

Sweet dreams are made of sugar and spice:

The Rise of Women Entrepreneurs

Women of the Northern Province are stimulating a culture of entrepreneurship

LALITHA - PROFILE



From kitchen to CEO: Lalitha received one million rupees through a coop grant from ILO to improve her homemade sweets. With prudent investment and efficient management, Lalitha stands tall next to a poster she has hung of the world's most famous billionaire: which reads, 'The best results are gained from the best experiences. And the best experiences are gained from the worst set-backs'.

The economic integration of women from the heart of the conflict-affected Northern Province in Sri Lanka is paying rich dividends. Not only have new and improved trades increased family incomes of mostly female-headed households in the local community, but expanding revenue streams have created a wealth of social capital.

Lalitha Suthakaran from Mullaitivu district says, "Ever since I became a member of the Puthukudiyiruppu Women Entrepreneur's Cooperative Society, I have had easier access to funds needed for improving my business. Previously, I made a few different types of candy but only sold it among my immediate neighbours. Though my products had a good demand, it never occurred to me to do this on a bigger scale."

"Not having resources to expand my sweet making activities was a discouragement and never did I think that I would be able to overcome this financial obstacle."

"After joining the society, I grasped the basics of managing finances and being cost-efficient. I pooled money to buy my raw material ingredients in bulk, and in this way was able to save on the unit price. With time, I was able to build savings and buy machinery through a loan from the society."

“This improved the productivity of the sweet making and increased its sales. Once I established myself a bit more, I was able to construct separate premises for my factory. With a bigger set-up, I was able to employ other women from the community, and also offer jobs to people with disabilities.

“After one year, I bought a van to help market my products. I now sell even in distant places such as Jaffna district where the market is bigger. My husband helps with this. On the return journey, he buys more raw material that I can sell to similar businesses, at a small profit.

“It is a win-win as I save on fuel for transport, while also helping others in the community to buy in bulk and thereby set them on their way to prosperity too.”

The women of the tiny village in Puthukudiyiruppu do not just see Lalitha as a successful entrepreneur and owner of the flourishing Sri Priya Industry. They look up to her as a shining star—an idol and role model of what dedication and hard work can do for their family, their children and the community.



The ceremonial opening of Sri Priya Industry, owned and operated by Lalitha Suthakaran. The presence of the Government Agent and District Secretary speaks for the economic and social empowerment of this entrepreneur and her community. Key facets of inclusion under peacebuilding work.

The ILO's EMPOWER project with the support of the UN Peace Building Fund has partnered with a group of women-affected households in Puthuykkudiyiruppu. This work not only tackles poverty as a driver of conflict but also results in the social empowerment of women, their households and the community.

LALITHA IN ACTION



Lalitha (right) shows her employee how to get the groundnut halwa sweet mix just right.



Sampling her high demand chewing gum for consistency in its solid form