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Bonda Women Light up Village

The success story is even more stunning when one considers the fact that the initiative is just over a month old

by Diana Sahu

Bhubaneswar: Baunsipada is like any other village in remote Khairiput block of Malkangiri district inhabited by Bondas, the primitive tribal group (PTG). Home to just 26 Bonda families, all that the village has are some rows of neat mud houses. But, each of these houses is treading a success story in its own right.

With Baunsipada yet to be electrified, all the villagers depend upon solar LED lanterns and torchlights that have been prepared by 12 Bonda women of the village. Coming together under Tumbikunda SHG, 12 illiterate women have been able to learn to assemble and prepare solar LED lanterns and torches after undergoing training under the Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP).

Being marketed under the names of 'Laya' and 'Divya' and priced at ₹ 2,100 and ₹ 1,750 respectively, these six volt solar lanterns are also finding a good number of buyers at the ongoing Adivasi Mela in the city. These can be charged with both electricity and solar power and each lantern earns the SHG ₹ 100 to 150 to re-invest in the project.

The success story is even more astonishing when one considers the fact that the initiative is just over a month old.



Bonda women undergoing training to create solar lanterns at a training camp | Express Photo

Under the micro watershed initiative of OTELP, 12 women formed the SHG in December and were imparted training to assemble and prepare the lanterns by the project officials and a Bhubaneswar-based organisation providing technological solutions.

"These Bonda women learnt the technique of assembling a solar lantern in just three days. After being supplied with the raw materials, the women can prepare a lantern in just two hours," said a programme officer of OTELP, Dipti Ranjan Ganayat.

He said that after production, the lanterns are collected by OTELP officials and packaged for marketing in and outside the district. The women have also been trained to repair and sell the lanterns to further enhance their income.

"Training was hard as we had to learn alphabets and numbers to work out the circuit diagrams. But now most of the women in the SHG wield pliers and multimetres like qualified electricians," said Sankhi Khirsani, an 18-year-old Bonda girl who is here to sell the lanterns at the

Adivasi Mela.

Sankhi said they are already getting orders to build solar-power lanterns for schools and other institutions in villages of Malkangiri that are yet to be electrified.

"The solar lanterns have made a difference to many aspects of life in our village. First, villagers save on kerosene - an expensive item and one that carries a fire risk - for our oil lamps. Also, the bright, portable lights allow handicraft work, such as making brooms, to be done at all hours, not just during daytime," she added.