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## **Aesthetic Center boosts job opportunities for women in India**

*'Women on Wings' supports female entrepreneurs in India and strives to create employment for one million women at the bottom of the ladder before 2017. Our Aesthetic Centre takes part in one of the initiatives.*

Women on Wings sees Indian women as value-based consumers and potentially creative and energetic entrepreneurs. Using economic principles, Women on Wings supports these female entrepreneurs to create more business and generate more jobs. In colourful India, using paint seems an obvious way to create these opportunities. When Maria van der Heijden, one of the founders of Women on Wings, approached Tex Gunning mid-2009, the decision wasn't hard to make. Tex explains: "Women on Wings came to AkzoNobel explaining their mission and their intention to help woman in India to set up a business. Their idea to do something with colour and paint was so genuine and mission-driven that it was easy for us to take the decision to support them."

### **Local support for local women**

This support took shape with the help of the Aesthetic Centre. Willeke Jongejan, Senior Designer: "During our first brainstorming session with Women on Wings a concept we came up with was to design stencils for decorating walls. Local women would cut these stencils and eventually of course, the stencils could be sold as a package together with a can of Dulux paint."



### **Self-supporting process**

After months of extensive tests, redesigns and customer surveys with the help of Women on Wings, a process is taking shape with local Indian organizations at the core. Willeke visited the women of Varanasi in June for a first workshop: "The training started with basic stuff, such as how to best hold a knife and how to tap the paint without dripping. Also we showed the importance of good tools: good knives, special brushes, sponges. The paper we selected is a handmade paper with a wax coating so it can be reused several times while still having a natural look and feel. It's important to deliver quality, in all aspects."



### Colourful pictures

Sumeet Anand, Market Research & Insights Manager Deco India: "Knowing that India is largely a BIY market, by bringing consumers closer to colour and paint, we do reinforce the 'Let's Colour' philosophy and Dulux's association with colours among consumers. The boxes are called 'RangChitra', meaning 'colourful pictures', with which we hope to bring a slice of the Indian tradition to adorn the walls of a home with your own hands."



### Growing your way out

Maria van der Heijden: "Initiatives like this give women a change to grow from a deprived, predestined situation to a little bit more independency. That's exactly what Women on Wings strives for. If these women get the chance to acquire some money, this will reflect on their children and their education. By giving the mothers a chance, you develop a family."



### A small step

For Willeke it was a special experience, to be able to share five days together with these women from rural India: "Initially everybody was very quiet, but after a few days we really felt connected. There was a sense of mutual understanding, a sense of universal sisterhood. We're all mothers, we all have a house; culture, religion, it's not important anymore. As soon as the formal role disappeared, the enthusiasm and pleasure triumphed. On that little piece of the earth we really make a difference; we gave these women hope for a better future, the feeling they are really worth something."



That this initiative fits perfectly with our Let's Colour initiatives needs no explanation. Tex concludes: "It's a so-called 'Bottom of the Ladder' initiative that fits entirely with 'who we are' and 'how we are' and I always encourage all of us to find similar initiatives around the world."

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