain as much knowledge as possible. But one day my mentor introduced me to the most fascinating thing ever - Google.

Google was the powerhouse of knowledge and everything that the human brain could think of was readily available on Google. But before we actually delved into learning more about it, my mentor told me that anything and everything available on the internet had its benefits

and disadvantages, and that we must always be consciously aware of these disadvantages that come our way. That I think was one of the most important pieces of advice that someone had given to me and I am grateful to her for that.

Soon I began my research online. In school I had loved mathematics and so whenever I got the chance I would Google maths concepts and when I came across calculations that were large and tedious, I would use the inbuilt calculator on my phone. This is how I also came across the Digital India scheme that had been launched and I was the happiest person on the planet then! Google helped me boost my knowledge to a much greater extent and I am grateful to DEF and my mentor for introducing me to it.”



*“Google was the Powerhouse of knowledge.”*



*"Yes you're right, women can never be at par with menfolk, they can be better than them."*

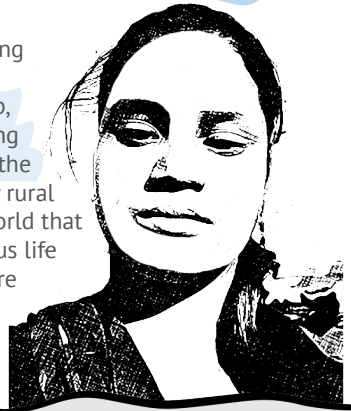


"Imagine being locked up in a room for years and having missed all the developments that happen in the world outside the confined room. Imagine people growing up, places changing and society transforming but one being completely unaware of what is happening and why in the world outside. Similar was the case with me and many rural women from our district. We were locked inside the world that our village had shown to us and had a very monotonous life which included doing household chores and taking care of children. What happened outside this, we never knew. But when DEF approached our district, it acted as a key to the locked door and it opened for us a multitude of opportunities in the world outside.

I never knew that a smartphone was something real, but when I held one in my hands I felt empowered without even knowing how to use it. We soon started learning, beginning with communication, applications and location

features. But before we were even half way through, I faced the judgement and criticism from the society. 'Women can never be at par with the menfolk', they said continuously. One day I felt that I couldn't take it anymore and so with extreme frustration replied to them that, 'Yes you're right, women can never be at par with menfolk, they can be better than them'. I think those few lines shut the mouths of many. I kept working towards learning about the smartphone and using it to expand and diversify my business along with other women of my district. Together it felt like we were a team and that no one could break this bond of unity between us.

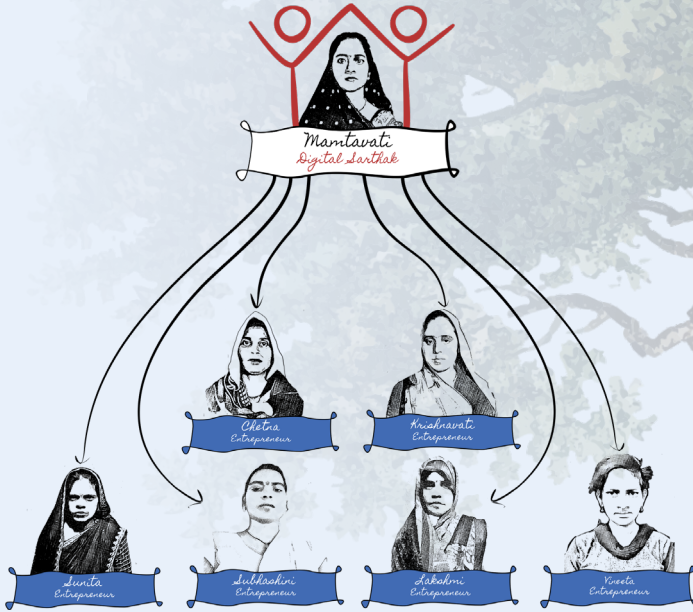
If women like me want to learn about the phone and approach me, I ask them to imagine. Imagine being trapped in a cage like a lioness where the only option to survive is to get food and the only person that can bring us food is the gatekeeper. Hence, even though we are strong from within, we are still dependent on the keeper. What we need to be is a true lioness, break the cage of stereotypes and hunt for our own food which means to stop being dependent on the society or the family. When women understand their worth, only then can they fight for it."



Name: **Aarti**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Bharatpur**  
State: **Rajasthan**

*"Imagine being locked up in a room for years and having missed all the developments"*

# Every Ounce of Courage Helps to Change



*"My Courage changed myself and I was no longer a housewife, but an inspiration for many."*



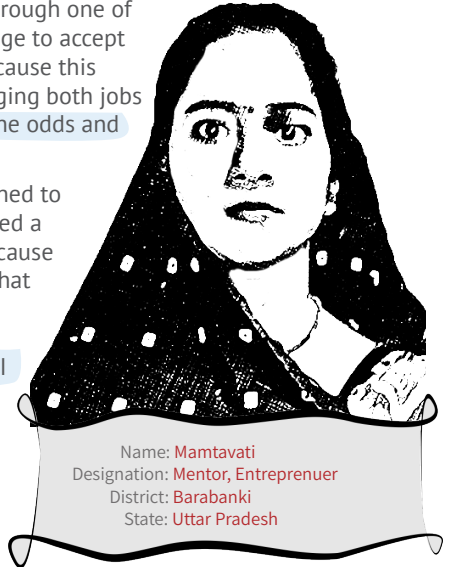
"Life wasn't easy and I definitely knew that. But there are some who stay silent and bear the brunt, then there are those who speak up and fight. I belonged to the former who only got involved in farming and household chores for a living. But things changed, when I came across DEF through one of my friends. It took me quite an amount of courage to accept the organisation's work and be one of them, because this meant giving up farming and adequately managing both jobs simultaneously. Fortunately, I decided to fight the odds and make the world a better place in my own way.

I gathered the women of my district and explained to them what DEF wanted to help them with. I faced a lot of reluctance from the women's families, because lack of exposure and dependency are exactly what women are associated with in villages. What kept me going was newfound courage and an unwavering belief in doing good to others. Yes, I was scared and nervous, but it changed when the women started responding to my efforts.

I taught them the functioning of a smartphone and how they could use it to expand their businesses. Some time later, two of those women inaugurated their own beauty parlour and perfume shop. That was when I felt proud of myself and the work I had done.

My courage changed myself and I was no longer a housewife, but an inspiration for many. Little did I know that my time at DEF would provide me with a new path to walk on. Since the summer of 2021, I along with the women of Barabanki, have taught one another how to sew and get inspired from designs on Google, how to link our Aadhaar cards, how to store important documents etc. While we have gained knowledge, I say that we have also gained experience in the process. I now love going out, meeting new people, talking to them about their problems and collectively finding a solution! If I could change one thing about the world, it would be spreading awareness about the benefits of education to every person so that no one misses out on the opportunity of being successful and self-motivated.

Therefore, in my opinion, despite all the obstacles that come our way, we must never be discouraged and instead go all the way and etch our names as inspirations for our future generations. I think that I have inspired other women to be brave and never let anyone or anything stop them from being the best version of themselves, just like I have inspired myself.



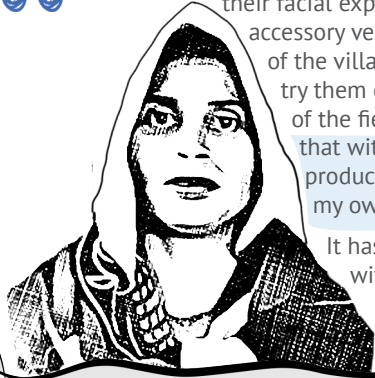
Name: **Mamtavati**  
Designation: **Mentor, Entrepreneur**  
District: **Barabanki**  
State: **Uttar Pradesh**

*"I taught them the functioning of a smartphone and how they could use it to expand their businesses."*

*“If you believe in yourself and work long enough, futile looking dreams might start looking fruitful.”*



Ever since I was young, I always felt that one could express themselves with their facial expressions. I would go around the market looking at the accessory vendors selling various beauty products to the women of the village. I would save up my money sometimes to buy and try them on by myself. Later, when I gained some knowledge of the field, I signed up with the DEF program and I realised that with just my phone and different kinds of beauty products in the market, I could do more and actually start my own business.



Name: **Chetna**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Barabanki**

State: **Uttar Pradesh**

It has been 2 years since I started my beauty parlour with appropriate training. Since then, I have learnt about many advanced products that I initially had no knowledge of. Despite not knowing how new age cosmetics work, I was easily able to learn them and properly utilise them after a consistent amount of practice. I always thought it was hard to do something or start something just because I was inept at learning it the first time around.

However, this was not the case as I later found out that anything you do for the first time, the result of it will never signify your best work, you just have to try it until you find your rhythm. I sometimes look outside my window to find curious minds looking at what I am doing. Coming across DEF was one of the best things that happened to me. My mentors at DEF gave me every opportunity to enhance my knowledge and become a tech savvy woman entrepreneur that I had never thought of being. Having a family has not hindered me and I doubt that it will. I feel a sense of belonging when I look back at what I have done these past two years. I feel that the secret to achieving anything is a pure devoted interest behind it. There are always people who will help out in times of need and people who will guide you towards the right path.

I want to keep continuing what I do and inspire people like me to strive for what they want to do. I hope more women like me can boldly take the steps in the direction they want to. If you believe in yourself and work long enough, futile looking dreams might start looking fruitful.



*“I sometimes look outside my window to find curious minds looking at what I am doing.”*

*“When I was first introduced to net banking, it would take me a lot of time”*



From a very young age I was taught by my family the art of sewing as a part of being a good housewife so I always knew how to sew. But my knowledge of it didn't go beyond stitching 2 pieces of cloth together and making the stitch look neat. With DEF coming into my life I was able to gain plenty of information about this craft that I had only mastered partially. I am now happy to say that I have an advanced understanding of the skill than I had a couple of years ago. My business is going strong as people constantly find out about my enterprise. I have a display line of accessories with more to come in a few years. I strive to achieve perfection every day.

Social media platforms such as YouTube helped me to purely master my basic skills and even later on, advanced skills. DEF even introduced me to the concept of net banking. I was not sure about it at first as I had always been brought up in a household where money could be seen and touched. After a brief overview along with a handful of successful orders I felt much more relaxed. When I was first introduced to net banking, it would take me a lot of time and I

would make mistakes to complete just one transaction but I pressed on getting better with every try. Practice makes a man perfect are the words I live by. I completely feel that one can master anything that he/she wants to, purely by the method of trial and error. When I first started people told me that I don't need to push myself or stretch myself by working for long hours but I took their wise words with a good approach and set myself a schedule rather than just stopping completely. There were also people who demotivated me after looking at my blunders and started scoffing at me, saying that I should just quit and do something that I 'can' do. But I ignored everything that they said and kept to myself until I could show the fruits of my perseverance. There is always an easy way out when you try to do something but you should take the harder, less trodden path so you can get more experience for yourself.

There will be hardships along the way and there will be some questions along the way, but for every one of those questions there will be an answer and for every hardship there is time and perseverance. As long as you are doing something that is right you should never stop just because somebody asked you to.

*“There were also people who demotivated me after looking at my blunders and started scoffing at me, saying that I should just quit and do something that I 'can' do.”*



Name: **Krishnavati**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Barabanki**

State: **Uttar Pradesh**



*“Shared learning is one of the great practices when learning anything new.”*



In the art of stitching, there are a total of 7 types of stitches which can be made with the help of machines and another 24 stitches which can be made by hand. It shows the versatility that our own hands provide as it can be clearly seen that you can stitch three and a half times more techniques than you can do using machines. When I joined DEF my first order of business was to master most of these 24 techniques that are available to bring perfection and a personalised touch to my work.

Google has helped me explore live lessons for the same.

Then I used the machine and my phone to make my work efficient and actually finish the orders in a limited time frame.

Along with using my phone to learn the business, I also had the help of a local mentor who shared the same passion for sewing. It is a special feeling to have the same kind of excitement about the interests that you share with someone else.

My mentor and I spent a lot of time learning techniques together. I was able to teach some of them to her while some were taught by her to me. This concept of shared learning by

partnering up with someone helped me in a good way, especially in areas that I have the least knowledge of. So I also encourage others to take up such an initiative.

Shared learning is one of the great practices when learning anything new. It gives you a feeling of having a classmate throughout the whole experience as well as a patient mentor to guide you throughout the process in a great amount of detail. The learning process is also fun throughout. You also feel empowered when you get praised by somebody who knows the craft. And I felt even more satisfied with the knowledge that a woman, a self-empowered woman, was teaching me. It gave me confidence by signifying that I was in a sea of boundless opportunities and I could essentially achieve my goal.

I feel blessed that everything worked out easily for me. I know that there are families that do not allow women to pursue any advanced work or the opportunity to start up a business. My family on the other hand didn't meddle much and let me take up this opportunity to show the world that I can stand on my own. I know that I might seem insignificant as there are hundreds and thousands of women like me, but just knowing that I'm a part of a change in the right direction makes me feel good every time. I genuinely think that other women like me can share this joy of one another and go for it themselves too.



*“Google has helped me explore live lessons”*



Name: **Sunita**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Barabanki**

State: **Uttar Pradesh**



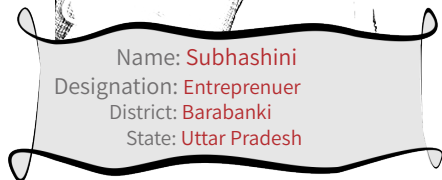
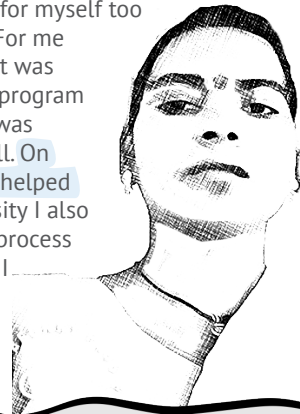
*“I hope to inspire young and aspiring women like me to follow what their hearts tell them”*



“Several people around me had phones. They would show off their phones by pointing at the size, camera quality and the fact that they could talk to other friends using it. This made me get a phone for myself too because I wanted to experience what it felt like. For me phones served only one purpose till then and that was communication. It was not until I joined the DEF program while studying for my final year in college that I was aware about using it for learning purposes as well. On the internet I found boundless knowledge which helped me in studying during the final year. Out of curiosity I also gained some knowledge on the concept and the process of starting my own business. As to what business I would start, I felt that I was pretty handy at sewing so I decided to improve my skills using the same medium which had helped me this past year.

While learning the craft, I had a pretty easy-going attitude towards the people with whom I was affiliated as they were also learning the craft with me. It is rightly said that Rome was not built in a day. Just like Rome, my business would at least take a year to start. This was one of the first things I was taught. Patience is key to do anything. If you are patient and hard-working enough, things will eventually work out for you and that is how it happened with me. It has been a year now since I started my business and I am happy to say that I have a steady flow of income. I am also open towards the idea of expanding the working staff. A woman can achieve a lot of things with an accepting and a hard working attitude. With these qualities any woman in the world can achieve anything and get information about things that she is eager to learn. The same goes for me as I try either to learn a new skill or add people with different skills to my business. Being one year into the business I am still new and there is a steep learning curve associated with anything that I experience over the course of making my business flourish.

It will still take me a few years to set myself comfortably into this line of business but I can proudly say that in times of doubt, I have people I can approach confidently to ask the questions that a woman would normally not ask. I hope to inspire young and aspiring women like me to follow what their hearts tell them and live a thrilling life instead of a monotonous one.”



Name: **Subhashini**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Barabanki**

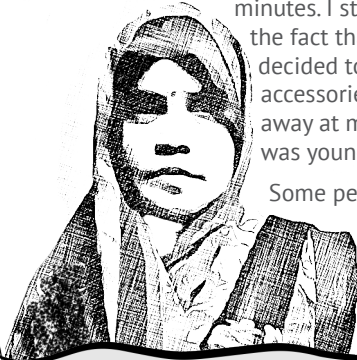
State: **Uttar Pradesh**



*“Just like Rome, my business would at least take a year to start.”*

*"The bread earner of a family is a role that has been generally given to the man but not anymore."*

We had a sewing machine at home and I would look at my mother for hours working away on it. I felt that she liked doing it as she would hint a few smiles over the course of these few hours. The machine was like a wondrous thing to me as it did the work that would take hours to do by hand and do them in minutes. I still have a sewing machine at home but I am happy with the fact that I have 6 more at my workplace. After joining DEF I decided to specialise in sewing and eventually made my own accessories' company. I still feel very happy all day while toiling away at my machine. I have had a deep passion for sewing since I was young and that passion has not faded since that time.



Name: **Lakshmi**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Barabanki**

State: **Uttar Pradesh**

Some people said that I was just doing futile things when I was learning to sew. DEF explained to me how I could sell my own creations online but it was not received well by the family as well as some others who were stuck to stereotypical standards. I however have been able to prove them wrong by showing the amount of things you can do with the help of your phone as well as a useful skill and how a small device is limitless in terms of resources. To give you an example, the fashion website Nykaa that was started by a woman is now a billion dollar company making the owner a billionaire. I also hope to be

as successful as these women who are my inspirations. Right now I only have 6 machines but I can say with certainty that I will have 600 machines as long as I work hard, give it all time and follow a strict work ethic in my day to day life. The bread earner of a family is a role that has been generally given to the man but not anymore. I feel independent spending my own hard earned money. This change in the tide will not only affect me but a lot of women throughout the nation. I have found that in other countries, nobody stands up against a woman entrepreneur and senselessly tells her to stop. India had been like that for a while but now it is gradually evolving to a country which does not discriminate on the grounds of gender when it comes to entrepreneurship.

I want to have my name written as the first of the few who started this trend and live my life happily, free of worries and dependence on someone else. Entrepreneurship can also have different meanings and to me along with starting a business of my own, entrepreneurship also means mentoring the young minds towards a more equal future along with taking ownership of not just your business but of your own, not just sitting in the backseat of the car but having the control of the wheel. That's how DEF has helped me.

*"Entrepreneurship also means mentoring the young minds towards a more equal future"*



*“My mentor even introduced me to services like Zomato and Swiggy”*

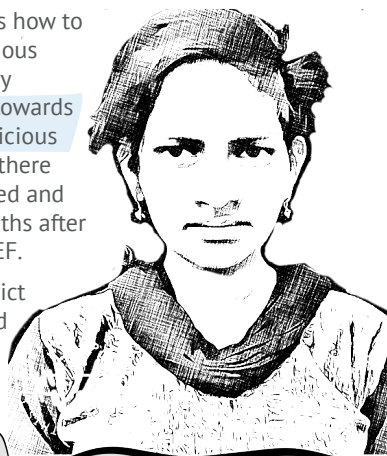


“As a girl child, what one learns even before reading is how to cook. Similarly my mother taught me how to cook various types of vegetables, chapati and sweet dishes at a very young age. Unknowingly I developed a keen interest towards cooking and when I got married I used to prepare delicious food for my family of which they were huge fans. But there always comes one point where you do not feel satisfied and want to learn more. My tipping point came a few months after marriage and around that time I was introduced to DEF.

DEF and its mentors educated the women of our district regarding digital literacy and its benefits but I decided to not join as it didn't pique my interest at that point of time. Then when one of the mentors heard about my impeccable cooking skills they asked me to join DEF stating that with the smartphone and the internet I could do wonders in the field of cooking.

When I had learnt the basics entirely, my mentor introduced me to YouTube using which I learnt recipes of dishes that I had never heard before and spent my leisure time cooking those. After YouTube I learnt Facebook and started exploring various pages of different food bloggers. With this I was able to understand the culinary culture of various states in India and abroad.

My mentor even introduced me to services like Zomato and Swiggy that deliver restaurant cooked food at our doorstep and I found this service to be extremely pleasing and accessible. I have been working over improving my current recipes, learning more and even trying out food combinations so that slowly and gradually I am able to open my own food outlet. I thank DEF for giving me the opportunity to explore what I couldn't.”

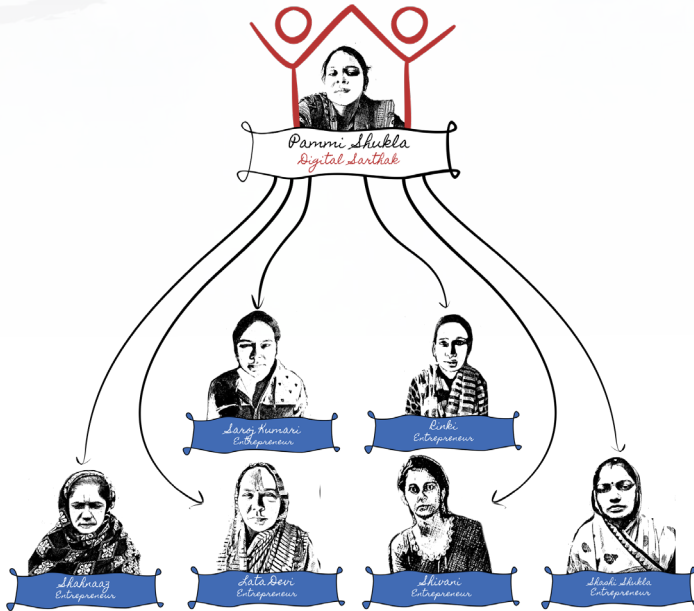


Name: **Vineeta**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Barabanki**  
State: **Uttar Pradesh**



*“Just like Rome, my business would at least take a year to start.”*

# Journey for a New Identity



*“When you plant a seed and it grows up to become a tree, you feel happy”*



“A monotonous schedule, a 9 am to 3 pm job, a teaching career, was all that I had before the onset of the devastating pandemic. Although I had no complaints with how I spent my time earlier, Covid forced me to sit at home the entire day with nothing to look up to. It held me back from my dreams. It was then, in 2020, that I discovered about DEF, and like every other opportunity that came my way, I decided to give it a try as well. Since teaching was one of my strengths, I felt that the task would be easy, but it wasn't since this was the first time I actually paid attention to what was happening around me!

The women were reserved, which I had expected, but at the same time they didn't agree to the fact that digital literacy was beneficial for them. They chose to stay away from the 'modern city life' and that's when the incessant gap between cities and villages struck me hard. I realised that for people to express their rights, they need to first learn about them and for that they need someone to provide them with that knowledge. That's when I decided to come into the picture. I contacted

all the women I knew in Barabanki and personally encouraged them to be a part of the training sessions. When they showed up, I actively taught them how to operate phones, how to form and structure their business, how to earn and pay money online etc. Time passed, and I saw the strength of women grow. Just like when you plant a seed, and it grows up to become a tree, you feel happy; similarly, when I saw the women become entrepreneurs, I was happy that they had broken their chains of confinement to come back even stronger. I soon found out that the only reason the women were not breaking free was that over the time they had adopted the belief that it just wasn't possible. But through DEF, they got a chance, just like I did too. We had the chance to change our identities, to transform them, to forget the old conventional versions and acknowledge the new chosen versions of ourselves.

I believe that I have brought this change in the society I live in where I have made my fellow women entrepreneurs believe that no matter how much the world tries to hold you back, always continue with the belief that what you want to achieve is possible. Believing you can become successful is the most important step in actually achieving it. However small this change might be, it still is significant and I shall strive to always pursue this in life.”



Name: **Pammi Shukla**  
Designation: **Mentor, Entrepreneur**  
District: **Barabanki**  
State: **Uttar Pradesh**

*“Believing you can become successful is the most important step in actually achieving it.”*

*“The aim was to empower women financially and create women entrepreneurs”*



Name: **Saroj Kumari**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Barabanki**  
State: **Uttar Pradesh**

In a male dominant society, it is not an easy walk for women to make decisions for themselves, be it financially or personally. But with a ceaseless zeal, things were not really as difficult as they seemed. Most of the challenges were eventually solved through our inbuilt tolerance and determination to have a life for ourselves. The concept of an independent life was as simple as this. But I had just refused to adhere to these principles because subconsciously my mind was soaked in an environment of stereotypes and false judgements. A year ago, Pammi ji approached me through DEF and began raving about endless opportunities that I shall have if I became a part of the initiative, but for several days I kept saying no. She didn't stop coming to my house every single day convincing me to be a part of something great. One day, I finally agreed and that day my life changed completely.

As one cannot deny, this initiative has pushed women into more informed decision making, increased their active participation and representation in the public sphere of development in the locality and the community as a whole. The aim of DEF was to empower women financially and create women entrepreneurs. We had training sessions and we created our products marketing it on social media and sometimes even selling stuff online, making everything happen within the boundaries of our village. Now we can sell our products without having to incur extra expenditure like transportation etc. This has saved us a lot of time, improving our quality of life and raising our almost dead hopes in the process of growing our business.

I think that with the success of DEF, we as a team of women entrepreneurs, are scaling up local markets and creating a network of an independent rural chain where no one other than us and DEF are involved. This initiative has not only opened a door of development and opportunities to the rural communities but also brought economic prosperity in our lives.



*“we as a team of women entrepreneurs, are scaling up local markets and creating a network of an independent rural chain”*

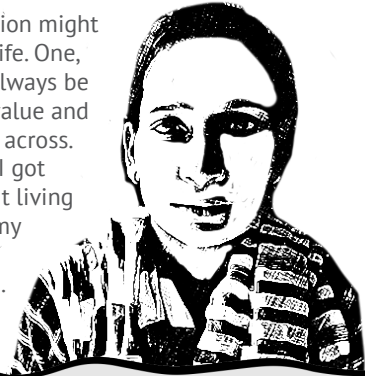
*“to never let someone else govern my choices”*



“My mother always taught me that whatever the situation might be, I must always remember three essential values of life. One, to never let someone else govern my choices. Two, to always be determined and focussed towards my goals. Three, to value and respect every loyal and good human being that I come across. I also decided to live my life by these ideals but when I got married and moved away from my family, I realised that living by these ideals was not easy. I always had to sacrifice my desires for the sake of my family and I could never be the master of my own choices because I never had one. There was only one option for any option which was thrust upon me. But when DEF came into my life, I realised then that now I have a choice and this choice could change my world.”

The choice was either joining DEF and learning what they had offered me or declining that and continuing to live the life for my family like I was already doing. But the bigger picture that only I could see included the choice between being independent and doing what I love or not living by the ideals that my mother taught me. Gladly, I chose the former. With DEF I evolved from a housewife to a woman entrepreneur. I knew sewing as a skill and I made that into my business. Things happened gradually and now I think I have set up a full fledged business that is still growing. Throughout this journey starting with learning the smartphone and using it, I think there were several ups and downs. It took me quite some time to master digital payments but then I recalled my mother’s values. I put in all my dedication and reached my goal.

I wholeheartedly express my gratitude to DEF as an initiative and my mentor who guided me all the way through. They provided constant support to finish the task that I had started. Till date, I have earned good money through my business. However, the value that they have added to me and the society cannot be measured. It is indeed a great service to society.”



Name: **Rinki**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Barabanki**

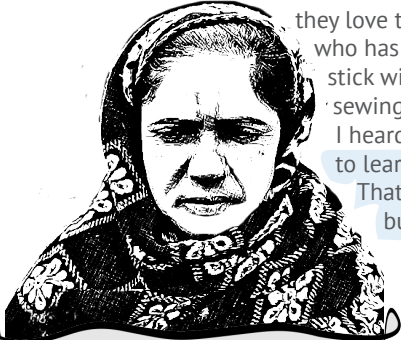
State: **Uttar Pradesh**

*“to value and respect every loyal and good human being that I come across”*

*“Digital empowerment has helped me to widen my horizon”*



“The greatest thing about life is that it is temporary and short-lived. Which means that one must spend it the way they want to and do what they love the most. I have always been a spirited woman who has had tons of hobbies over time and struggled to stick with one. But if I had to choose, I think cooking and sewing/stitching would be the top two in my list. But after I heard about DEF and joined them, I got an opportunity to learn about the smartphone and several of its features. That was when I discovered a new hobby, running a business single handedly.



Name: **Shahnaaz**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Barabanki**  
State: **Uttar Pradesh**

I always liked cooking and used to cater to parties, weddings etc. Initially I started supporting neighbours in their cooking during parties, functions etc. as I would always enjoy helping and supporting people around me. I think because of my caring and helpful nature I might have won the hearts and trust of the people. But when DEF came into my life, their mentors encouraged me to set up my own catering business. My financial condition

was also not so good at the time and so I accepted the suggestion and decided to try out the catering business. With the support of other women and DEF volunteers my business ran smoothly since I was able to manage orders, organise materials and contact people all within the tip of my fingers. Many other women came to me asking how I set up a business like this and I simply prompted them to join DEF.

Throughout my time in the training sessions, I not only learnt about the phone but also developed essential life skills like leadership, teamwork, communication etc. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic I decided to work tirelessly. I stitched masks and distributed them among the people of our village. Now I can proudly say that I have achieved success in my life with the support of my fellow women entrepreneurs and DEF. I am grateful to them for having supported and appreciated my work. DEF has helped me to widen my horizon and increase my popularity amongst the community that helps my business flourish.”



*“I not only learnt about the phone but also developed essential life skills like leadership, teamwork, communication etc”*

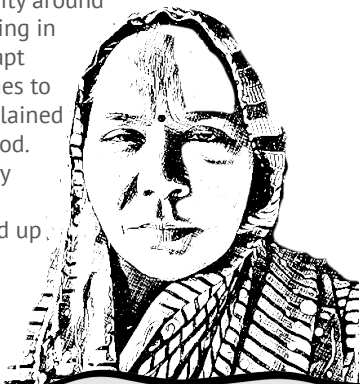
*“I started selling my stitched products and other such handicrafts. To get creative inspiration, I used to surf the internet for hours”*



“I can say that women are not timid. If rituals, superstitions and traditions are kept aside and one could believe in honesty and hardwork, then women would definitely step forward. The problem with the community around me is that it fails to evolve. With development happening in the world and generations changing, we must also adapt ourselves with the modernities especially when it comes to evolving social norms like gender equality. When I explained this to my families and friends, none of them understood. At first they took me for granted but later on when they realised I was serious, they made me understand what women were meant to do and not do. I was entirely fed up, and that’s when I was introduced to DEF.

DEF worked with a few volunteers of our district who acted as trainers and were given the responsibility of spreading awareness about a smartphone and its benefits to the women of the district. I decided to be a part of DEF without any reluctance. Our training sessions happened for over a few months and we were taught in great detail about the phone’s functioning. We were made aware about government policies and reforms that could actually benefit us and were eager to be its part as well. I was glad to hear that the world outside my village actually put efforts in recognizing a woman’s worth and I was happy to be a part of it. When I read about government initiatives for women entrepreneurs, it encouraged me to start my own business even if it was small scaled.

Therefore, I started selling my stitched products and other such handicrafts. To get creative inspiration, I used to surf the internet for hours. Not only this, the internet helped me decide a price for those products and even spread a word to people outside my village. I kept reading inspirational stories of women all around the globe in my free time and probably thought to myself that one day I might also have my story published. And I think this is the moment!”



Name: **Lata Devi**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Barabanki**  
State: **Uttar Pradesh**

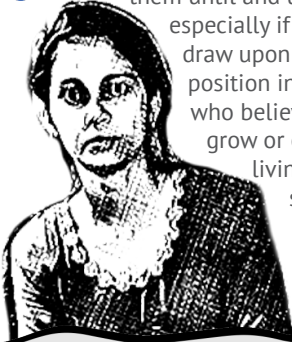
*“If rituals, superstitions and traditions are kept aside and one could believe in honesty and hardwork, then women would definitely step forward.”*



*“I was also amongst those who believed in the patriarchal theory of society”*



“One can never uncover the deep potential that is hidden somewhere within them until and unless they are given the right opportunity to do so, especially if they are a woman. A woman today is challenged to draw upon traditional strengths while continuing to redefine her position in a rapidly changing society. I was also amongst those who believed in the patriarchal theory of society. I never wanted to grow or explore but was content with the monotonous life I was living. One day one of my friends told me that she along with several women from our district were going to attend a campaign initiative by DEF which was apparently for women. I decided to accompany them just so that I could take some time out of my monotonous schedule. But, to be honest, that day changed my perceptions on life all together.



Name: **Shivani**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Barabanki**

State: **Uttar Pradesh**

DEF first informed me why it is a privilege to be a woman and that we ourselves should not undermine our worth. Then they even informed us about the ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ initiative being introduced in the country. It was then that I

decided to make my own living and not be dependent on the men of my family. Gradually, DEF taught me more about the smartphone. We went on learning about calling features, banking facilities and social media all in no time. I used to look up YouTube for design inspirations for my sewing art and began making products, but this time for sale. In a few months I had my own stable income which kept on increasing bit by bit.

DEF has made me confident that science and technology could play a vital role in income generation for women of several states and districts. Having knocked on many doors to realise my dream, DEF finally answered and I got to build a whole new life for myself for which I am certainly proud and grateful. My blessings are with all those who want to establish initiatives like these.”



*“DEF first informed me why it is a privilege to be a woman and that we ourselves should not undermine our worth”*



*“my parents never saw my inclination and passion towards studies”*



“At school I was a promising student who would never budge away from any class or examination. I would always be the topper of my class. But my parents never saw my inclination and passion towards studies. They believed that things like books and knowledge were worthless for women and hence they married me off at a comparatively young age. During school, I had developed a keen interest in businesses and work, which is often male-dominated in a society like ours. But I nevertheless wanted to pursue being a businesswoman, although I did not have the means to do so.

But then one day DEF came to our district. It provided me with the means and opportunity to fulfil my dream. I learnt the features of a smartphone first and then some business practices which I could use to open my own daily goods store. At first I had my fears and apprehensions about how I would be able to cope with an environment that was surrounded by only men. But it was my strong will and power that overcame every negative thought that I had ever had. I held my ground when the patriarchal society stood as a hurdle in my path and I think that I completed the challenge with flying colours. When I inaugurated my shop and people started buying goods from me, I was the happiest person alive.

Now I earn my own income, my dreams are fulfilled. I even got a chance to continue my remaining studies online through the smartphone that I had learnt to use because of the immense help and support I had received from DEF and its mentors. Just like the way DEF changed my life, I shall now change the world. It is only a matter of time.”

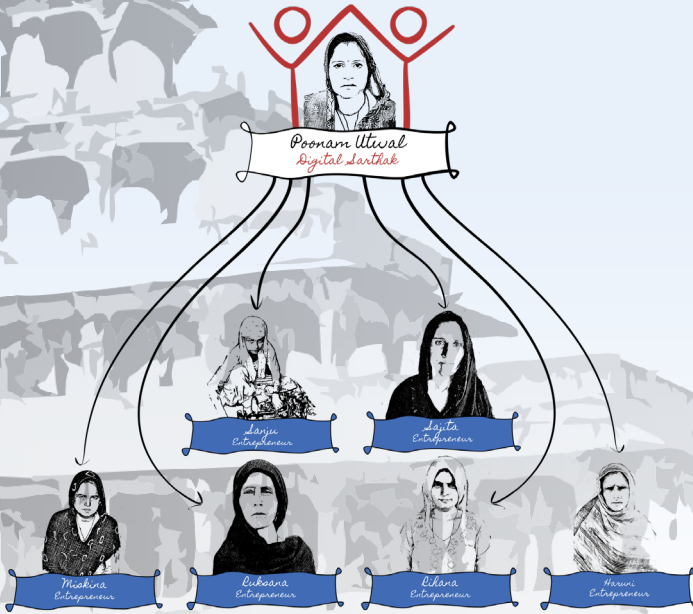


Name: **Shashi Shukla**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Barabanki**  
State: **Uttar Pradesh**



*“I had my fears and apprehensions about how I would be able to cope with an environment that was surrounded by only men”*

# The Torn Veil of Ignorance



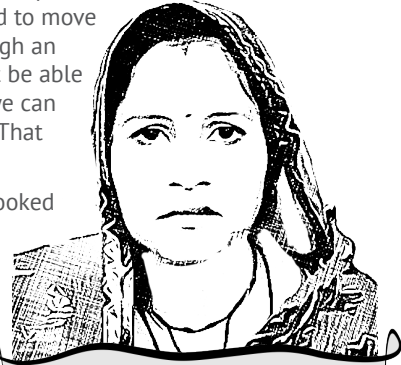
*"They were of the view that digital education or education of any form was not meant for women"*



"People say 'ghoonghat' (face covering veil) doesn't belong in this century, but districts like Alwar are still veiled and kept out of view. I knew several women like me who were ordinary homemakers and were held captive within the walls of traditions and customs, not allowed to move ahead. But one day when I first heard about DEF through an advertisement, a thought struck my mind. We may not be able to control all the events that happen to us, but what we can decide to do with those situations is entirely upon us. That was when I joined DEF as a trainer, five years ago.

When I went to several women's houses, I was being looked down upon by their families. They were of the view that digital education or education of any form was not meant for women. This is why several of their talents like art work, sewing, handicrafts, etc. went unexplored. We started teaching with a very small number, but you know, each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women. That's how our numbers increased, and soon we had budding women entrepreneurs of Alwar. Looking at these women work for success, their families encouraged them too. What developed next was immense friendship between all of us. I never have to go back to their houses to call them, instead they approach me whenever required and take the initiative to meet and learn from each other. We are the strongest when we cheer each other on. Even though we live in the 21st century, women are being ignored. They are being deprived of opportunities for no reason! If I had all the power in the world, I would change this ignorant attitude towards women all around the globe. Sometimes I wonder, what if I had given up at the beginning? What if I had complied with society's wishes? But fortunately I didn't and I never regret my choice. My struggles are now my strengths. Without them I would have never grown as a person.

I am grateful for the fact that I came across an organisation that helped me connect with women I relate to, with women who pave the way for themselves and in the process, inspire women like me. Five years ago, I would have never dreamt of being this confident woman I am today. But now, I have several dreams to fulfil and numerous milestones to achieve."



Name: **Poonam Utwal**  
Designation: **Mentor, Entrepreneur**  
District: **Alwar**  
State: **Rajasthan**

*"My struggles are now my strengths. Without them I would have never grown as a person"*



*"If I wanted to change one thing in the world I would change the outlook of people around me so they can also achieve what I have achieved"*



"I have been in the field of sewing for the last 6 months. Before these six months I have practised for 3 to 4 years. I would look at other people using their phones for purposes that I did not know about and wonder what was the reason that they were using it for. The DEF program helped in educating me about the functionalities that my phone possessed. Before this I had been using it for miscellaneous purposes. DEF taught me that it could be a lot more including a learning space and also provides opportunities to earn a considerable amount of money. My phone now usually helps me in keeping up with the current affairs of the government and the new schemes that they launch. I like to take debatable stands from both sides that either oppose or support the new schemes that the government brings out. It is of great interest to me what the government does towards the policies for women as I feel that I am part of a change that has taken place within a few years. It makes me feel like I am part of something bigger than my small little world and strive towards doing anything that I aspire to support. I remember hearing of revolutionaries who did things like this and I feel that there is an internal Revolution going on of which I am a big part.

Name: **Sanju**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Alwar**  
State: **Rajasthan**

Then I embarked on a journey towards the path of becoming a sewing-entrepreneur. I was afraid at each and every step thinking that it might or might not be the wrong answer to one of my problems. But I was grateful to Pooja ma'am, my mentor, who showed me that anything and everything you do comes with a set of consequences which either works in your favour or works against you. If they work against you then they only make you stronger and they show you the mistakes that you made so you can correct them when another opportunity arises. It's all part of the learning process and you should take it positively. If you take it practically then there is nothing that you cannot achieve. Now that I have set out on this path a lot of family members are actually pushing me towards it too. They are helping me achieve what I have set out for. They are taking over my chores so that I can focus on my business and my studies. Every family wants to see their children achieve great things in life.

If I wanted to change one thing in the world I would change the outlook of people around me so they can also achieve what I have achieved. I would clearly let them see that they are as capable as I am and can also do what I am doing as they have my support and continued devotion towards their progress. The world will become a good place if that happens one day."



*"My phone now usually helps me in keeping up with the current affairs of the government and the new schemes that they launch"*

## *“My husband now does the household work sometimes”*

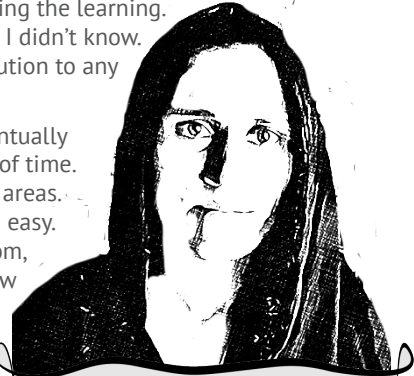


“I used to be a simple housewife about a year ago. I didn't feel dissatisfied with the role I was given and I was beautifully following through with it. That is until DEF entered my life and made me realise that I could do a lot more. I always had a wish that I wanted to make and sell female clothing accessories. DEF made me realise that it was not a pipe dream and that it was quite within my grasp if I wanted to do it. I joined the program not knowing what it was about. One of the most important things to learn was proper use of the phone that I was given. Everything else was a simple trial and error using the learning. I quickly got into the habit of Googling anything that I didn't know. Google has given me answers for everything. The solution to any problem was just a click away.

I started my shop from a smaller place and I was eventually able to move to a bigger one in a very small amount of time. I am even thinking of opening 2 more shops in other areas. Now that I know how to do it I am sure that it will be easy. DEF helped me on where to get the raw materials from, what people to meet to sell your products in bulk, how to greet them properly and what sort of payment method to use with different customers as well as different amounts of money. Online transactions such as Paytm or UPI were a foreign thing for me. But my DEF mentor gave me guidance as to what I should do to understand them in the best way possible. Earlier, my one-time sales used to be Rs 1,000, but now they go up to Rs 5,000.

This exponential growth in my income gives me courage to do more. Learning anything from the beginning is never an easy thing to accomplish, but you have to put your best foot forward and do it anyway. It all gets easier with time and that's the thing that you have to believe in always.

My husband now does the household work sometimes. This is something that is unconventional in my neighbourhood or even my village for that matter. He also works on delivering cars while I look after the shop and the home together. It gives me confidence to know that the whole routine is being followed just to cater to my interest. It also gives me confidence to know that nobody has ever come around to tell me to second guess my decisions or question me regarding my choices. It shows that people have seen me grow and now believe in me to do the right thing. I enjoy my life every day to the fullest now. I also hope that other women like me can do it too.”



Name: **Sajita**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Alwar**  
State: **Rajasthan**

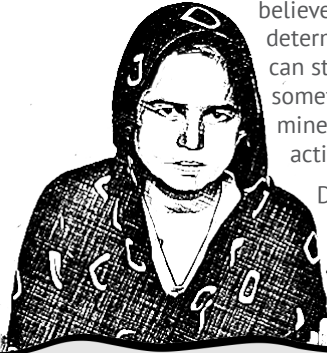
*“I started my shop from a smaller place and I was eventually able to move to a bigger one in a very small amount of time. I am even thinking of opening 2 more shops in other areas”*



*“Gradually, my family and society started supporting me due to my extreme dedication and determination to my work”*



“Our society is always evil pervaded due to the less attention given to women and their education. But as a woman myself, I have always believed the opposite. I wanted to prove the fact that if a lady is determined to do a certain work, no power, let alone a human, can stop her. I always had a desire and determination to do something of my own. I think that it was this determination of mine that pushed me to explore new opportunities and be an active part of those, like DEF.



Name: **Miskina**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Alwar**

State: **Rajasthan**

Due to financial constraints at home, I decided to do something new, in addition to the family store. Moving forward with this thought, I have started making beautiful crafts and pictures using my sewing and stitching techniques. Many people including my family protested against this and made fun of me. Despite this, I was not ready to give up. I continued working with passion. I explored the features of a smartphone as I learnt during DEF training sessions and used Google to get inspired with new techniques, tricks and designs. I even took my products online and sold them

for money. Gradually, my family and society started supporting me due to my extreme dedication and determination to my work. Irrespective of the negative judgements I came across, what kept my loyalty towards my work was DEF's constant support.

My mentor at DEF never gave up on me even when I was at my worst. They taught me to be a resilient person, an independent entrepreneur and most importantly a confident woman. No matter what I say in appreciation of DEF, it will always feel as if I haven't justified their efforts entirely. I am grateful for everything that DEF has done for me.”



*“They taught me to be a resilient person, an independent entrepreneur and most importantly a confident woman”*

*“because of that knowledge, I have my own business that runs on profit and brings a steady income to help provide for my family”*



“When you asked me what comes to mind when asked about progress, I replied, satisfaction. But to be honest, I lied. The truth is that before being an individual who thinks about herself and is independent, I am also a daughter, a wife and a mother. Therefore at every moment I feel that the stakes that I am accountable to are very high. Therefore, when I think about progress what actually comes to my mind is selflessness, and the attitude of putting everyone else’s lives before mine. And when I see their growth, I think that I have progressed as well.

I think that deep down I knew the truth, but it was DEF who helped me gain an insight into this truth. It was only after DEF that I started to work for myself and by myself. I started to become independent, and all the way through it was the little things that mattered. If I share my achievements about learning YouTube and Google, people would disregard them as mere knowledge, but to me it was a medium to gain insight into a completely new world where I was capable of having my own identity. Therefore I say that DEF not only taught me how to use the smartphone but also to use it for good reason. Today, because of that knowledge, I have my own business that runs on profit and brings a steady income to help provide for my family.

For women who are fighting stereotypes and overcoming immense odds to initiate their entrepreneurial journey, DEF can be an initiative that can help each one of them. There are many stories of successful rural women entrepreneurs who have become agents of change both for their families and villages. They are transforming communities by providing skill training and employment to local people, and spreading the spirit of entrepreneurship among other women. I believe that mine will be one of them, sooner or later.”



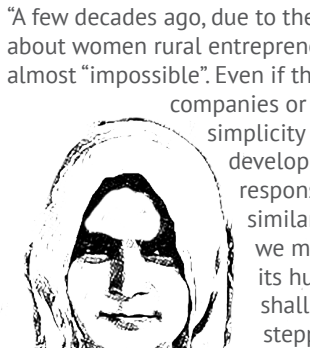
*“There are many stories of successful rural women entrepreneurs who have become agents of change both for their families and villages”*



Name: **Ruksana**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Alwar**  
State: **Rajasthan**



*"This is the era of innovation and equality, we must adapt to it"*




"A few decades ago, due to the different structures in Indian society, thinking about women rural entrepreneurs in India was not just anachronistic, it was almost "impossible". Even if there were probably women who were running companies or businesses, they were made 'irrelevant' owing to simplicity or got veiled by men's activities. But with development happening all over the world, I think it is the responsibility of us, citizens, to evolve our mindsets in a similar fashion. This is the era of innovation and equality, we must adapt to it. With the new millennium, India with its huge quantity of people is changing a lot. But who shall bring change in our villages? This is where DEF stepped in.

One of the most evident aspects of this change is visible thanks to the formal entrance of women in the business world, and not just as workers, but as entrepreneurs, successful entrepreneurs, in various activities. It is true that the number of women entrepreneurs in India is lower, due to social and cultural restrictions, compared to the men, but it is exponentially higher compared to twenty or thirty years ago! I didn't believe all of this. But when DEF taught me how to Google and verify facts and information, I knew that I found something very valuable. With the

technical knowledge in mind I stepped forward from our village community as a woman entrepreneur and proudly own my shop in the district. Due to DEF and their introduction of the internet, our villages are, day after day, more connected to the fastest version of the internet, with better services and better (using a western idea of standards) living conditions.

Without having an education or work background, for women (but it is the same for men), it is harder to understand the different elements of the industry: it becomes more complicated to run companies and to be successful women entrepreneurs in India having these knowledge gaps in technology updates or techniques, marketing, and communication or even how to find funds or government help to invest and grow. DEF bridged this gap for me and today I live in a developed society and run my own business."



*"I stepped forward from our village community as a woman entrepreneur and proudly own my shop in the district"*



*“Although the term entrepreneur is a gender neutral term, it has long been reserved for men”*



“Although the term entrepreneur is a gender neutral term, it has long been reserved for men. Despite such patriarchal bias, even when women rise up to the position, their success stories are chronicled but their hardships and difficulties are rarely touched upon. Despite the increase, female entrepreneurs continue to face several unique challenges. These challenges often range from lower personal financial assets to gender discrimination and social taboos. When I learnt about the smartphone and read inspirational stories of women online, I was proud but at the same time shed tears for all that we have to go through as if it has always been our fault.

In the stories that I have read, all these women started from scratch or with very little, be it finance or experience. Yet, they’ve all reached the peak of their career by changing the business landscape of India with their sheer grit, determination and strength of purpose. This is how I want to become. I want to be self-reliant and successful. Undeterred and with the support I had from DEF, I decided to start my own venture and began building my own business from scratch. I understood that entrepreneurship was traditionally a male bastion and that the society wasn’t kind to women in business, but I chose to persevere anyway. There were many challenges in the path, including family’s acceptance and stiff reluctance from the stereotypical community. I also had to struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance, but I persisted and never gave up because I knew that at the end of the day there were people to cheer me up.

DEF might have ‘only’ contributed in teaching me the smartphone, in my journey of entrepreneurship. But for me, it was way more than that. It was also about confidence, courage, stability, independence, joy and growth. I thank DEF for all that they have given me in a very short span of time that feels like yesterday!”

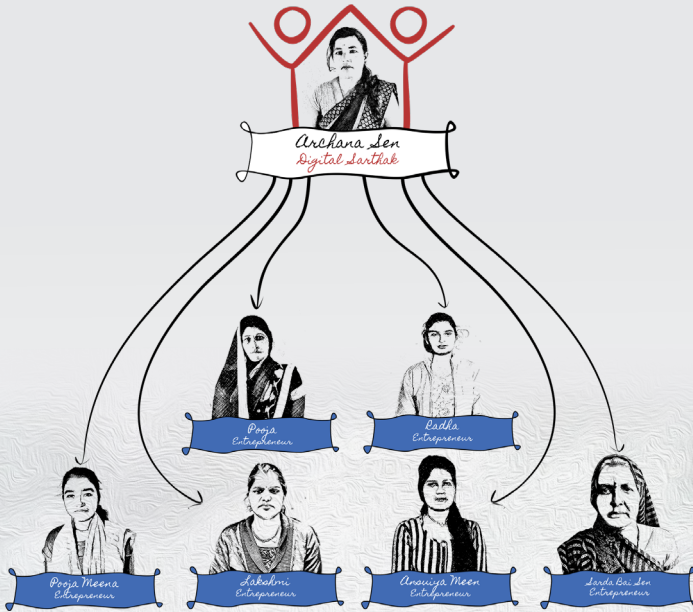


Name: **Haruni**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Alwar**  
State: **Rajasthan**

*“I want to be self-reliant and successful”*



# The Unstoppable Rise to Success



*"Living in a conservative society and having the 'dare me to dream' attitude has its own challenges, not just for it being an idea against the 'rules', but also a product of negligence"*



"Being born in the district of Guna gives me my uniqueness and an identity that has culture, history and traditions. I joined DEF in 2018, but before that I kept saying this to myself that 'it is for the best reasons', as if I was trying to convince myself into believing that something is meant for me when it actually wasn't. Living in a conservative society and having the 'dare me to dream' attitude has its own challenges, not just for it being an idea against the 'rules', but also a product of negligence.

I have always been fascinated by community service but never had the chance to do so until DEF. Thus when I was asked to communicate with other women of the district and spread awareness about our campaigns, I was very hesitant. This nervousness caught me off guard, and I could hardly convey my points which is why they looked confused. But the next day, and the day after, when the women kept showing up for training sessions, I started gaining confidence. I was able to teach and they were able to understand. The communication gap between us entirely vanished, and we began sharing a special bond. During my time at DEF, I even stood as a speaker in the village panchayat, which I am certainly proud of. This made me believe that all of us have chances, and all we have to do is to convert those chances into opportunities and sooner or later we will know that we are growing as individuals. My favourite thing about DEF is that it has a cause and a motive for which it strives hard. Similarly, my motive in life is to grow and achieve all that I couldn't by making DEF my greatest strength.

Today all the women I have taught are my closest friends and whenever they ask me for inspiration, I just say, 'look at me and where I came from earlier and then look at me now'. This is all they need to hear, and they get back on working hard on their respective businesses. I encourage them with my whole heart and I encourage every woman out there to outdo her potential every single time and never stop growing."



Name: Archana Sen  
Designation: Mentor, Entrepreneur  
District: Guna  
State: Madhya Pradesh

*"I encourage them with my whole heart and I encourage every woman out there to outdo her potential every single time and never stop growing."*

*“far-fetched dreams now seem like immediate opportunities”*



“Whenever I used to go to the general store, I would look at each of the products hanging from the walls while my mother shopped. I only knew the use of a limited number of products there as our shopping list was pretty much the same every time. Nevertheless, it did not discourage my spirits towards owning all of those things that I could see as far as the store stretched someday. DEF helped me see that this opportunity that I wanted was not as far away to grasp as I thought it would be. With DEF and my mentors, I was able to learn and comprehend the ‘smartphone’, and its several features like Google, apps, payments, location settings, etc. Thus, far-fetched dreams now seem like immediate opportunities.



Name: **Pooja**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Guna**

State: **Madhya Pradesh**

With the help of DEF I was able to revive things of the past and modernise it to my will. Kirana stores are a thing of the past now as COVID has made every transaction to go online. Kirana stores work on the concept of serving the neighbourhood stretching approximately 1 km around the shop. When you go to a house in any neighbourhood, they will have a designated store for their every need. That’s something that

makes it profitable. I have been able to modernise this by giving out my stores contact info and offering door step services for any and every needs from 6 in the morning till 12 at night. It has been 6 months since I started my store and I am happy to say that it has become very profitable in this short period of time. The creditors are being paid in a timely manner and as per the sales. It seems like I would not need these creditors after 2 years. Some people may call it a blessing or a miracle but I assure you a lot of thinking has gone into choosing the location to set up my business. You have to choose a neighbourhood which does not have a shop that specialises in miscellaneous products.

Owning a Kirana store is not a big feat for somebody but as a woman it gives me great confidence to own something that is completely mine. I have the decision making power for this enterprise and my choices will either make the business sink or float. This amount of responsibility makes me extremely excited for the future prospects of my life.”



*“as a woman it gives me great confidence to own something that is completely mine”*

*“One of the things that this experience has brought me is the feeling of independence”*

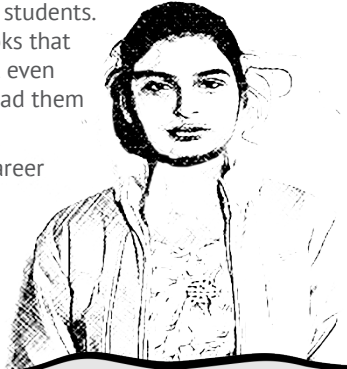


“Coming from a village which hardly offered any education, I was always eager to study and learn new things. I would always select a topic, learn it, understand it and jump on to another one. College libraries were mostly desolated as all the students would either spend their time sitting at cafes or restaurants, spending time at scenic places or unpopulated areas or just run around town aimlessly from one place to another just to hang around. The library on the other hand gave me as much joy as these other places did to those students. It was similar to heaven for me as it was filled with books that I could learn from. Some of these books might have not even been touched for years but I would pick them up and read them to my heart’s content.

After graduating college I was looking into my future career prospects when it hit me that I could just teach what I have learned over the years. DEF was the window of opportunity for me in taking this decision. They helped me to learn the mechanisms of online features using which I read e-newspapers, websites and all other information that provided me with education. This endeavour was however one of the hardest things that I could have picked for myself. Learning things and actually teaching them are two different things, so I had to start learning how to teach effectively. It was hard in the beginning but I slowly got the hang of it , and let me tell you , it

has been one of the most rewarding things that I have done in my life. Teaching students is basically filling them up with knowledge so they are able to test well in their trials of life. One of the things that this experience has brought me is the feeling of independence. Knowing the fact that my knowledge and teachings are constantly travelling by word of mouth, unshackled in the world, brings me great pride. A person is only done when they are forgotten and I am happy to say that I will live on for at least some centuries to come. It’s easy to just think this and sit and do nothing but I constantly tell my students to fight because until and unless you don’t fight for your rights and your beliefs, you are not free. This world tries to constantly control anyone and everyone they can but great minds will always find a way to free themselves from these hands as long as they fight.

DEF helped me enhance these attributes so that I could fight, I could win and I could be independent in all possible ways. I think that the best way to express gratitude towards my mentors at DEF, would be to flourish my business and help it achieve great heights so that ‘our’ collective efforts could get to the desired result.”



Name: **Radha**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Guna**  
State: **Madhya Pradesh**

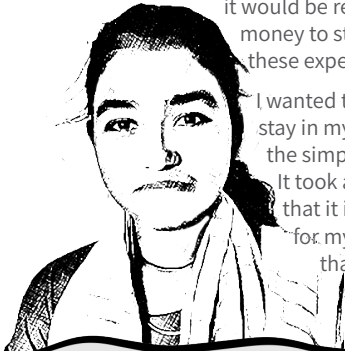


*“Knowing the fact that my knowledge and teachings are constantly travelling by word of mouth, unshackled in the world, brings me great pride”*

## *"Now I pay all the bills in my house"*



"On odd days, I would go to the office to pay bills for the house instead of my husband. I would go with the money that he earned, pay the money and come back wondering whether I gave the right amount even though it was calculated countless times before it was given to me. On some days the amount would be a small sum and on other days it would be relatively more. But I always thought what if I could make the money to stay? What if I didn't need the money that I was going to pay for these expenses?"



Name: **Pooja Meena**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Guna**

State: **Madhya Pradesh**

I wanted to make the money stay and I wanted to make the money stay in my hands. That's when DEF helped me. It showed me that by the simple skill that was sewing I could achieve a lot of things in life.

It took a while to master the skill but now I can say with certainty that it is paying off. I have a steady income of my own that I made for myself. It was a problem in the beginning to learn something that was just a hobby for me. It did take a while but now I can

say that I am proficient at it. Many people have supported me along the way and many people have stopped me along the way saying that I could not do it and that I should

just quit. But now that I am successful I can say that it turned out for the best. I have found that it takes a lot of initiative and a lot of time to set up a business of your own. Taking that initiative is what first started as placing baby steps towards this enterprise. I am glad that I took it, followed my heart and listened to what my mind was

saying to me. Now I pay all the bills in my house and I pay them with a slight glee in my heart. It gives me a sense of satisfaction of doing something worthwhile in my life rather than just looking at nothingness all day. It will take time before it goes mainstream but initial results show that I am heading in a good direction. I could not be more proud of myself for just going for it.

Nothing in this world goes your way, it is you who has to take the initiative to make it your way. The world goes on without looking at you if you do not make it look at you. Especially for women who have been ignored. But they could be so much more. All you have to do is take that first step and not look back until and unless you feel satisfied with the platform that you have built to stand on. That's all it takes. It takes 'Leap of Faith' to make the best out of yourself. Once you start, it will take some time to get into a rhythm but afterward it's like driving an automatic car, smooth. Every information that you need is provided to you by the internet or by your close trusted mentors. If you want to do something then there is nothing stopping you. Excuses are for the weak, because winners don't make excuses and weak are not winners."



## *"It takes 'Leap of Faith' to make the best out of yourself"*



*“To become wealthy you need to do a lot of hard work and follow through on promises you make”*



“When I was young I found out that my name literally represented the goddess of wealth. I was a little naive at the time and thought that wealth only meant richness and properties. Reality dawned on me after a while as I realised that just being named after the Goddess of wealth does not bring you actual riches. To become wealthy you need to do a lot of hard work and follow through on promises you make. You need a better part of your time towards what you are doing and make it successful. DEF made me realise this and I became the independent woman that I am today.

It has been one year since I started my sewing business and it has been a great year. DEF educated me towards the process of net banking to expand my business. Usually Sewing businesses are quite local in a sense that whoever comes to the store and wants to buy the goods is able to buy them. But now I have tapped into a market that I couldn't even imagine existed before. I could sell my creations to anyone around the world knowing that I was getting money

through secure transactions. I made my own business and earned the respect of the crowd that encouraged me. I also wanted to prove against the people who were mean as well as indifferent towards me. For a woman who has not done anything that she could flaunt about before, it felt great to take the initiative and do something for myself that I could show off to people. And now I want to show my story off to young girls not to make them jealous but to motivate them to do similar things like me so they can keep their heads high in this gender-biased society.

As long as you have your own original dreams and aspirations you can pretty much achieve anything that you set out to do. Nothing is unreachable in this world as long as you have a pure, unbridled passion for it. The first step might just be the hardest but as soon as you get your first win, as soon as you have the taste of it, believe me when I say that you will want more.”



*“I made my own business and earned the respect of the crowd that encouraged me”*



Name: **Lakshmi**

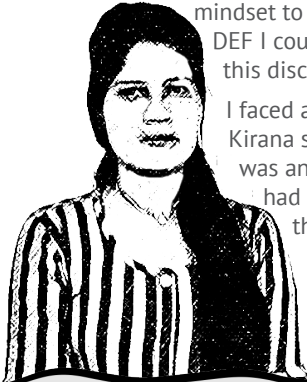
Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Guna**

State: **Madhya Pradesh**

*"it was just a Kirana store to them. To me it was an open declaration of defiance from the social norms that had lived on for too long"*

"In a village, the stance of the society is quite backward. The adults think that boys are the future for their households as they are going to be the breadwinners of the next generation. People have this subconscious mindset to care more about men rather than the women. But in DEF I could see the light that could obliterate the darkness of this discrimination.



Name: **Ansuviya Meen**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Guna**

State: **Madhya Pradesh**

I faced a lot of discrimination when I stepped up to start just a Kirana store. That is, it was just a Kirana store to them. To me it was an open declaration of defiance from the social norms that had lived on for too long. People would scoff at me saying that I did not have what it took to run a business. Though I have proved this wrong as my business still stands today, one year after I started it, profiting from the same people who wanted me to fail. There will always be people like them who do not want to change anything that is wrong in the world because they want the world to be familiar to them. No heed should be paid to people like them. In fact, I took up this challenge to prove that slowly but surely, the way of the world is changing. If you do not choose to ride the wave then you will be the one drowning under it. This perception has been

inspired by the women whom I have seen working on the phone with the help of DEF. I realise that what I am doing is fairly simple compared to the complicated situations and prejudices that other women face. I am moved by the fact that they are able to push forward without giving this any attention.

I want to be like that, which is why I have stopped fretting over small instances of people ridiculing me and pointing fingers at me. The frequency of these instances have also decreased by time as people have started adapting to the new norms around them. I have no worries about the future as I believe that everything will work itself out. That is the least you can expect from the ongoing agendas of society. Everybody will want to even everything out. Till then it is the job of women like me to fight on until social justice is achieved and a girl can be treated as a child and not girl child."

*"it is the job of women like me to fight on until social justice is achieved and a girl can be treated as a child and not girl child"*



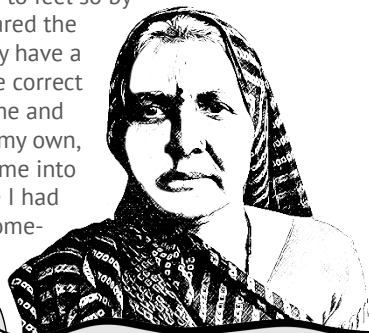
*“It was only after I had access to resources like Google, YouTube, social media, etc that I came to know about developments in the country, government policies for the welfare of women ”*



“Two years ago, I would look at myself in the mirror and repeatedly say words like ‘worthless’ and ‘undeserving’ to myself. Why? Because I didn’t believe in myself and my capabilities. Why? Because I was made to feel so by the people around me, by the people with whom I shared the same community with. I was of the opinion that if they have a certain perception about me then it must definitely be correct and accurate. I gave others the opportunity to judge me and set out a path to walk on, when I could do this all on my own, and perhaps even choose a better path! When DEF came into my life, I took a leap of faith and joined them because I had nothing to lose. But what I gained in the process, is something immeasurable.

Whatever you do, be different – that was the advice my mother gave me, and I can’t think of better advice for an entrepreneur. If you’re different, you will stand out. Nothing could be truer for the women entrepreneurs of today who are chartering unknown territories unabashedly and fearlessly. Be it in e-commerce, education, investment, travel, fashion, retail, fitness, hiring, and anything and everything under the sun, they are proceeding with gumption and unbridled enthusiasm to change the world around them, make a difference with their ideas, seek solutions that have never been sought, fight diseases and social norms, run successful ventures and generate employment for many, and give rise to new sustainable ecosystems. Each of them is scripting her own success story in today’s new age world.

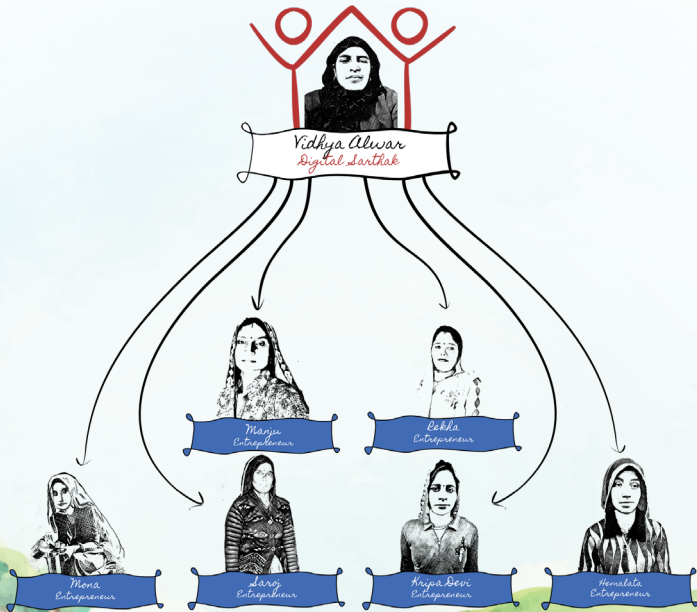
It was only after I had access to resources like Google, YouTube, social media, etc that I came to know about developments in the country, government policies for the welfare of women like me, benefits of having digital bank accounts, medical facilities nearby, etc. With these bundles of information, I actually converted my routine hobby into a business venture and began selling my stitched products to people. I earned money and satisfaction when I saw their gleaming faces. I was on the top of the world and happier than I had ever been for a long long time.”



Name: **Sarda Bai Sen**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Guna**  
State: **Madhya Pradesh**

*“I was on the top of the world and happier than I had ever been for a long long time”*

# The Desire to Solve Problems



*“People were unaware about internet banking, government policies, current affairs, fashion trends and what not”*



“I have been working with DEF for almost four years now, and I can't imagine myself doing anything else other than this. I educate the women of my district about the benefits of a smartphone and how it can make life easier and provide all the resources that one needs. Before joining DEF, I worked at an Anganwadi, but there was this one thing that I noticed almost everywhere - lack of awareness. People were unaware about internet banking, government policies, current affairs, fashion trends and what not! Soon, I heard about DEF and when I saw how similarly inclined our motives were, I immediately decided to join.

During my time at the Anganwadi, I had learnt that life skills like communication are extremely important in our daily lives. This was one of the many qualities I lacked before joining DEF. Now, as a mentor to several women, I had to convey my knowledge to them somehow but due to the lack of my quintessential communication skills there remained a significant gap between me and the women to whom I tried to impart knowledge about the phone. But gradually, when I saw the women's willingness to learn more, I pushed myself and bridged the gap. While interacting with the women, I found out that just to go to the market and buy daily necessities, they had to walk five kilometres because their village didn't have one. There was a very easy way out of this problem, but due to the lack of awareness about technology the women were unaware about various other options. Then I taught them online shopping, and soon they began ordering clothes, grocery items, toiletries, etc to their homes, making their lives a lot easier.

According to me, the best memory I shall always remember about DEF and working with them was when women progressed and approached me to share their joy. I felt proud and happy at the same time, because now they had an identity of their own. On one such day, one of the women entrepreneurs told me that she has come from nothing to everything, and that was what felt like success to me. I have never experienced this before, but with DEF I got a chance to and I shall always grab such opportunities that come my way.”



Name: **Vidhya Alwar**  
Designation: **Mentor, Entrepreneur**  
District: **Alwar**  
State: **Rajasthan**



*“I felt proud and happy at the same time, because now they had an identity of their own”*

*"Finding the balance was the hardest thing in all the process but I have now been able to achieve it since my day can accommodate more hours due to my family's support."*

"I believe that I am a wise woman from my town as I am doing something that all the other women in the village are not doing. They are going along life like they used to 10 years ago. They are doing the same things that their own mothers used to do when they were young. But I am different as I am educated. Educated in using this wonderful thing called the phone. I have been constantly asking around the DEF program and my mentor for the different things that I can do on my phone. Since I learnt that there could be a lot of other things that I could do except just communicating I have been in awe of it. I never knew it was so easy. DEF has helped me find my own shortcomings and put them out of existence.

I have been studying sewing in order to master it since the last 3 years. But it didn't encourage me enough as there was no tangible output from it at the end of the day. I would sit on the machine and toil away for as long as another duty came up and my presence was needed. Something was very intuitive as I had seen other people also sew and I could make some techniques out on my own. The use of the phone greatly helped me in actually studying in detail as to how I could make the same patterns. Even some of my old

sewing methods were strengthened using a phone to get an in depth knowledge on the technique. This last year though has been the most special of all. I have completely shifted my mind to sewing. Household tasks such as cooking food, cleaning around, etc. have been scarce for me lately as my family usually delegates these tasks among themselves in order to keep my schedule free. I have been selling my creations on Facebook Marketplace and learning about the social media site altogether in that way.

Finding the balance was the hardest thing in all the process but I have now been able to achieve it since my day can accommodate more hours due to my family's support.

I sometimes remember Vidya Chachi as she used to have a great outlook on life. She also liked to sew. She used to tell me that change is necessary for the world to move. And I changed along with my family. Changing is the way of life which is something that I have realised and I am constantly changing myself to change with the coming wave."

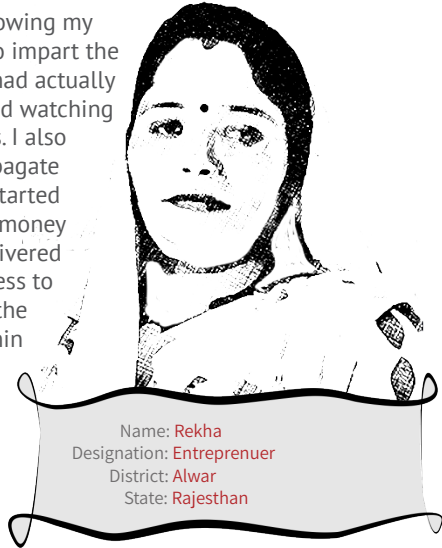
*"Changing is the way of life which is something that I have realised and I am constantly changing myself to change with the coming wave."*

*"I want to see a new generation of women standing up on their own two feet and not taking any handouts."*



"I have been sewing since last year. Before that I was a humble homemaker. I think that this lack of thrust to do something might have been the cause for my give-up attitude. My family decided that I should just start preparing myself to become a housewife. They thought that would at least set a clear intention and know what I needed to do so that I could become a good housewife in a good household. But when I became a housewife I found life quite monotonous. I wanted to do more and that is when DEF approached me.

I learnt the use of the phone and the benefit of showing my talents to the whole wide world. Soon I saw it fit to impart the knowledge on to the social media platform that I had actually learnt my sewing from. I joined YouTube and started watching tutorials for how to do different sewing techniques. I also realised that I could use the same platform to propagate the products that I was making. And that is how I started advertising all my products on YouTube and made money using online payments on the goods that I had delivered to my customer's doorstep. It was an intricate process to master but I usually found my pace when I was in the thick of a problem. I had to change something within myself to move ahead. That is the only way that I thought I could be free. And I became free when I changed things in myself, started experiencing new things and living a new life. I want to have an impact on a large crowd of women so that they don't leave school as early as I did and just give up on their hopes and dreams. I want to see a new generation of women standing up on their own two feet and not taking any handouts. That is the way this whole country should move ahead.



If I had the power to change one thing, I would change the state of my villages. Now that I have a business I often go to cities and see the amount of development taking place right in front of my eyes. I see new buildings being made, the trendy new designer clothes women wear, the walking and talking sense of the people of the city and I feel like I want all of it to be in my village. I also want the village people to have more resources as I do not wish to be left starving while the people in the urban areas have more than what they need. I need to bridge the gap between the two and the way I am impacting myself right now, I feel like it is quite possible."



*"If I had the power to change one thing, I would change the state of my villages"*

*"You have to follow certain processes when you are doing something or you will not learn it."*

"People always tell me that I have a pretty name or a modern name. They never evaluate me based on my skills. I am not too cynical about it but I would be lying if I said that it does not irk me from time to time. But now

I am going to change that. I am one year into learning sewing and I shall master this skill to the point that people value me according to my qualities and not according to something that I had no control over or happen to have by chance.

DEF has helped me a lot as it made me understand that I could have a skill at the cost of nothing. I could use my phone to study something that I wanted to do and not pay a dime for it. DEF told me where to look when I wanted answers to certain things as it wanted me to do things for myself and not take anything for granted or easily.

You have to follow certain processes when you are doing something or you will not learn it.

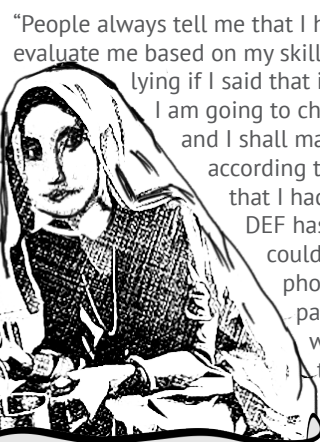
Babies need to waddle before they start to walk.

Students first need to learn the alphabets in order to learn the English language the same way that they need to learn about numbers before they can

start learning actual maths. If you do not have a strong foundation on anything then that is a bridge about to fall. Same goes for a business. If you have built a business with your own two hands, then you know what goes where, who to talk to when you have a problem, how to solve that problem and keep up with the business. Even the second generation of the founders have to learn from the older generation about the workings of the business that they are going to tend to. If you just jump to conclusions then you will never get the answer to what you actually want to know through the process.

When you start to do it, anything is not as hard as it first appears to be. It is the same way as you see your books for the coming year when you are in school. Nothing will make sense in the first few minutes. But as soon as there is someone to guide you and to tell you where to start and what you need to do, everything will become infinitely easier. Just don't stop until you feel the need to stop. And even then stop only temporarily and keep going because that's how life works."

*"When you start to do it, anything is not as hard as it first appears"*



Name: **Mona**

Designation: **Entrepreneur**

District: **Alwar**

State: **Rajasthan**



*"I had to remain stable and calm during the monetary exchanges knowing and believing in myself that I was doing the right thing literally as well as figuratively."*

"I quit school pretty early because I was not confident that I was going to pass through the whole education process. I would stay at home and do the household work and then go to play with my friends in the evening. Some of my friends had dropped out with me too and would do the same. Some others continued to complete their education until the tenth grade or the twelfth grade at least before opting out. I on the other hand stayed at home and went on learning the way of the household thinking that was all that I was good for. Then I was faced with a situation that I had not seen. Financial problems hit me as much as it would hit any other person. But DEF helped me get out of it. The program taught me that I could use the phone that I purchased in my hand to make money beyond my wildest imagination.

My phone helped me focus on skills that I was lacking and gain the basic knowledge that I needed to run a business. I am happy to report that now it has been two years since I started my silverware business which has been booming and earning ample amounts of profit since it started. The biggest problem was that I did not have the arithmetic skills to run a business. And if you don't take good care of money in a business, that business is bound to fail. So I had to learn how to properly handle the money, how to write the accounts, how to take loans and at what rate and stay away as much as possible from the loan sharks. I found the manufacturers of the silverware and struck a deal with them to sell their goods. I used the marketing skills that I had learnt from my own phone to sell their products at a higher rate than the one I was buying it from. I had to remain stable and calm during the monetary exchanges knowing and believing in myself that I was doing the right thing literally as well as figuratively.

Believing in yourself is a big help to yourself. When you help yourself, a certain sense of satisfaction comes about. Feeling of joy is what you should always try for. Every success is a happy turnout and every failure is an opportunity to learn. Everything else can basically be categorised into the category of living a life. The quality of life which we live is in our hands."



Name: Saroj  
Designation: Entrepreneur  
District: Alwar  
State: Rajasthan

*"Every success is a happy turnout and every failure is an opportunity to learn."*

*"To society, women are a minority group. But to women themselves, they are talented human beings with a respectable and unique identity."*



"Our village is brimming with talented women who can contribute a huge amount of wealth into the country's economy, and empower others along the way. But the problem is that their talents go unrecognised and wasted instead of being put to use in such a way that they could socially and economically empower themselves. The sole reason for the drain of these talents is a stereotypical societal system that we live in and its patriarchal boundaries set for and against women. To society, women are a minority group. But to women themselves, they are talented human beings with a respectable and unique identity.

I did not want to fall prey to these stereotypes and the traps of being a homemaker forever. I wanted to have my own personality and I was ready to go to great lengths for it. Thus when DEF approached me, I immediately joined them. Our first few sessions were about the theoretical benefits of a smartphone that left me in great wonder. And when I practically tried out the things that I had learnt on the phone, I was even more in disbelief because so much could happen with the tip of my fingers and in so little time. Determined to be

financially independent and find success, I taught myself sewing and stitching and began selling my products.

I believe that although there needs to be a huge reform in the way the country works, and monumental changes in the mindsets of people, there are many women who have been able to stand their ground and establish themselves as entrepreneurs. And I have DEF to thank for this."



*"there are many women who have been able to stand their ground and establish themselves as entrepreneurs."*



Name: **Kripa Devi**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Alwar**  
State: **Rajasthan**



*"a team is not just a group of people who work together, but a group that trusts each other"*

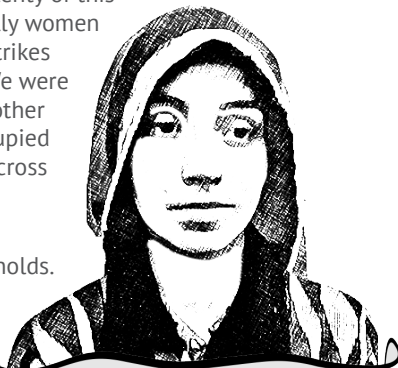


"Someone once said, 'a team is not just a group of people who work together, but a group that trusts each other'. In our village, there's plenty of this camaraderie and trust to be seen in rural folk, especially women who never refuse to join hands whenever a calamity strikes even one of us. Two years ago, this was not the case. We were a disjoint group who only communicated with one another on a requirement basis. Otherwise we were pretty occupied with our monotonous schedules. But when we came across DEF, things changed for the better.

The men of the villages here are busy with their agricultural work, while women look after their households. But during lean times, the family's income dips. DEF's aim was women empowerment and job creation.

The women here are enthusiastic, but we were unable to find jobs due to lack of higher education and low skills. DEF's first step was to form different self-help groups to train us women on how to save and manage money online through digital banking. They also introduced us to enterprise-oriented skills such as pottery, soap making and more which were completely available on platforms like youtube. Watching these videos, we learnt new skills and implemented them in creating products for sale. We enjoyed making these things also then selling them for money was always a plus point in our businesses. We also market our products in the village and nearby local shops.

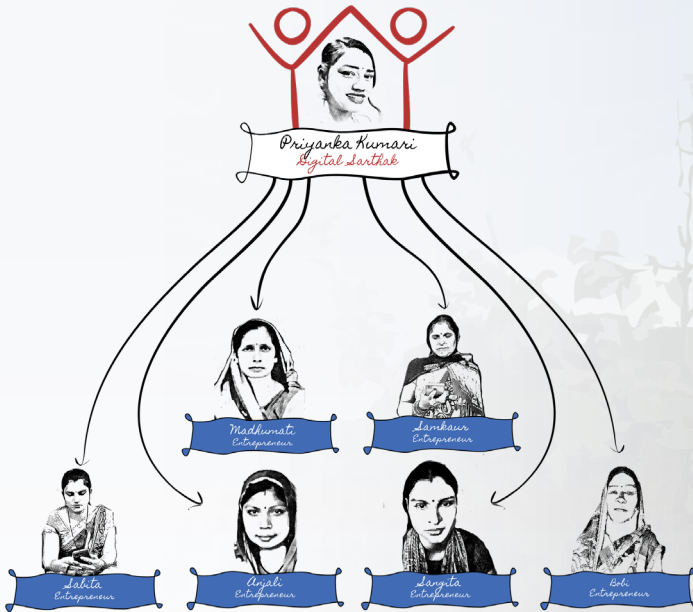
Keeping the accumulation of knowledge apart, I have gained the trust and support and built a business. I think that DEF has also given me a special bond of friendship with every other woman who was with me in the journey of becoming an entrepreneur. I think we have together faced the judgements of society and optimistically survived them thereby becoming great friends. I shall cherish this bond of ours forever!"



Name: **Hemlata**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Alwar**  
State: **Rajasthan**

*"I have gained the trust and support and built a business."*

# The Spirit of Togetherness



*“A rock solid bond is what comes out of the mentor/mentee relationship.”*



“Even if people claim to have paved their way on their own, there’s a strong chance that someone was there early on to set them on the right path or give them sage advice. It was this sense of direction that the women at DEF needed. They needed to explore the opportunities and then be given the right to choose, because without knowing the world how can we expect them to live in the world? When I joined DEF, I knew that my role as a mentor would not only be significant to me but to several others. Hence I wanted it to be perfect.

Such a person can be the magic ingredient your small business needs to thrive, the person who tells you to keep at it when you’re at your lowest point, or just someone who gives the right advice at an opportune time. Whatever the situation, many people owe a great deal of gratitude to their mentors. I wanted to be that mentor for ‘my’ women and today when I look at them managing

their shops or selling their products, I feel that I achieved my goal. I decided to give them a chance when they didn’t seem to have anything to offer. We started right from scratch and we have come a long way since then. A rock solid bond is what comes out of the mentor/mentee relationship. Despite my situation back at home, I wanted to tirelessly work through frustration and fear to ensure a bright future for those I hope to inspire. These women were few of the many young people facing an opportunity-gap. The odds were stacked against them, but we drove past those odds at a lightning speed, and most importantly, we did that together.

The women are now entrepreneurs. They have stores, salons, handicraft businesses and what not! Sometimes it seems that there is nothing that can stop their growth, but I have always reminded them that challenges are part and parcel of life and that some days shall be good but some days shall be bad. What we have taught one another is that no matter what, we shall stand up for each other and never let anyone fall from the heights of success, because we are all in it together!”



Name: **Priyanka Kumari**  
Designation: **Mentor Entrepreneur**  
District: **Khunti**  
State: **Jharkhand**

*“The women are now entrepreneurs. They have stores, salons, handicraft businesses and what not!”*



*"The use of a simple thing such as a phone has helped on this path."*



Name: **Madhumati**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Khunti**  
State: **Jharkhand**

"I have a lot of roles in this society. I am first and foremost a housewife but after which I am also into the fruit business and now, I am thinking of starting and expanding a sewing business to cap it all off. It's a lot of things for somebody to do. I was always this dedicated human being who if sets her heart and mind onto something knows that she has to get it done. That was what helped me manage two businesses and my household simultaneously. But I am content with going through these three roles just for my pure happiness. I take pride in knowing that every hour of my day is not wasted in lazing around. DEF has taught me this work ethic and I do not intend to lose it until the day I retire.

The use of a simple thing such as a phone has helped on this path. It used to be so bad that I didn't even know how to charge my phone. I did not know that you have to plug the charger on the wall and then plug the other part of it to

your phone so that it would get charged and run through the day. I used to have a phone which would take 5 to 6 days to completely drain its battery and then my family would charge for me so I never knew. But along with having a good battery life that phone also came with a lot of limitations. The smartphone on the other hand helps me study the art of sewing as well as sell my fruits to the customers in the area. It showed my customer that I had a good harvest most of the time and that I was a trustworthy person to buy fresh fruit at great deals. As soon as I joined the program everything sort of worked for me but it does not go as smoothly as it did for me. Some people have to work more for the same prize.

I would say the one thing that I want to change in the world is the point of mistrust. In India especially, people usually don't trust women with taking on work but I want to show that anybody can do anything as long as they put their backs into it. You need to have genuine interest in it and you can do it as easily as the other person. It does not take much from you but it returns to you a lot in terms of benefits in my life. I have these benefits and so I have this happy life which I thank the stars for every day."



*"I have this happy life which I thank the stars for every day."*

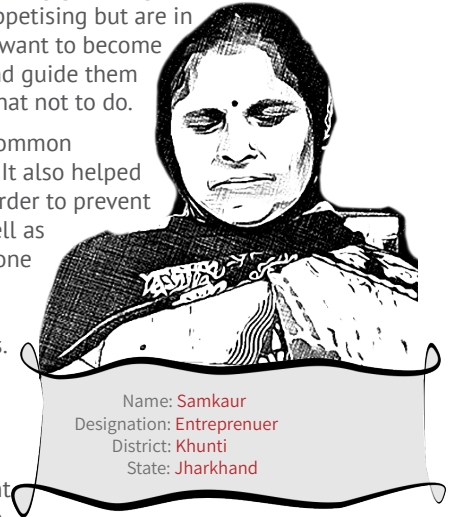
*“I am in for the long haul and I will not leave until I see proper hygiene, safety and awareness.”*



“I am the woman of ‘present’ when I can act and think independently. I want to propagate the cause of safety to each and every one of my citizens and I want to do it in the most effective way possible. My hopes and dreams have reached the ears of DEF as they have helped me through guiding me as to what is the best part that I should take to preach the cause of having good hygienic practices as well as refrain from a lot of things that seem appetising but are in every shape and form, a poison to the society. I want to become a social worker who can reach distant minds and guide them towards the right path about what to do and what not to do.

DEF helped me in researching what the most common diseases are found in the village areas in India. It also helped me educate how I can undertake measures in order to prevent myself, my family, and my neighbourhood as well as the whole village from these diseases. I have gone out to two neighbourhoods where hygiene is not proper and I have educated the villagers there to maintain a better upkeep of their areas. A lot of villages in their youth have a habit of drinking locally made alcohol so it is my duty to educate them that if this alcohol were to be made incorrectly it could easily be fatal as it would be poisonous. A lot of people do not want these changes in their life but this is the way to progress and I want to bring my whole community forward with me. People mock me and say I didn’t even know about this stuff until a while ago but it’s better to be educated rather than to be ignorant of the facts. One of the most useful properties of the phone I found was the live location that I could share with my fellow companions on this mission so that I could know their location at all times and regroup to discuss strategies on handling certain problems.

This initiative that I am taking will not take a day or a week to conclude. But I am in for a long haul and I do not want to leave until I see proper hygiene, safety and awareness practised in the communities. If I could change the way something worked in this world, I would change the thinking processes of the adults who think that proper safety and awareness are a luxury rather than a necessity. I would make them realise that their way of thinking is wrong and move them to take up the cause that I have.”

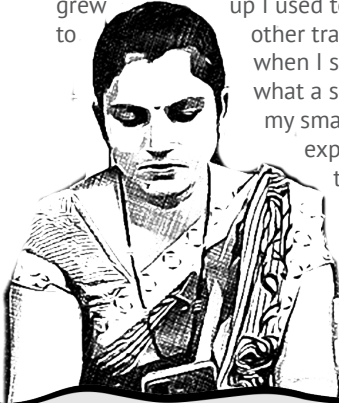


*“I would change the thinking processes of the adults who think that safety is a luxury and not a necessity.”*

*"With the help of a smartphone I learnt what sort of crops would be best to grow in what season."*



"Growing up I used to visit the farms a lot and see my father along with his other farmer friends toil away in the fields. I picked up a few things here and there to know enough about farming and the crops that used to grow on our land. When I grew up I used to farm for the house and then sell everything else off to other traders in exchange for some amount of money. That's when I stumbled across DEF. When I asked my DEF mentors what a smartphone would do and how it was different from my small phone, the list that I got was a lot more than I expected. With the help of the smartphone I was able to learn what sort of crops would be the best to grow in what season. I was able to check the weather according to which I started planning my harvests. I learnt the market prices of all the things that I had bought and the volume in which I would be able to sell them and I also got different traders to sell me their goods. One of the biggest things that we were not taught as farmers was that we had to do fertilisation control. We were not familiar with the concept of over fertilisation.



Name: **Sabita**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Khunti**  
State: **Jharkhand**

By learning this concept of appropriate amount of fertilisation my crop harvest basically doubled itself. My family members genuinely stood in awe of what I had accomplished. It was a very fulfilling experience to receive the praises of the people who were so good at the craft even before I was born. That's when I realised I had to pursue this as much as I could with the help of my new found knowledge. I have very little farming experience in terms of climate interpretation so I usually take the help of my older family members who are well versed in farming. But with the help of excellent minds like them and some other people from the program I have started grasping the knowledge quite easily.

When you find something that you are good at that you actually like you should always stick to it. Believe it or not the world walks on small or big processes. Every person has a role in the world which he or she can feel fulfilled about. So no job is good or bad. As long as you love what you are doing you don't need to think about the future that much because your conscience will always pick the right choices for you. Like our beloved Prime Ministers I also have this belief that good days are going to come and they are going to come as fast as they can."



*"Every person has a role in the world which they are fulfilled with."*

*"I want each and every woman to experience what it is like to be appreciated for one's hard earned skill."*



"I grew up in a house where I was the eldest so all my younger siblings would always come to me for help with homework and other such academic tasks. Teaching them was no problem as I loved to teach, but kids being kids, they would get distracted pretty soon and run away from their work to play with friends. I tried every possible trick to glue them to their benches. Some people asked me to encourage them to watch educational videos on YouTube, but I had never even heard the Y-name before! I had never used a mobile phone as a tool to teach because when we were young we had grown up learning on boards and slates, that was all I knew. Our house seemed no less than a fish market with all the shouting and cribbing of kids and the increasing workload of household chores.

It was after joining DEF that I started to feel that there are so many ways of teaching and imparting knowledge let alone the traditional methods. My mentor at DEF taught me how to upgrade myself with the use of the latest technology. Life instantly became much easier and simpler. Students started enjoying sessions and more importantly, this time they sat patiently on their desks waiting for me to share more educational videos with them. With time, my teaching methods changed, perspectives changed and I could see the optimistic results that these changes brought with them. I love the newfound respect that comes along with my status and I want each and every woman to experience what it is like to be appreciated for one's hard earned skill.



Name: **Anjali**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Khunti**  
State: **Jharkhand**

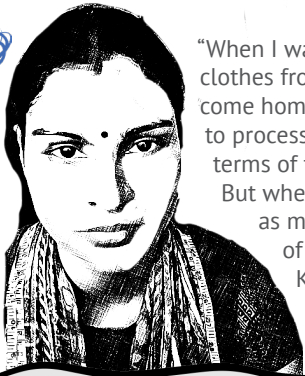
I believe that dreams can always come true if you want them to, because DEF made me believe that. Now when I come across students, I never shout or scold them for not completing their homeworks on time. I teach them in a way that makes them realise and understand their mistakes. I am grateful to this initiative for motivating and pushing me in the correct direction, making me capable enough to push these young minds in the correct direction too."



*"I believe that dreams can always come true if one really wants them to."*



*"I learnt the techniques of making Khadi handcrafted products and then selling them online using social media marketplaces as well as actual markets."*



Name: **Sangita**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Khunti**  
State: **Jharkhand**

"When I was young, I used to watch my mother make Khadi clothes from cotton that grew in our farms. My mother would come home with a bag full of cotton and then she would get to processing them. She wasn't the most efficient person in terms of technique as well as speed so it would take a while.

But when the product was finished one would look at it with as much satisfaction as she would when I would eat all of my dinner. I would almost say that she thought that Khadi cloth was a part of her and the reason why it was so might have been because it took her such a long amount of time to make it. I would watch her sell it in the marketplace while also carrying the heavy bag. Things changed for the good when I joined DEF. DEF told me that by just using the phone that was in my hand I could do the same thing that she did but faster and better. I learnt the techniques of making Khadi handcrafted products and then selling them online using

social media marketplaces as well as actual markets.

I am always happy whenever I go to visit my mum now and I always bring a Khadi item with me. She looks at it the same way she used to look at her own creations. She always praises me when I make new products and then gives me ideas of what more I could do to increase the appeal of a product or make a new one altogether. This business venture that I started a year ago has turned into a joint project between my mother and I as we both love to talk about it to no end. I feel like when you want to make a connection with someone, learning their likes and dislikes is one of the most important things to do.

When you like or dislike something there are always going to be people who like the same things. After all there are 7 billion of us on this planet. That is a fun fact that I learnt from Google along with a lot of other things that came in handy now to start my business venture. Sharing happiness with even one of them is one of the purest joys of life, according to me."



*"Sharing happiness with even one of them is one of the purest joys of life, according to me."*



*“I also introduced cashless transactions so that we don't have to stock up on change.”*



“The ideology of a gender bias has inflicted everything around me, even within my family. My father owns a Kirana store, and he unwillingly asked my brother to look after it when he started feeling unwell. My brother on the other hand had different interests. But I was a business-minded child and no one in my family recognized this. Soon, I came across DEF and the work they had done for all these years. Without an inch of hesitation, I signed up. What happened after a few months of training is another story, but a great one.

With the help of DEF I made several of the business transactions for the store online so that the payments could be made easily without any hassle to my father. I started taking charge by prioritising what material should be bought in bulk because of a certain season approaching and the previous one ending. For example I would always stalk up on pickle ingredients right before the summer started as I knew that rural homes will start making pickles as soon as the season begins. I also made some online transactions with the customers so as to streamline my business. And I also introduced cashless transactions so that we don't have to stock up on change.



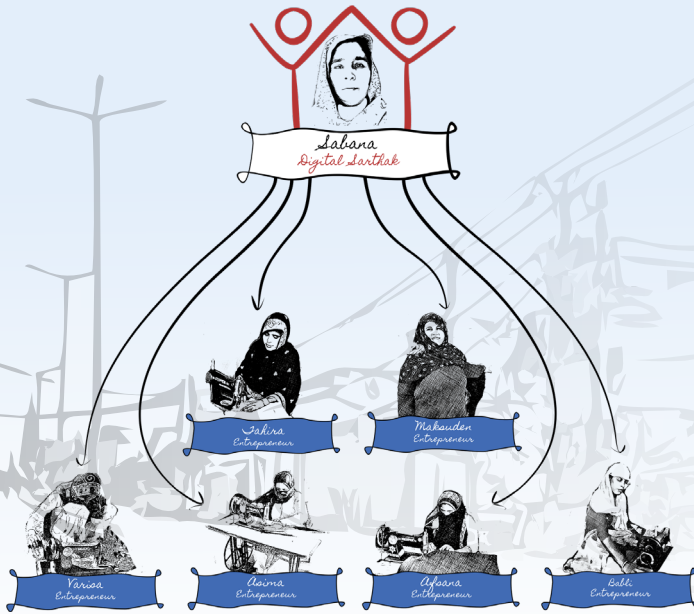
Name: **Bobi**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Khunti**  
State: **Jharkhand**

When you see something that you know has some flaws in it, you can always go and change it or you can just make a suggestion. If your words hold any power, people will always listen knowing that whatever you say will be valuable towards their betterment. A status like that is earned when you prove yourself over and over again in a life skill. Just like I proved myself to be a better entrepreneur than any of my other siblings. When you want something, just go for it. Run and run until you can and then run some more until you have it in your hands. Then finally take a breath.”



*“When you want something, just go for it.”*

# A Blessing in Disguise



*“I learnt from the internet on how one could teach online from the comforts of our homes.”*



“As a woman who wants to make sure that the future of our next generation, the youth of today, is secured, I joined the Anganwadi in our district and taught the students essential life skills. At the same time, I also decided to join the DEF initiative to better myself in all walks of life, including digital literacy. The Anganwadi was my way of ensuring that our children get the best education possible for them to survive in this highly competitive world and thus I decided to pass on the digital knowledge I gained from DEF to my students. Children everyday would flock together outside the verandah in the pursuit of learning something new. But along with children I started to see many women willing to learn about the smartphone in order to spike their businesses. All of them were my students.

But life throws obstacles, and it is natural. This was when COVID-19 struck and the world experienced a complete lockdown. Since we didn't have proper medical facilities in villages, we had to be all the more careful. Irrespective of the stringent measures taken, people would fall ill, and the most vulnerable would even die. Frequent visits from doctors were constant reminders for us to not step out of the house. I missed my students and I knew that they missed me too. I felt all the more helpless, since I did not want their progress and growth to come to an excruciating halt.

Just when all hopes seemed lost, I learnt from the internet on how one could teach online from the comforts of our homes. Although, when I tried using the applications they were far from simple but I never gave up. Using the help of my other mentors at DEF I taught the students and the women, applications like Google Meet and Zoom through which we actually held short but educational meetings.

During this time of isolation, I felt that I was guiding the whole village in the direction of education and awareness. Some of them initially hesitated to encourage this approach of mine because they found the idea to be complex and intimidating. But I think that the pandemic was a blessing in disguise in the context that it opened up the children and women to adopt ways that were beyond the conventional ways of learning and teaching. I think that this is one of the greatest progresses I have been a part of during the entirety of my career. I hope to educate others like I have been educated and help them live a better life and have a fruitful future.”



Name: Sabana  
Designation: Mentor Entrepreneur  
District: Nuh  
State: Haryana

*“I hope to educate others like I have been educated and help them live a better life and have a fruitful future.”*



*“I had become the change I dreamt to see in the world.”*

“Life to me was a subtly boring video game wherein I encountered the same characters, same setting and same plot on every level. There was nothing new, no new experiences or tasks, nothing. That was my tipping point when it seemed pointless to even try out new things, even if that meant going shopping nearby. I had lost all of my zeal and enthusiasm. It was then that DEF came into my life and transformed it entirely. I joined the initiative looking for a change but within no time I realised that I had become the change I dreamt to see in the world.



Name: **Tahira**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Nuh**  
State: **Haryana**

With proper digital training from DEF I mastered the skills of banking, designing and communicating online and started selling my stitching products to people. My hard work, commitment and dedication fetched me the success I dreamed for. I made enough money to take care of my children and near relatives. My dream to provide good living conditions to my children was fulfilled. But I thought it was not my mere responsibility. I have always been thankful to all the people who supported me. I shall never forget the

hurdles that I had throughout my life. I think that in the future I shall have a vivid and constructive vision to extend my service to needy people. I want to provide educational facilities and long term result oriented services. Everyone should accept self responsibility and try to be courageous enough to face the challenges. Struggle in life strengthens the calibre of the people. I strongly feel that every individual should stop blaming the environment and start helping themselves. God always sends his hidden helping hands through different unexpected sources. We don't need to look back when we realise that we are responsible for our lives.

Nothing could be truer for the women entrepreneurs of today who are chartering unknown territories unabashedly and fearlessly. Be it in ecommerce, education, investment, travel, fashion, retail, fitness, recruitment, and anything and everything under the sun, they are proceeding with gumption and unbridled enthusiasm to change the world around them, making a difference with their ideas, seeking solutions that have never been sought, fighting diseases and social norms, running successful ventures and generating employment for many, and paving the way for the rise of sustainable ecosystems. I am proud to be one of them.”

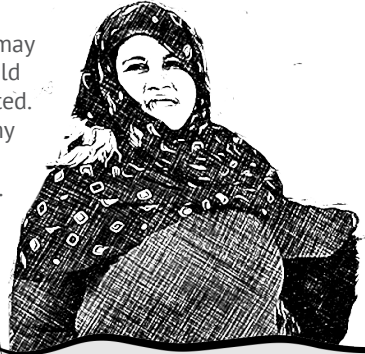
*“women entrepreneurs of today who are chartering unknown territories unabashedly and fearlessly.”*

*“Most of the women are born with entrepreneurial skills ”*



“Being a woman, everyone should feel proud of themselves. Looking into every field of life, managing corporations, managing household things or the sports world, women’s success stories are so many. Most of the women are born with entrepreneurial skills and are known for it. Women are embedded with patience, perseverance, risk-taking attitude, hard work, etc. and these are the qualities of entrepreneurs. I never believed that I could be one of these entrepreneurs, but DEF made it possible.

In my quest to empower myself, I have realised that I may try my best to show myself the way forward but it would have been in limited ways since my knowledge is limited. DEF on the other hand played the role of expanding my knowledge to a certain extent and I was able to freely communicate with the world through digital mediums. Now, my goal or aim is to show myself the world of opportunities that exists out there. I try to show myself that this is a golden opportunity for me to find new business avenues. Although, one cannot deny the fact that skills are required in the field of entrepreneurship. One should have passion, knowledge about what they are doing and the ability to invest. DEF also conducted counselling sessions for women like me to know their interests and make them ready for the future. Lots of opportunities are available for women today, which they are not aware of. In government and private sectors, there are certain schemes for women. DEF plays the role of a nodal agency between women entrepreneurs and the government so that the schemes can reach the women they are meant for.



Name: **Maksuden**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Nuh**  
State: **Haryana**

Women, if determined, can achieve any goal , whatever may be the situation. Successful women entrepreneurs viewed life as challenging. Their stimulated positivity in the thinking process and finding solution to a problem after a persistent effort made them successful in their business ventures. Women around the world have achieved wonders. They not only run successful businesses but also take care of their families. There is nothing more powerful than a determined and confident woman. The day you decide to follow your dreams, that day you will start seeing your dreams turn into a reality. All you have to do is believe in yourself and take those first few steps.”

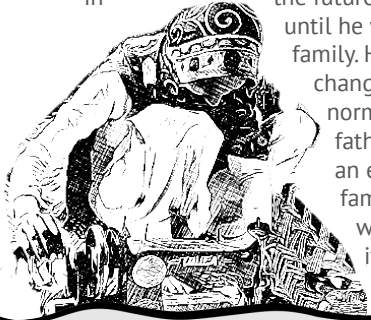


*“All you have to do is believe in yourself and take those first few steps.”*

*“Now, with new tools and more manpower I am able to make 15,000 rupees per month.”*



“In my childhood I had this spark inside me that always pushed me to my limits. There were not a lot of parents in the village who would send their kids to study. I was lucky that my father wanted me to study and become independent in the future so that I can support my family. It was all good until he was around as he was the earning member of the family. He used to work in a factory nearby. But all this changed after his body stopped functioning the way it normally does. I had to leave school and stay with my father at home so that my mother could go and work in an embroidery shop nearby. My mother belonged to a family where everyone was into embroidery work. So it was something that was in my blood. Sooner or later it became quite evident that school was now not an option for me. Though my mother worked hard she was not able to provide and take care of the family. Since my childhood, to help my family who was struggling, I had to always work without having the possibility to continue my studies and I did not like that because my friends used to go to school and I had to work and help my mother bring money into the house and somewhere there



Name: **Varisa**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Nuh**  
State: **Haryana**

that spark that I had to push myself to limits was lost. Life became boring and mundane. Working from home with my mother made it possible to learn directly from the maternal hands about the traditional embroidery methods.

After years of work, I started to be more and more skilled, discovering new ways to approach the different jobs I had to do. One day I came across the DEF program. I had heard about it from the nearby villages and how it changed the lives of people. I ended up being a part of it and have never regretted ever since. With the help of mentors at DEF I not only learnt how to take my embroidery skills to the next level but also how to work smartly. I started this business with only two women but now I have 8 other women from my village working with me. DEF brought that spark back into my life. Now, with new tools and more manpower I am able to make 15,000 rupees per month.

The products made with these new tools and skills started getting sold and in big quantities. The bags I used to create became very famous. Now women from villages nearby come in every month to learn this traditional art. Not only am I moving forward but I am taking a lot of other ladies forward with me and that is the biggest achievement of my life. My goal is to make sure that no other girl in the village should ever go through the stage that I was in.”



*“My goal is to make sure that no other girl in the village should ever go through the stage that I was in.”*

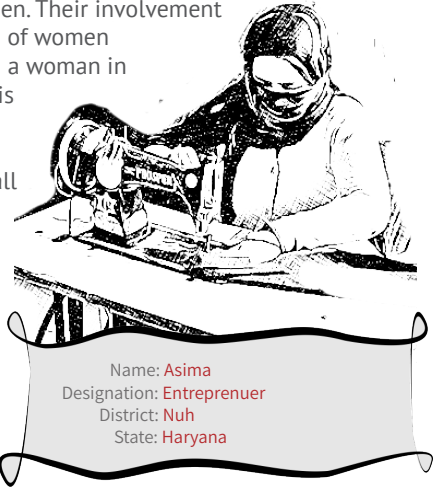
*“the issue of women empowerment assumes a great significance.”*



“In the present scenario, the rural women lead harder lives and are often discriminated against with regard to land and property rights, access to facilities and handling finances. Women in most places have to undertake the drudgery of day-to-day household work including the collection of wood to use as fuel for cooking and fetching of drinking water from faraway places. Their nutritional status and literacy rates are lower than those of men. Their involvement in decision making is also limited. Hence the issue of women empowerment assumes a great significance. Being a woman in a similar environment, I never paid attention to this inequality and biased discrimination that we were facing for several years. DEF came and opened my eyes to this bias and prepared me to fight it with all my courage.

Being termed as a literate is nuanced in the current digital era where the ability to read and write may not necessarily be a prerequisite to function in the fast paced world as the focus and the need of the hour has been on skills to use digital tools. Through experience, it has been commonly observed that with the help of women entrepreneurs, a rural community can prove to be self-sufficient in organising their finances which tends to make the people of the community better informed and hopeful in being able to receive their rightful entitlements. DEF made me realise this. DEF trained us on a free-to-use Digital Tool (MeraBills App) for formal bookkeeping, online and offline business operations management, and business insights generation to be introduced in parallel to women entrepreneurs. This included rigorous training on usage, features and other specifics, along with query resolution support, etc. After such a detailed training I finally established my business and even took it online

Today I might have sold several products and gained enough money to support my family financially, but every time I hold that money in my hands, I always thank DEF and my other fellow women entrepreneurs for having supported me all the way along.”



Name: **Asima**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Nuh**  
State: **Haryana**



*“Being termed as a literate is nuanced in the current digital era”*



*“I started feeling more confident about myself as she mentored me and made me believe in myself.”*



“I did household chores and also took care of a family. I had a small mobile phone earlier, but I didn’t know much about mobile phones. Once I met Sabana Bai, DEF’s Digital Sarthak, she told me about the various digital literacy initiatives that the organisation has in place for women. Under this program I was identified by her as a trainee to receive digital literacy training. My mentor asked me to spend some time with her and I observed the way she would speak to people. I wanted to become comfortable in my interactions with people and so I closely observed her for a long time. Slowly I started feeling more confident about myself as she mentored me and made me believe in myself. Along with giving us knowledge about digital tools and their functions, she has helped me and so many women in my village overcome their fears and express themselves freely. I never used to think that women could express themselves so freely but interacting with her and the other women in this program really motivated me to step out, express myself and become more confident.”



Name: **Afsana**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Nuh**  
State: **Haryana**

So far I have been in six training sessions wherein I have learnt about calling, connecting using WhatsApp, running YouTube channels, searching on Google, removing photos and videos, and how to talk to customers. I also helped my husband by taking this training, as he also did not have much knowledge about mobile phones. So I taught him as well. I do not make online payments because I have a small shop in the village, so here the customers pay by cash. Me and my husband are very happy because earlier we didn’t even have a smartphone and now we use it without any problems. We use it to earn money, learn new things and also to pass our time by watching YouTube videos. I have learnt how to converse using a phone, how to sell and market products online, how to do market research and much more.

Earlier I was reluctant about talking to outsiders and would get nervous about going out alone but spending time with Sabana ji has helped me gain confidence. Along with me many other women in our village have learnt about digital tools and how to use them to reach out to more people. Now I am able to do all of these things by myself as I have become comfortable with digital devices.”



*“I have learnt about calling, connecting using WhatsApp, running YouTube channels, searching on Google, removing photos and videos, and how to talk to customers.”*



*“Since my childhood, I have heard stories about goddesses and brave queens whom everyone respected but when I see my village and observe how women are treated, it hurts.”*



“I come from a social setting where people are riddled with the mentality that a woman is meant for getting married, cleaning, giving birth to kids and then looking after them. This was something that has always disturbed me as a woman myself. Since my childhood, I have heard stories about goddesses and brave queens whom everyone respected but when I see my village and observe how women are treated, it hurts. Even my life would have been like other women if it had not come to a standstill when my husband met with an accident that left him physically disabled. He had to quit his private job and life seemed insecure for us. But I did not give up. I had a keen interest and skills in sewing. My in-laws had this sewing machine that was never used after my mother-in-law passed away. My neighbour Sushila introduced me to this DEF program. First of all I was scared to go along with her and meet Sabana Ji, who is my mentor now. I still remember how nervous I was leaving my house and with all those elderly men of my village staring at me as I left my place. But it was just a leap that I had to take. After a lot of training and hard work, I started sewing handbags of different types. My craft garnered notice and with my dedicated effort, slowly and gradually I started receiving larger orders from neighbouring villages and nearby towns. This boosted my confidence and I started branding and selling these bags.



Name: **Babli**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Nuh**  
State: **Haryana**

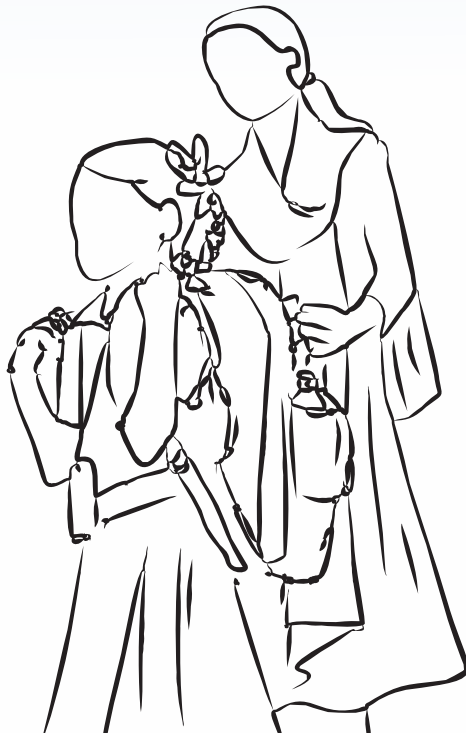
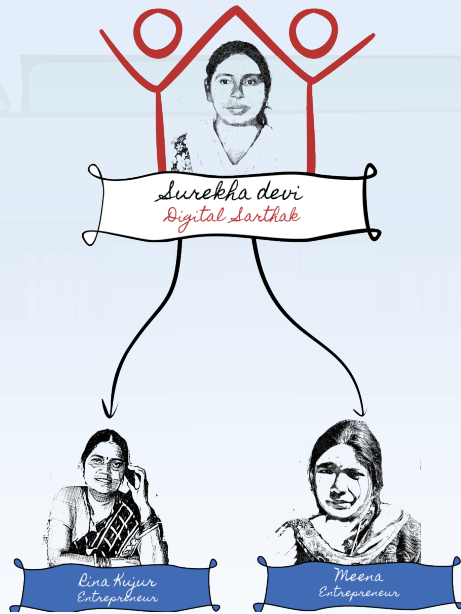
Today, I financially support my entire family and aim to set up a shop to sell my bags and earn more money from which I want to give my daughter the best possible education. For me, the solution to my problem was within me – honing my skills and backing it with appropriate training. DEF helped me overcome my problems and fears and it has shut the mouth of the people in my village.

DEF not only made me capable but also introduced me to other women who, like me, have overcome these barriers and achieved good things for their family. I have realised every woman you meet can inspire you with their ability to face and fight their challenges. Their ability to smile through their difficulties is something we can all learn from.”



*“ I financially support my entire family and aim to set up a shop to sell my bags and earn more money from which I want to give my daughter the best possible education.”*

# The Fruits of Satisfied Success



*"The greatest job on this planet is the job of a teacher."*



"The greatest job on this planet is the job of a teacher, according to me. A teacher helps you understand, comprehend and solve many hurdles and difficulties in life without any reluctance. The teacher is always selfless, and I believe that once you have mastered this art of teaching, you have earned success.

I feel my biggest weakness is public speaking. I love to talk to other people, and I'm comfortable working with small groups of people, but speaking in front of bigger groups is sometimes difficult for me. However, being a mentor at DEF challenges me to face my fear, and it's helped me become more confident as a speaker. In fact, I often use this as an example when I'm training to demonstrate how it's possible for everyone to improve their skills even when it feels impossible.

When I was in school, I was fortunate that one of my professors became my mentor. He taught one of my most difficult courses in my junior year, and we developed a friendly relationship because I frequently attended his office for help. One of the most important things I learned from him was the value of consistency. There were times I felt I would never master the concepts for the course, but he refused to give up on me. I now apply this same level of commitment to my mentees, ensuring they feel supported. These women have grown to become entrepreneurs and when I look back at their journey through thick and thin to achieve this, I not only feel proud but also empowered. I feel empowered enough to bring out more of such optimistic change in the society we live in and are an active part of today.

I think what helped me overcome the challenges throughout my journey at DEF were the key skills of patience and listening. When the women started learning about the phone, they took significantly greater time in absorbing the basics. I had continuously pushed them to try and try harder. It took them weeks before they could actually understand features like Youtube. But then onwards, these women caught up and began learning very quickly. Within no time they could use advanced features like net banking on the phone. When I asked one of my mentees if I was of some help as a teacher. That's when she pointed out that if it weren't for my patience, they would have given up long ago. That moment, I felt satisfied."



Name: **Surekha Devi**  
Designation: **Mentor Entrepreneur**  
District: **Khunti**  
State: **Jharkhand**

*"These women have grown to become entrepreneurs and when I look back at their journey through thick and thin to achieve this, I not only feel proud but also empowered."*

*"This training provided me with a lot of information about smartphones."*



Name: Rina Kujur  
Designation: Entrepreneur  
District: Khunti  
State: Jharkhand

I used to make a lot of attractive and colourful bangles which were sold at the shop I had and also in the nearby market so that I could earn some extra money for the family.

My husband is a farmer and he has struggled to run the family of four with the meagre income. I started attending digital training sessions under the Digital Sarthak project. This training provided me with a lot of information about smartphones. Eventually I learnt to use smartphones for business and started using social media platforms. Through WhatsApp I was able to create better networks of people using which I could sell many products on a larger scale. I got to know more about using ATMs and other banking services which made me feel more confident in continuing my business.

The training has not just helped me but also my family. They are well acquainted with the tricks of the smartphone. With this kind of digital education I am able to run my shop on a much larger scale. My monthly income has increased to a great extent which is contributing to the welfare of my family. I am so glad to have learnt about the potential of digital skills in uplifting any kind of business. I am also proud to have been able to use it optimally."



*"I am so glad to have learnt about the potential of digital skills in uplifting any kind of business."*

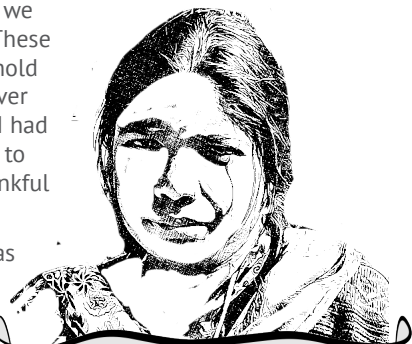
*“The first thing that we learnt about a smartphone was how to install applications and their respective uses.”*



“Introverted, shy and reserved are the words I would use to describe myself a few months ago. I rarely spoke to people outside my family, and social interactions as such were entirely a ‘no’ for me. Now when I look back, I think that the cause of my extreme introvertedness was perhaps the burdens of misogyny and patriarchy inflicted on me. As women of an extremely conventional, traditional and orthodox Indian family, we had to abide by rules that were solely meant for us. These rules included no social interactions, working household chores only, curbing our desires and many more. I never thought I would like talking to people until actually I had an opportunity to. This experience gave me a chance to explore the unknown aspects of myself and I am thankful to DEF for making that happen.

The first thing that we learnt about a smartphone was how to install applications and their respective uses. One of the first applications that I installed was Facebook. When my mentor explained its features like posting photos, commenting and liking our friends’ photos, connecting and interacting with people, joining groups who shared the same interests as you do, I was very much intrigued. I immediately created my profile, updated my pictures and was all ready to explore a digital world that I thought never existed. Initially I made several blunders. I accidentally liked photos and commenting was something I thought I could never do. I soon became discouraged and lost hope. But my mentor at DEF asked me to not give up. She made me believe that although learning new things that we have never even heard of before might feel intimidating at first, gradually the stars align in favour of us and we can achieve whatever we desire. That’s what kick started my journey to learn again and today I am a new person altogether.

Today I follow what I like, and I mean literally! I follow pages and accounts, share my smallest achievements with the world and encourage others too. I had always loved interacting and connecting with people, but now I actually have the opportunity to do so even if it is online. Recently, I have started posting my sewing products online and when people like and comment on those, I feel proud. I have even sold a few of these products on these platforms in return for cash. I have changed, and I like this change.”



Name: **Meena**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Khunti**  
State: **Jharkhand**



*“I follow pages and accounts, share my smallest achievements with the world and encourage others too.”*

# The Fight against Patriarchy



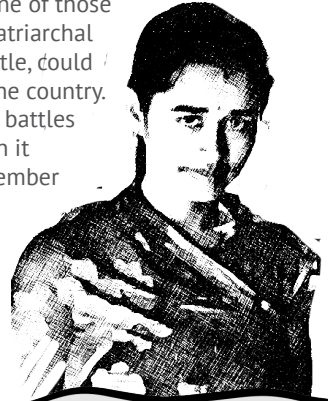
*“women had to fight for their rights against the brutal patriarchal societies that they lived in.”*



“I have heard stories of inspirational women all over the globe through the means of newspapers or sometimes television channels. And the one thing that I find common with most of those stories is that each one of those women had to fight for their rights against the brutal patriarchal societies that they lived in. Only when they won the battle, could they conquer their right to be independent citizens of the country. That made me ponder a lot. As women we have to fight battles and these might seem very small and insignificant when it comes to global problems and issues, but we must remember that they cannot be ignored.

When DEF approached me and asked me if I could educate the women of my district about how to use the smartphone and its associated benefits, the first thought that struck my mind was that I got to fight my own battle. That's when my journey as a mentor at DEF began. I took the first few sessions with the women very slowly and instead of teaching them the technical aspects straight away, I first taught them how to muster courage to stand up against the society and demand for their rights because I knew that once their journey towards education began there will be questions and judgements from almost everywhere. When I felt that the women were ready, I began teaching them about smartphone features like calling, chatting, Googling etc. Gradually we learnt about digital payments, government services and policies. As expected, their families questioned their need to learn about a smartphone that had no use for them. But these women, with courage, demanded that it was extremely essential for them to free themselves from the shackles of dependence.

Within no time, the women that I am addressing now became ‘Women Entrepreneurs’, smart, courageous and victorious in their respective battles. I am proud to have been a source to guide them all this way. I won the fight against patriarchy a long time ago, but today when the women entrepreneurs I had trained won this fight, I felt like I won all over again.”



Name: **Rekha Kumari**  
Designation: **Mentor Entrepreneur**  
District: **Ramgarh**  
State: **Rajasthan**

*“But these women, with courage, demanded that it was extremely essential for them to free themselves from the shackles of dependence.”*





*“Digital tools allow women to uplift their businesses from home by providing various alternatives to continue managing the business amidst busy and unpredictable schedules at home.”*



Name: **Gayatri Devi**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Ramgarh**  
State: **Rajasthan**

“I used to run a grocery business before becoming a woman entrepreneur. I come from a joint family and my husband is a farmer who works as a labourer during off season. I started the business outside our home so that I could financially assist my family.

Digital training sessions have helped me to understand smartphones better. I have passed on this knowledge to my family members who are confident in using many applications of the smartphone. With this knowledge, I am able to reach out to customers on a larger scale as I could connect with more dealers online. I find money transactions very easy with the help of many applications. As a result, my monthly income has increased which is helping our family to a great extent.

Digital tools allow women to uplift their businesses from home by providing various alternatives to continue managing the business amidst busy and unpredictable schedules at home. My family is also more engaged in supporting me to run the business as they get to learn something new online as well. I hope these tools help many more women to improve their lives.”



*“I hope these tools help many more women to improve their lives.”*

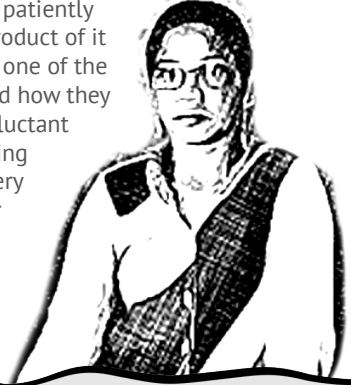
*“I made my handcrafted and sewed products, clicked their pictures using my phone and posted them online”*

“I loved sewing and it was as if sewing was my favourite pastime or hobby. After completing all my household chores, I would sit down patiently with a needle and thread and keep sewing until the product of it all is a beautiful and gorgeous garment. One morning, one of the neighbouring women came and told me about DEF and how they had started an initiative in our district. At first I was reluctant about even participating in their campaigns and learning about what they had to offer because all of this was very new to me. But one of my friends dragged me with her and I am glad she did. Otherwise, I would have missed out on a great opportunity.

After basic sessions on using the mobile phone, they taught me how to apply our knowledge to a skill that we already possessed. And I immediately knew that for me it would be sewing. So without further delay I made my handcrafted and sewed products, clicked their pictures using my phone and posted them online. People liked what I had to offer and customers from all over the country approached me to buy them. The best part about

it all was not earning money or selling my products, although that was one of the good ones. But the best part was seeing that a simple machine could connect me to places that I have never been to. Places that are so far away in terms of distance but only a click away on my phone.

Before discovering the phone I had no dreams, none at all. But now I feel like travelling endlessly. I dream of earning my own money using the business of selling products online and using that money to travel to places I have never even heard of before. This is my dream and I hope to achieve it very soon. I am grateful to DEF for helping me uncover this potential of being able to harness my far-fetched dreams.”



Name: **Rakhi**  
Designation: **Entrepreneur**  
District: **Ramgarh**  
State: **Rajasthan**

*“I dream of earning my own money using the business of selling sewing products online”*

# Conclusion

Stories are a powerful tool to convey fascinating ideas and enlighten readers with empowering journeys. The objective of this book was to put a spotlight on women and their journeys of becoming 'Women Entrepreneurs' through thick and thin. The Digital Sarthak project has been a successful endeavour in bringing digital transformation to those who needed it the most. Women have outnumbered men on nonfarm payrolls, yet despite having a majority of women in the workplace, they still face several difficulties. The fact that women still make less money than male counterparts for doing the same job is one of the main problems, and it has been extensively discussed and disputed. But now that Digital Sarthak's Women Entrepreneurs are the breadwinners of the family, perspectives have changed. These stories share the internal struggles under external shackles and depict the nuanced effects financial independence has on an individual bound by social norms. The project has been successful so far in achieving these outcomes and DEF hopes to see such stories grow in number as it has had a multiplying effect on the peripheral groups of women through its supportive and growth enhancing structure.







Women Empowering Women is a documentation of women's leadership and entrepreneurship through the lens of socio-behavioral nuances when they are introduced to digital tools, skills, and newly acquired communication and transaction methods. The canvas for these women entrepreneurship stories is the hidden land of Jharkhand, UP, Assam, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Haryana, where Digital Empowerment Foundation ran a program called Digital Sarthak. The program aimed to create a count of 16,500 women digital entrepreneurs and was supported by USAID and DAI.



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