

TARU NATURALS



CASE REPORT
CLEAN TECH- AGRICULTURE





First of its kind accelerator, globally, focusing on women-led businesses in the energy value chain.

Access to Energy | Sustainable Mobility | Waste to Value |
Energy Efficiency | Smart Energy

Set up as a joint initiative of Shell Foundation (UK Registered Charity) and Zone Startups, and funded by Department of International Development (DFID) India and DST Government of India, the objective of the POWERED Accelerator is to support selected ventures by helping them expand their businesses with an ultimate goal to increase economic empowerment of women-owned businesses in the energy space.

POWERED aims to build a multi-level ecosystem comprising of grand challenges, bootcamps, workshops, an accelerator programme, and seed investments. As part of this approach, the programme supports the entrepreneurs through mentorship from domain experts, industry connects, peer community, tech tools and support, investor pitching, a global network and an equity-free seed fund of up to \$10,000 each (for selected portfolio companies).

This case study is an effort to understand the impact of POWERED Accelerator for women entrepreneurs in the energy sector.

Portfolio Startup – Taru Naturals



TARU NATURALS originated from the notion of creating a value chain ecosystem for small-scale rural farmers in India while simultaneously respecting human rights and environmental rights and reviving traditional farming systems. TARU was built on the model of creating fair trade markets for agri-produce, value-added products, sourced directly from tribal and small farmers, connecting end communities, customers and businesses, for safe food, health, sustainability and lifestyle shift TARU has been constantly growing since its inception and does not plan on slowing down anytime soon.



Ruchi Jain

Founder, Taru Naturals

Ruchi Jain has done her MSc Environment Change and Management from Oxford University. Upon her graduation, she began working at the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy as an energy consultant in Delhi.

In 2014 she left her job at the government and spent the year working with multiple NGO's including an NGO in Pune for women entrepreneurs in rural India. That year she learned that one cannot hand communities the equipment for solutions they must also provide the educational tools and multiple solutions for issues that communities face. This ignited the conceptualization of Taru Naturals.



Selection of Taru Naturals

POWERED Accelerator received more than 130 applications for its first cohort. 40 applications were shortlisted and interviewed by Zone Startups India and Shell Foundation teams. Taru Naturals was selected amongst the top 10 startups for its competency in the area of operations, products in the pipeline, market research and team strength in the sector. The vision of Taru Naturals aligned with the programme perspective of women empowerment with the inclusion of cleantech.

Programme Impact

Business model focus

When Taru Naturals started its journey with POWERED Accelerator, it had its major focus on B2B customer segment with major supplies to restaurants. Although TARU ran an e-commerce website, retail partnerships were not in place. During the sessions, one of the major learning for Taru was in refining and streamlining their workflow into a three-stage model, - Capacity Building of natural farming of small-scale farmers, set up of cleantech food processing & creating fair trade market linkages for small scale farmers. The streaming of the model which helped clarify the communication for the TARU team. Based on which they were able to establish a B2C market for the first time and also expand their e-commerce portal. They have now launched TARU as an organic brand in Natures Basket and many other retail shops. In the context of expanding markets, TARU was further able to increase supply bulk produce to restaurants partnerships.

They are now actively working with more than 70 restaurants in Mumbai.

Streamlining of internal process

The very initial days of the programme included sessions on the importance of building process and introduced tools for startups to streamline their operations. When Taru started implementing these learnings, the first thing that came up was they had worked with around 50 restaurants – a number which was considered to be 20. It also helped in evaluating the efficiency of team members and made them replace certain resources to suit the required roles.

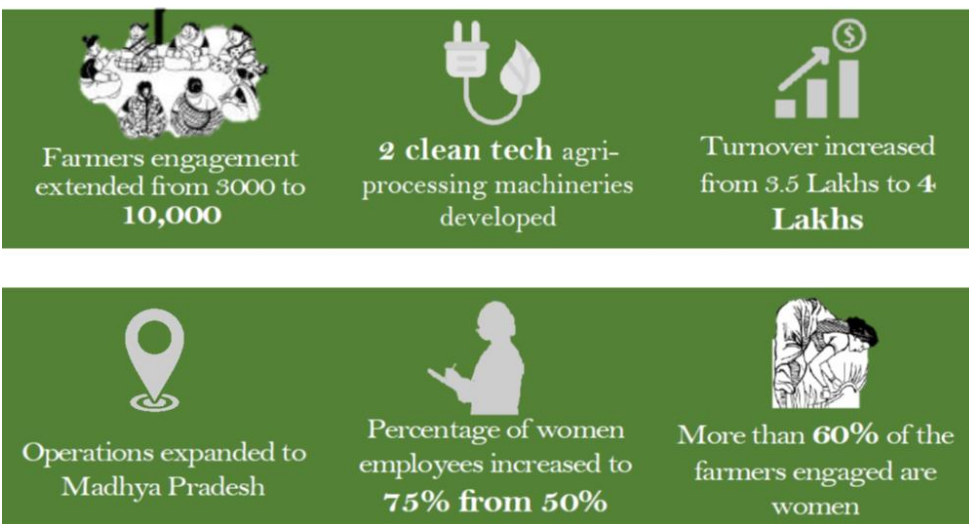
Push to Private Limited registration

Taru Naturals was registered as Sole Proprietor and had its Trade Mark and FSSAI license which was helpful to build a brand name. Taru was in processes of getting NPOP & NOP Organic Certification trader and processing license. During conversations with the POWERED team and with legal session instructors they realized the scalability opportunities with Private Limited registration.

Taru is now getting registered as a Private limited firm and then applying for organic certifications under the name of the firm.



“POWERED accelerator has truly empowered me as a woman entrepreneur; connecting me to networks, training, capacity building, a sense of belonging with other women going through the same challenges and the funding had helped me to scale up our impact on the ground with Farmers.” – Ruchi Jain



Fund Utilization

Utilized around 2 Lakhs INR

- 40,000 INR for Atta Chakki
- 1 lakh INR for FSS Machine
- 50,000 INR for Operations

A major project in Pipeline:

Taru Naturals is working on the formation of a Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) in Purandar - a remote village in Maharashtra, with NABARD to implement the cleantech products. This project will be a pilot case for establishing many such FPOs with cleantech processing machines. Expansion of this model will have a direct impact on improving the efficiency of FPOs and livelihoods of farmers.

Why Women Entrepreneurs in Energy?

“It’s all about integrated development. Energy is one of the very crucial parts of livelihood development. As women entrepreneurs in the development sector, we are responsible to take the supply chain ahead in all the verticals of the sector. It is established that empowering women with access to finance and energy contributes to the overall economic and social development. Women are able to consider other aspects of development rather than just economic growth. We are able to connect with other people in their lives rather than with just them as individuals.

Women are more holistic. We create businesses which are holistic. Hence, our businesses are about overall development. While doing this, we do go through a different set of challenges. It’s great to have a platform to interact and share your ideas, opinions, and challenges with women sailing the same boat. It gives us confidence.”

- Ruchi Jain

Ruchi had been on a long journey in the sector and has performed the roles of different stakeholders. Performing all of these roles and entrepreneurship journey with Taru has given Ruchi a rich perspective and skill set to deal with societal norms about women in the sector. She is confident towards her visions and aims to gather contribution from a larger set of women in the industry.

“We feel empowered to make our own decisions and grow with the company”

- Manjiri, Accounts Manager at Taru Naturals



Learnings

Sectoral Learnings:

- **The FPO Model for Cleantech Agri-Processing technologies:** There are two major problems with current Agri-Processing technology. Firstly, individual farmers can't afford these technologies; secondly, these technologies are usually inoperable due to an erratic power supply. A two-fold approach to resolve these issues would be to employ an FPO model to address the former and a cleantech application that would address the latter. Earlier in this decade, there has been a rise in the adoption of the FPO model in rural areas where a central community-owned enterprise manages the produce, processing, and market for associated farmers. They also empower the local women through the generation of jobs in their processing centers. Taru Naturals' model of creating FPOs with cleantech agri-processing machines builds on efficiency, standardization, and market size for associated farmers.
- **Organic Certification:** Many Organic companies in the market are not authentically certified which acts as a roadblock for organic farmers. A platform like that of Taru Naturals tackles this issue with a customer base that trusts the brand name.
- **Dryland Organic Farming:** Taru Naturals' customer segment also includes dryland farm owners where production is absent due to water scarcity. These lands can be made productive through the implementation of organic farming practices which require rigorous training; this training is also conducted by Taru Naturals.

Programme Learnings:

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Individual Monitoring indicators need to be identified and analyzed to capture the growth of the startups strategically which can later be shared with stakeholders to extend their support.
- **Peer Network and Support:** There have been consistent feedback from the entrepreneurs of the POWERED Accelerator that women only accelerators are beneficial as they provide them with a close-knit peer community which they are unable to access through gender agnostic programmes.

POWERED Accelerator has been actively engaging in Cleantech-WIN meetups (Cleantech-WIN is a networking platform for women stakeholders in the cleantech and energy sector). Ruchi Jain, Founder of Taru Naturals has been a part of these meetups on a regular basis.

- **Knowledge Sharing:** The startups constantly require references of tools and templates related to the operational stages of a company. Templates of Financial Models, Fundraising Decks, Job Descriptions, etc. have been shared with the cohort on a need basis. These templates and tools are now being compiled together in the form of a toolkit to enable easy access for the startups.

Going Forward...

Taru Naturals is a growing startup and would require support on various fronts as they continue achieving their milestones.

Engagement of POWERED Accelerator in the coming year with Taru Naturals:

Mentoring

- Patenting and Certifications
- Marketing Strategies
- Financial Modelling
- Support in setting up the first FPO
- Crowdfunding Campaigns

Platforms

- Taru Naturals would be having access to Monitoring and Evaluation platform to track its development throughout the year.
- Taru Naturals would be part of sector specific industry nights and events organized by Zone Startups to get engaged with more stakeholders, partners and fellow entrepreneurs.

“Taru’ means tree. I wish Taru to grow as a big fruitful tree so that more and more farmers get associated with it and grow with it.”

- Dr Sadunkhe
Organic Farming trainer

(Supplies organic turmeric to Taru through a network of farmers he has trained)