

### Listening: A DA Approach to Micro-Enterprise Development



SBI Foundation team with women entrepreneurs

**D**evelopment Alternatives (DA) places great importance on listening as a fundamental aspect of social innovation-led micro-enterprise development. Through the State Bank of India Foundation funded project, “Accelerating Entrepreneurship through Social Innovation approach (AESI)”, DA is actively working in 7 districts to strengthen the local ecosystem and foster entrepreneurship through the District Entrepreneurship Coalition. The coalition aims to co-create an innovative finance product that caters to the credit needs of entrepreneurs and shares social innovation knowledge with other civil society organisations.

During a recent visit to Mirzapur, the SBI Foundation team, together with DA, Manviya Dristikon Sewa Sansthan (MDSS), and Swami Vivekananda Shiksha Samiti (SVSS), employed three distinct listening tools. The first listening tool entailed ‘ethnographic one-to-one listening’ sessions with two entrepreneurs. These sessions covered various aspects such as entrepreneurs’ backgrounds, aspirations, business awareness, business model knowledge, and interaction with the local ecosystem and market.

In the village of Paidapur, Mirzapur, the team conducted an ‘Interactive Visioning Exercise’ (also known as a Comic Workshop) with 18 members of a Self Help Group (SHG). During this exercise, the women shared their goals and business ideas, such as producing sanitary pads and bakery units, etc. They discussed how joining SHGs has empowered them with financial independence and expressed their desire to expand their ventures.

The third listening tool, ‘Community Canvas’ game, was used in the Maharajpura village, Bhadohi. In the game, 23 people from different SHGs in the village participated and discussed the community’s resources, possibilities, needs, and success stories. This exercise provided valuable insights into the community’s current system for enterprise development.

Following these listening exercises, the SBI Foundation and the project team from Development Alternatives, SVSS, and MDSS brainstormed potential pathways for women SHGs and other entrepreneurs within the SBI-AESI project. Moving forward, Development Alternatives and its implementing partners will focus on deepening the listening processes to support 1250+ enterprises across 7 districts of Uttar Pradesh, with a particular emphasis on women and youth entrepreneurs.