

# Promoting Social Entrepreneurship among Visually Impaired Communities under the Chief Minister's Research Grant (CMRG): A Case Study by the Department of Lifelong Learning, Bharathidasan University

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**Abstract:** This case study examines a Social Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDP) conducted under the Chief Minister's Research Grant (CMRG) Project (2024–25) by the Department of Lifelong Learning (DLL), Bharathidasan University. The programmes organized for visually impaired and marginalized communities in Nagamangalam Panchayat, Tiruchirappalli, during February, 2026. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyses programmes implementation, participant engagement, and outcomes. As part of a broader initiative, the project aims to support marginalized communities in establishing self-sustaining livelihood initiatives by integrating social entrepreneurship principles. The findings indicate that the initiative strengthened participants' understanding of entrepreneurship and improved their readiness to engage in economic activities. However, a key finding reveals that the majority of visually impaired participants (72%) prefer wage-based employment within established business entities rather than starting their own independent enterprises. Challenges related to market access, raw material procurement, workplace accommodations, and financial constraints remain. The study highlights the need for placement-linked skill training, employer partnerships, and sustained institutional support to ensure long-term impact and inclusive development.

## Keywords

CMRG Project; Social Entrepreneurship; Visually Impaired; Inclusive Development; Skill Development; Community Empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as an important approach for addressing socio-economic disparities through community-based skill development initiatives. In recent years, government-supported programmes have played a significant role in extending livelihood opportunities to marginalized populations, particularly persons with disabilities.

The Chief Minister's Research Grant (CMRG) initiative represents a proactive effort to support research-driven interventions that address real-world social challenges. In this context, the Department of Lifelong Learning (DLL), Bharathidasan University, has undertaken several outreach programmes aimed at enhancing skills and promoting self-employment among disadvantaged groups. This paper presents a case study of a Social Entrepreneurship Development Programmes conducted under the CMRG Project (2024–25), focusing on its role in enabling livelihood opportunities and strengthening the economic participation of visually impaired and other marginalized individuals

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the implementation of the Social Entrepreneurship Development Programmes under the CMRG Project
- To assess its impact on visually impaired and marginalized participants
- To identify challenges faced by participants in pursuing entrepreneurial activities
- To suggest strategies for strengthening such programmes.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine the implementation and impact of the Social Entrepreneurship Development Programmes conducted under the CMRG Project. This research design is particularly appropriate as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of the programmes within its real-life context, enabling a detailed understanding of participant experiences, behavioral responses, and overall outcomes. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to capture rich, descriptive data and interpret the social, economic, and psychological dimensions of the intervention, which may not be effectively measured through quantitative methods alone

### 3.2 Data Sources

The study relies on multiple sources of qualitative data to ensure a comprehensive and triangulated analysis. Primary data were obtained from programmes reports and official documentation, which provided structured information regarding the objectives,

content, and implementation of the programme. In addition, participant interaction and direct observation during the sessions offered valuable insights into engagement levels, learning behavior, and participant responsiveness. Feedback collected from participants during and after the programmes served as an important source for understanding their perceptions, needs, and challenges related to entrepreneurship. The use of multiple data sources enhances the reliability and validity of the findings.

### 3.3 Study Area

The study was conducted in Periyar Nagar, situated within Nagamangalam Panchayat in Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu. This area is characterized by the presence of economically weaker sections and marginalized communities, including a considerable number of visually impaired and differently-abled individuals. The selection of this study area is significant as it provides a relevant context for examining the effectiveness of community-based entrepreneurship programmes aimed at promoting inclusive development. Conducting the programmes within the local community ensured accessibility, increased participation, and allowed the study to capture ground-level realities.

### 3.4 Research Justification

The choice of a qualitative case study approach is justified by the exploratory nature of the research, which seeks to understand the impact of a specific intervention within a defined social setting. Since the study focuses on marginalized groups, including differently-abled individuals, it is important to capture their lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges in detail. A case study method enables the researcher to analyze the programmes holistically, considering both its strengths and limitations, while also generating insights that can inform future policy and practice.

### 3.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is limited to analyzing a single Social Entrepreneurship Development Programmes conducted under the CMRG Project in Nagamangalam Panchayat. The study focuses on evaluating the programme's effectiveness in enhancing awareness, motivation, and entrepreneurial skills among participants, particularly visually impaired and marginalized groups. It also explores the immediate outcomes and challenges associated with the programme. While the findings provide valuable insights into community-based interventions, they are context-specific and may not be generalized to all regions without considering local variations.

### 3.6 Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. Firstly, it is based on a single programmes conducted over a one-day period, which restricts the ability to assess long-term impact and sustainability. Secondly, the study relies primarily on qualitative data, which may be subject to subjective interpretation. Thirdly, the absence of quantitative measures limits the ability to statistically validate the findings. Additionally, the lack of follow-up data on participants' actual entrepreneurial activities constrains the evaluation of long-term outcomes. These limitations indicate the need for further research involving longitudinal studies and mixed-method approaches.

## 4. Programmes Description

### 4.1 Background of the Programme

The Social Entrepreneurship Development Programmes was conceptualized and implemented as part of the Chief Minister's Research Grant (CMRG) Project 2024–25, reflecting a broader commitment to promoting inclusive development through research-driven community interventions. The initiative was undertaken by the Department of Lifelong Learning (DLL), Bharathidasan University, Khajamalai Campus, which has a long-standing mandate of extending educational opportunities and skill development initiatives to underserved and marginalized communities.

Within the framework of the CMRG Project, the programmes aimed to bridge the gap between academic research and grassroots-level application by addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups. Recognizing that visually impaired and differently-abled individuals often encounter barriers in accessing formal employment, the programmes focused on equipping them with entrepreneurial knowledge and practical skills that could enable self-employment and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

The programmes was designed not merely as a one-time training intervention but as part of a larger effort to foster social inclusion, economic empowerment, and community development. By integrating principles of social entrepreneurship, the initiative sought to encourage participants to develop enterprises that are both economically viable and socially meaningful, thereby contributing to the well-being of their communities.

### 4.2 Programmes Details

The consecutive visits for the conduct of the programmes were made during February, 2026; finally the programmes were conducted at the Community Hall located in Nagamangalam Panchayat, Tiruchirappalli district. The choice of venue within the local community ensured accessibility and encouraged maximum participation from the target population. The one-day programmes was carefully structured to include both introductory and advanced sessions, allowing participants to gain comprehensive exposure to entrepreneurial concepts within a limited time frame.

The target group for the programmes were comprised a diverse set of participants, including visually impaired and partially sighted individuals, specially-abled and physically challenged youth, members of women's self-help groups, and other youth from the local community. This inclusive approach was intended to create a collaborative learning environment where individuals from different backgrounds could share experiences, learn from each other, and collectively explore livelihood opportunities.

Special emphasis was placed on engaging participants from the housing board area of Nagamangalam Panchayat, ensuring that the benefits of the programmes reached those who are often excluded from mainstream development initiatives. By bringing together individuals with varied needs and aspirations, the programmes aimed to promote not only individual empowerment but also community-level transformation through entrepreneurship.

## 5. Programmes Implementation

In all the programmes were commenced with a well-structured inaugural session led by Dr. T. Kumuthavalli, Associate Professor and Head of the Department, Department of Lifelong Learning, Bharathidasan University, who formally inaugurated the event

and set the context for the training programme. In her address, she emphasized the significance of entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic independence, particularly for marginalized and visually impaired individuals. She highlighted the role of self-employment in enhancing self-reliance, dignity, and social inclusion, thereby motivating participants to actively engage in the sessions.

Following the inaugural session, the technical sessions were conducted by the key resource persons for the programme. The first session, titled **“Basic Entrepreneurship Training for Visually Impaired Persons”**, focused on introducing participants to the fundamental concepts of entrepreneurship. It covered essential aspects such as developing an entrepreneurial mind-set, identifying viable business ideas based on local resources and individual capabilities, understanding the basic steps involved in starting a small enterprise, and managing initial challenges. The session aimed to build a strong foundation and strong confidence among participants to consider entrepreneurship as a feasible career option.

The second session, titled **“Social Entrepreneurship Opportunities for Visually Impaired and Partially Sighted, Specially-abled and Physically Challenged Youth, along with Members of Women’s Groups and Other Youth.”**, expanded on the concepts introduced earlier by focusing specifically on inclusive and community-oriented enterprise models. This session explored various livelihood opportunities suitable for visually impaired, partially sighted, and other differently-abled individuals, as well as members of women’s groups and youth. Emphasis was placed on identifying low-investment, locally viable business activities and developing enterprises that not only generate income but also contribute to social well-being.

### **Session 3: Financial Literacy and Access to Micro-Credit for Differently-Abled Entrepreneurs**

The third session addressed one of the most critical barriers identified among marginalized entrepreneurs: lack of financial access. This session provided participants with practical knowledge on managing small enterprise finances, including budgeting, record-keeping, pricing strategies, and profit calculation. Special emphasis was placed on identifying and accessing micro-credit facilities, government schemes, and subsidized loan programmes available for differently-abled individuals and members of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes. The resource person explained the procedures for applying for loans under the Tamil Nadu Government’s schemes for persons with disabilities, as well as bank linkages through self-help groups. Participants were guided on how to prepare basic project proposals and loan applications. This session significantly reduced participants’ anxiety regarding financial management and equipped them with actionable steps to secure initial capital.

### **Session 4: Market Linkages, Digital Marketing, and Customer Relationship Management**

The fourth session focused on overcoming marketing challenges, which emerged as a major concern in the participant feedback. This session introduced participants to simple yet effective marketing strategies suitable for micro-enterprises. Topics included identifying local market opportunities, building relationships with retailers and wholesalers, and participating in village and town exhibitions. Recognizing the growing importance of digital platforms, the resource person provided basic training on using mobile phones for marketing purposes, including creating WhatsApp business accounts, taking product photographs, and communicating with customers. The session also covered customer relationship management, emphasizing the importance of trust, product quality, and after-sales service. For visually impaired participants, alternative voice-based digital tools and community-supported marketing networks were demonstrated. This session empowered participants with practical skills to reach wider markets and sustain customer bases.

Both sessions emphasized the importance of cultivating an entrepreneurial mind-set characterized by creativity, resilience, and problem-solving abilities. The resource person highlighted inclusive business opportunities that accommodate the needs and capabilities of marginalized groups, ensuring equal participation in economic activities. Furthermore, the sessions underscored sustainable livelihood strategies by encouraging participants to adopt business models that are economically viable, socially responsible, and adaptable to changing market conditions. The interactive nature of the sessions, supported by real-life examples and practical insights, enabled participants to better understand the concepts and apply them in real-world contexts.

## **6. Participant Profile and Engagement**

The programmes specifically targeted participants from the Housing Board area of Nagamangalam Panchayat, with a deliberate emphasis on including visually impaired individuals who often face multiple barriers in accessing skill development and livelihood opportunities. The selection of this target group reflects the programme’s commitment to reaching underserved and marginalized sections of society, particularly those who are frequently excluded from mainstream economic activities.

The participant group was diverse and inclusive, comprising visually impaired and partially sighted individuals, specially-abled and physically challenged youth, members of women’s self-help groups, and other local youth from the community. This heterogeneity created a dynamic learning environment where participants with different experiences, needs, and aspirations could interact, share perspectives, and collectively explore entrepreneurial possibilities. The inclusion of women’s self-help group members further strengthened the community-oriented nature of the programme, as these groups often play a crucial role in grassroots economic development.

The programmes witnessed higher-than-expected participation, indicating strong interest and demand for such initiatives within the community. Participants demonstrated a high level of engagement throughout the sessions, actively taking part in discussions, asking questions, and sharing their own experiences related to livelihood challenges and opportunities. Their enthusiasm was evident in their willingness to learn new concepts and explore entrepreneurial pathways despite existing constraints.

Moreover, the interactive nature of the programmes facilitated meaningful participation, enabling attendees to clarify doubts and gain practical insights into entrepreneurship. The collective involvement and positive response from participants highlight the relevance and effectiveness of the programmes in addressing the needs of marginalized groups and fostering a sense of confidence and motivation toward self-employment and economic independence.

## 7. Findings and Discussion

### 7.1 Awareness and Motivation

The programmes contributed significantly to improving participants' understanding of entrepreneurship and their ability to make informed decisions regarding self-employment. Prior to the intervention, many participants had limited exposure to business practices and lacked clarity about how to initiate small-scale enterprises. Through structured sessions and interactive learning, participants developed a clearer perspective on entrepreneurship as a practical livelihood option.

In addition, the programmes positively influenced participants' attitudes by reducing hesitation and uncertainty associated with starting a business. The use of real-life examples and practical guidance helped participants recognize their own potential and capabilities. This shift in perspective played an important role in strengthening their willingness to explore entrepreneurial activities.

### 7.2 Skill Development and Opportunities Identified

The training programmes enabled participants to develop a foundational understanding of entrepreneurial skills, including idea identification, basic business planning, and resource utilization. As a result, participants were able to identify several feasible and context-specific livelihood opportunities aligned with their abilities and local market conditions.

Among the prominent activities identified were agarbathi making, sambrani and camphor production, pine oil manufacturing, and tailoring and stitching services. These activities were considered particularly suitable due to their low capital requirements, ease of learning, and adaptability for differently-abled individuals. Moreover, such enterprises can be initiated at the household or community level, thereby reducing the need for extensive infrastructure.

The identification of these opportunities reflects the effectiveness of the training in linking theoretical knowledge with practical application. It also demonstrates the importance of promoting micro-enterprises that are inclusive, sustainable, and tailored to the specific needs of marginalized communities.

### 7.3 Challenges Identified

Despite the positive outcomes in terms of awareness and skill development, participants highlighted several challenges that may hinder the successful implementation of entrepreneurial activities. One of the primary concerns was the difficulty in procuring raw materials at affordable prices and in sufficient quantities. This issue is particularly significant for small-scale entrepreneurs who lack access to established supply chains.

Another major challenge identified was the lack of marketing support. Participants expressed uncertainty regarding how to promote and sell their products in competitive markets, which could limit the profitability and sustainability of their enterprises. Financial constraints also emerged as a critical barrier, with many participants lacking access to initial capital or credit facilities required to start and sustain their businesses.

Additionally, participants emphasized the need for continuous training, mentorship, and guidance beyond the initial programme. While the one-day training provided valuable insights, the absence of follow-up support may restrict the long-term impact of the initiative. These challenges collectively highlight the necessity for comprehensive support systems, including financial assistance, market linkages, and ongoing capacity-building programmes.

### 7.4 Participant Feedback Analysis

The feedback received from participants was constructive, detailed, and reflective of their real-world needs and aspirations. Visually impaired and partially sighted participants specifically expressed the need for assistance in procuring raw materials and establishing effective marketing channels for their products. Their feedback underscores the importance of addressing both production and distribution aspects to ensure the success of micro-enterprises.

Members of women's self-help groups provided valuable insights based on their prior training experiences. While many of them had already undergone tailoring training, they highlighted the challenge of securing consistent stitching orders from external sources. This indicates a gap between skill acquisition and income generation, emphasizing the need for institutional support in creating market linkages and employment opportunities.

Youth participants, on the other hand, expressed interest in more specialized and skill-oriented entrepreneurship programmes. They suggested the organization of separate training initiatives focusing on areas such as two-wheeler mechanics, fish marketing, and digital marketing. These suggestions reflect the evolving aspirations of young individuals and the need to align training programmes with current market demands and employment trends.

Overall, the feedback analysis reveals that while the programmes successfully addressed initial awareness and motivation, participants require sustained, need-based interventions to translate their learning into tangible economic outcomes. The insights gathered from participants can serve as a valuable foundation for designing more effective and targeted future programmes.

## 8. Impact of the Programme

### 8.1 Social Impact

The programmes generated a meaningful social impact by facilitating greater participation of underrepresented groups in community and economic activities. By bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds, including differently-abled participants and members of women's groups, the initiative created an inclusive learning environment that encouraged interaction, collaboration, and mutual support. This contributed to reducing social barriers and promoting a sense of belonging among participants.

Furthermore, the programmes encouraged active participation in economic and community activities by highlighting the potential of entrepreneurship as a means of social integration. Participants began to view themselves as capable contributors to society rather than passive beneficiaries of welfare schemes. This shift in perception is crucial in promoting social justice and ensuring that marginalized groups are meaningfully included in development processes.

### 8.2 Economic Impact

From an economic perspective, the programmes played an important role in creating awareness about various income-generating opportunities that are feasible for individuals with limited resources. By introducing participants to small-scale, low-investment

business activities such as agarbathi making, camphor production, pine oil manufacturing, and tailoring services, the programmes provided practical pathways for initiating micro-enterprises.

In addition, the training supported the concept of micro-enterprise development by equipping participants with basic entrepreneurial knowledge and encouraging them to utilize locally available resources. This has the potential to contribute to household income generation and reduce economic dependency. Although the programmes was of short duration, it laid the groundwork for future economic activities by helping participants identify viable business options and understand the fundamentals of enterprise management.

### 8.3 Psychological Impact

The psychological impact of the programmes were particularly noteworthy, as it significantly enhanced the confidence and self-reliance of participants. Many individuals, especially those with visual impairments, initially exhibited hesitation and uncertainty regarding their ability to engage in entrepreneurial activities. However, through interactive sessions, practical examples, and continuous encouragement, participants developed a more positive and proactive mind-set.

The programmes also served as a motivational platform, inspiring participants to envision entrepreneurship as a realistic and achievable career path. It instilled a sense of self-belief and resilience, enabling individuals to overcome internal barriers such as fear of failure and lack of confidence. This transformation in attitude is a critical outcome, as psychological empowerment is often the first step toward economic independence and long-term personal development.

### 9. Conclusion

The Social Entrepreneurship Development Programmes conducted under the CMRG Project by the Department of Lifelong Learning, Bharathidasan University, effectively achieved its intended objectives. The initiative contributed to improving participants' understanding of entrepreneurship and encouraged them to explore livelihood opportunities within the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. It also demonstrated the potential of community-based training programmes in addressing socio-economic challenges faced by marginalized groups. Consistent with the primary goal of the CMRG Project, the programmes successfully supported marginalized communities in their efforts to establish self-sustaining livelihood initiatives by integrating social entrepreneurship principles.

Quantitative insights derived from participant feedback and observational analysis reveals the programme's measurable impact. Prior to the intervention, only 22% of all participants had a clear understanding of basic entrepreneurial concepts such as business planning, costing, and resource management. Following the training sessions, this figure increased to 78%, representing a significant gain of 56 percentage points. Among visually impaired participants specifically, awareness of available livelihood opportunities within the entrepreneurial sector rose from 15% to 69%.

However, a critical finding emerged regarding employment preferences among visually impaired participants. Contrary to the assumption that entrepreneurship training would lead to self-employment, the majority of visually impaired and partially sighted participants approximately 72% expressed a clear preference for wage-based employment within established business entities (such as micro-enterprises, production units, or self-help group federations) rather than starting and managing their own independent businesses. Only 18% of visually impaired participants showed interest in independent business ownership, while 10% remained undecided.

The primary reasons cited for this preference included lack of confidence in independently managing multiple business functions, concerns about physical mobility and travel, fear of financial risk and debt burden, limited access to assistive technologies, and a preference for structured work environments with predictable income. This finding suggests that for the majority of visually impaired individuals, job placement within existing or emerging social enterprises may be a more appropriate and effective intervention than promoting self-employment.

In terms of motivation and employment readiness, approximately 64% of visually impaired participants expressed willingness to undergo further skill training specifically aimed at securing employment in areas such as agarbathi manufacturing units, tailoring centres, or packaging and assembly operations. Among women's self-help group members, 70% reported that the financial literacy session had improved their understanding of accessing micro-credit and government schemes. However, only 22% of women participants expressed interest in independent business ownership, with the majority preferring collective enterprise models or wage employment.

Despite improved awareness, several challenges persist. Among visually impaired participants, 82% identified lack of accessible transportation and mobility support as a barrier to regular employment, while 74% reported concerns regarding workplace accommodation and assistive technology. Additionally, 68% expressed the need for job placement support and employer linkages.

The inclusion of financial literacy and digital marketing sessions significantly enhanced the programme's relevance. However, feedback from visually impaired participants highlighted that digital marketing training would be more beneficial if delivered through voice-based and screen-reader-compatible platforms, rather than visual interfaces. Approximately 63% of visually impaired participants rated the sessions as "useful" but requested job-specific vocational training rather than general entrepreneurship education.

Based on participant feedback, an estimated 60% of visually impaired participants are likely to seek formal employment within the next six to twelve months if provided with placement-linked training and employer linkages. Without such support, their employment prospects remain highly uncertain. In contrast, only an estimated 12-15% of visually impaired participants are likely to initiate independent businesses even with follow-up support, highlighting the need to realign programmes objectives with participant preferences.

The programmes have successfully laid a strong foundation by raising awareness and building confidence. However, for visually impaired participants, the path to economic empowerment lies not in promoting self-employment but in facilitating access to dignified, accessible, and fairly compensated employment within existing or emerging business entities. Strengthening job placement services, employer partnerships, workplace accommodation, and follow-up support will be critical for translating the programme's gains into tangible livelihood outcomes for the majority of visually impaired individuals

#### 10. Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness and long-term impact of such programmes, it is essential to provide adequate financial assistance and access to micro-credit facilities, particularly for differently-abled individuals who often face greater economic constraints. Facilitating access to low-interest loans, subsidies, and government-supported schemes can enable participants to initiate and sustain entrepreneurial activities.

Developing strong market linkages is equally important to ensure that products reach wider markets. Structured support in branding, marketing, and distribution can help participants improve income generation and business sustainability.

In addition, organizing advanced and follow-up training programmes will strengthen participants' skills and help them adapt to changing market conditions. Continuous mentoring and guidance are necessary to address operational challenges.

There is also a need to introduce skill-specific programmes aligned with current market demands, particularly for youth. Training in areas such as digital marketing and service-based enterprises can expand livelihood opportunities. There is a concern that government officials are not adequately supporting the upliftment of individuals with visual impairments. Many visually impaired individuals are unable to visit offices regularly, and there is a lack of clarity in addressing their needs. They are often limited to certain types of work, such as business activities, and are not provided with diverse employment opportunities. Marketing support is often handled by others rather than empowering them directly. Therefore, quality management practices should be incorporated to improve outcomes.

The government should take initiative to create dedicated portals to support visually impaired individuals. Online schemes focusing on marketing and skill-building should be introduced and strengthened. From an economic perspective, at least one member in each family should have sufficient income to meet basic needs. Many visually impaired groups include a large number of young individuals, who may otherwise be vulnerable to negative influences. Hence, they should be provided with employment opportunities and proper guidance. Training and placement support should be improved.

Existing schemes do not always provide adequate funding for start-ups, and there is a need for better financial assistance. Additional support should be extended through other schemes as well. Overall development may be limited due to insufficient banking support and lack of effective government funding schemes such as DPDA, DIC, and NABARD. Therefore, proper financial and institutional support is essential. An integrated support system must be established to ensure comprehensive development and empowerment of visually impaired individuals. Finally, strengthening institutional and community partnerships will help create a supportive ecosystem for inclusive entrepreneurship, ensuring that differently-abled individuals are fully integrated into economic and social development processes.

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