

# Changing lives

**ABF aims to provide one million sustainable livelihoods across 27 states by 2017**



**I**nfllicted with polio, Saroj is still the sole bread-winner of his family and has been so for the last three years. After the sudden death of his father few years ago, this young woman of 18 from the tribal village of Neemkheda in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh had to look out for some job to support her mother. Through local villagers, she came to know about the tailoring training centre, Kumbaya Bhawan in Neemkheda, run by Dewas-based non-profitable organisation Samaj Pragati Sahayog (SPS), which works for women's empowerment. She got herself enrolled and learnt the basics of stitching. Today, she does tailoring work at home and also works as one of the several producers that work for 'Kumbaya' – an SPS initiative, which makes and markets traditional machine-stitched ready-to-wear garments, home linen and accessories, employing women from tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh. Saroj currently earns around ₹4,000 per month.

Like Saroj, Gora Bai, 30, also learnt stitching of garments at the Kumbaya training centre 12 years ago and is now earning about ₹4,500 per month. She supports a large family of eight members, including her parents. Under its Kumbaya initiative, SPS has trained and empowered over 240 tribal women in the last four years – some of them are physically

challenged. Since inception, more than 600 women across 58 villages have learnt stitching here at a professional level. Over the past few years, Kumbaya has evolved as a popular brand of Indian ethnic wear and other collectibles with annual sales crossing over ₹50 lakh.

This women empowerment programme of SPS is being supported by Axis Bank Foundation (ABF), the CSR arm of the Axis Bank for the last over four years. The foundation, which has been undertaking various livelihood programmes including agriculture, watershed development, vocational skill development and livestock enhancement initiatives through multiple NGO partners, has already reached out to 100,000 beneficiaries in 12 districts of Madhya Pradesh in the last four years. Importantly, 97 per cent of these beneficiaries have been women.

"Most of the interventions initiated by ABF are aimed at reaching out to women beneficiaries and we are happy that Madhya Pradesh at 97 per cent scores ahead of other 26 states where our interventions are operational. Besides, the ABF initiatives align well with the over-arching objectives of the state government, which is focusing on programmes aimed at women empowerment," says Anil Kumar, executive trustee

& CEO, ABF, whose members of the board include S. Ramadorai, chairperson (former vice-chairman, TCS) and Som Mittal (past president, NASSCOM), among others.

"We are happy the way things have shaped up so far. However, there is need to further scale up these activities through various levels of partnerships and collaborations. Selection of partners is also very crucial," says Ramadorai, who is currently also the adviser to the prime minister in the national council on skill development.

ABF, focussing on alleviation of poverty, has disbursed close to ₹34 crore towards various social programmes in Madhya Pradesh and earmarked incremental funding of ₹25 crore to cover more than 50,000 households in the next two years. Through implementation of 43 nationwide programmes across 27 states, the foundation, which is aiming to reach out to 10,00,000 beneficiaries by 2017 (1 per cent of the bank's profit set aside to achieve this target), has so far touched the lives of 750,000 beneficiaries. Over 60 per cent of these beneficiaries are women. Set up in 2006, ABF has so far disbursed over ₹235 crore in implementing various programmes primarily in the field of livelihood, education and highway rescues.

♦ ARBIND GUPTA

feedback@businessindiagroup.com