

CODE Forum 2026

Introduction to the Papers and Workshops

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From the Margins to the Centre: What Self-Reliant Groups Teach Us About Leading in Hard Times

What does diaconal identity look like when the teacher is a community of women in India?

There are now 9 million Self-Help Groups across India, with close to 100 million women members. That's one in eight Indian women. These are not pilot projects. Women who began with nothing are repaying loans at a rate of over 96%, outperforming every formal bank in the country. They are running waste cooperatives, managing water supply, and entering public life for the first time. The model works because it starts not with institutional resources, but with what people already have: each other.

When Wmove.nu brought the model to the Netherlands (now called Self-Reliant Groups), women at the edges of society discovered something they hadn't expected; not just individual dignity, but the exhilarating experience of collective power. Acting together, they found they could do what none of them could do alone.

This presentation carries a personal note too: the facilitator's deepest learning came when she had to sit on her hands and keep her mouth shut, convinced everything was going wrong, only to discover the opposite was true.

A provocation, warmly offered, for anyone asking what diaconal leadership might yet become.