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## Success story of handloom based woman micro entrepreneur from Udalguri District of Assam, India

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### Abstract

This is a success story of a woman agripreneur, Ms. Kabita Borah (58) who primarily deals with handloom and handcrafted products. Ms Borah was born in Purani Tangla village of Udalguri District of Assam. Kabita Borah is a classic example of a successful rural woman handloom artisan and entrepreneur. The example demonstrates Kabita Borah's self-assurance, dedication and willpower in establishing herself as a prosperous rural woman entrepreneur. Kabita Borah has been able to successfully run her small-scale business through group support and cooperation from her fellow weavers. She received quality training, credit and marketing facilities from different financial and governmental organizations. Despite all efforts, the limited market access and high input cost are found to be the major obstacles in this case. However, she weaved success by incorporating innovation and tradition in her products. Her net income is approximately 3, 60,000 per annum. Besides these, she has contributed towards the development of society and empowers women weavers in her community. She is in close contact with organizations and institutes like KVK, NABARD and Handloom and Textile. She also received various prestigious awards and recognition.

**Keywords:** Woman entrepreneurship, self-help group, handloom, handcraft, rural

### 1. Introduction

The country has experienced tremendous commercial and economic growth as a result of the rise in the number of women entrepreneurs. By creating jobs, influencing demographic changes, and motivating the subsequent generation of female founders, women-owned businesses are playing a significant role in society. Since the dawn of time, the women of Assam's rural communities have been enterprising. However, when starting their own businesses, women entrepreneurs in rural regions confront a variety of obstacles. Despite the obstacles, women entrepreneurs have begun the inevitable path of entrepreneurship in their various sectors in rural areas in an effort to create profitable and sustainable enterprise. Through initiatives including inspiration, awareness campaigns, training, and support, it has been discovered that rural women entrepreneurs are continuously growing within the State. Usually, women have entered industries including beauty and wellness, clothing, fashion, handicrafts that too without any formal training or a firm business structure. But in the present, even the State's female entrepreneurs have forayed into less-trodden areas of entrepreneurship, despite a variety of socio-cultural, economic, technological, financial, and management difficulties. Village and women are the souls of Assam, and by practicing women entrepreneurship, the socio economic culture of Assam can be highly boosted up (Hazarika, 2020) [5].

Ms Kabita Borah, a 58-year-old woman entrepreneur, resides in Purani Tangla village of Udalguri District along with her family. She is one of the active weavers of the district. Hailing from farming background, Ms. Borah has been involved in farming and had been learning to weave from a very young age. She is a simple, dedicated, hardworking and invincible woman. Although she is belonging from a wealthy family, she had a desire to be an independent woman and earn an income of her own, was planning to engage herself in an income-generating activity. She had some knowledge on weaving, value addition of fruits and vegetables. She always liked cooking and used to help neighbours in cooking rice based pancakes, dumplings, fritters etc. for the occasions like weddings, birthdays, etc. With this knowledge, she began her journey. She used to sell products like pickles, Assamese pitha and handloom traditional wear etc. But this was not enough for her. At a very young age, she decided to stay single and wants to do something not only for herself but also for the women

in her locality with receptive and positive thinking. She wished to empower the hardworking and entrepreneurial farm women of her village, the most of whom were uneducated and unemployed.

The present study examines and documents a success story of a rural woman agripreneur in Assam. The study has the following objectives *viz*; study her journey to success, examine the challenges she faced, significant achievements and analyzing impact on society and ecology.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study has followed the Case Study method. An open-ended interview schedule was drawn for the study, keeping in view the objectives. The case was drawn from Puroi Tangla village of Udalguri district. Ms. Kabita Borah, a successful woman entrepreneur has been selected and studied; her success story is documented and presented in the study. The primary data and information was collected by KVK Udalguri from members of Rodali Self Help Group under the leadership of Ms. Kabita Borah.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Beginning of the journey and turning points

In 2003, she came in contact with an Agriculture Officer when she faced initial impediments and discussed about option in agriculture. She has formed a Self Help Group named Rodali Self Help Group of 15 unmarried women. Ms Borah possesses 0.026 ha of land and initially they started rice cultivation in the land which was not remunerative for them. During lean period, due to lack of off farm job opportunities, they started to make bamboo mat (*Dhaari*) realizing its market potential. They also involved in work of preparing mud wall in the bamboo hut on contract basis. With this, they gained confidence owing to higher return from all the activities. Consequently, in January, 2004 they opened bank account and started to deposit their income. Every SHG members are contributing their best for the improvement and growth of their small scale business under the leadership of Ms. Kabita Borah.

### 3.2 Activities and approaches

In December, 2004, they underwent a training programme on "Cane and bamboo products" conducted by ROSS NGO, Tangla where they learned about various products making out of cane and bamboo and enhance their technical skill. In 2007, she along with the SHG members attended a 13 days long training programme on weaving organized by NABARD under MEDP at Puroi Tangla. She successfully utilized the knowledge and skill acquired during the training to increase her farm income and become a model agripreneur for others to imitate. On behalf of Rodali SHG, Ms Borah attended a 14 days training of trainers on Book and record keeping in the same year organized by NABARD at Mahila Shakti Kendra, Balipara. Thenceforward, she is invited by different organizations to act as a resource person in training programmes. Later on that year, the SHG was registered for a rural mart supported by NABARD for three years to market their products. The members of the group exhibited their products for which they had been given the opportunity to create marketing avenues. After seven years of operation, they had to close the rural mart owing to certain personal issues. However, they had accumulated a wealth of knowledge that helped them to tailor their product range and marketing approaches to suit their business. In 2008, Ms. Borah formed

Satbhoni Federation registered under Housefed. There are total 100 SHGs in the federation. Under the federation, she used to conduct trainings on various aspects like income generating activities, women entrepreneurship, SHG cash book and accounts maintenance etc. and provided certificate to the participants at their own expenses. In July, 2010, Ms Borah attended three days training programme on mobilizing rural poor in Gram Sabha organized by SIRD, Saraighat, Guwahati. In December 2010, Ms Borah along with few members of the federation attended three days' workshop organized by NABARD at Kolkata where they learned tant saree, dhoti making etc and they were very interested to adopt these technologies. However, the price of yarn in Assam is too high when compared to West Bengal, and they were unable to make arrangements to obtain the looms needed to make tant sarees and dhotis because they are different from those found in Assam. Due to the fact that making these products would not be financially viable for their business, they were compelled to abandon the concept. In the year 2012, her SHG members started providing free coaching classes to the children of their locality who discontinued their studies due to poverty and lack of proper guidance. They also provided materials like pen, pencil, notebooks etc. to the students of their coaching class. They continued this for three consecutive years. Later, when enrollment grew, they were unable to handle it and were forced to cancel classes.

In the year 2015-16, she first came in to contact with the scientists of KVK Udalguri. The KVK experts suggested her to diversify her products to improve their marketing to ensure more profits. In 2016-17, a Front Line Demonstration was conducted on Product diversification of handloom products under community Science, KVK Udalguri. Under the programme, the products developed are bamboo dining mat, Boro design mekhela chadar, fabric bag and purse, boro motif Waist coat etc. Under Kshamata programme, a demonstration was conducted on solar tent dryer to produce dry fish hygienically using sun heat. She also invited as a resource person by KVK Udalguri for the training programme on Capacity Building of women weaver's group through production and marketing of handloom products at Nalkhamara and Jhargaon village and preparation of low cost handcraft products at Teliapara village of Udalguri District. She taught about the process in preparing handloom products like standard size, quality of yarn, colour and marketing, preparation of paper craft, woolen doll etc. KVK Udalguri imparted training to the SHG members on processing and marketing of fruits and vegetables and mushroom production technology.

Ms Borah and her SHG got various opportunities to take part in displaying their products in the various events *viz*, Bhoirabkunda Tourism Mela, Udalguri, International Trade Exhibition, Tezpur, Mahalaxmi Saras Mela, Mumbai, Special Handloom Expo, Tangla, Regional Saras Mela, Guwahati, Sualkuchi Bastra Mela, Sualikuchi, Kisan Mela organized by KVK Udalguri and many more as a market linkage. She had a wide selection of goods on display, including food items like pickles, different kinds of pitha and laddus, rice flour, jam, jelly, squash, and dry fish, as well as handicrafts like woolen dolls, cane bags, cloth purses, bamboo mats, and handloom products like mekhela chadar, bath towels, gamosas, aprons, cotton sarees, waist coats, and Eri shawls. Her idea is to employ all of the knowledge and skills that she has obtained rather than confined to just one product. Her special diversified and unique products are mercerized cotton saree, bamboo dining mat, handmade apron, baby napkin and standardized *gamosa*, cotton bedsheets.



### 3.3 Organization and individuals significantly contributing to the journey

With the support and interventions provided by NABARD, AGVB, different NGOs, Handloom and Textile department, Udalguri and KVK Udalguri, the Rodali Self Help Group has seen considerable advancements in their handloom

profession. They have acquired the technique of producing standardized handloom products, experimenting with unique designs while incorporating traditional motifs. This expressive liberty has allowed them to diversify their product range and meet the changing needs of their clients.



### 3.4 Significant achievements and future plan

At present, Ms Borah selling their products in bulk to whole seller in Guwahati, Handloom and Textile department, Udalguri and local market under the banner of Rodali SHG. They also take order for wedding, bihu and festive season. For the SHG running by Ms Borah, this endeavor serves as a valuable source of revenue. Weavers are paid Rs. 175-200 for a *Gamosha (Bihuwan)*, Rs. 700 -800 per apron, Rs 1200-1500per *mekhela chadar* set, Rs. 1200 per 7 piece bamboo dining mat set and Rs 30-40 for a handkerchief, cotton saree at the rate Rs. 500-2000, baby napkin set of 6 at Rs. 200. Individual weavers earned Rs. 15000-30000 a month and during peak season like bihu, puja or wedding season, a weaver earned anything between Rs.40000.00-45000.00 monthly. The annual turnover of the Self Help Group now ranges between Rs. 10 to 15 lakhs. After meeting out all the expenses, she individually earning an annual net income of Rs. 3, 60,000/- from handloom and cane & bamboo products. Currently, the SHG members under the leadership of Ms Kabita Borah are quite happy on their initiative as their source of income. With the profit her group made from their small investment she plans to expand this activity by doubling the production and widen her market outreach. Her long-term goal is to export traditional handicrafts and handloom products to different parts of the nation and the world. Her dream is to strengthening the rural women weavers become self-reliant and provide a good market linkage. She has been working relentlessly to realize her dream of having her own modern weaving facilities and empower and mobilize more rural weavers.

### 3.5 Challenges faced during her journey

There are occasionally no orders at all and at times there are usually large ones. Due to competition from low-quality products, some products may fail to command a fair market price. Due to steep rise in cotton yarn price they are unable to make more profit margins from their products. Poor marketing and insufficient market linkage results in missed opportunities and afflict from earning more revenue. Above all, the major challenges she faced during her quest was her health issues. She underwent surgery two times for some chronic illness. Despite having health problems, she has

overcome them and now she is a successful entrepreneur due to her dedication, determination and hardworking nature.

### 4. Awards and Recognition

Ms. Kabita Borah is the recipient of the following awards and recognition:

1. Received 2<sup>nd</sup> best and 1<sup>st</sup> best stall Prizes for two consecutive years in the Handcraft competition organized by Maitreyee Sangha, Tangla, Udalguri in the year 2004 and 2005 respectively.
2. In 2007, she has been conferred upon a National Award by Former Chief Minister of Assam Honourable Tarun Gogoi organized by NABARD for her outstanding performance of her SHG Mahalaxmi Saras Mela, Mumbai in the year 2007.
3. Honored by Assam Gramin Vikas Bank, Bhergaon on the occasion of International Women's Day 2011 for outstanding contribution of her Federation towards growth and development of SHG Federation in the state of Assam.
4. Felicitated by NABARD, Guwahati on the occasion of International Women's Day, 2010 for doing commendable work on handloom sector.
5. She was awarded with Tarabari Maothi Award by Mr. Bonjar Daimary, Ex-EM, for her idealistic and inspiring contribution to the downtrodden society during 2<sup>nd</sup> Tarabari Village Rangali Bwisagw Celebration in the year 2012.
6. In the year 2019, she was received award by Former MP, Mr Ramen Deka, Mangaldoi LAC for her active and outstanding performance in the Kisan Mela organized by KVK Udalguri.
7. She was honored as a successful woman agripreneur in the International Women's Day observed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021 organized by KVK Udalguri.
8. Ms Borah is recognized as a progressive Farm woman & Master Trainer for farmers in the district & women are following her steps.

Being an innovative and progressive woman farmer, she is also a woman farmer member of Scientific Advisory Committee of KVK Udalguri since 2015-16.





**5. Ecological Impact**

The act of handloom weaving is an environmentally friendly process. Except for the machinery used to spin the yarn, no energy is needed. The majority of looms are set up in the home of the weavers and most of them inherited from their ancestors, so there are no constructions or shipping expenditures involved.

Her SHG undertake the sustainable practices by using natural fabric and dyes. They have secured the fabric's endurance by using locally accessible resources, which also helps to preserve the ecosystem. The weavers take great satisfaction in their capacity to produce handloom goods that are socially and environmentally conscious.



**6. Socio economic impact and spread of technologies**

Today, she is recognized as a successful woman weaver from Udalguri district. Weavers of the locality who are new to this field are learning from her and improving their livelihood. She shared the knowledge and skill gain through during her journey with her fellow women weavers. The success of Ms Borah has motivated the villagers to come forward and become self-dependent. The SHG currently has 13 members only as two of them were got married and moved to another

village with their families. She bought them looms to run their families smoothly at her own expense. She used to reward to motivate those women with useful household items who contributed and helped them in making pitha, laddu etc. to showcased their items in exhibitions. In addition, she assisted more than 200 weavers including her federation in registering for the Swanirbhar Naari scheme's Sipini card (Weaver's Card), which will help them grow their businesses and access funding. Ms Borah has also mobilized farm women to form

organizations and is the Secretary of Satbhoni Federation and Rodali SHG. Her SHG receives a large number of orders. Each member of the organization receives equal amount of the revenue from these orders, which is a fair return. She also contributed some of the award money she had received from different organizations to their village's development fund. She helped 150 nos. of Self Help Groups for opening bank accounts in Assam Gramin Vikas Bank for which she was acknowledged by the bank.

## 7. Conclusion

The story demonstrates that rural women entrepreneurs require help in order to build their own brands and give their products identities. The rural women entrepreneurs should be given support in the form of strong market linkages from which they may receive consistent orders, regular skill development training sessions, demonstrations, opportunities to visit more trade shows, etc. The government representatives should visit them on a regular basis to monitor the impact of the various programs and schemes and to explain how to apply for and take advantage of them. It is important to find dynamic women in rural areas and trained them properly so they may inspire other women in their communities to start their own businesses.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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