

CII MEMBERS TO STEP UP SOURCING FROM DALIT-OWNED SMES

The organisation has trained 6,122 Dalit and tribal youths in entrepreneurship development

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The Confederation of Indian Industry's move to encourage its members to increase sourcing of goods and services from Dalit and Scheduled Tribe (ST) entrepreneurs is set to make the two communities entrepreneurially more vibrant.

To increase the number of entrepreneurs in the country, CII has suggested to its members that they step up sourcing from Dalit entrepreneurs. Milind Kamble, chairman of the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Dicci), said some CII members, including Tata Motors, have already started sourcing from

Dicci members.

CII has trained 6,122 Dalit and tribal youths in entrepreneurship development through various initiatives. Besides, it recently tied up with Dicci, which has a membership of about 1,000 entrepreneurs from the Dalit community.

Tata Steel Vice-Chairman and CII President B Muthuraman said the industry chamber will work closely with the Dalit community to provide them with a chance to participate in economic growth opportunities.

CII Affirmative Action Initiatives will focus on how to create more employment and make people employable by improving their skills, and

how to develop more Dalit entrepreneurs.

CII is organising regular awareness programmes throughout the country to promote greater inclusion of Dalits and STs in the private sector, assisting multinational and Indian member companies to achieve greater representation for Dalits and STs in new recruitment at all levels and strengthening member companies' HR systems to enhance access and opportunity to Dalit and ST applicants with equal qualification and competence.

CII is also working with member companies to set up mechanisms to track the composition of its members' workforce, and specifically, the

numbers of Dalits and STs employed. It has set a target of training 50,000 youngsters from among Dalits and STs and helping an equal number of them gain employment in the year 2011-12.

Dicci's members are spread across industries such as food, engineering and infrastructure, and its motto is, "We want to be job givers, not job seekers," Kamble said.

Dicci comprises first-generation, self-made Dalit industrialists, and they want better opportunities for their kind. They want to prove that India Inc is not the sole preserve of those born rich — or as upper castes.

"We have a member whose turnover is around ₹25 lakh

and a member whose company clocked revenues of around ₹1,800 crore," said Kamble.

"Our community members want to grow, but it is not easy to find someone to lend them money to start a unit," he said, because Dalits owned virtually no land or other assets. The search for funding to start a business usually took members of the community to private lenders, he added.

The community has a few entrepreneurial success stories. According to Dicci, there are about 30 members who are *crorepatis*. The list includes Ashok Khade, chairman, Das Offshore Pvt Ltd, who presides over a business empire that is worth ₹550 crore; Natha Ram, who runs Steelmont Pvt Ltd, a



₹600 crore company that makes steel converter machines; and Devjibhai Makwana, the owner of Suraj Filament, a ₹300 crore company that makes flat and twisted high-tenacity polypropylene multi-filament yarns.

"These successes have not

come easily, they came after years of fighting a system which is designed to keep Dalits out," added Chandrabhan Prasad, a columnist representing this community. Trade and enterprise have never been part of the community's tradition; the only trade tradi-

tionally linked with Dalits is leather work, he noted.

Dalits are not discriminated against in business, but they need support in terms of training, identification of market opportunities and financial help, and to provide this is Dicci's aim, added Kamble.