

External Evaluation – FXBVillage Villupuram - India

In December 2015, the FXBVillage Villupuram reached the end of its implementation phase. It lasted for 3 years, from January 2013 and December 2015 and supported 48 beneficiary households, corresponding to more than 200 children and adults. The programme addressed the needs of landless rural households whose capacities to break the vicious circle of poverty was limited by the lack of job opportunities and productive assets, the difficulty for children to pursue education and persistent social prejudice against the lower cast communities, the Dalit in this concern.

Against this background, the objective of the programme and focus of the external evaluation was to develop successful and autonomous social entrepreneurs enabling 48 rural women to develop a steady and sustainable economy and help improve overall quality of living of their families. This was achieved through activities revolving around 3 components:

1. Income Generating Activities (IGA): including skill building and the development of poultry farming, manufacturing of sanitary napkins and coir rope,
2. Health: including sanitation, health camps, latrines, awareness, training, nutritional support, kitchen garden and day care centre,
3. Education: including support for school fees and materials, supplementary education centre and computer training.

The external evaluation was conducted at the end of 2016, namely one year after the official end of the programme. The following tables present the main results highlighted by the evaluator.

INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES – RESULTS

- The IGA component is especially relevant given lack of job opportunities locally available
- All 48 women are involved in collective IGA units. Yet, there is no evidence that collective IGA generate superior economic benefit than individual IGA. However, collective IGA are associated with many intangible effects such as faster and more effective empowerment process, precious productive assets created for the group and broaden scope of occupations that can be developed in rural context
- The 3 collective IGA developed have achieved different levels of performance across the scale of profitability, ownership and sustainability:
 - The coir rope unit is profitable and the ownership by the women is excellent. Women are empowered: they master the economics and the logistics of the production. They run the unit by themselves. Further sustainability prospects are promising although the group has no institutional capacity of its own yet. Two men are also involved in marketing and accounting
 - The poultry unit is profitable and the ownership is reasonably good, although FXB India Suraksha (FXBIS) is still involved in some aspects of management. Sustainability prospects are good as well. The unit also implies men from participating families as they got interested in the business once they learnt it was profitable
 - The sanitary napkin unit is still run by FXBIS. It is not profitable nor sustainable. The women of the group have an ownership of the production processes owing to the technical skills they developed but are not empowered with management issues. The women are wage workers: they are paid monthly by FXBIS on the basis of daily attendance. The unit is not profitable because the production costs are higher than the market price. FXBIS made the decision to keep the unit afloat because the management considers sanitary napkins play a strategic social role for the community and contributed to good health/hygiene
- The contribution of the programme to the economic empowerment of women in targeted communities of Villupuram was substantial and led to both tangible and intangible benefits: better gender balance, increased confidence among women, stronger SHG and higher savings. Indeed, the programme helped unleash potential human resources that had never been properly tapped into

HEALTH – RESULTS

- The project has addressed the causal factors related to illnesses through a combination of preventive (awareness), curative (health camps) and promotive (toilets, safe drinking water and school and at home) measures
- Surveys conducted by The Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Villupuram confirmed the improvements
- Beneficiaries confirmed a better knowledge and understanding of diseases
- Better income have translated into better nutrition (more vegetables)
- Sanitation component is a big success among population, the toilets being unanimously considered as one of the most important changes under the project. The usage of toilets has spread among houses, attitudes have changes, open defecation has disappeared
- Sustainable improvements have also been made in personal hygiene and access to safe drinking water: the causes of water borne diseases is better understood and women boil water more frequently when preparing meals
- A virtuous cycle was triggered by the realization that the health of the community was improving over time, which further encouraged the adoption and continuation of hygiene-related measures. This includes the use of sanitary napkin
- Beneficiaries now know how to approach health-related issues: this is an intangible but sustainable achievement. People approach diseases with a better attitude: they are aware of diseases, treatments and follow-up processes. As for tangible results, according to PIMS, the incidence of cholera has decreased where toilets have been installed in Villupuram district and acute diarrheal diseases -also a cause of morbidity and mortality- have also come down. Even though health seeking behaviours have improved, vigilance is a must because critical health issues have not entirely disappeared in the targeted areas

EDUCATION – RESULTS

- Education-related activities are rightly considered by FXBIS as the cornerstone of long-term empowerment processes and it was quickly realized that they could not be stopped after the end of each project without halting the strong momentum they had triggered, because governmental budget for schools is extremely low and cannot be tapped into. Therefore, a decision was made to maintain a minimum level of funding for a few strategic activities (e.g. transportation of children, salary of a teacher at primary level)
- By facilitating access to education and the acquisition of academic skills, FXBIS has maintained a desire for school and encouraged the yearning of poor rural families for higher education
- All children enjoyed evening classes, the only place they can study without distraction; evening classes are continuing but financially supported by another NGO. Elder children also benefitted from computer training sessions
- The headmistress of the Mathur primary school confirms the high value of the evening classes: better reading and writing skills, better level of interaction from the children who now finish their assignments.
- As for parents, the dream they pursue is the “first generation student”, i.e. their child should be the first in the family to enter college, an achievement rewarded by state schemes; therefore parents welcome any activity having the potential to bring their children closer to this goal and are striving to save money for college education; they are especially fond of evening coaching classes and not only value the project for its education component but also for IGAs -which continues to strengthen their savings capacity- and for its health component, which kept their children healthy and fit for school