

Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in Rural Bengal

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Creating Brand 'Metho' to promote chemical free products

Who We Are?

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

EquiDiversity Foundation is a feminist, civil society organization working in three districts of South 24 Parganas, Birbhum and Purulia since 2016 on leadership, decision making and political participation

Our Vision: we envision a society where there is gender equality, co-sharing of power and freedom from gender-based violence

Our Mission: we are committed to create an environment that promotes gender equality through political, social and financial empowerment with active informed participation of individuals (particularly women and girls), the community and the state

Our Values: we are driven by the values of equity, diversity, inclusion, non-discrimination, non violence, mutual respect, transparency, accountability, democracy, openness, shared leadership, co-creation, active participation, honesty and commitment



Where We Work?

Birbhum- Labpur & Nanoor Blocks- 6 GPs

Jamna, Thiba, Dwarka, Daskalgram Kareya II, Kirnahar I, Kirnahar II

South 24 Parganas- Pathar Protima Block- 2 GPs

Dakshin Gangadharpur, Sreenarayanpur Purnachandrapur

Purulia- Jhalda II Block- 2 GPs

Tatuara, Nowahatu

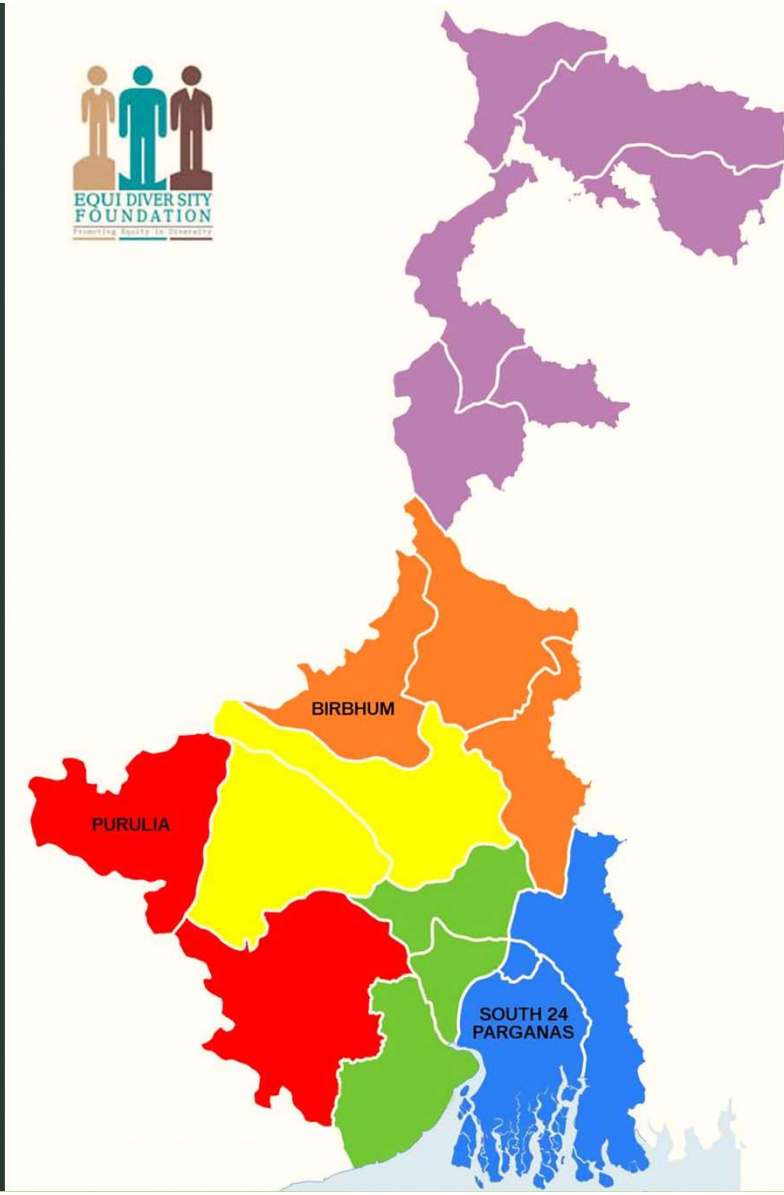
Kolkata

Geographically diverse

Politically challenging

Natural Calamity prone

Categorized as 'backward districts' of WB



Thematic areas

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity



Women's empowerment & Leadership

Leadership

Collectivization

Addressing GBV

Safe space



Governance , citizenship & participation

Gram sansad sabha & gram sabha

Child parliament

Child sansad sabha

Women's collectives



Livelihoods & resilience in the face of Climate change

Nutrition garden

Agro based products

Water & housing

5 key stakeholders of systemic change

- Personal Capital
- Knowledge & Skills Capital
- Leadership Capital
- Social Capital



EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Individual | Family | GROUP & NETWORK | COMMUNITY | STATE

Strengthening women's entrepreneurial abilities to become economically self sustainable

- The Entrepreneurs come from the socially and economically marginalized classes.
- Most of them are survivors of domestic violence. Many are struggling to make ends meet. They are trying to break the patriarchal control in their families.
- All are members of the Nari Jagaran Committees that have been mobilized by Equidiversity Foundation.
- Almost all of them do not have any land in their name and have major debts in their names being part of self help groups.
- As members of Nari Jagan committees all of them are involved in social activities trying to strengthen other women in their neighbourhood to break the patriarchal shackles and spread awareness about their rights.
- **Social entrepreneurship doesn't mean much unless these women are economically stable and independent.**



EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Voices: Entrepreneurs

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Kajal Ghosh, a 54 years old member of the Nari Jagran Committee in Kirnahar, Birbhum has transformed her life through entrepreneurship. With support from EDF, she manages a spice unit, processing and supplying spices to various customers. Through training and market linkage, Kajal has gained economic independence and confidence. She now participates in fairs and events, receiving orders from different places. This initiative has improved her financial stability and fostered entrepreneurship, enabling her to take control of her economic future. Her neighbours would often taunt her, saying ""What's the need for a woman to do business, can't your husband and son earn enough?"" Kajal's success demonstrates the impact of empowering women through entrepreneurship, creating a ripple effect of positive change in her community. Her journey serves as a model for others, showcasing the potential for economic self-sufficiency and independence through determination and support. On average, she sold 64,400 rupees worth of products every month over the past years.

"I want to expand the business, increase the number of machines, involve more poor women from the village, and send our products to other districts in West Bengal as well as to other states outside West Bengal".



"As a woman working in the village household, stepping outside, balancing household and outside work, dealing with capital issues, and selling in the market was challenging. Since our products are chemical-free and pure, they are priced higher than the market products, which initially made it difficult to find a market for them."



allenges faced by women

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

- **Personal Challenge**
  - Lack of confidence
  - Family support
  - Limited child care options
  - Limited Role Models
- **Cultural & Social Barriers**
  - Traditional Gender Roles
  - Lack of Support Networks
- **Legal and Regulatory Challenges**
  - Complex Regulations
  - Property Rights
- **Environmental and Climate Challenges**
  - Climate change
  - Sustainability Practices
- **Business related challenges:**
  - Lack of business skills
- **Access to capital**
  - Financial barriers
  - High Interest Rates
  - Access to credit: Existing debts for family
- **Assess to market, and technology.**
  - Geographical Isolation
  - Market Information
- **Infrastructure and Technological Barriers**
  - Poor Infrastructure
  - Digital Divide

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Metho

- Promoting agro-based chemical fee and preservative free products made by marginalized women from Birbhum and Sunderbans







EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

What is "Metho" A fragrance of Bengal?

The idea

- **Metho: A Fragrance of Bengal!**
- Is a non-profit initiative of Equidiversity Foundation, a feminist organization working to promote gender equality through women's empowerment & leadership in the amongst the last mile villages of rural Bengal. **Metho** is a brand name created to support rural women entrepreneurs and their products.
- **Metho** brings a basket of agro based products ranging from masalas, lentils, Sunderban honey, mushroom pickle, sattu, besan, rice, jiggery, ready to eat diet chirwa and roasted rice etc. The uniqueness of the products are:
- *Non use of harmful preservatives*
- *Either handmade or environmentally sustainable technology used*

Objectives

- Strengthen last mile women to become entrepreneurs
- Support a collective business model run and managed by Nari Jagaran Committees
- Establish and expand a wide market to support the entrepreneurs
- Make preservative free and chemical free quality agro-product available to people at an affordable price
- Enhance and boost small scale village level cottage and handicraft industries

Who are involved?

- Prepared by marginalized women from rural Bengal
- Women are from the distant villages of Sunderbans and Birbhum who are worst affected by gender inequality & gender based violence coupled with the aftermath of covid and other natural disasters like super cyclones.
- Despite everything, these women are resilient enough to fight and see through their struggles.
- These women are landless with their families having small land holdings
- They undertake subsistence farming for livelihood

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Products under ‘Metho’ currently

Moong Dal/মুগ ডাল
Masoor Dal (Small grain) Premium quality / মুসুর ডাম (ছোট দানা)
Turmeric powder/ হলুদ গুঁড়ো
Sattu/ছোলার ছাতু
Besan/বেসন
Cumin Powder/জিরে গুঁড়ো
Chilli Powder/লঙ্কা গুঁড়ো
Coriander Powder/ধনে গুঁড়ো
Jaggery in container/গুড় পাটালি
Govind bhog rice/গোবিন্দভোগ চাল
Honey/মধু
Desi Ghee/দেশী ঘি
Chola Bhaja/ছোলা ভাজা
Daaler bori/ ডালের বড়ি
Chalkumro Bori/চাল কুমড়ো বড়ি
Dudheswar Rice/দুধেশ্বর চাল
Mushroom/মাশ্রুম

Bamboo Basket/বাঁশের ঝুড়ি
Sweet/প্যাড়া
Sweet- Manda/বীরভুমের মন্ডা
Gamchha Bag/গামছা ব্যাগ
Cloth Side Bag/কাপড়ের সাইড ব্যাগ
Denim Side Bag/ডেনিমের সাইড ব্যাগ (নীল)
Putli Bag/পুটলি ব্যাগ
Jute Side Embroidered Bag/জুটের হাতের কাজ করা ব্যাগ
Cloth Pencil Bag (Round)/কাপড়ের পেন্সিল ব্যাগ (গোল)
Cloth Pencil Bag (Flat)/কাপড়ের পেন্সিল ব্যাগ (প্লেন)
Handmade Paper pen, file, writing pad
Neem Soap/নিম সাবান
Turmeric Soap/হলুদ সাবান



Rina Naskar Mondal, a 40 years old woman from Srinarayanpur Purnachandrapur village, has overcome incredible obstacles to become a successful entrepreneur. Rina has become a beam of hope for her community. She has been involved with the Nari Jagaran Committee for five years, working tirelessly for women rights. Rina has also been selling handmade soaps, pure Sundarbans honey, Dudheshwar rice, and moong dal at fairs and other markets. She is empowering herself and other women in the process. Her products are in high demand due to their quality and authenticity. Rina's journey is a testament to her determination, proving that with hard work and dedication, anyone can achieve their dreams. Over the past year, calculations show that we have managed to do business worth approximately ₹17,930 per month.

"There were challenges in stepping outside the home, going to the large market, and issues with capital. Since we didn't use any chemical products in what we made, our products were priced higher compared to market goods, making it difficult to sell at first".

I want to take the business further, so I can involve more women from the village. Apart from Kolkata, we want to send our products to various places across West Bengal.

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Empowering Women Economic Entrepreneurs



- Women Involved: 62 women across various production units (e.g., masala, ghee, muri, soap making, tailoring).
- Wider Impact: 2,000 women and families engaged in sustainable agriculture and small animal farming.
- Support and Training: Provided machinery, training, and handholding to help women establish economic units.
- Market Linkages: Connected with government and non-government institutions and a private company, Ekok, for market opportunities.

Support Plan for Empowering Women Economic Entrepreneurs



This support plan is designed to empower 62 women by transforming them into successful economic entrepreneurs. By centralizing production, providing critical financial support, enhancing skills, and leveraging partnerships for marketing and branding, we aim to create a sustainable and impactful business model under the Metho brand. This initiative not only strengthens the women's economic standing but also contributes to the broader goal of gender equality and community resilience in rural Bengal.

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Support Plan for Empowering Women Economic Entrepreneurs

1. Strengthening the Production Unit:

- Consolidation of Units: Currently, various small units operate independently in the production of masalas, puffed rice, lentils, etc., within individual homes. To enhance efficiency and quality, we plan to centralize these operations into two main production units located in Jamna and DKII/Kirnahar II.
- Regularity and Quality Control: By bringing the machinery (grinding, lentil de-husking, puffed rice making) under one roof, we will ensure consistency in production, maintain quality standards, and streamline packaging processes aimed at penetrating the Kolkata market.
- Group Bonding: The consolidation will also foster a sense of group identity and collaboration among the women, reinforcing the business approach needed for success in urban markets.



EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity



Devjani Baidya, a leader from South 24 Parganas, exemplifies the impact of empowerment and sustainable practices. In 2016, she received training in earthworm fertilizer and nutritional gardening, sparking a transformation. Joining the Nari Jagaran Committee of EquiDiversity Foundation, she accessed seeds and established a nutrition/kitchen garden. By cultivating vegetables like brinjal, ginger, and more, Devjani has significantly reduced her household's vegetable expenses, embracing frugality.

With available space and enthusiasm, Devjani eagerly seeks seeds or saplings to expand her garden, demonstrating her commitment to sustainability. Her journey showcases the potential for individuals to drive change, promoting self-sufficiency and environmental stewardship. As a leader, Devjani inspires others, illustrating the ripple effect of empowerment and sustainable practices in her community.

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Support Plan for Empowering Women Economic Entrepreneurs

2. Direct Marketing Support:

- Storage and Packaging Facility: Establish a dedicated space in Kolkata for the storage and packaging of Metho products.
- Dedicated Marketing Personnel: Hire a dedicated person responsible for marketing Metho products, managing sales, and coordinating home deliveries to customers, thereby expanding our market reach.



EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Support Plan for Empowering Women Economic Entrepreneurs

3 Critical Funds for Support

- Access to Resources: The women face significant challenges due to limited access to capital. Though they are part of self-help groups, most loans are used to meet immediate family needs, leaving little for business investments.
- Interest-Free Loans: To address this, we plan to continue providing interest-free loans from our limited funds. This has proven successful in the past, with loans consistently repaid.
- Operational Costs: Support is needed to cover operational costs (e.g., rent, electricity) for at least one year to give these women the financial stability required to establish their businesses.





Baisakhi Das Vairagya, a 37 year old member of the Dristikone Nari Jagaran Committee, Kirnahar 2no Panchayat, Birbhum decided to put all her efforts in becoming an entrepreneur after she faced severe health struggles and financial constraints though building a working ghee business. Once a victim of patriarchy in her own home, Baisakhi's life took a turn when she started making ghee from milk to pay for her medication. Her family used to sell milk, as they had cattle shed. However, Baisakhi faced significant health issues, including a heart problem, which left her bedridden for five months. The costly treatment and frequent blood tests led to infections, putting a strain on her family's finances. She realized unless she started earning, she had no chance to fight her situation.

To pay for her medication, Baisakhi started making ghee from milk and selling it. This entrepreneurial venture not only helped her earn a steady income but also gained popularity among locals. Her ghee business flourished, enabling her to supply ghee to various households for special occasions and fairs. Equidiversity Foundation, supported her in accessing the market, significantly increasing her earnings.

By selling Ghee, Peda (a type of sweet), Kheer (a rice pudding), and Milk, Baishakhi is able to earn Rs. 48,000 monthly.

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Support Plan for Empowering Women Economic Entrepreneurs

4. Capacity Development and Handholding



- Skill Upgrading: Continuous training is essential for the women to enhance their business acumen and adapt to a more professional, business-oriented approach.
- Training Modules: Key areas of training will include:

✓ Marketing Skills and Brand Development

✓ Setting Up and Running a Production Unit

✓ Quality Control and Assurance

✓ Bookkeeping and Financial Management

✓ Group and Team Building

✓ Leadership and Communication Skills

- Ongoing Support: Regular handholding and mentoring will be provided to help women navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship.

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Support Plan for Empowering Women Economic Entrepreneurs



5. Partnership and Networking:

- Digital Marketing and Branding: We aim to collaborate with private organizations and NGOs to enhance the digital marketing of Metho products, develop branding strategies, and simplify financial management through the development of user-friendly apps.
- Trade Licensing: Support will also be sought to obtain the necessary trade licenses, ensuring legal compliance and market access.
- Steps for setting up Company: We shall start the discussion process.

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity



NARI JAGARAN ENTERPRISE: *AN ASPIRATION*

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Seema's Flight to Freedom *[translated from A-Porajito (The Undaunted), published by Equidiversity Foundation]*

Seema Bagdi is my name, and I am thirty years old. I live in the village of Bagdol, Birbhum. …My childhood experiences were mostly joyful. But every time I stepped out of the house, people would make fun of me because of my skin tone and appearance. In fact, people used to laugh at me, making jokes about my height and looks. I was told that I was ugly.

My in laws and marital family members never allowed me to accompany them anywhere. They insulted me all the time. I used to spend all of my time inside the house. I had become nervous at the thought of going out. One day, left the house on my own accord to attend a Nari Jagaran Committee training. I felt like a human being as a member of Nari Jagaran Committee. I attended the rally to celebrate women's day. I heard that the committee managed a wide range of tasks. Later, I discovered that this was a space where you could talk about yourself. I enrolled myself in the group to express myself about my problems. I have joined their cooking team. ……I am the committee caseworker. Along with other committee members, I also cook to earn a livelihood. I provide food during workshops and team meetings. We are two cooking teams at the moment. We take turn. I want to contribute monetarily to the household and help raise my son. I grow nutrition garden. Because of the vegetable I grow, we don't need to purchase as much. Therefore, some money is saved.

I want to work for the advancement of women. Outer beauty is nothing but temporary. I now realize that people can be very attractive if they strive hard to achieve good through social work. I help others to understand it.



- The monthly income for Seema's cooking team is Rs. 25,000.
- Seema wants to start a canteen

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

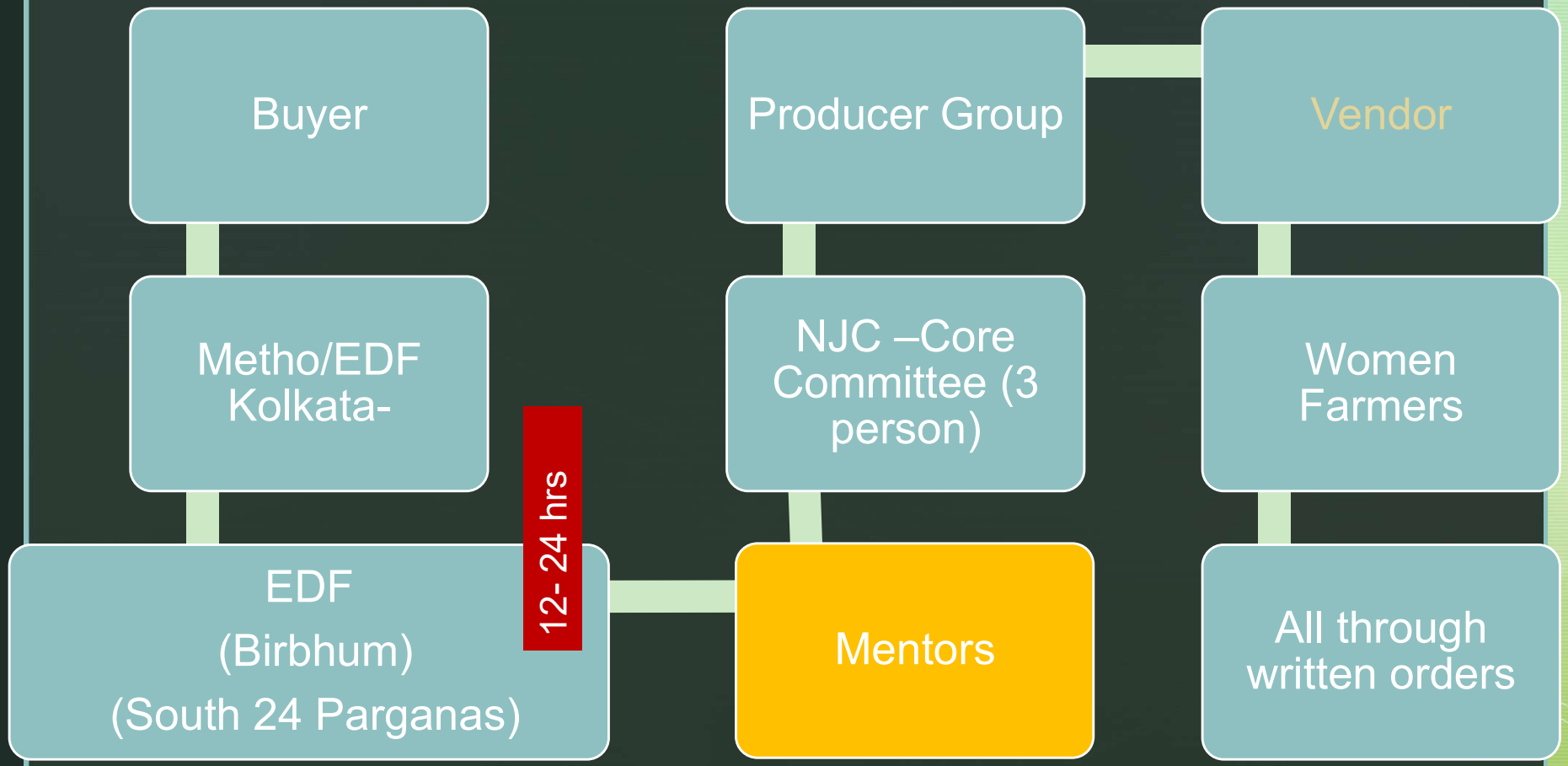
EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Legal Standing of 'Metho'

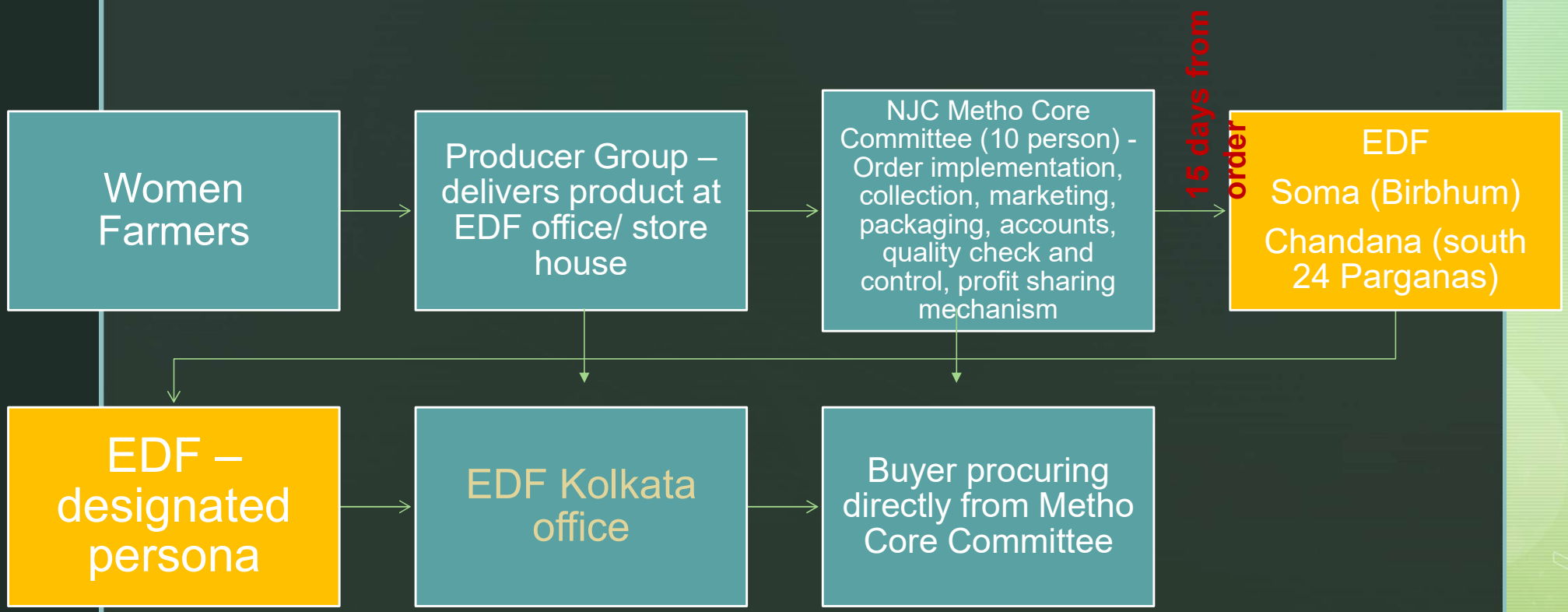


- *Trade license* obtained in the name of '**Nari Jagaran**' an umbrella license covering NJCs of three districts.
- *FASSAI* obtained by Nari Jagaran
- *Bank account* opening in the name of **Nari Jagaran** in process with 3 signatories from Birbhum and Sunderbans.
- *Trade mark* in the name of 'Metho' to be obtained by Equidiversity Foundation with **Nari Jagaran becoming a licensed user of Metho product.**
- Explorations on registering the entity **Nari Jagaran** either as a company, co-opertaive, partnership etc need to take place.

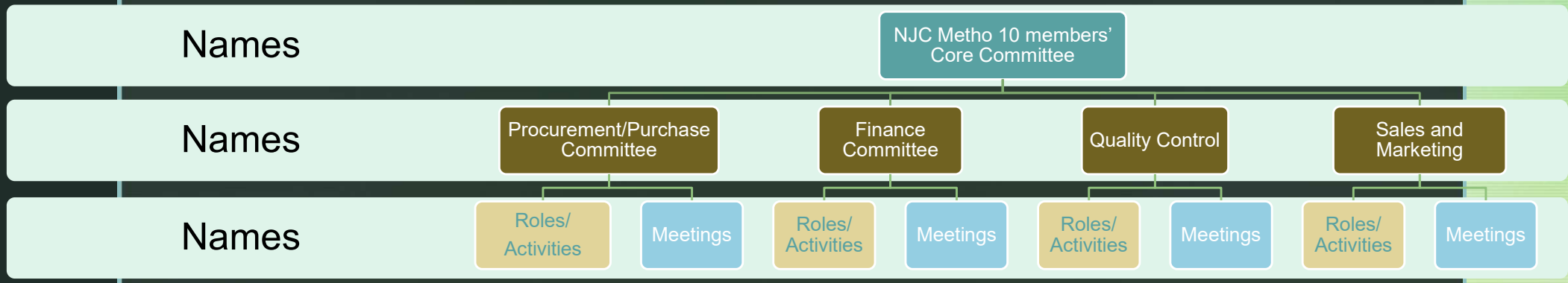
Communication Flow: Order From Kolkata



Communication Flow : Procurement



Governance of NARI JAGARAN



EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

EQUIDIVERSITY FOUNDATION
Promoting Equity in Diversity

Capacity Development List



- Quality control
- Storage
- Safe preservatives
- Book keeping & accounts
- Sales
- Market survey
- Pricing
- Product development
- Legal protocols