

Announcing Winners of the CII Foundation Woman Exemplar Award 2021

The CII Foundation announced the winners of the [CII Foundation Woman Exemplar Award 2021](#) on 20 August. The Award recognises grassroots women who have risen above crippling circumstances, fighting poverty and social discrimination to emerge as leaders in their communities. These women are, therefore, called 'exemplars' since they lead by example.

For the 2021 edition of the Award, supported by CLP India, the CII Foundation received over 250 nominations. After a rigorous shortlisting process that entailed personal visits and interviews, 15 finalists were chosen. From these, three winners were selected in the categories of Health, Education and Micro-enterprise by an eminent jury led by Mr Vipin Sondhi, Chairman of the CII Foundation Steering Committee and MD & CEO, Ashok Leyland Ltd, and other members drawn from civil society, media, and the social development sector.

Each winner receives a trophy, a citation, and a cash award of Rs 3 lakh.

The winners for the CII Foundation Woman Exemplar Award 2021 are:

Reeta Kaushik from Kushinagar District, Uttar Pradesh
Winner: Education Category

As a poor Dalit in Uttar Pradesh, Reeta Kaushik was denied schooling even though she chaperoned her brothers to school. Undaunted and determined to study, Reeta finally entered a classroom as a student. But caste-based discrimination followed her throughout her school life, especially since she was the first girl from her village to go to school. She fought the discrimination at every level and became determined to create educational opportunities in the Musahar and Dalit communities, driven by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's vision that only education can lead to the true emancipation of Dalits. Working with these communities to develop the desire to educate their children, Reeta has helped over 25000 children through direct linkages and bridge courses.

"Education is the medium to drive change."

Reeta Kaushik

Dhapu Devi from Ajmer District, Rajasthan
Winner: Health Category

As a *ghoonghat* (veil)-clad village woman, Dhapu Devi, an illiterate, was relieved when her sick child's life was saved by a local, nutritious mix. Inspired by the potential of such nutritious mixtures to address malnutrition, she became determined to help women and children beat anaemia and malnutrition. Despite no knowledge of or exposure to setting up a production unit, she set up a production unit to manufacture Super 5 or Amritchuran. Dhapu Devi learnt on the job and leads the production unit that caters to the healthcare needs of women and children, supplying Super 5 to 40 villages in Ajmer district through a network of women entrepreneurs. This nutritious miracle mixture has strengthened over 24000 women and children so far. Currently producing Super 5 at double capacity, Dhapu aims to spread the net of health and nutrition to other states.

"I want to create 100 more women like me to promote nutrition through Super 5."

Dhapu Devi

Minu Mandrawaliya from Ajmer District, Rajasthan
Winner: Micro-enterprise category

Life was a challenge for Minu, who was afflicted by polio as a child and made acutely aware of her disability by the world. Crushed but not defeated, Minu focused on what she could do rather than what she could not do. Passionate about learning, Minu learnt how to stitch bags and became a master trainer within a year. Since then, she has been training women in Ajmer district. Minu not only teaches women the craft but also helps develop the personalities and self-esteem of the women she trains. Covering the length and breadth of Ajmer with the help of her crutches, Minu's never-back-down attitude has helped her train over 13000 women, and she serves as an inspiration for them.

"I will continue to empower the marginalised to make them self-reliant."

Minu Mandrawaliya

Congratulating the winners, Mr Sondhi said, "I am impressed by the commendable work these women have done under such trying circumstances and am proud to have them as CII Foundation Woman Exemplars. The CII Foundation has been scouring the country to identify, recognise and support such women, who are driving India's inclusive growth, and I wish them all success."

The 3 winners of the Award and the other 12 finalists will receive further support from CII Foundation through mentoring and coaching to help them scale up their work for a more significant impact.

Today, there is a pan-India network of over 100 Exemplars driving social change with their vision and leadership.
