



Vice President of India presents CII Foundation Woman Exemplar Award to 3 Grassroots social transformers

New Delhi, 8 April 2018:

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, presented the three grassroots women leaders with the CII Foundation Woman Exemplar Award 2018 for their extraordinary contribution in transforming the excluded and disadvantaged communities in India. Ms. Munni Begam, Ms Asha and Ms Vechulou Kanuo were conferred the awards in the fields of education, health and micro-enterprise respectively at the CII Exclusive Award Session held in New Delhi.

Born into a family of farm laborers, married at the age of 12, home-schooled herself by writing with coal on waste papers, Munni Begam's journey is a tale replete with challenges at every step. Despite all odds, today, Munni is a leading advocate for women's functional literacy, campaigner for women's education and advisor to the Gram Panchayat. This 'Malala of Eastern UP' has transformed the lives of 5,770 illiterate rural women through functional literacy classes and advocacy for access to government schemes and entitlements in Jaunpur and Pratapgarh districts of Uttar Pradesh. From being a tailor to becoming a sewing tutor, educator, and Zilla Panchayat member; Munni's story is truly an inspiration.

Married by the age of 9, a daily wage labourer at 11; and widowed, diagnosed as HIV positive, and lost her newborn child by the age of 16; Asha is a survivor and campaigner for the rights of people living with and affected by HIV. An epitome of courage and willpower, Asha founded Saksham, the Ajmer chapter of the Positive Women's Network to eliminate the stigma of the society by opening access to government health services & welfare schemes for HIV affected people. In her endeavour to eradicate the social exclusion she faced herself, Asha provided de-stigmatized counseling, free treatment, and nutritional supplements to HIV patients via Saksham in Nasirabad, Rajasthan's most high-prevalence HIV belt, giving the right treatment at the right time.

Vechulou Kanuo grew up in an isolated Thetsumi village, Nagaland with limited resources, on the Indo-Burmese border, managing farm work and domestic chores. Her capacity for back-breaking work enabled her to transform a bankrupt organization, the Chakhesang Women's Welfare Society, to one of the most successful livelihoods ventures in the state. Vechulou has introduced modern agriculture and animal husbandry to 10,586 women, farmers and youth, seeding thousands of small entrepreneurs in the deep rural interiors of Nagaland. The only woman to be invited to traditional Naga tribal council meetings, Vechulou represents the voice of Naga women in the state.



These three extraordinary women leaders were recognized as the CII Foundation Woman Exemplars 2018 for their courage and conviction in transforming lives of many others in their communities.

The Award is part of the CII Foundation Woman Exemplar Program (WEP) which focuses on promoting women's empowerment at the community level by discovering and recognizing those who chose to look beyond their limitations and contributed significantly to positively impact the community. Since its inception in 2005, 41 women have been recognized and supported. The platform aims at celebrating the Women Exemplar Collective with industry leaders, and to spur dynamic learning and exchange among the Women change makers.

In addition to a cash reward of Rs 3,00,000 each, the three winners and 12 finalists of WEP 2018 will be part of the CII Foundation leadership training and mentoring program.

Selected by an eminent panel from Industry and social sector, the awardees were shortlisted from over 225 nominations received from NGOs across the country. The award, now in its 14th year, was supported by JK Tyres (in Health category) and JCB India (in Micro-Enterprise category).

About CII Foundation:

The CII Foundation (CIIF) was set up by CII in 2011 to undertake a wide range of developmental and charitable activities pan India by enabling industry for infusing inclusive development. CIIF works towards inclusive development by providing a meaningful bridge between marginalized communities and donors, especially corporates by providing strategic guidance on CSR and developing and managing high impact programmes. The thematic areas of CIIF include: Education; Public Health and Sanitation; Skilling, Employment and Livelihoods of the marginalized; Gender Equality, Women Empowerment and Safety; Environmental Sustainability, including water; Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation.

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