

TECH4GOOD COMMUNITY

FOSSFWD

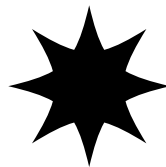
› IMAGO





Introduction

IMAGO was founded in 2014 to close the missing middle in the development sector. They work with grassroots organisations & social enterprises to build capacity & scale impact in a way that respects their unique context and strengths. The name comes from 'Imago', which is the last stage of growth in a butterfly when it attains maturity to find its wings. True to its name, Imago partners with organisations across Africa, South Asia, Latin America and the United States to design a pathway for scaling their services and impact, while remaining true to their core values.





Their work in India

In India, IMAGO works with grassroots organisations to scale innovations on gender equity and sustainable economic opportunities for local communities. Since 2022, IMAGO has collaborated with SEWA (Self-employed Women's Association) and the State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand to implement and scale a women-led, value-chain-based agri-business enterprise solution, the 'Unnat model'. The Madhya Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MPSRLM) is an initiative by the Government of India, that reaches out to the poorest of the poor households for their economic and social empowerment.

The Unnat enterprise model aims to integrate local agricultural value chains with entrepreneurial networks of Self Help Group (SHG) women to create additional income opportunities for rural women. It involves setting up a Cluster Level Federation owned agro-processing enterprise focused on localized procurement, value addition (processing & branding), and sales & distribution through the localised network of rural sales women entrepreneurs (Unnat didis). One agro-processing enterprise directly provides income opportunities to 250-300 rural women. Currently, there are 14 operational agro-processing units across Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand.

The name "Unnat" means "of the highest standard," and this vision is at the core of the enterprise's mission. By establishing a localised sales network and setting up agro-processing units, this program aims to meet the demand for high quality unadulterated staples in rural markets. Each enterprise is managed by a team of four SHG women. The SHG women who run the local sales network are known as Unnat didis, which means "sister" in Hindi. On average, each SHG woman who is part of the sales network generates an additional income between 4000 to 6000 INR per month, providing support to their households.

› **Proprietary Pickle**

Initially, Imago relied on a proprietary ERP solution. While comprehensive in functionalities, it proved to be too complex and overwhelming. With too many features and minimum customisation, the interface and nomenclature were not aligned with the reality of how the women managed their businesses. The system was difficult to use, resulting in wasted resources and time taken to learn the system. In situations like this, technology adoption is met with a lot of resistance. The Unnat didis spent considerable time to get acclimated to the system. Yet, the overwhelming interface, unfamiliar workflows, corporate jargons and terminologies that did not fit into the right context only added to their resistance and the system was rendered not useful to the didis.

The success of the Unnat Didi program, at its core, depends on whether the women can significantly improve their monthly income by participating in the enterprise. The existing system failed to provide the insights needed to showcase this impact to stakeholders, such as funders and governments. It also failed to provide the necessary sales and income-related insights to be shared with the Unnat didis, that would enable them to track and plan their entrepreneurial engagement effectively.

This highlights a significant insight: The ability to customise software exhibits high potential for the social sector. Existing products are built keeping a specific user persona in mind—one that is significantly different from users with no technical expertise. For nonprofits, technology isn't just about supporting administrative operations; it plays a vital role in reaching and empowering their beneficiaries. Technology is built to enable human-driven goals, which makes a deep understanding of end users critical. To be effective, one should place importance in understanding the user interaction behaviour. Proprietary solutions often lack the customisability required to address these nuanced needs of the social sector.

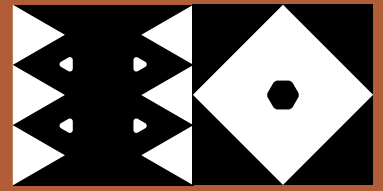
› **Introduction of FOSS**

To address the limitations of their existing solution, T4GC collaborated with the IMAGO team to develop a Point of Sale (POS) system to address the data insights and inaccuracy problem. The system offers the following capabilities:

- Capture detailed operational data including purchase records, production volumes, sales data, and stock inventory.
- Manage member-level information by tracking the demographic profiles and sales performance of Unnat didis.
- View and track the sales performance of each individual Unnat didi who is part of the program
- Financial data tracking by incorporating all accounts-related data such as expenses, cash flow, and balance sheets.
- Data visualisation featuring dashboards and report generation capabilities for a comprehensive view of operations

This new system was designed with the end user—the didis, at the centre. The design process incorporated existing familiar practices, such as tracking sales using Excel sheets or physical registers. The system's nomenclature was adjusted to reflect the everyday language of the users, making it intuitive and easy to use. The most significant feature of the new system was its ability to track individual income levels of the didis. This data became instrumental in decision-making at multiple levels.

How Technology is Transforming Decision-Making



At the individual level, the system tracks the baseline income of each didi, her monthly sales, and profit margins. This data allows her to evaluate whether she wants to continue dedicating time to the enterprise or take part in more training programs. On the enterprise level, the system can identify top-performing didis, who could be offered advanced training to help them further develop their businesses. Additionally, the income & demographic data can be used to refer other government schemes that they qualify for, expanding opportunities for the women involved. At the policy level, the availability of detailed income increment data has provided state governments with valuable insights that can be used to advocate for the success of similar programs across the region. By using this data, policymakers can better understand the effectiveness of such initiatives and scale them across other districts.

The POS system is currently in use across 6 agro-processing enterprises, with plans to expand to 50 enterprises by March 2025. Built on open-source technology, the system has reduced technology costs by over 85%, enabling cost-effective replication. The solution has already been presented to three state governments, all of whom have expressed enthusiastic support. The Jharkhand State Rural Development Department has even offered to host the POS system on their state server.

Through these systems, Imago has access to a holistic view of all the active centres implementing the program through a centralised dashboard. This enables the admin team to monitor each enterprise effectively, ensuring real-time visibility into operations. Monitoring aggregate and individual income levels encourages state governments to support this model and establish accountability at various levels.

