



Unlimited Potential for Future Collaboration

Maria van der Heijden

Women on Wings injects Dutch business knowledge and expertise into rural India

The Dutch are a nation of people who like to spread their wings to the remotest parts of the world, whether for adventure, trade or for aid purposes. As early as the 1600s, the Dutch set sail to find the finest spices and exquisite fabrics. Trade and business is ingrained in the Dutch genes as exemplified by internationally renowned corporates such as Philips, Shell, Unilever, KLM, AkzoNobel, SaraLee, Heineken, Ahold and BAM. Currently, we see many SMEs being added to this list. The Netherlands has an excellent entrepreneurial climate for engineering, innovation, agriculture, infrastructure, building and trade and business knowledge.

Imparting Knowledge to Indian Social Enterprises

Women on Wings capitalises the Dutch expertise for social business in rural India. The mission is to generate 1 million jobs for women in rural parts of India by 2018. Founded in 2007 by Maria van der Heijden en Ellen Tacoma, *Women on Wings* has so far created 1,25,000 jobs. The model dictates that every year the previous number of jobs generated must be doubled. "Around 60 Dutch experts with at least 15 to 20 years of working experience commit to make their expertise available for 15 days on an annual basis for at least 3 years. They typically share their business knowledge with Indian



social entrepreneurs, especially focussing on job creating business models for women. The businesses have to be profitable at the end, without subsidies and grants”, says Tacoma. The experts bring world-class experience in retail, manufacturing, organisational development, marketing, and business strategy and impart this knowledge and experience to the local management of SME’s. With this knowledge, Indian companies can accelerate their business growth and create more jobs for women.

Partners for Progress

In 2013, *Women on Wings* reached the milestone of 100,000 jobs for women, which was achieved in collaboration with nineteen Indian business partners. This corresponds to the growth scenario and is due, in part, to the intensive collaboration with business partners such as Jharcraft, Fabric Plus and Rangсутra. Ronald van het Hof, Managing Director in India, works intensively with these three fast growing business partners.

Jharcraft

Women on Wings works together with Jharcraft in Jharkhand. This company produces a wide range of different products, from clothing to interior decoration. It works with 2,35,000 people, of which 70 percent are women. “Since 2012, we have worked on strengthening the entire supply chain, with a special focus on marketing and sales. This involved establishing a timeline for the strategic plan and developing a roadmap. We organised management workshops



in order to identify competences lacking in the organisation. Our experts worked with the team on branding to sharpen the brand and brand values and to develop visual merchandising guidelines for all distribution channels. We work on a regular basis with team members in Ranchi and on a weekly basis with the marketing team in Delhi”, states Van het Hof.

Dhirendra Kumar of Jharcraft says, “The partnership with *Women on Wings* has

enabled our management to get better organised, enhanced production control and greatly reduced our stock. Our brand awareness has increased. With better quality control, we are able to supply large retailers in India. *Women on Wings* is an important partner for us. We are training women in weaving. During these training sessions, women produce fabrics of all quality. *Women on Wings* supports us in looking for creative product development.

We use the value chain model to clarify the areas we support



WOMEN ON WINGS

The mission of the Indian organisation Rangсутra is to offer income to women in Rajasthan and Varanasi by supplying high quality products (clothing and household textiles) based on the rich craft heritage

The *Women on Wings* experts are highly experienced people. Our young professionals have greatly benefited from this experience”.

Fabric Plus

About the partnership with Fabric Plus, Van het Hof says, “At the start of our collaboration with Fabric Plus in 2009, the number of rural women that found employment through them was 214. We worked intensely with the board and the management team on improving the entire business chain. As a result, they now create employment for over 25,000 women. Fabric Plus is known for its high level of innovation in silk yarns and in the design of ready to wear products. The high standard in quality and design of Fabric Plus products means that they enjoy high demand in domestic and international markets.”

Rangсутra

The mission of this Indian organisation is to offer income to women in Rajasthan and Varanasi by supplying high quality products (clothing and household textiles) based on the rich craft heritage. *Women on Wings* advises Rangсутra on ways to build its brand and organisation and taking the next step towards exports. According to Van het Hof, “We strengthened the exhibition proposition and worked out the growth scenario for the next few years with the team.” Ellen Tacoma has been a member of the Supervisory Board of Rangсутra since 2013.

Rangсутra’s Sumita Ghose says, “*Women on Wings* helped us in two ways. Firstly, with our exhibition in Gurgaon, in which Karen and Ronald’s team helped us with planning the layout right up to the promotional materials and invitation list.

Also, we received Ellen’s support in our workshop on preparing a plan for scaling up. I think *Women on Wings* would be even more effective if they leveraged their international experience and contacts to establish more tangible links and connections between Indian organisations and international markets. Their down-to-earth attitude is very refreshing.

The Missing Middle of Rural India

Why work in rural India? The World Bank stated in the India Report 2013¹ that India is lacking medium enterprises in rural areas. “In the last decade, India’s economy expanded at an average annual rate of 7.6 percent, placing it in the top 10 of the world’s fastest growing nations. Life expectancy more than doubled from 31 years in 1947 to 65 years in 2012 and adult literacy more than quadrupled, from 18 percent in 1951 to 74 percent in 2011.

At present, only 16 percent of the workforce derives its income from regular wage employment, and more than 50 percent is engaged in agriculture. The government estimates that 93 percent of Indian workers are informally employed. The size distribution of firms in India is characterised by a ‘missing middle’, which is a source of concern given that small and medium enterprises are typically an important source of wage employment.

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Job Generating Business Models

As Van der Heijden says, “We learnt that with a job and income, women become the driving force of the economy. If you invest in a woman, you invest in a whole family. Therefore, collaboration between India and *Women on Wings* means an unlimited potential for the future.”

Maria van der Heijden is the Managing co-founder of *Women on Wings*

Country partnership strategy for India for the period FY 2013-2017, World Bank, March 2013
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EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY DIPLOMATIST

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