

Press Release

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Empowering Change: Skill Development for Rehabilitation of Safai Karamcharis and Their Dependents in Valmiki Puri

Valmiki Sabhagrah, Valmiki Puri, Lucknow: Embarking on a visionary journey towards societal transformation, ICAR-NBFGR's Mission Navshakti, under Scheduled Caste Sub Plan component is set to revolutionize the lives of dependents of safai karamcharis/ scavengers and their families. By focusing on skill development in the intricate art of aquarium fabrication, creative design, and the nurturing of ornamental fish, this initiative goes beyond mere training—it represents a commitment to building self-sufficiency and resilience within marginalized communities. Through comprehensive training and support, Mission Navshakti empowers individuals to harness their creativity and entrepreneurial spirit. Participants not only learn the technical aspects of crafting aquariums and cultivating vibrant fish species but also receive crucial guidance in business management and marketing strategies. This holistic approach ensures that newfound skills translate into sustainable livelihoods, empowering participants to break free from cycles of poverty and dependency. Moreover, the programme's impact extends beyond immediate economic gains. By fostering a community of skilled artisans and entrepreneurs, Mission Navshakti cultivates a sense of pride and dignity among participants. It encourages them to envision a future where their talents are valued and their contributions recognized, fostering a ripple effect of empowerment within their families and communities. As these empowered individuals embark on their entrepreneurial journeys, supported by ongoing mentorship and access to necessary resources, they not only transform their own lives but also contribute to the broader goal of socio-economic upliftment. Mission Navshakti thus stands as a testament to the transformative power of skill development, lighting the way towards a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

The aim of the training programme is to impart new skill which will provide women a new source of income and help in their livelihood. Similar initiatives have already been taken by ICAR NBFGR at Veerpura, Udaipur, Rajasthan, Bangla Bazar, Lucknow and Dhankutti, Barabanki, UP. Around 150 women belonging to Scheduled Caste community have been trained who are using the skills for earning by fabricating aquariums and reared ornamental fish. The training does not produce entrepreneurs in one training programme, after the training is imparted, the women are added to a whatsapp group where they get immediate solution for the problems they ask related to fish rearing. Additionally women were also taught how to create aquarium from scrap material "*Kabad se jugaad*" like boxes, cannisters, tank etc by keeping them on a roof top with some shade and start rearing live bearers that are in huge demand because of their hardiness and colours

One of the standout features of this initiative is its continuous support system. Post-training, the women were added to a WhatsApp group, where they receive instant solutions to any issues they encounter related to fish rearing. This support network ensures that the training doesn't end with the programme but continues to provide guidance and mentoring, promoting sustainable self-employment ventures.

To kickstart their micro-enterprises, each participant is provided with a basic **Essential Start-up cum** input kit, including an air filter, pump, pebbles, and light. This initial support is crucial for the socio-economic upliftment of these women. The best part is that they can start their ventures right from their homes.

Innovative Marketing Strategies will be adopted by the women who will have the flexibility to sell their aquariums directly to customers or through Aquaworld. This innovative model ensures returns within four months through ornamental fish sales and immediate income from aquarium fabrication.

The future aim of the women of Valmiki Puri will be to cooperate and establish themselves as a cooperative society and create a brand. They plan to form a cooperative to scale up their enterprise, rehabilitate more women, and create an alternative source of dignified income. The women have come up with a brand **VOFA**: Valmiki Ornamental Fish Aquarium, and shall work together as a unit by setting up a cooperative in future for scaling up the enterprise and rehabilitating more women for alternative source of income livelihood for living with dignity and honour in society, culminating in success of mission Navshakti. This initiative is more than just a training programme; it is a movement towards dignity, honor, and economic independence. By providing these women with the tools and skills they need, ICAR-NBFGR is not only changing lives but also setting a precedent for future socio-economic upliftment initiatives creating milestones towards success of Mission Navshakti bringing hope and prosperity to the women of Valmiki Puri.

The work is being done under SCSP project of ICAR NBFGR conceptualised by Dr Poonam Jayant Singh, Nodal Officer SCSP project and coordinated by Sh Ravi Kumar and Sh Vikas Kumar of ICAR-NBFGR, Spearheaded by Dr Uttam Kumar Sarkar, Director ICAR-NBFGR. Sh Indramani Raja, AquaWorld trained the women in aquarium management and Dr Suresh Sharma, Entrepreneur informed about the scope of Ornamental fish business.

The partnership and teaming up of ICAR-NBFGR Aquaworld, HiTech Fisheries and Safai Karamchari Andolan and Community of Valmiki Puri, Mohan Meakin, Lucknow opens new doors for capacity building and creates a new model where government and private sector get together to change lives of women and help in skill development of an entire community for livelihood empowerment.

