

# CSR Interview : Tata Power fostering Change Agents with Dhaaga and Abha

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*Praveer Sinha, MD & CEO, Tata Power*

**By Rusen Kumar**

MUMBAI: Women in India constitute only 14% of the total entrepreneurs. These women from marginal communities face multiple barriers to pursue income-generating activities. Tata Power has over the years focused on breaking these barriers and feels committed towards women empowerment which it has been supporting through its various initiatives such as Dhaaga and Abha.

**Praveer Sinha, MD & CEO, Tata Power** speaks to *India CSR Network* on how Tata Power has been relentlessly working towards uplifting the livelihood of the community women and fostering their holistic development through these initiatives.

**What has been the rationale behind launching initiatives like Dhaaga & Abha?**

'Leadership with Care' has been the fulcrum of the numerous best practices such as conserving the environment and resources, augmenting the lives of the communities and above all creating a culture that reflects and reinforces Tata Power's core values. The launch of Dhaaga and Abha initiatives is a testament to our vision of making both urban and rural women independent and brings us a step closer to fulfilling it. This venture was kick-started with an aim to uplift the livelihood of the community women by making them self-reliant and financially independent, in turn nurturing their holistic development.

**Give us an overview of the Abha initiative.**

An *Earn while you Learn* initiative, Abha was established for women in JJ Clusters of Delhi as an extension of the Women Literacy Program (WLC). Under Abha, women are provided with quality education at TPDDL Women Literacy Centres. Many beneficiaries of the initiative, called the brand ambassadors conduct door-to-door campaigns raising awareness in the communities about Tata Power's CSR activities, like vocational training, scholarship program, free health services through mobile dispensaries, drug deaddiction camps, also serve as the first contact point for queries regarding these programs.

Additionally, post undergoing training programs at the centres, these women become a part of the Self Help Groups that assist the JJ cluster communities to link with government schemes and facilitate various commercial and energy conservation activities. With an average earning of Rs 10,000 per month, Abha is fostering the financial independence of the women in the community.

### **How important is it to make women self-sufficient and financially independent in today's day and age of gender equality?**

Countries around the world including India have been increasingly emphasising on women empowerment. The Government of India has recognised this phenomenon and through initiative such as *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, advocating the philosophy of empowering women from a very young age. Since 2005-06, current employment levels have decreased for women as per a report by *National Family Health Survey*. Thirty-six percent of women were currently employed in 2005-06, compared with 24% in 2015-16. The under-representation of women in the workforce is both a social and economic loss, and it is something we have recognized.

Our initiatives like Dhaaga and Abha are therefore, designed to provide education, monetary empowerment and safety for women enabling them to bring about a change that revolutionises gender equality.

Financial empowerment is a crucial aspect for every woman in today's day and age because it is not only the genesis of confidence but also enables women to become an integral part of decision making, for themselves and their families. It also helps them sustain independently in every manner.

### **What has been the response of the community women in the areas of operation?**

Both Dhaaga and Abha have been well received in the communities where we operate. The initiatives have witnessed growing participation of women who are becoming the 'Change Agents' of the community.

The implementation of our programmes has encouraged women at the grassroots to get on a path of financial independence and are able to contribute to their family's income which is a big leap towards building a sustainable future. Our brand ambassadors or the change agents from these communities are setting an example for other women to follow their footsteps. This just

reaffirms our commitment to foster the growth of independent women in this country.

**What have been the key milestones and how have these initiatives contributed in transforming the community?**

Since the inception of Dhaaga and Abha, our journey has been remarkable. As mentioned above, the acceptance has been overwhelming and over the last one year the Dhaaga initiative has empowered over 1000 women at 14 locations across 97 villages. Under the Abha initiative, we have covered over 200 clusters that has benefitted more than 2 lakh families. What started off as an extension of our Women Literacy Program with 5 women, has now blossomed into an initiative with 841 Abha members.

**What is the annual CSR spending for Dhaaga and Abha initiatives?**

Under its Affirmative Action Program, Tata Power has invested around Rs. 2.5 crore for Dhaaga and Abha annually thereby encouraging employability and education for women.

**Will you be taking these initiatives beyond your plant locations?**

Yes we will. Tata Power has always been a custodian for the dreams of many vulnerable communities and aim to continue doing that. Today Dhaaga also runs in Jawahar village which is not near our plant location but needs help and such interventions to progress.

Through Dhaaga and Aabha we have blazed a new way for women in India and plan to devise such initiatives across other cities as well. We believe that where there is power and resources, there is change and we would continue to invest our efforts to be the change agent.