

Fidgety Fingers

Geographic Spread: Sikkim, India

South and East Sikkim, 58 women from rural Sikkim trained and employed



Key Messages: ‘Fidgety Fingers’ is a social entrepreneurship venture based in Sikkim, started by a woman entrepreneur, Ms. Devika Gurung. They create and sell handicrafts (mostly woollen) through social media platforms in Sikkim and across India. They support women belonging to various necessitous backgrounds, training them on the skills of knitting and crocheting. This project also intends to preserve and promote the vanishing fibre art in a non-conventional way.

Need

In Sikkim, ancient customs and traditions have kept the decades-old styles and forms of craftsmanship alive. Sikkim is known for its traditional handicrafts, paintings, motifs, carpets, traditional shoes, dresses, ornaments, and so on. Traditionally, weaving and knitting are symbols of cultural expression in the state of Sikkim. Handloom weaving is another important craft in which woollen and cotton products are derived.¹

The traditional skills of Sikkim lie in its handicrafts, which encourage the natives to preserve and promote the traditional cottage art and craft of genuine Sikkimese design. Many women belonging to the rural areas of Sikkim source their earnings by manufacturing handmade products using knitting and crocheting techniques. The skill is passed on from the previous generations to the next; thus, it is important to enhance these skills and promote these products in the market. It was noticed by Ms. Devika, a budding entrepreneur from Sikkim, that a lot of women belonging to below poverty-line localities of Sichey, Gangtok, sold handicrafts that they prepared for earning extra incomes that they could spend on necessary household items. According to Ms. Devika, handicrafts are a lost traditional skill in most places of the country, making it an unconventional source of income, such as in Sikkim, where knitting, crocheting and hand-loomed are prominent traditional skills. Improving market trends with increased demand for handmade products was seen as an opportunity to start a business venture that would focus on traditional handicraft skills as a means to generate livelihoods for the women in Sikkim.

Response

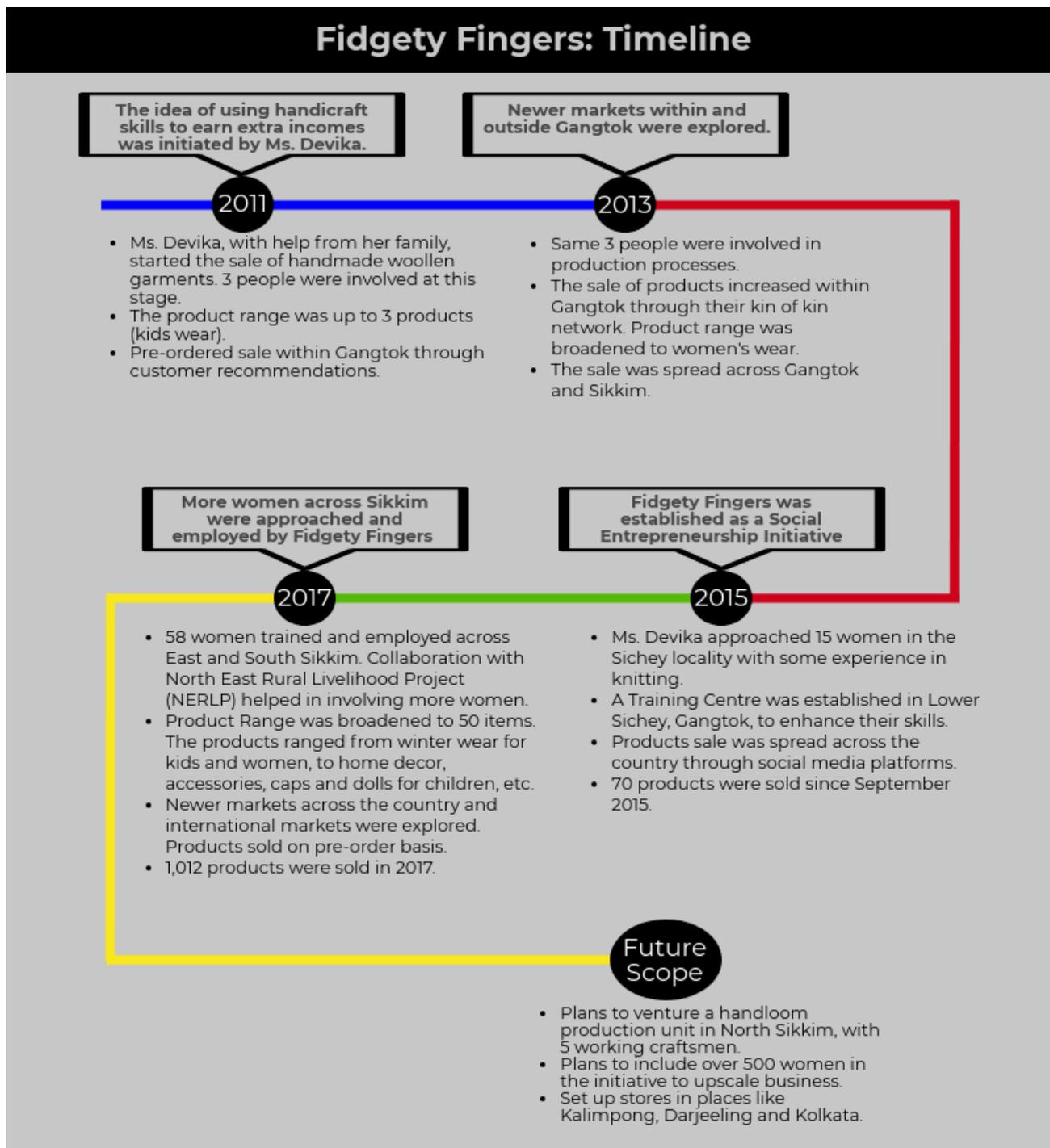
The idea of Fidgety Fingers occurred to Ms. Devika in 2011, which was later initiated with the involvement of three people in knitting and crocheting handmade products. The venture took its course and started expanding officially in September 2015. Ms. Devika approached women belonging to the low income classes within Gangtok, East Sikkim, who had some experience in knitting, and employed them to prepare handmade products for sale. Ms. Devika thought that Fidgety Fingers would be a great platform to enhance the women’s skills and help them earn more, thus making them financially independent. The project intends to preserve and promote the vanishing fibre art in a non-conventional way, and to support livelihoods of the women in rural areas of Sikkim.

- They set up a training centre for these women in a school in Sichey, Gangtok, to enhance their skills to create optimal products.
- They provide the women with knitting sets and crocheting kits at the start of the training session which lasts from two weeks to about two months, depending on their knowledge and expertise in the skill.

¹ Handicrafts and Women of Sikkim

The investment required to initiate a business venture like Fidgety Fingers is minimalistic, as the only requirements to derive outputs are raw material, labour force and product-marketing skills. The venture was also initiated to revive the old traditions through new and innovative designs in the products. They believe in uplifting the underprivileged to create a successful society.

Process



Features

- Fidgety Fingers approaches groups of women in the rural areas of North East and South West Sikkim, and persuades them to join the venture by incentivising them with alternate livelihoods.
- They are provided with 2 to 4 weeks training, where their knitting and crocheting skills are enhanced.

- On an average, in a week, one woman worker can knit up to two sweaters for Fidgety Fingers. The women are salaried regularly on product basis, i.e. they get their wages per product. Average wages for these women range from INR 200 to INR 600, depending on the type of products they make.
- Fidgety Fingers follows the 3Rs idea of reduce, reuse and recycle - at not only their handicraft production level, but also at the packaging level. The packaging constitutes of reused cardboard boxes and bubble wraps.
- Their products range from kids wear, such as sweaters, socks, caps, dolls, etc. to clothing items for women, accessories, home décor, etc. They make their accessories through the needle tatting technique.
- They had started with 3 products in 2015, and slowly broadened their range to a total of 50 products by 2017. The price of their handmade items ranges from INR 50 to INR 3,000 per product.
- Product sale occurs through online orders via their social media pages, such as on Facebook and Instagram.

Performance

Environment

- All their products are handmade, which means that little or no energy is used at the production level.
- All of the packaging material is reused; they collect almost 80 to 100 cardboard boxes in a month to package their materials.
- The products are made without any use of chemicals, thus making them environment friendly.

Social

- They employ and empower over 58 women through their social entrepreneurship venture. Each woman earns from INR 500 to INR 6,000 per month, depending on their product delivery rate.
- They are bringing back the essence of culture and tradition among people, which is increasing the demand of handicraft products.

Business

- The venture was started with an investment of INR 7,000, and within two years, they have received returns of about INR 150,000 by 2017. Their working capital depends on the number of orders they receive before production, as they only sell pre-ordered items.
- They had started with a group of three people, and now they have about 58 women working directly under them.
- They receive maximum orders from within Sikkim, i.e. about 300 orders a month. About 80 to 100 orders are received from outside of Sikkim, such as Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Vellore, Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore and other such places.

Overcoming Barriers

- It becomes difficult to convince women to get involved in the knitting and crocheting business, as it is a slightly time-consuming skill.
- Sometimes, they lag behind due to excessive orders and insufficient labour-force.

Future Scope

Fidgety Fingers as a social enterprise is self-sustaining at present, though they aim to expand their business throughout the state of Sikkim, and then upscale their business. They aim to expand by creating a set of master trainers who will then train women under them to either begin their own entrepreneurial journeys or work with Fidgety Fingers. They are currently venturing a handloom production unit with five craftsmen in North Sikkim. By 2022, they aim to open up production units in different parts of Sikkim, and train and employ over 500 women in the project. They also aim to have stores in several places like Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Kolkata.

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