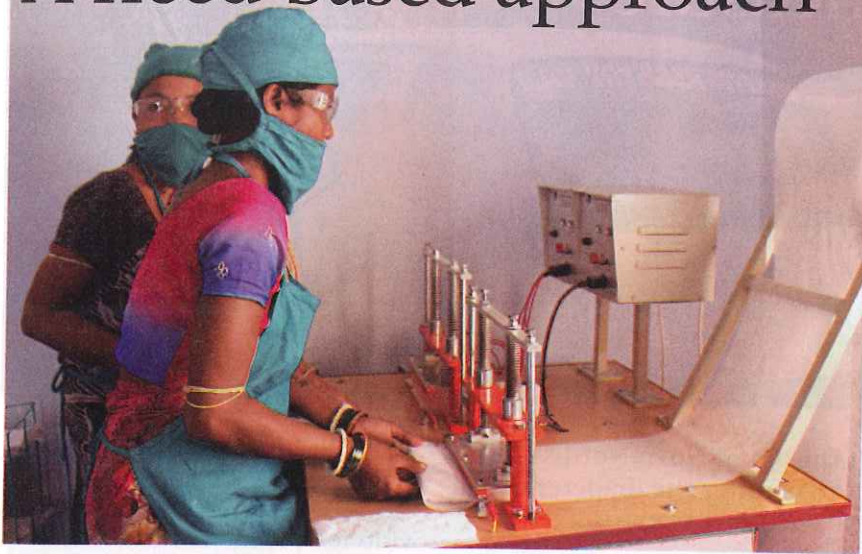


## A need-based approach



JSPL's social investments in Angul, Orissa, are multifarious

Crouched on the floor, 35-year-old Rabibari Bhoi is busy at work. Her nimble fingers work their way around what looks like a sterilising machine. Too shy to look up or even remove the green mask from her face, she is completely oblivious of the vital role she is playing in the revolution that is silently spreading across Angul district in Orissa.

Bhoi is part of a 12-member self-help group, created by Jindal Steel & Power Limited (JSPL), that makes sterilised sanitary napkins under the brand name of Sshodashi. In the local language the term denotes '16 years' or the age when girls reach puberty. The brand's shop floor is a humble two-room set up where the women work in shifts of four hours each to maximise the output of the single machine that they own. Another 48 women are being trained and soon they will get four other machines to expand the business. Meanwhile, the brand will get registered as well.

Nobody, including Bhoi, had imagined at the onset of the project four months ago that it could be so successful so soon. A survey by Nielsen revealed that almost 70 per cent rural women can't afford sanitary napkins. Apart from the dismal statistics, the subject too was taboo.

While the way forward was to offer an affordable alternative to women, the challenge was to address a need that was not even expressed! Menstrual health and hygiene wasn't a concern area for most.

The conviction found its way through an unconventional channel – Kishori Express – another initiative by JSPL. Primarily a mobile health van, it was launched to improve female adolescent health through regular haemoglobin check-ups and anaemia control interventions. The van also had a touch screen computer to conduct interactive quizzes to raise awareness about iron-rich food sources. The ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) workers and Jindal's CSR team, which manned the Express were surprised when the village girls requested them in hushed tones to get Sshodashi. Some even offered to



pay them in advance!

Priced at just ₹20 for a pack of 16, Sshodashi is easily the cheapest in its category in India, a distinction so far held by Saathi from the Hindustan Latex stable. Gradually the demand is exceeding the supply of 275 napkins a day. Bhoi is hopeful that "when the four new automated machines increase output more than 10 times, possibly her income of ₹1,000 a month may rise too."

Sshodashi is a classic case of social investment, a step beyond mere philanthropy. Bhoi's land was part of the 6,000 acres acquired by JSPL for its mega project in Orissa. While her husband got employed at the plant, Bhoi got engaged in this project. All the initial investment in the Sshodashi project has been done by JSPL – more in the nature of seed capital. The machines have been procured from Jayaashree Industries. Unlike large-scale production models, which require ₹3.5 crore as initial investments, this technology, designed by Muruganandam Arunachalam founder, Jayaashree, cost just ₹75,000 each.

### Self-reliant enterprises

JSPL's idea was to build a self-reliant enterprise. The same philosophy reflects in Eco Spa, a brand that you may soon find on the shelves of Reliance Fresh. A self-help group of 119-odd women, trained by NABARD, are using locally grown wealth of pineapple, papaya, aloe vera, hibiscus, etc, to make soaps, scented oils and moisturisers. The project started in November last year.

"We have an annual CSR budget of ₹15 crore to fund our several initiatives – vocational education for skill development, organic farming, a food preservation unit, infrastructure development, health centres, etc. We will also enter the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), a comprehensive sustainability reporting framework this year. Our CSR portal will also be up in a month or two – it will help us track the progress of all our initiatives seamlessly," says Rajesh K. Jha, executive director, projects, JSPL.

By Kiran Yadav