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Statement submitted by Shrimad Rajchandra Sarvamangal Trust, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

India is home to 669 million women. However, despite the country's ambitions of rapid innovation, industrialization, and metropolitan immigration, only 15.5% of India's women live in urban environments, out of which only 5.4% are employed. This said, the stories of India's women are truly the stories of India's tribal women living in the most rural and remote villages across the country. These are the stories of Geeta Rawal, a mother who became the sole bread-earner of her family after losing her husband in a severe accident; Rupliben Mahla, a wife whose autorickshaw-driving husband fell into a coma, preventing them from paying for their daughter's education; and Kaajal Gavit, a daughter of a sick father from a village in Gujarat who is forced to step up and provide for her family.

These stories are the ones that Shrimad Rajchandra Sarvamangal Trust's front-facing organization, Shrimad Rajchandra Love and Care encounters every day. These stories add up. According to the World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Gender Gap Report, India ranks at 135th out of 146 countries in gender parity. With India still reeling from the economic devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant further stress on employment opportunities for women, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has insisted that the speedy development and empowerment of women is necessary for India's development in the 21st century.

That is precisely why Shrimad Rajchandra Love and Care has stepped up to tackle these initiatives head-on. Shrimad Rajchandra Love and Care's longstanding 'Woman Care' initiative aims at uplifting the status of underprivileged women by providing adequate medical facilities, opportunities for education, and undertaking activities to make them self-reliant. It understands that nurturing young girls in their formative years and empowering them physically, emotionally, and financially can support and sustain the welfare of the entire community at large.

The 'Woman Care' initiative can be broken down into the below sub-programs:

1. **Raj Uphaar:** Uplifting rural women by providing them with employment opportunities under the brand Raj Uphaar. Women here produce more than 100 varieties of desserts, snacks, fragrances, and utility items. Through this, women are supported in their quest towards attaining self-reliance and a respectable source of income. In 2021, Raj Uphaar expanded to a 4,000 sq. ft. manufacturing unit.
2. **Safe Motherhood Program -** An initiative to ensure that all mothers in rural Gujarat have the opportunity to have a safe delivery in a hospital, under the supervision of gynaecologists. Awareness drives are conducted through which expectant mothers are provided with medical check-ups, counselling, and vitamins.
3. **Health Education Program for Adolescent Girls -** Adolescent girls are given health awareness lessons on a diverse range of subjects such as pregnancy, childbirth, childcare, hygiene and nutrition, anatomy, and diseases, as well as prevention of common ailments.
4. **Financial Literacy and Opportunities for Women -** Imparting literacy to rural women through campaigns, workshops, and seminars on aspects of financial management like smart savings, wise spending, minimising debt, and matured borrowings.
5. **Widow Welfare Program -** Providing support to widows through distribution of essential items like flour, rice, pulses, sugar, etc. Also helping them sustain their families and assisting them in getting employment.

6. Sowing for Energy, Empowerment and Development Program - Improving family nutrition levels and supplementing livelihood through cultivation of organic kitchen gardens. Using kits, villagers are trained in organic farming methods, healthy cooking practices and are supported to improve the intake of nutrients.

7. Higher Education Resource - Providing financial support to rural girls who wish to pursue higher studies in fields such as pharmacy, nursing, engineering, etc. This enables girls to pursue their dreams of being self-dependent and leading a life of dignity.

Other initiatives within the sphere of women empowerment include:

1. Shrimad Rajchandra Mission Dharampur Yoga Teachers Training Course for Tribal Women - A special 200-hour teacher training course for tribal women has been crafted which will not only make them emotional and physically fit but will also enable them to be Yoga trainers themselves and earn a living.

2. Computer Skills Training Course - From having zero digital literacy to now smoothly operating programs like Microsoft Office, Tally, and other sales software, women are empowered to become proficient in advanced technology.

3. Women Empowerment Unit Workshops - Across 10 acres of land in South Gujarat, Shrimad Rajchandra Love and Care has prioritized a space to spark important conversations, collectively learn, and aim for the holistic growth of women. These workshops will facilitate a new vision for rural women to embrace their potential and influence the community at large. These workshops include combating social stigmas, inclusive health & hygiene practices, nourishing one's mental health, meditation & mindfulness, relationship management, and women & child safety.

4. Vocational Training Program for Women – Shrimad Rajchandra Love and Care conducts training programs to build confidence in underprivileged women and help them earn a living through vocations including cane weaving, mehndi artistry, stitching skills, mobile repairing, and beauty art.

5. Raj Uphaar Leadership and Soft Skills Workshops - In addition to the core skills built, Raj Uphaar is dedicated to building a generation of women who are responsible, proactive, confident, and resilient in a number of soft skills including: leadership, problem-solving skills, conflict resolution, team building skills, effective communication, and listening skills. This also leads to role diversification with skills including human resource management, production management and scaling, quality control functions, management of accounts, and administrative skills.

6. Shrimad Rajchandra Skill Development Center and Gem & Jewelry Skill Council of India (GJSCI) – in this partnership, rural youth will have the opportunity to learn how to design jewelry and receive end-to-end support from training and teaching soft skills to assistance with job placements. This three-month course is suited for girls who have more design skills in jewelry and allows them work-from-home as an option to avoid long distance travel and relocation. This initiative also helps the skill-starved industry in meeting its human resource requirements.

The Woman Care initiative has had a wide reach, impacting thousands of rural and tribal women over the past years. The stories of these tribal women continue. Geeta Rawal is now a Head Manager at Raj Uphaar allowing her to become the bread-earner of her family. Rupliben Mahla is now a Product Innovation Manager at Raj Uphaar, and over the past seven year of working she has been able to pay back loans

and is now saving money to get her younger daughter married. Kaajal Gavit is now a part of the Packaging Team and can now afford to pay for treatments for her sick father as well as the tuition for her sister to go to school. These are the reasons why Raj Uphaar is in the process of building a new state-of-the-art Center of Excellence facility spread over 25,000 sq. ft. in the hopes of employing over 700 tribal women to produce additional categories such as artisanal candles; local cane and bamboo handicraft items like baskets, trays etc; special tribal Warli painting on various utility items and stitching unit to make home and personal accessories like tablecloths, bedsheets, bags, pouches etc.

Beyond decreasing India's gender gap and moving higher on the Global Gender Gap Index, this message aims to uplift and inspire our fellow organizations across India and the globe to support women looking for empowerment opportunities and in need of the right resources, guidance, and training to do so.

Through the virtues that our founder has instilled in us, we hope to offer service. Our volunteers strive to put our founder's, Pujya Gurudevshri Rakeshji's, words into action. Through the magic of intention and power of community spirits, we endeavor to serve others selflessly. As our leader tell us, we may not be able to change the whole world, but we can definitely change someone's whole world. We hope that our initiatives continue to have a ripple effect impact, diffusing throughout South Gujarat and beyond.
