Taxis for women, driven by women

By selecting and training vulnerable women from deprived backgrounds to become professional drivers, the “Women on Wheels” programme run by Azad Foundation enables them to get remunerative and respectful jobs, moving from marginalisation and hardship to social and economic empowerment. The training programme covers areas such as legal rights, self-defence, English language, personal presentation, hygiene, financial literacy as well as the essential driving skills. Qualified women chauffeurs are then placed in jobs through a partner organisation, Sakha Consulting Wings, that provides safe transport options for women. They are able to double their family income as cab drivers or chauffeurs for women, and become confident women in control of their lives, gradually altering women’s roles and status in Indian society.

**DURATION:** 2017-2020  
**FOCUS AREA:** Women’s social and Economic Development  
**COUNTRY:** India  
**PARTNER:** Azad Foundation

**CONTEXT**

While Indian economy has been growing rapidly over the past 30 years, gender disparities in women’s economic participation have remained deep and persistent in India. As India’s economy grew at an average rate of 7% between 2004 and 2011, its female labour force participation fell to 24% from 31% (Source: National Sample Survey, 68th Round). Much of the reason behind this decline appears to lie in the persistence of India’s traditional gender norms: there are just a handful of sectors that formally employ women in the country and there are
only certain jobs that women, especially women from resource-poor communities, get societal approval to do.

**ACTION**

Azad Foundation challenges cultural and socio-economic barriers in India, with the aim to engage marginalised women in non-traditional jobs so that they become economically independent and gain control over their lives. Through our support, Azad Foundation is committed to enrol 480 marginalized women in Jaipur in their signature training programme Women on Wheels to become employable as professional drivers. The training combines a technical module (driving theory and practice, basic mechanics skills and map reading) with self-empowerment (gender equality, women’s legal rights, health and sexuality) and self-development skills (self-defence, first aid, financial literacy, spoken English). While acquiring a driving license, women become visible citizens and are accompanied in the process of acquiring documents such as ID cards, birth certificates and address proofs.

A combination of community mobilization activities will be carried out across 88 slums to identify women eligible for the training and engage communities on gender issues at a larger scale. Azad Foundation partners with Sakha Consulting Wings, a social enterprise that facilitates employment opportunities for the trained drivers upon successful completion of the programme. Graduates are placed through Sakha as private chauffeurs and, after one year, they can apply for a position as commercial drivers.

**EXPECTED RESULTS**

- Upon completion of the training, 330 resource-poor women will have increased their life skills and their awareness of women rights and become qualified drivers.
- 215 offered a job as professional and commercial drivers through Sakha social enterprise, considerably increasing their income and offering safe transport options to women travellers.

**LONG-TERM STRATEGY**

By providing marginalized women a remunerative job with dignity, Women on Wheels enables them to get out of the vicious intergenerational cycles of poverty. The majority of women who complete the programme become principle breadwinners in their families. Once employed as professional drivers, women earn salaries between $115-300 per month, in many cases increasing their family income up to four times. They are financially independent and empowered to exercise their own choices. Many women decide to continue with their studies and are able to support the education of their children and other family members. Many are able to delay marriage and leave violent relationships. They become agents of change in their lives and lives of those around them.