

AMFI-WB

WE-LEAD project

Launched by SIDBI

Overcoming Adversity through the WE-LEAD Project - The Story of Bel mala Trade at Chhatna Block, District: Bankura, West Bengal.

Introduction: Metyala is a small village in the Bankura district, Chhatna Block of West Bengal, India, known for its traditional craft of making Bel Mala (a garland of Bel fruits). The craft has been an important cultural and economic activity for the villagers for generations. This case study explores the process, socio-economic impact, challenges, and sustainability of Bel Mala making in Metyala village.

Bel Mala, also known as Bel Mala or Bael Patra Mala, is an important religious and cultural artifact in Hinduism. It involves the use of Bel (*Aegle marmelos*) leaves strung together as a garland, often worn during religious observances and rituals, particularly those dedicated to Lord Shiva. The Bel tree is revered in many parts of India and is closely associated with Shiva worship, with the leaves of the tree considered sacred.

Metyala village, Chhatna Block, Bankura District:

Metyala is a rural village located in the western part of Bankura district, characterized by its agrarian economy. The area is rich in biodiversity and home to a large number of Bel (*Aegle marmelos*) trees, which are used for religious, medicinal, and cultural purposes. The craft of making Bel Mala has deep religious and cultural significance, particularly among the local Hindu community. The garlands are commonly used in temples, during festivals, and for offering prayers. In India this art can be found mainly in metyala village of West Bengal. SIDBI lunched WE-LEAD Project run by AMFI-WB is currently working In metyala village of Chhatna Block under Bankura district, West Bengal.

The Process of Bel Mala Making:

a) Collection of Bel Fruits: Bel fruits are collected from the local trees during the fruiting season, typically between April and June. The fruits are harvested carefully, as they are fragile and need to be handled delicately to avoid damage.

b) Preparation of the Fruits: Once collected, the fruits are washed to remove dirt and impurities. They are then cut into halves or sliced, depending on the preferred size for the garland. In some cases, the pulp of the fruit is removed to make the seeds more prominent in the garland.

c) Stringing the Bel Fruits: The prepared Bel fruits are strung together using strong cotton threads or nylon cords. The beads are arranged in a specific pattern, often with alternating

colored threads for aesthetic appeal. Some garlands may also incorporate decorative elements such as small flowers, leaves, or beads.

d) **Drying and Preservation:** Once the garlands are strung, they are left to dry in the sun. The drying process helps preserve the garlands and prevents decay. In some cases, natural preservatives such as turmeric or lime powder may be used to extend the shelf life of the garland.

e) **Distribution:** The finished Bel mala Local markets, nearby temples, and religious festivals are the main avenues for selling the garlands. In addition, the Bel Malas are often sold directly to pilgrims or devotees visiting the region.

Confronting Adversity: Most of the men in the village are engaged in labor and farming, so the women in the village also want to earn, so they make bel malas to connect with more markets, or through skill training to produce more bel malas. So that the women of the village can conduct their children's education better and also manage the family well. harbors a fervent desire to contribute to the family's finances through her passion for tailoring. Yet, her aspirations remained unfulfilled amidst the family's financial constraints. Faced with mounting challenges, they're resolves to take charge of their destiny, determined to be the beacon of hope amidst their trials.

A Beacon of Hope: The We-Lead Project: Amidst the gloom, a ray of hope emerges as women in the village discover the trans-formative We-Lead project, supported by SIDBI and AMFI-WB. This initiative, igniting the spirit of entrepreneurship, beckons women in the village to embark on a journey of empowerment. With the baseline survey conducted on Jun month, 2023, women's in the village sees a glimmer of opportunity on the horizon.

Embracing Change: Bel mala Dreams: There are about 42 beneficiaries involved in this trade in this village, their main livelihood is this trade. After that WE-LEAD Project started engaging with the families involved in this trade to get more in-depth information about this trade and make these families economically self-reliant. After that, a total of 55 households have been connected to the WE-LEAD Project through the baseline survey. WE-LEAD Project started the work of making the women of these 42 beneficiaries more efficient in their business by first providing training in Financial, Digital Literacy, Business Literacy, Business Plan, E-commerce business through Entrepreneurship Development Program.

With unwavering determination, 32 beneficiaries enroll in the We-Lead project's Bel Mala skill training programme on 6th December to 12th December, 2023. In the rustic charm of metyala village, amidst the absence of modern conveniences, women in the village tirelessly pursue their dreams. With loan from the government SHG & MFI, they are buying raw materials for Bel Mala making , symbolizing the dawn of a new chapter.

Crafting Success: The Entrepreneurial Odyssey:

As women in the village hone their Bel Mala making skills, the landscape of their lives begins to shift. Women in the village order take from middle man. Guided by the supportive AMFI-WB staff, women in the village venture into the bustling tarapith market, where opportunities beckon. With each creation, women in the village not only make Bel mala but also weave dreams, earning Rs 3000-3500, per month and paving the path to financial independence.

Current Situation and Future Aspirations:

The WE LEAD project, launched by SIDBI and operated by AMFI-WB, aims to promote the growth of Bel Mala art businesses in metyala village, Shushunia, under Chhatna Block in Bankura district. Through a survey, we have included 32 women under the WE LEAD project. At that time, only 25 of the women had well-running businesses, while the rest had modest Bel Mala businesses due to their homes being located in the back areas. After joining our project, especially after receiving EDP and skill training, the income of 29 women has increased significantly. They now sell Bel Mala products through both online and offline.

Under the SIDBI-launched AMFI WB-operated WE LEAD project, one buyer-seller meet has been organized. The buyer-seller meet was conducted offline at metyala village on 15th July 2024, with sales amounting to ₹6,100.

The We-Lead project doesn't merely change the lives of women in the village; it orchestrates a symphony of transformation. Through her grit and the unwavering support of the We-Lead project, women in the village transcend adversity, emerging as a beacon of inspiration. Their journey from a humble homemaker to a thriving entrepreneur epitomizes the resilience and fortitude of women in rural India.

As women in the village redefine their destiny, their story reverberates as a testament to the indomitable spirit of women. Through the We-Lead project, women in the village not only make Bel Mala but also thread together the making of their family's future. Their journey serves as a clarion call, inspiring countless others to embark on their entrepreneurial odyssey, illuminating pathways to prosperity and empowerment.

SL NO .	Name	Income during Exposure Visit in Bolpur	Buyer Seller Meet Income 15/07/2024	Present Status of Business	Beneficiaries Baseline Income	Beneficiaries Present Income	Beneficiaries Increase Income
1	Chobi Das		0000	Yes	2500	3700	1200
2	Rupali Das		0000	Yes	2400	3500	1100

3	Namita Das		1200	Yes	2500	3400	900
4	Asmita Mahanta	2900	1000	Yes	2200	3300	1100
5	Bela Rani Das		0000	Yes	2400	3500	1100
6	Sonali Das		900	Yes	2300	3200	900
7	Chandana Roy		0000	Yes	2500	3600	1100
8	Chandana Bauri		0000	Yes	1400	2200	800
9	Ganga Das		0000	Yes	2300	3500	1200
10	Sabita Das		2000	Yes	2400	3400	1000
11	Jaba Rai		0000	Yes	2600	3600	1000
12	Soma Das		0000	Yes	2500	3500	1000
13	Jaba Roy		0000	Yes	2400	3500	1100
14	Rinku Roy		0000	Yes	2400	3400	1000
15	Chaya Dhibar		0000	Yes	2500	3800	1300
16	Bharati Bauri		0000	Yes	1000	2400	1400
17	Archana Roy		0000	Yes	2500	3500	1000
18	Kalpana Mahanta		0000	Yes	2400	3600	1200
19	Champa Roy		1500	Yes	2300	3400	1100
20	Namita Dhibar		0000	Yes	2400	3500	1100

21	Chaitali Das		0000	Yes	2500	3500	1000
22	Tularani Roy		0000	Yes	2600	3500	900
23	Padma Roy		0000	Yes	2400	3200	800
24	Kallyani narayan Dey		0000	Yes	2400	3300	900
25	Pratima Roy		000	Yes	2500	3500	1000
26	Dipali Dhibar		0000	Yes	2400	3500	1100
27	Puspa Das		0000	Yes	2300	3400	1100
28	Sandhya Bauri		0000	Yes	1200	2200	1000
29	Suparna Roy		0000	Yes	2400	3600	1200
30	Moyna Bauri		0000	Yes	1500	2600	1100
31	Puja Das		0000	Yes	2500	3500	1000
32	Sabita Das		0000	Yes	2400	3600	1200