

MEDIA RELEASE

Growing role of women-led *kirana* stores: Five women entrepreneurs from Madhya Pradesh felicitated by NITI Aayog and Reliance Foundation

- **NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) and Reliance Foundation felicitate outstanding Rural Women Kirana Entrepreneurs**
- **The initiative supported women-led *kirana* stores across three districts of Madhya Pradesh through digital and financial capacity building, market access, and business planning.**

New Delhi, July 23, 2026: Five outstanding women kirana entrepreneurs were felicitated by the Women Entrepreneurship Platform incubated at NITI Aayog in partnership with Reliance Foundation under the Empowering Rural Women Kirana Entrepreneurs (RWKEs) ATR pilot programme at a special event held at NITI recently.

The felicitation ceremony in Delhi was attended by **Dr. Joram Aniya, Member, NITI Aayog; Ms. Anna Roy, Mission Director, WEP and Programme Director, NITI Aayog; Ms. Deepthi Nukalapati, Chief - Women Empowerment, Reliance Foundation; and Ms. Sonal Jaitly, Associate Partner and Global Lead – GEDSI, MicroSave Consulting (MSC)**, along with the awardees and their family members. The five outstanding women entrepreneurs who were felicitated were presented with a grant of INR 1,00,000 each in recognition of their entrepreneurial commitment and progress.

The five women entrepreneurs represented inspiring examples of resilience, adaptability, and entrepreneurial leadership within their communities. During the ceremony they shared their learning experiences and vision ahead to expand their business implementing the techniques and knowledge gained through the training programme.

Empowering Rural Women Kirana Entrepreneurs (RWKEs), a pilot initiative by Reliance Foundation, in partnership with the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP), and implemented with MicroSave Consulting (MSC) as the technical partner to strengthen women-led *kirana* stores across the districts of Barwani, Vidisha, and Raisen in Madhya Pradesh.

The programme was designed in recognition of the critical role that rural women entrepreneurs play in supporting household incomes and local economies, while acknowledging the structural barriers that often constrain the growth of their enterprises. Through targeted capacity-building and handholding support, the programme focused on four key areas: financial capability, digital adoption, market orientation, and business planning.

Since its launch, the RWKE programme has delivered 1,200+ hours of structured learning across 175+ training sessions spanning 6 blocks (Barwani, Pati, Ganj Basoda, Vidisha, Obedullaganj, and Sanchi) across 3 districts (Vidisha, Raisen, and Barwani), reaching 108 women entrepreneurs.

Delivered in local languages through participatory sessions, the capacity-building curriculum equips women with practical skills from budgeting to bookkeeping, from supplier linkages to inventory and enterprise growth planning.

The programme underscores the importance of collaborative efforts between public and private sector stakeholders in strengthening rural entrepreneurship ecosystems. By combining institutional support, technical expertise, and on-ground implementation, the initiative has created a structured pathway for rural women entrepreneurs to enhance their business capabilities and improve enterprise outcomes.

The RWKE programme also highlights the growing role of women-led *kirana* stores as vital nodes in rural supply chains and local economies. Through targeted interventions, such programmes could improve business resilience, increase digital adoption, and enable better financial and operational decision-making among women entrepreneurs. Reliance Foundation has a deep commitment to women's empowerment through various pathways, including economic empowerment and entrepreneurship to catalyse impact not just for the individual but for society as a whole.

About the WEP:

The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP), incubated in NITI Aayog in 2018 and transitioned into a public-private partnership in 2022, serves as India's national platform for strengthening the women's entrepreneurship ecosystem through collaborations with public and private sector partners.

At the core of WEP's programmatic interventions is the Award-to-Reward (ATR) programme - a cohort-based, sector-specific accelerator for women entrepreneurs, designed for contextual adaptation across sectors and geographies, enabling implementing partners to tailor interventions to specific entrepreneurial ecosystems.

About Reliance Foundation:

Reliance Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Reliance Industries Limited, aims to play a catalytic role in addressing India's development challenges through innovative and sustainable solutions. Led by Smt. Nita M Ambani, Founder and Chairperson, Reliance Foundation is relentlessly working for the overall well-being and enhanced quality of life for all, focusing on rural transformation, education, health, sports for development, disaster management, women empowerment, urban renewal and arts, culture and heritage, and has touched the lives of over 100 million people across India, in over 98,000 villages and urban locations. More on www.reliancefoundation.org.