

From Green Stems to Green Enterprises

How the Traditional Bamboo Resource is Creating New Livelihoods, Enterprises and Opportunities

Posted On: 12 SEP 2026 10:55AM by PIB Delhi

A bamboo bag might seem like an ordinary find at a city market stall. But its journey tells a story that winds from a small village enterprise to a shift in national policy. At the SARAS Aajeevika Mela 2026 in Gurugram, one such story stood on display: bamboo bags crafted by **Vishakha Didi** from Assam. In 2014, she joined a Self-Help Group (SHG) and revitalised her father-in-law's bamboo craft enterprise with new designs. Government support and exhibitions helped her reach wider markets. She participated in the India International Trade Fair, 2025; her bamboo creations earned her ₹2 lakh in sales. Her journey captures a moment that turned a homegrown craft into a thriving enterprise.



Image 1: Vishakha Didi at Saras Mela

For generations, bamboo was closely linked with **traditional livelihoods** across communities, but an outdated regulatory barrier once held back its true economic potential. Under a British-era law, bamboo was classified as a tree, which made harvesting and transporting it unnecessarily cumbersome for the people who depended on it. In 2017, the government took a landmark step by removing bamboo from this classification, freeing it from restrictive forestry regulations. This forward-thinking reform opened the doors to **greater innovation, entrepreneurship, and value addition** in the bamboo sector. The importance of this move is now visible across the country, especially in the Northeast, where bamboo is driving employment, business, and innovation.



Image 2: Bamboo Plants

One such example is fashion designer and sustainable innovator **Chimi Ongmu Bhutia's** Lagstal Design Studio near Gangtok, **Sikkim**. This women-led manufacturing enterprise makes **bamboo handicrafts, incense sticks, furniture, interior décor items**, etc. Bamboo here moves beyond traditional craft into contemporary design and enterprise. Chimi's story is part of a wider movement. In **Tripura**, **Bijoy Sutradhar** adopted technology to **improve bamboo product manufacturing**. In **Nagaland**, SHGs around Dimapur are adding value to **bamboo-based food products**, alongside local enterprises like **Khorolo Creative Crafts** producing furniture and handicrafts. Meanwhile, in Mizoram's **Mamit district**, teams are advancing scientific cultivation through **bamboo tissue culture** and **poly-house management**. These examples point towards the bamboo sector becoming more diverse, innovative, and value-driven.



Image 3: Chimi Ongmu Bhutia and her Studio

A transformation of this scale requires more than skilled hands. It needs technology, processing facilities, training, and stronger market connections. This is where government support becomes important. The **National Bamboo Mission** focuses on **cultivation, processing, and market access** for bamboo farmers, manufacturers, and sellers. It also supports **nurseries for quality planting material**. Consider an example to understand the impact of this government scheme at the farm level. In **Madhya Pradesh**, **Vijay Patidar** turned to bamboo after repeated losses from conventional farming in 2019. He planted around **4,000 bamboo saplings** with support from the bamboo mission. Within two years, he earned approximately ₹75,000 from selling bamboo poles. Bamboo also allowed him to **intercrop** chilli, capsicum, ginger and garlic. His experience shows how bamboo can become both a crop and a **longer-term livelihood asset**.



Image 4: Engineered Bamboo Boards

Further, the **North East Centre for Technology Application & Reach (NECTAR)** has supported bamboo technologies across several **commercial applications**. These include food and agro-processing, construction materials, manufacturing machinery, renewable energy, industrial products, etc. These interventions have generated employment of around **30 million man-days** annually. They have also raised value addition for bamboo commodities from 10 percent to as high as **70 percent**. For example, **engineered bamboo** is opening new possibilities in the field of construction. Engineered bamboo is a composite material made by binding and compressing raw bamboo fibers, strips, or particles. Furniture made with new designs and engineered bamboo is gaining popularity and attracting the attention of architects, designers, and interior decorators. Consequently, more than **42 lakh square feet** of engineered bamboo structures have been built for **disaster relief and rehabilitation**. In **Chhattisgarh**, **576 school rooms** have been made from engineered bamboo, housing about **20,000 children**. This shows how bamboo is moving into construction applications once associated only with conventional industrial materials.

The bamboo value chain is expanding in directions beyond product diversification. Women's groups are becoming important participants across this emerging value chain. Such a story of women's livelihoods becomes especially visible in Gadchiroli, **Maharashtra**. A bamboo-based agarbatti initiative, named the **Gadchiroli Agarbatti Project (GAP)**, started production centres across the district in 2012. By 2020, they had **32 centres** employing around **1,100 people**, and nearly 90 percent of these workers were women. Monthly earnings reached around **₹5,000 for every woman**. Employment also increased from roughly 45-60 days annually to **more than 225 days**. Work also moved closer to home and became less physically strenuous in nature. Women gained new skills, confidence, and opportunities for leadership. This initiative also **reduced dependence on forests** as a source of income.



Image 5: A member of Gadchiroli Agarbatti Project making agarbatti from bamboo

Stories like these have been made possible due to continued efforts by the government towards capacity building and training. **CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI), Nagpur**, recently, in June 2026, conducted a five-day training programme on bamboo handicrafts for women SHGs. The theme of this training programme was “Empowering Women SHGs through Bamboo Handicrafts from Bamboo Grown on Fly Ash Dumps.” The training provided hands-on skills in bamboo harvesting, treatment and processing, handicraft production, value-added product development, entrepreneurship, branding, marketing, and product design. The initiative demonstrated how **reclaimed fly ash dump sites can be transformed into productive landscapes**, generating both environmental and socio-economic benefits for local communities.

The bamboo story is becoming a story of people, possibilities, and transformation. Across India, bamboo is creating livelihoods, enterprises, and sustainable opportunities. **The story of bamboo in India is therefore no longer simply about what bamboo can become. It is about what communities can become when a traditional resource is connected to technology, enterprise and opportunity.**

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