

**INTER-CITY MARKETING NETWORK FOR WOMEN MICRO-ENTREPRENEURS
THROUGH CELL PHONE
(infoDev Activity ID number: 466-000317)
Implementing organization: Foundation Of Occupational Development (FOOD)
Email: food@XLweb.com**

DELIVERABLES 2

Summary of current Project Status, Issues, and Actions:

Activity	Status
Preparation of operation manual	Completed
Visit to 100 semi-urban areas	Completed
Sensitizing the CBOs	Completed
Conducting orientation program for CBOs	Completed
Survey	Completed
Short-listing products made locally	Completed
Training program for the CBOs in management of the network and marketing	In progress
Coordinating the marketing activity	In progress
Organizing regional workshops to create awareness	In progress
Quality assurance	In progress
Evaluation	In progress

The "Intercity Marketing Network for Women Micro-Entrepreneurs" project was initiated in July 2001.

Out of the project target of 100 CBOs, 51 CBOs have been identified as on date. Out of this, 42 CBOs have been sensitized and orientation and training programs conducted for them.

Survey results with details of the socio-economic status of 11 areas where products will be sold have been collected. To start with we have fixed a target population for marketing to around 200 families in each area. This will be up-scaled to 2000 families during the project duration.

List of products made by the production CBOs have been collected. There are 6 products being produced by 4 producer CBOs at present. The products identified are those that have a daily demand among target buyers, e.g. rice, washing soaps, shampoos etc. This allows the CBOs to increase their turnover and provides scope for daily income.

20 CBOs from among the 51 identified have already started production/marketing after being oriented on production, marketing and management issues.

On an average, the production groups made Rs 1,100 during the first month of operation and the marketing groups made Rs 605 during the first month of operation.

Since the marketing activity has just started we have not provided cell phones to the CBOs yet. The project team would like gauge the impact of ICTs in this project by deferring the introduction of cell phones until couple of transactions take place without cell phones. This will allow us to measure the impact that the introduction of ICTs (cell phones) before and after the cell phone is provided to the CBO and also assess the increase (or decrease) in their income.

Lessons Learned:

We find that the first 3 months progress on the project has been encouraging on all fronts. We have been able to shortlist 51 CBOs who were willing to participate in the project either as producers or marketers. The project target of reaching 100 CBOs will be achieved.

The awareness created and economic empowerment that this project has offered to the women who have all along been stuck to domestic work has brought them to the front line. Through this program community solidarity has been established and the women groups have become well known in their community. The community organization skills of the women involved in this project has empowered them to leap forward to a level wherein three women from the inter-city group are now standing for local body elections!

We also held discussions with various government departments and within two months of commencing the project the Government of Tamilnadu has expressed their willingness to partner with us in the project by making available their official machinery to assist us in field level activities and also include this project in their agenda. The Government has pledged their support in popularizing the program among the Government departments and also included the inter-city marketing network activity in their regular training programs provided to officials and community organizations so that the program could be up-scaled to more areas. The Tamilnadu Government has addressed letters to all the 102 municipalities and 4 corporations in the state to join hands with us in promoting this program throughout the state.

Establishing such linkages between community-based organizations and the Government are seen to be very important, both in terms of scaling up activity after proven success as also to sensitize government officials of the needs and interests of people at the grassroots level.

The Tamilnadu Corporation for Women Development, another Government organization exclusively working for women, has also expressed interest in partnering with us in the project. We have agreed to share our experience and train their women groups to be a part of the cell phone marketing network enabling further scaling up of the project.

The main lesson learnt during this quarter is that women are able to pick up the project idea very fast. We find that any pre-conceived notion in selecting products for marketing without the women groups consent is leading to reduced sales thus leading to less enthusiasm when we thrust products on to them. We see the rate of social solidarity is on the increase. We also learn that when a women makes money she spends the entire income for the family welfare compared to men who provide only a part of their income to the family and rest is retained by the men for their personal expenses.

The community has started to realize that a good communication network will improve their income. When we offered both the cell phone and regular phone options the community informed us that the cell phone is more appropriate for them since they are most of the time mobile, that is to say they have to fetch water, buy household provisions, leave their children at school, pick up children back from school etc. So they feel a mobile phone is more appropriate and they will not miss any calls compared to a regular phone wherein they need to be at the phone at all the times else they will miss vital business calls.

The initial problem we are facing is that many producer and marketing CBOs do not have the sufficient startup funds (Rs 5000 as stipulated in the operation manual). We have stipulated that the CBO who are willing to join the project should look for at least 20 members who can contribute Rs 250 each hence collecting the startup fund of Rs 5000 required to purchase materials for production or purchase products for marketing. This is delaying the process of adding more CBOs to the marketing/production groups to a certain extent. This is also increasing our budgetary expenses in looking for CBOs who already have startup funds or willing to mobilize it before joining the project. Although we can support the community by providing startup funds ourselves or by arranging micro-credits, our team prefers to leave it to the community to mobilize the funds within the group so that it will be a community initiative and contribution.

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