

AT A GLANCE

Incorporation: 2010

Sector: Waste to resources

Website: www.paperwings.in

Stage of Startup: Maturity/Price Competition

Stage of Product: In-market

Customer Focus: B2B, B2C

Funding: Raised grants



Nilanjana Das

After 8+ years in the corporate world, Nilanjana launched Action Center for Transformation to fuel her entrepreneurship spirit and to create an impact. She is passionate about empowering rural communities, particularly women through creativity, art, and innovation.

ABOUT

Action Centre for Transformation (ACT) is a social enterprise with a mission to save the environment and empower women. Through their signature program - Paper Wings or Kaagaz Ke Pankh they employ more than 300 women in 5 villages to upcycle paper waste to a resourceful marketable product.

THE CONCEPT : PROBLEM & SOLUTION

While working on the Rural Health Mission Project, Nilanjana met women from the Bandhwari cluster in Gurgaon. The women in the village had no stable source of income and were in dire need of income generation activities. In seeking a solution to upskill them and find them job opportunities, Nilanjana noticed another problem: paper waste, which accounted for 35% of waste at landfills.

ACT then came up with its flagship program, "KAAGAZ KE PAANKH" to improve waste management and extend opportunities for home-based livelihoods to rural women. Under this program, women are trained to upcycle paper waste to innovative handcrafted utility products.

PRODUCT

Due to limited financial resources, ACT uses handcrafting upcycling techniques of rolling, coiling, quilling, and weaving to upcycle paper waste into eco-friendly long-lasting products like home décor and utility items, jewelry, stationery, etc.

To create new products ACT team brainstorms ideas, based on the needs and demands of their customers. For a better product-market fit, they make products in tune with upcoming festivals, occasions, etc. like Diwali, World Environment Day, etc.



FUNDING

ACT has raised grants from NABARD and Sodexo in 2020-21, which helped scale Paper Wings. They now support more than 300 women and 100 products, a huge leap from 5 women and 2 products that they started with. They are collaborating with DC Handicrafts under Ministry of Textile for a recognition for the paper crafters with a ARTISAN IDENTITY CARD from the government. They are now looking to raise funds to scale operations to 4 states across India.

CUSTOMERS

ACT's primary marketing channel is exhibitions. To increase market visibility, they collaborate with organizations that display their products. They also have a handicraft shop in Delhi where their products are displayed. With the buzz in the market about handmade products, they have been getting significant interest from customers abroad. Nilanjana also leverages her networks to sell some of the décor products at hotels, corporate offices.

VALUE PROPOSITION

- At Paper Wings all products are unique and handcrafted. With her venture, Nilanjana aims to support Indian handicrafts and presents a story with each product sold.
- They also make customizable products as per customers need

SUPPLY CHAIN

Nilanjana's strong corporate connections enable her to source waste paper from corporate offices - used papers, newspapers, magazines, and cardboard. They are delivered to the village where the women begin to work with them.

The women are divided into Self Help Groups (SHGs) of 10 members each. with a trainer to train and coordinate them. Though there is handholding from the ACT team, the women are the real catalysts to scale the business, word of mouth is a strong channel for recruiting more women.

The ACT model of production has been strongly developed and refined over the years. To distribute orders the women are divided into clusters, each specializing in making certain products.



IMPACT

- Women at Paper Wings can upcycle 3000-5000 Kg paper waste monthly
- With their training to upskill and build capacity, they now have a team of 300 microentrepreneurs who have the skills to create innovative products with paper waste.



All their products pass through four stages of quality check. They maintain a line sheet with all product details to maintain a record of products they have.

CHALLENGES: HURDLES & LESSONS

Pandemic has acted as a major hurdle for Paper Wings. With no direct sales and exhibitions, the business has slowed in covid. It also impacted skill development as rural women aren't tech-savvy. With no access to laptops or zoom, it became difficult to train women. But with her resilience and never say never attitude they are now digitally training women to market their products online, through group calls on WhatsApp.

Nilanjana is slowly taking Paper Wings on a digital road by finding the best means to showcase their products. Due to minimal funds and limited fund mobilization, they struggled mainly with professional images to tie up with e-commerce websites. They Cannot access funds freely with ACT registered as a nonprofit. To overcome this, she reached out to her friends who had skills and professional cameras to create an online portfolio. Business at Paper Wings is demand-driven and Nilanjana always has to stay active and leverage all opportunities to create a buzz and popularize their products.

WHAT'S NEXT

Nilanjana's next step is to scale operations across India. She's looking to collaborate with like-minded people who can help digitize her sales channel and can help train women to upcycle more waste like textiles, metals etc. helping diversify their portfolio.