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Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative Aimed at Poverty Alleviation: Livelihood Programs in the Tribal Regions of Maharashtra

Thakur M¹ and Chaudhury S^{2*}

¹Department of Social Work and i/c Director, Karve Institute of Social Service, Pune, India

²Department of Psychiatry, Dr D Y Patil Medical College, Hospital and Research Centre, Dr D Y Patil University, Pimpri, Pune, India

***Corresponding author:** Chaudhury S, Department of Psychiatry, Dr D Y Patil Medical College, Hospital and Research Centre, Dr D Y Patil University, Pimpri, Pune, India; E-mail: suprakashch@gmail.com

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Abstract

Organizations today need to devise and develop effective solutions to social problems while preparing their annual Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies, plans and programs. As CSR is now mandatory, corporate houses are working on creating long-term sustainable solutions to meet the challenges being faced in the society within which they operate. This paper deals with three such impactful projects implemented by Sudarshan Chemicals Ltd, in association with Karve Institute of Social Service (KINSS). The CSR projects discussed in this article were launched in the state of Maharashtra, at villages inhabited by primitive tribes. The projects were planned after considering various parameters like location, existing abilities and skills of the beneficiaries and making a concerted effort to understand how the local resources could be tapped in order to aid the livelihood programs being launched. The three projects were successful and resulted in significantly improving the earning of the beneficiaries.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility [CSR]; Tribal regions; Village development; Livelihood; Sustainable livelihood approaches; Poverty alleviation

Introduction

Through an amendment to the Companies Act, 2013 in April 2014 India made corporate social responsibility (CSR) mandatory. Thus, India became the first country in the World to make CSR mandatory. Corporates can utilize their profits for CSR in areas such as education, hunger alleviation, reduce poverty, and promote gender equality, and so on [1]. Sustainable livelihood approaches have emerged as the most effective and sustainable tool for poverty alleviation, contributing in the holistic development of any given region. They have been successful in doing so, the world over as evidenced by studies by Food and Agricultural Organization, studies in India and many countries all over the world [2]. Livelihood programs can therefore be most effective if they are

built on this principle of retaining and improving existing skill sets available with the target group, tapping locally available resources and building on them with the aid of newer technologies. Long term sustainable livelihood concepts that rely on this principle will ensure that they use skills they know, improve their earnings and have better lifestyles. The community will no longer remain in poverty. We can therefore establish that effective livelihood programs can alleviate poverty [3-6]. Based entirely on this principle, Sudarshan Chemicals as part of their CSR, along with Karve Institute of Social Service (KINSS) launched three different livelihood programs at a few tribal settlements in the state of Maharashtra. The broad objective of the whole exercise was to identify and improve existing skills of the tribal community, in

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order to create better livelihood opportunities for poverty alleviation and achieving economic independence.

The village development initiative was taken up in a region that is predominantly inhabited by primitive tribes such as the Katkari and the Kolis. While the members of the Katkari tribe live in abject poverty, they continue to be mostly illiterate and economically backward, almost on the verge of extinction. On the other hand, the Koli tribes from Mumbai region were primarily fishermen. Over the years, as their tribe multiplied, they moved to other coastal regions where they could continue with fishing, which has been their main source of livelihood over the centuries. Mumbai. The area of intervention chosen for the CSR program was primarily inhabited by the Katkaris and the Kolis beside a few other primitive tribes of the region; economically backward and poor. The aim of this initiative was to bring them out of poverty and misery; helping them acquire effective livelihood skills such as fishing, training in music and entrepreneurship.

Material and Methods

The livelihood and village development programs were undertaken in the tribal regions of Maharashtra. Two programs were undertaken at Dhatav village in Roha Taluka, Raigad district of Maharashtra State, India, belonging to the Konkan region. It is located around 47 kilometers towards east, from district head quarters, Alibaug. This region is close to the Arabian sea and various rivers flow through, making fishing

one of the main sources of livelihood for the tribes that live here. The third program was launched at a nearby village, Mahadev Wadi also in the Raigad dist. of Maharashtra. Since the three projects are quite distinct in terms of beneficiaries, intervention, and impact, they are described separately.

The Fisheries Livelihood Program

In our first area of intervention, at Dhatav Adivasi Wadi, the literacy levels of the beneficiaries chosen under the Fisheries Livelihood Program was very low. 6 beneficiaries of the 20 were illiterate, while 7 went to primary school. All those who had enrolled at schools dropped out eventually, to support and earn for their families. There were none who went to senior school (Figure 1).

The beneficiaries that were part of this program were mostly ranging from between 25 to 40 years of age. They were most pro-active and already possessed traditional and indigenous skill sets, and were also the most active earning members of the family. This age group is also otherwise considered most active when it comes to most professions across sectors, worldwide. Therefore maximum beneficiaries were chosen from this age group, keeping in mind their available skill sets, productivity, energy levels and enthusiasm (Table 1). A comparison chart below reveals that after intervention, the incomes of the beneficiaries that adopted fishing as their main source of livelihood, increased to a large extent, bringing about a positive impact to their lifestyles (Figure 2 and Table 2).

Table 1: Age, education and employment levels of the beneficiaries of the three CSR projects.

		The Fisheries Livelihood Program (n=20)	The Tribal Sursangam Musical Program (n=10)	Raigad Radiance LED Bulb Project (n=10)
Age (in years)	18-25	2	7	8
	26-40	15	3	2
	41-55	1	0	0
	>55	2	0	0
	Mean (S.D)	34.6 (10.03)	24.5 (2.88)	24.6 (0.97)
	Range	24-65	21-29	23-26
Education	Illiterate	6	0	0
	1-5	7	0	0
	6-8	5	7	0
	9-10	2	6	5
	11-12	0	0	2
	Graduates	0	0	3
Employment before intervention	Unemployed	0	6	0
	Student	0	0	4
	Labourer	20	1	6

Fishing	0	2	0
Tractor driver	0	1	0

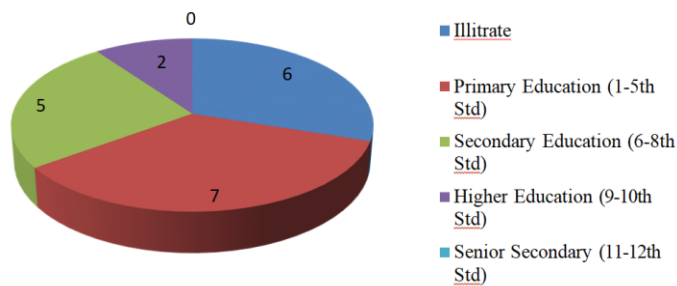


Figure 1: Basic educational qualification of beneficiaries.

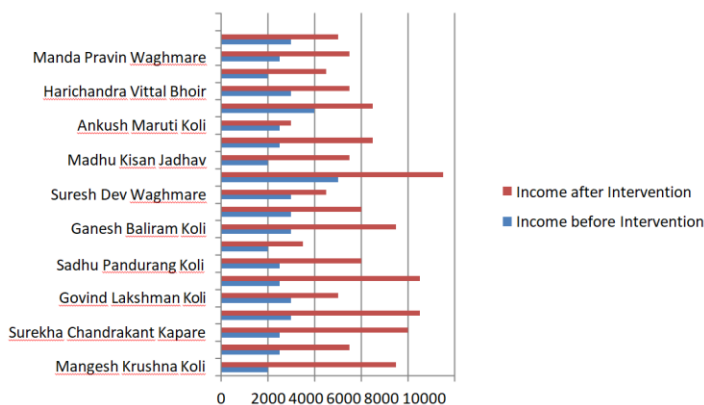


Figure 2: Changes in incomes after intervention.

Methodology

The process of intervention lasted over a period of 6 months, during which time the problems were identified, as were the beneficiaries. As many as 26 meetings and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) lasting over 45 minutes each, were conducted in order to understand and study the existing scenario and derive effective sustainable solutions. Once the beneficiaries were listed out in the process, appropriate training sessions were conducted and exposure visits organized to help understand better, effective fishing techniques by experts. Follow up meetings were also organized to gauge the effectiveness of the exercise and the overall impact it created on the target group.

Intervention

In a span of six months that the teams were present in the region, extensive training sessions were conducted for the beneficiaries chosen, on improving their fishing techniques, helping them increase their productivity. Marketing techniques were also imparted to aid them in selling their catch better in the markets. Ice boxes were distributed to them for keeping

their catch fresher, longer; ensuring that the fish did not rot as quickly as it otherwise would, resulting in losses. Motivational meetings were held in phases, over 6 months, to ensure they stayed in touch with the team for any help they would need during the process of being trained and to discuss the on-goings of the activities. Life jackets were distributed to the fisher-folk as a measure to ensure they remain safe at sea/while fishing in the waters, as most were the sole breadwinners of their families and the threat of losing their life during storms or accidents, loomed large over them and their families.

Qualification of the beneficiaries

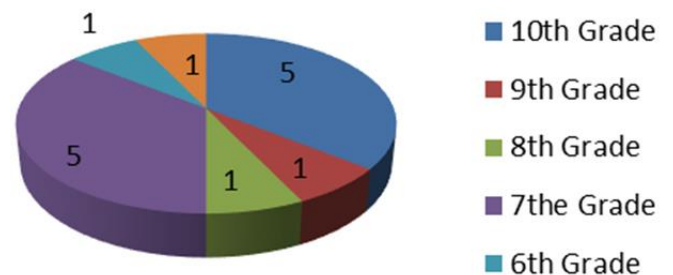


Figure 3: Qualification of the beneficiaries.

Impact

In the impact assessment, it was found that the project was effective and the results were encouraging. Twenty families were covered under the fisheries livelihood project, that were given intensive training in improving their fishing techniques which eventually resulted in over 50% better productivity. Simultaneously, two Self Help Groups (SHGs) were formed during the process. A 50% increase in family incomes was also recorded as a result of better productivity and sales post training, and skill improvisation. The average monthly income increased from an average of INR2000-4000 to over INR5000-9500 per family. Village participation got better and the entire community was seen to be more pro-active in activities being conducted as part of the village development project.

The Tribal Sursangam Musical Program

Under the Musical livelihood program, as in the rest of the tribal community in the area, the literacy levels were low amongst the older, while educational levels were as low amongst the youth (Figure 3), most of who had dropped out of high school, eventually helping parents do odd jobs and helping them with fishing and farming (Figure 4).

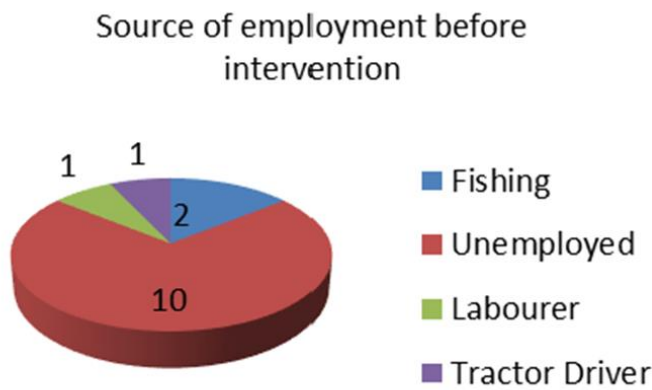


Figure 4: Employment before intervention.

Methodology

The process of intervention lasted over a period of 8 months. 15 meetings, training sessions of 45 minutes each, were conducted in order to study the existing scenario in the families chosen as beneficiaries in the process and introducing effective livelihood programs. Follow up meetings were organized to measure the effectiveness of the exercise and the overall impact it created on the target group.

Intervention

In a span of eight months, training sessions were conducted for the beneficiaries chosen based on their inclination to music and to improve their knowledge of instruments and theory in music. Promotional techniques were taught to them in order to aid them in marketing and advertising their services as a professional band.

Impact

Totally 15 families were covered under the project with an aim of providing an effective means of livelihood to the youth, thereby helping them contribute to their family incomes. Specifically, 5 Group members were trained to maintain effective functioning of the music band. They were taught nuances of music and its theory, besides training them in a few instruments. This enabled them to train more youth from the community who wanted to be part of this initiative.

By the end of its first phase, the total savings of the group was close to INR20,000 saved in a bank account, a first for them. This motivated many more youth in the settlement to participate in the program and this added to the efforts of bringing holistic development to the village. The members began earning an average income between INR2000-4000 as a result of their services, which meant they had better lifestyles now (Figure 5).

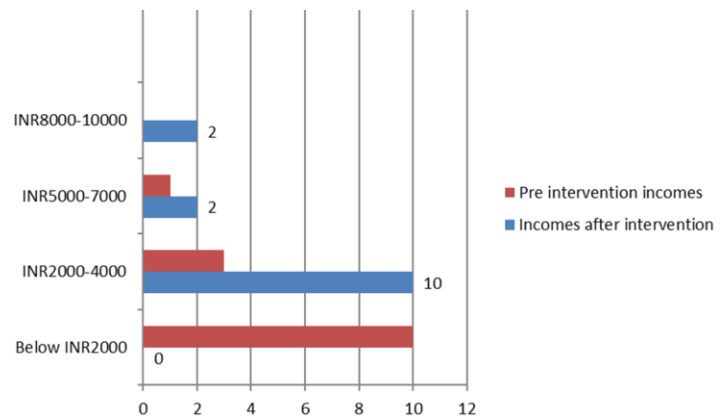


Figure 5: Incomes before and after the Tribal Sursangam CSR initiative was launched.

Raigad Radiance LED Bulb Project

The main objective of launching the project was to introduce effective small scale entrepreneurial and business skills to chosen beneficiaries of the tribal community. The intervention period for this program was around 7 months. In the first phase of intervention, competent individuals were selected based on a few pre-determined criteria and training provided to them thereafter. The qualification of the beneficiaries and their occupation before intervention are given in (Figures 6 and 7).

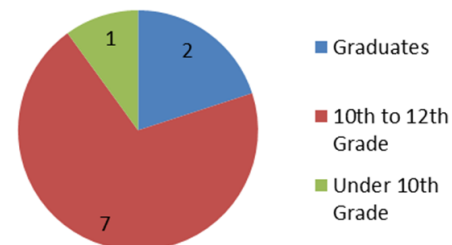


Figure 6: Qualification of beneficiaries.

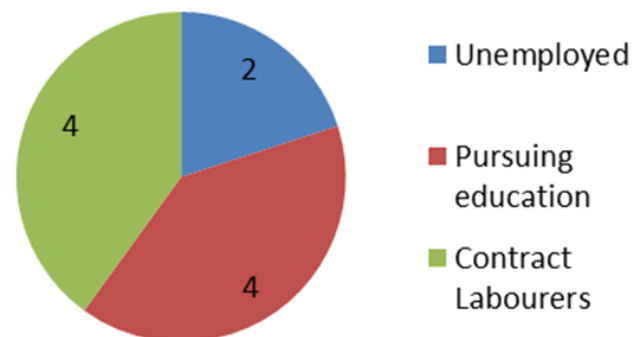


Figure 7: Occupation before intervention.

Methodology

In over 7 months, as many as fourteen group meeting were held with the beneficiaries. Extensive training in bulb making was conducted and a LED unit set up in the area of intervention, for its production.

Intervention

Six in-depth meetings were organized to improve youth motivation, along with extensive 2 day residential training for the beneficiaries where life skills, leadership development and marketing trainings were provided. For the business to get started, raw materials were distributed as part of the process. An LED unit set up for production and the product ISO Certified. To head-start the sale of the first batch of LED bulbs, the team participated at the MDL Diwali Mela and the Roha Mohhtsav (Local festivals).

Impact

Ten families were covered under this program. A team was formed and trained extensively to head-start the project. The first lots that were trained had amonthlyaverage income of INR2000-2500. The team of beneficiaries made a total sale of

INR48, 140. The business began receiving orders from various companies. The beneficiaries were, as a result, earning a steady income and ten youth from the tribal community were economically independent and capable enough to live a meaningful life of their own. As a result of these ISO certified LED bulbs and their demand, the newly trained entrepreneurs made satisfactory incomes due to which the burden of contractual work reduced. This encouraged many others to follow. The project is now self-sustaining and thriving, adding to the workforce involved in productive income generating activities in the region.

Discussion

From the data given above it is evident that the beneficiaries gained in a big way from the village development programs initiated and executed by Sudarshan Chemicals Ltd and Karve Institute of Social Service, in the tribal regions of Maharashtra. Livelihood Projects undertaken in the tribal regions of Maharashtra were successful, as the impact assessment conducted revealed a drastic rise in the economic condition and status of the beneficiaries (Table 2).

Table 2: Monthly income of the beneficiaries at the three projects before and after intervention.

Monthly Income in Rupees	The Fisheries Livelihood Program		The Tribal Sursangam Musical Program		Raigad Radiance LED Bulb Project	
	Pre intervention	Post intervention	Pre intervention	Post intervention	Pre intervention	Post intervention
< 2000	1	0	7	0	10	0
2000- <4000	18	2	2	5	0	10
4000- <6000	1	7	1	1	0	0
6000- <8000	0	7	0	3	0	0
8000- <10,000	0	4	0	1	0	0
Fishers exact test	P=0 Significant		P=0.003 Significant		P<0.0001 Significant	

Extensive training sessions to the target group ensured better understanding of skill sets. This coupled with the introduction of the latest technology and skill-based knowledge imparted to them helped increase productivity in a big way. Marketing techniques taught during the process resulted in better sales and a huge increase in their incomes, eventually resulting in poverty alleviation, better lifestyles and happier families. More villagers were now showing interest in adapting and learning

from beneficiaries who had gained from the initiatives that had resulted in improved lives and developed villages.

Conclusion

Properly planned and conducted CSR activities can help in creating sustainable livelihood for the deprived sections of society.

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