**Opportunity partner in India honoured with**

**prestigious microfinance award**

**28 February, 2018** - Opportunity International Australia is delighted to announce that one of our microfinance partners in India, Sambandh Finserve Pvt Ltd, was honoured with the ‘Microfinance Organisation of the Year Award’ (Small & Medium) at the Inclusive Finance India Summit in Delhi.

Opportunity’s Acting Chief Executive Officer, Chris Murdoch, congratulated Sambandh saying: ‘For the last 25 years, Sambandh has empowered hundreds of thousands of Indigenous tribal women in the remote Chhottanagpur region of India to use small loans to build service and trading businesses. The Chhottanagpur region covers part of Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Bihar states in the country.

‘Tribal women use income from their businesses to repay the loans, put food on the table and send their kids to school. And as their businesses grow, many take out small loans to build toilets and improve their homes,’ he adds.

One of the reasons Sambandh won the award was its focus on empowering Indigenous tribal women in Chhottanagpur. Chhottanagpur is home to about 40 per cent of India’s Indigenous tribal population and 70 per cent of them live in poverty in the rural areas. Families in this area mainly live in forests and grow barely enough food to feed themselves. They lack access to safe shelter, clean water, toilets, health services and quality schools.

Sambandh’s Founder and Chairman, Livinus Kindo, is a member of Chhottanagpur’s indigenous community and happens to be the first bureaucrat from the community as well. His initial focus was to provide social services to the tribal families in that region some 25 years ago. His son, Deepak Kindo, who is now Sambandh’s MD & CEO, started providing microfinance services in 2006 and since then Sambandh has provided small loans to more than 0.2 million women.

Sambandh also won the award because of its innovative use of technology to reach women in even the most remote areas. Sambandh is one of the first microfinance providers in India to partner with Vodafone M-Pesa to disperse loans via low-cost mobile phones, and women use them to repay their loans. They also use mobiles to talk to suppliers and customers, and access health and other information services. Sambandh gives the women training in their local dialect to ensure they can confidently use the phones in their journey out of poverty.

‘Sambandh is empowering tribal women in Chhottanagpur to find their voice,’ Murdoch says. ‘These women are now heard in their families and have greater influence on decision making. As businesswomen who earn an income, they are now seen as important members of their households.

‘Sambandh’s leadership as a provider of socially-focused microfinance is enabling hundreds of thousands of families in one of India’s most marginalised regions to live lives free from poverty,’ he says.

**About Opportunity International Australia**

Opportunity International Australia enables you to invest in a mother living in poverty, so she can use a small loan to buy an item like a sewing machine and build a small business. For a family in a developing country who can’t afford the basics, a gift as small as $70 can be life changing. With this hand up, a mother can put food on the table, send her children to school and transform her family’s future for generations. Mothers want what is best for their children, and as businesses become successful (98 per cent of Opportunity’s loans are repaid), your help means they can make their dreams for their children come true. For more information, visit [www.opportunity.org.au](http://www.opportunity.org.au)

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