

Promoting Women Entrepreneurship in Rewa (M.P.), INDIA

A Case Study of Women Self Help Groups

Arinsun Clean Energy Pvt. Ltd. (ACEPL) is a Special Purpose Vehicle incorporated in December 2016 under Sprng Energy platform to set up a 250 MW solar power project in Raipur Karchuliyan block of Rewa district in Madhya Pradesh (MP) state. Raipur Karchuliyan, where the project villages are located, is the smallest and one of the most under developed blocks of Rewa district. With the belief that communities in the vicinity of their operations are the most significant stakeholders in their business and an intent to create positive socio-economic impacts on the lives of these stakeholders and uplift their quality of life ACEPL started implementation of a broad range of locally relevant activities as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative in five villages of Raipur Karchuliyan block, namely – Badwar, Barsaita, Ramnagar Pahad, Itar Pahad and Dadhwa in partnership with PRERANA, a Non-Government Organization (NGO) having over 20 years of experience in working with the marginalized communities.

While the CSR activities initially revolved around facilitating better infrastructure at a local government school and provisioning for round the year access to safe drinking water in a hamlet, ACEPL had been very keen to design their interventions to bring long-term impacts in the lives of local community members. During the community consultations it was identified that women in this region had limited opportunities. Young girls in the villages had no options after completing their secondary education but to sit idle at their homes until they were married off. The overwhelming patriarchal family system in the region restricted women from participating in income generating activities and in playing a role in household decision-making. Their economic deprivation was further compounded with their limited technical knowledge and access to markets.

In rural areas, access of poor households to institutional credit is almost non-existent, which is a major barrier to establish or expand micro-enterprises at individual or household level. Whereas SHGs can act as a link to institutional credit as government has mandated banks to provide loans through SHGs on priority basis. Therefore, PRERANA designed the Self Help Group (SHG) approach to community mobilization, skill development and enterprise promotion and started working with 100 households in the project villages with a vision to promote women's participation in the economic activities. In February 2020, 104 women from these households were organized under 10 SHGs. Over a period of three months, training of all the SHG members were organized on basic concepts of SHG functioning such as



savings, lending, repayment habits, responsibility of group members and office bearers, book keeping and accounting, decision making, conflict management and long term benefits of the SHG. Regular monthly meetings of the SHGs were facilitated in which the members were motivated to deposit their monthly saving contributions of Rs50 each. All the SHGs were motivated to open their bank accounts and deposit their monthly savings in their respective accounts to bring in financial discipline. After a few months of savings, the SHGs were hand held in providing small loans to their members for their personal requirements at 1% monthly interest rate. The SHG members were trained in the





process of loan approval, its documentation and loan recovery. The women members were happy to find a convenient way of obtaining loans at a low interest rate and took loans of Rs500 to Rs1,000 as per their requirements and repaid their loans within one-two months with interest.

Having started with the basic financial literacy the SHGs were designed to act as the primary unit through which skill development and enterprise promotion activities were to be facilitated. In the first round, two batches of two-month long skill development training on “Stitching and Tailoring” were organized for 54 of the women SHG members during November 2019 to January 2020.

During the course of this training the participants learnt how to operate a sewing machine and basic principles of stitching. They stitched various designs of Blouse, Petticoat, Frock, Salwar, Kurti and Skirt. At first, they were taught cutting and stitching on paper which was followed by stitching and finishing on machine. By the end of the two-month long training most of the participants had achieved good finish on their products and were keen to start stitching on commercial basis. For a majority of the participants successful completion of the training program was an achievement in itself as they had used a sewing machine for the first time in their life.

As part of the training follow up, PRERANA worked closely with these SHG members and provided them hand holding support to enable them start the tailoring activity. In order to provide them first hand market exposure an exhibition cum sale of their products was organized at a fair in Gurh on 30th January. 23 of the trainees displayed their products on the stall. Around 170 people visited the stall, looked at the products and interacted with the prospective entrepreneurs but only 3 people made a purchase totaling Rs365. Many of the visitors found the prices of their products to be on higher side. Besides, most of the women visitors liked the products and designs but showed interest in getting the job work done as per their material and colour instead of buying what was readily available. This exposure came out to be a good learning for the participants and they were excited to take it further.

Next came facilitating market visits of the SHGs, facilitating interaction of SHG members with the garment distributors and retailers and bringing trial orders for commercial production of garments.





Encouraged with these results, 7 SHG members came forward and set up their individual tailoring shops/ work from home set ups while another 16 members from 3 SHGs decided to work in their SHG set-ups in February 2020. The joy of these women SHG members knew no bounds when the 7 individual entrepreneurs and 3 SHGs were collectively able to make an earning of INR6,754 in the month of February 2020 which further grew to INR7,075 in March 2020 by completing the orders for suits, frocks, blouses, petticoats and repairing works from their villages. However, this joy was shortlived as the government imposed a nationwide lockdown from 24th March to combat the spread of Covid-19.

During the lockdown, the individual enterprises were able to get some orders and operate from their houses, on the other hand it became difficult for the SHGs to operate their shops. As a result, the overall earnings of SHG members fell down to INR3,405 in April 2020 and it appeared as if the SHGs will have to stop working. But, the SHGs took an



initiative and motivated their members to prepare around 500 cotton masks at their houses and distributed them to the needy people in their villages for free. This initiative, highly appreciated by the village community, boosted the morale of SHG members and they were further motivated to operate on individual basis from their respective houses. The successful delivery of another order of 500 cotton masks by the village panchayat and 1000 masks from PRERANA paved the way for individual work from home for the rest of SHG members too who had been working as a group. Orders for stitching bags came through, orders for stitching school uniforms are to start once the schools open. Gradually, the number of SHG members working from their home grew to 31 and so was their collective earnings. Cumulative earning of 31 SHG members from stitching enterprises have reached to Rs63,868 over the period February to October 2020.

PRERANA has linked these SHGs with National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). Representatives from NRLM graded the SHGs as per government norms. 8 SHGs received “A” grade and have been given a total of Rs84,000 as revolving fund. SHG members are utilizing this new funding to purchase new machines to further expand their work.



“Thank you PRERANA and ACEPL, your training and support has provided us a new direction. Now I have some money to spend as per my wish ”, says Namrata Dwivedi, one of the SHG members who had been sitting idle after completing her class 12th.

