



"SWAPNA NAGARI" INDEED A DREAM COME TRUE FOR DIFFERENTLY-ABLED

Naseema Hurzuk



Lajawab Cashew Processing Training Unit'

Sindhudurg is a major Cashew growing region. To provide employment opportunities to the differently-abled, Helpers of the Handicapped Kohlapur (HOHK) created a special cashew processing unit 'Lajawab Cashew Processing Training Unit'

Life of Dignity for differently-abled

HOHK was founded in 1984 by Naseema Hurzuk, who was struck with paraplegia at the age of 16 and, thereafter, confined to a wheelchair. Though she completed her graduation and even worked at the Central Excise Department—she experienced the trials of working in an environment that is not friendly for the handicapped. Along with friends and like-minded persons such as Rajani Karkare-Deshpande and Manohar Deshbhratar, they founded HOHK to support the physically challenged to live a life of dignity. Their work expands areas of health, education

and livelihoods, including a rehabilitation centre and hostel.

Employment for underemployed and unemployed women

The region grows some of the best cashews in the world—and Hurzuk along with her team realized its potential ability for processing in a handicapped-friendly manner while at the same time bringing in a lucrative price. At present it employs 130 people, of which 75 percent of the workforce is physically challenged. The rest are mostly women supporting the processing functions who are unemployed or underemployed women from the neighboring villages. It processes close to 1,200 kg of cashews in a day. This unit not only





provides them employment but also equips them with vocational training so that they can seek employment in their villages or nearer home.

Free Food and lodging facilities to the employees

The employees are paid on the basis of their function and contribution — averaging INR 3,500 a month and also given free food and lodging facilities. They have been trained on grading of raw cashews there are 22–26 varieties that fetch different prices from INR 550 a kg at the lowest grade to over INR 1,000 a kg at the highest grade level.

Vocational training and machinery to reduce strain

The CPU has now been operational since 2005 and is providing vocational training and employment to nearly 80 persons with disability and 25 underemployed women from the neighboring village. To reduce physical strain of vocational trainees and staff, they have installed a number of machines like cashew peeling machine, cashew grading machine and conveyor belts. These machines have enhanced the productivity of the unit.

‘It’s not been easy — we didn’t have a set model to replicate. After in depth research on how to create a working environment that is handicapped-friendly, we introduced tweaks such as special tables as against sitting on the floor in traditional set-ups and activities to maintain the stamina of our employees through the day. All this has led to the success of Lajawab,’ says Hurzuk.

The financial discipline that you often don’t see in many urban units — is however reflected in this rural unit. Lajawab has kept costs low capital costs incurred in the last 10 years are Rs 1.16 crore, while working capital requirements are typically in the range of Rs 35–40 lakhs per year. They focused on financial growth — and last year for the first time redistributed profits of 50% amongst long time loyal employees who has been striving since the inception and made Lajawab the brand that is.

