

went to India we saw that these rural women had huge potential. They made fabulous products, (handicrafts) but there wasn't a market for them to showcase or sell their products. What we do in Women on Wings is combine the power of these women together with our knowledge and expertise about all areas of the value chain – from production to sales.

Women on Wings began to work actively in India in 2007. Maria and Ellen, the two business partners from Netherlands went on a visit to India in 2006 to take part in a management development programme. It was a programme with managers and entrepreneurs from the Netherlands in India and they worked with local medium enterprises to give them support with business knowledge. It was then that they identified the scarcity of business knowledge in rural India. "We found out that SME's of rural India who helped and supported Indian rural women worked with community owned companies. These companies only focussed on production. There was no base to pay attention to post production and marketing of such beautiful hand made artefacts were not something they could easily do. So we found out a huge need for market information and knowledge. With that specific goal we began our journey."

Women on Wings don't work at the grass-root level with rural women directly, instead they cooperate with private or government funded production organisations, who create work for these rural women. They have already reached the number of 1 lakh jobs and there are still 9 lakh jobs to create. They intend to create these 9 lakh jobs by the year 2018.

When asked about the political and social atrocities of working in the rural Indian setting Maria bluntly replied, "We try not to be too much in the governmental or the political system. We link up with social medium enterprises and they are part of the whole governmental system. It is sometimes difficult for Indians to understand their own bureaucratic system so we consciously want to stay away from it." Women on Wings has a team of 60 business experts who support organisations working for the cause. They are associated with 19 organisations spread across the country. Few of the biggest names are *Jharcraft* operating in Jharkhand, *Sadhna*, in the rural areas around Udaipur, *Jaipur Rugs* and *Fabric Plus* in Assam. Women on Wings support them in marketing and share their sales knowledge. They support them in being more customer proof and retail proof as a company. Maria and Ellen together with their governing board undergo a proper selection procedure to bring NGOs or organisations under their banner. Maria adds, "We've our criteria to select the companies, which we decide to sustain. They should have a very good plan how to implement their goal of creating business for women and have the focus on being sustainable and



being independent. We look at their long-term views and on entrepreneurial skills. We also see that they maintain good labour conditions and have good salaries and payments for the women. Also the environmental issues are taken into considerations. For example, *Fabric Plus*. They started with 200 women and now they work with 30,000 women from the start of the cooperation with Women on Wings. We look at the supply chain and work together to mechanise a part of the supply chain in spinning silks. *Fabric Plus* now have the hopes to become the market leader in the production of silk."

There's a huge difference between Indian rural women and the modern Indian women. Domestic violence, high mortality rates, improper sanitation, abject poverty, lawlessness – these are perhaps not enough words to depict their life living. Women on Wings not only gives them the wings, it provides the two most essential things – job and a means to educate. With the present generation earning money the mothers save it for their children's education. Education can create identities. Women on Wings is working now with rural women of India but in a way it's shaping the future generation, brightening up the Indian horizon.

*Maria and Ellen we thank you.*