AN ASSESSMENT OF LIVELIHOOD SECURITY OF WOMEN IN THE RURAL SALES PROGRAMME



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Executive Summary

In October 2004 CARE/RMP started Rural Sales Programme (RSP) in Lalpur upazila of Natore district. The objectives of the RSP are to: (a) create opportunity for the rural poor women to generate income; (b) building capacity of small business women's group to develop and sustain partnership.

This study has been undertaken with the aims: a) to assess business capacity, eg. marketing, product supply, sales, problem solving, account maintenance, etc. developed among the small businesswomen groups; b) to understand the extent the linkage or partnership of the women with multinational enterprises in business dealings, sales promotion are functional.

For assessing the business capacity developed among the small business women groups and to find out the linkage or partnership of the women with multinational enterprises in business dealings, both quantitative survey was conducted and qualitative methods were deployed.

The study revealed that on average the monthly income of RSP members doubled to Tk. 1278.78 per month as compared to Tk.635.44 before project. More revealing is the fact that average monthly income of former RMP women has increased 2.28 times compared to before project. The rise in income of non-RMP women has been observed comparatively less pronounced than income of their colleagues (1.87 times). Fifty three percent of RSP women who earned less than Tk. 500 before the project mainly shifted to higher monthly income cohorts during May 2005. Of them, 23% have shifted to immediately higher income cohort (Tk. 501-Tk. 1000 per month) and 17% currently earn between Tk. 10,001 and Tk 15,000. Forty seven percent increase in income was attributable to commission earnings from sale of BATA products.

Efforts at diversification of income of BCU (Business Coordination Unit) members have become quite successful because of the fact that the increased income and the perception of solvency are inducing them to find out new avenues of income generation. The BCU members have significantly diversified their income activities. Currently, 82% of RSP women are having 3 or more income sources, while 29% before the project had the same. It is to be noted that 47% of RSP women currently having their income from 4 different sources.

As high as 50% of the respondents of the BCU women, who are usually destitute were found involved in petty trading activities as against only 4% as housewife. Ten percent each of the BCU women were involved in tailoring and poultry and livestock.

The successful RSP members are those who are living with their children, bearing family expenses often without help of their husbands, and apart from sale of BATA products involved in IGAs. Training imparted to these women has played an important role in making them confident and courageous to face life without assistance of others. Since RSP reduces income poverty of the rural destitute women (therefore contributes to economic empowerment) and builds confidence among these women, it is recommended to replicate the same as a poverty reduction strategy. In order to ensure more success, it is suggested to include other multinationals with their branded articles for sale; providing further training to firm up their grasp in book keeping, selling techniques and imparting informal but technical and vocational education; provision of additional capital funds for expanding their business ventures; diversification of linkage with government and NGO institutions to take care of their growing needs for finance, health care and other aspects of life; market linkage for sale of their handicrafts and cottage industry products in the style of Aarong, Kumudini etc.