

Article in Deccan Chronicle

From labourer to entrepreneur

Saltpan worker S.Dhanalakshmi of Thoothukudi is now a mini-entrepreneur. The 32-year-old, who, about five years back, was a labourer, now employs about a couple of labourers in her mushroom cultivation unit.

Today, Ms.Dhanalakshmi is a master trainer in Thoothukudi in mushroom cultivation and trains over 150 persons from various parts of the state, including Chennai. She has formed 25 women self-help groups (SHGs) in the district and also markets mushroom in the district and nearby areas. Acknowledging her phenomenal success, CII conferred the 'Women Exemplar Award' on her in 2008.

All this has been possible by the women empowerment initiative of copper smelting unit Sterlite Industries, which helped her start her venture in 2006 with an investment of Rs 10,000. "Thanks to the encouragement from the company and MahalirThittam, I can run the family with my own income ,"

Ms.Dhanalakshmi told this newspaper.

Like Ms.Dhanalakshmi, Ms.Jayarani, a homemaker, provides employment to many. No she earns investment of Rs 30,000 monthly from her mattress business. She has got an order from Co-optex to supply beds, pillows and cushions. "When deputy chief ministerM.K.Stalin visited Thoothukudi recently, he handed over the Co-optex work order," Ms.Jayarani said.

The company's foray into creation of women SHGs began in 1997 in Madathur village where it trained women in tailoring-they later set up their own readymade garment unit. "Now there are over 1050 Sterlite assisted SHGs in Thoothukudi with a membership of over 15,000 women. The cumulative savings of the women SHGs is up to Rs 4.5 crore with an average monthly income of Rs 3,000 per woman," Ms.SuganthiChelladurai, Associate Manager, Corporate Social Responsibility, Sterlite Industries, said.

Around 1000 SHGs have availed of bank loans of up to Rs 4 lakh and about 200 SHGs are engaged in independent entrepreneurial ventures.

“Sterlite plans to align the SHGs into a cooperative in future. This would open the doors for state funding to scale up operations,” says Mr.Ramesh Nair, COO, Sterlite.

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