



# EWOK

Enabling Women of Kamand



Newsletter

Oct 2016

## EWOKing a better quality of life

The sylvan valley of Kamand is home to many women with a variety of skills and talents and to many others who wish to acquire more skills and join the salaried workforce.

Since its launch in May 2016, EWOK has identified a group of women from the neighbouring villages who are skilled in the traditional crafts of plaiting the Himachali footwear, *pula*, from natural fibers and weaving the Kullu border. They say that they never found these skills to be a viable source of income and have used them only to make items for their own families' use. They remain mainly underemployed and excluded from the monetary economy.

One of the first logical steps of enabling them was to provide them with an opportunity and market for their products. We organised work for them crafting memorable mementos for the many visitors to IIT Mandi.

Another interesting development was an opportunity where the women donned the role of trainers themselves as they shared knowledge of the local crafts with the first year BTech students of IIT Mandi.

Read on to follow the journey so far.



## About EWOK

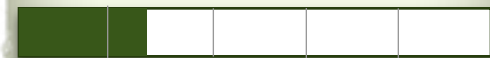
EWOK is an initiative to bring opportunities to the hardworking women of Kamand valley, enabling them to develop employable and marketable skills and access relevant information.

## Lend us a hand

If you wish to donate or know more, please contact us at

[ewok@iitmandi.ac.in](mailto:ewok@iitmandi.ac.in)

## Fundraising



₹ 0

₹ 5L



## Memorable Mementos

number of visitors and guests that IIT Mandi received every year, it was the most attractive market to begin with! The women got an opportunity to design and create mementos for IIT Mandi.

The first memento designed was beverage coasters made of the local grass referred to as grewia or bhiuli in the local lingo. We had anticipated beginning with training programs, but in this case we merely showed a few samples of coasters and explained our idea. The women themselves designed several different patterns of coasters combining the local plaited grasses and the woven patterns used on men's caps, stoles and shawls.

Currently to bring this initiative to a sustainable level, an incubator has been set up under EWOK. The next step will be to help the women explore the market in popular tourist towns and/or on the internet so that they can expand their business into a profitable enterprise. We will also guide the women in setting up of their own business or cooperative, introduce them to sources for

loans and to the art of running a small business.

## Local Heritage Ambassadors

The 2016 IIT Mandi Induction Programme for first year B.Tech students was a one-of-a-kind programme in itself. It also provided EWOK's participants a unique opportunity to give a demonstration of their local culture.

Seven of them were employed to train the young students in making ropes from grass typically used in households, and spinning thread from raw wool with hand spindles. While the students felt enriched to learn about the local culture, the otherwise diffident women found their confidence growing with every session as they conducted short lecture-demonstrations in front of unfamiliar faces.



## Looking ahead

This is a journey of several steps. With each step, EWOK looks forward to enabling more and more women of Kamand valley to realise their potential. As many women are skilled at weaving, we are working to

facilitate more local production.

The EWOK team is also working on building an information portal that will help the women in networking and marketing their skills. Watch out for the next newsletter to keep up with EWOK's progress. We are very grateful for your support.



**Hand embroidered shawls**

**Himachali footwear, pula**

Soon after the launch of EWOK, it was exciting to discover the range of skills of the women of Kamand valley. However, it also became evident that finding a willing local market to absorb these skills was going to be a big challenge. The lack of enthusiasm can largely be attributed to the availability of cheaper labour and finished products from neighboring states. That did not deter us from going ahead to help them find a market. Given the