

District Rural Dev. Agency, Barpeta, Assam

Success Story,

Community Fruit Processing and SHG Training Centre at Bennibari, Howly.

Barpeta District is a major vegetable and fruit producing district and a large quantity of vegetables like Tomato, Brinjal, Cabbage, Cauliflower, turnip, radish, citron fruits of various classes are supplied to different parts of the state and also outside. However due to lack of adequate cold storage, a large quantity of such products are damaged or sold by the grower at a very migre price. There is also absence of infrastructure for processing such vegetables and fruits nor there is good training institute for training up the SHGs.

DRDA, Barpeta look initiative to over come the above draw backs and approached District Industries Centre (DIC), Barpeta to provide one industrial shade located at Bennibari, Howly. One prominent NGO viz North East Development Organisation (NEDO) , Howly came forward who got adequate technical personnel for training the SHGs as well as to run the fruit processing unit. DIC, Barpeta leased the bare shade to DRDA, Barpeta and the required expenditure to develop the shade as a fruit processing unit fit for getting FPO was made from SGSY Infrastructure head during 2004-05 and 2005-06. Total expenditure including cost of machinery, Furniture, Training Materials, Development of the building and its approach road, water treatment etc. was Rs. 9.50 Lakhs. The official from Food Preservation Deptt. Visited the unit and FPO was issued to the unit which is first of its kind in the District.

The Bennibari Community Fruit Processing and Training Centre has following infrastructures :-

- The training Hall to train at least 50 members.
- Processing and bottling unit.
- Raw Materials / finish products preservation unit.
- Administration unit.

Each part is equipped with required utensils and tools. The center was inaugurated by Sri Ripun Borah, the then Hon'ble Minister, P&RD, Assam in presence of other dignitaries.

Training to SHGs particularly women SHG Members are being conducted and by now more than 200 members have been trained up. There is heavy demand for training and the managing committee is taking steps to increase the capacity of the Training Hall.

The management committee is headed by the Deputy Commissioner, Barpeta as Chair person and other members include, Project Director, DRDA, Barpeta, BDO, Bhawanipur, Sri Jayanta Das, Director, NEDO and other Officials of DRDA, Block and members of NGO.

The center has brought ray of hope among the SHG members who would produce semi products / finish products and the center takes care to produce the final products, sealing, packing and marketing.

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SUCCESS STORY OF MANENDRA DEKA, **THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN.**

Sri Manendra Deka, a young master Craftsman, hails from the village Metuakuchi near Barpeta Town. His is a very poor family and solely dependent on the bamboo artistic products sold in the near by places and could some how run the family along with his brothers. At times when State and National level exhibition were held, his products were sent for participation and got appreciation. But such efforts were hardly a solution for his economic stability as well as to offer him suitable opportunity to manifest his perfection in his field of activities.

Of and on he expressed his problems and the matter was examined from DRDA Barpeta. It was observed that lack of infrastructure for training of the unemployed youths as well as systematic production of Bamboo artistic products was the main hindrance for Sri Manendra Deka and like ones.

DRDA, Barpeta took up a Scheme “Cane and Bamboo Training Cum Production Centre at Vill Metuakuchi” for an amount of 2 Lakhs under SGSY infrastructure , 2000-2001 and had been completed the same within a very short time. For Bamboo artistic products, very sophisticated tools are necessary, hence DRDA, Barpeta provided 20 sets of such tools so that at least 20-30 nos. of youths can be trained at a time.

With the above infrastructural helps, large nos. of youths joined training immediatly and at present not less than 90-100 youths are self sufficient in production of bamboo artistic products. Now a days all the National and State level exhibitions are joined by the trained up artistic Craftsmen of Barpeta with their bamboo artistic products and in opening a new dimension in the Craft production activities. The Training Cum Production Centre, Metuakuchi is now run by the North East Handicrafts, Metuakuchi an SHG, led by Sri Manendra Deka.

In the year, 2000, Manendra Deka had been selected for joining ‘On the spot production Cum Exhibition’ held at Canada and he successfully joined the programme. He was immensely praised by the organisers and the representatives of different countries for his expertise in his field and brought laurels for the state and the country as well.

Manendra has recently joined as Master Trainer at CANE AND BAMBOO TECHNOLOGY CENTRE, Dispur Guahati, (UNIDO). The joining of Manendra in a service however has not affected the business of the Metuakuchi Centre since he has already trained up a Considerable number of Craftsman who are regularly producing bamboo products and also new batches of youths are getting training as earlier.

Mat Making at Kayakuchi Area :-

Bamboo Mats are one of the largely used items in Rural Assam taking in to consideration its multifarious use like temporary fencing, partition between room, sitting, covering, temporary urinal and latrine etc. Because of its affordable cost this item is abundantly used in north eastern states of the Country. These items are also supplied to different parts of the Country in large scale.

If any body goes to Kayakuchi (Kuriha) village of Pakabetbari Dev. Block under Barpeta District he will be immensely happy to see hundreds of workers, cutting Bamboo to different size, preparing bamboo blades and their smoothly preparing the bamboo mats of different size, different designs.

Although the work had been going on since a long time, and the return is very high, the actual benefits were grabbed by the financiers, who paid very poorly to the mat makers, hardly sufficient to earn two square meals for the family. The workers had to sink themselves under personal loans from the private lenders and the financiers in the mat making industry.

DRDA, Barpeta made an assessment of the situation and started motivating the mat makers to form SHGs under SGSY . Awareness was created among them and till date DRDA has been able to form 155 Nos. of Self Help Groups in Kayakuchi and nearby villages. 108 groups have been provided with revolving fund and Rs. 75.00 Lakhs has already been provided as loan to 75 Nos. of Self Help Groups. Moreover training has been imparted to diversify the bamboo products. Revolving fund is also being released to be rest of the SHGs. The above steps by DRDA has brought about tremendous change in the area and most of the mat makers who are now members of SHGs have been able to repay private loans and getting their proper share of the earning in this business. Now Kayakuchi village is being looked at as one of the villages with mostly employed population where both male and women workers are taking part. Because of heavy demand of the products it is expected that more and more people will take part in the activity and the economy of the area will improve to a great extent.

Cane artistic products of Gomafulbari :-

Barpeta District has a rich heritage of artistic products of Cane & Bamboo since long past. Eye catching utensils, Mats , Sofa etc. made of Cane are a matter of proud for any house hold who can possess such articles. However all these products came from artisans who belong to very poor families and did not receive proper value of such products, because these had to be sold only in local village markets or at best in Barpeta town. Gomafulbari is a place which is virtually cut of from rest of the district throughout the year.

Sri Baharul Islam EO(c) was specially given instruction to organize the rural artisans engaged in the trade and one SHG Naba Millon Self Help Group was formed with 10 members, who are mostly the artisans and Cane products. Revolving Fund has been given to the SHG. The members who are mostly illiterate had to be motivated who actually did not believe that such easy financing was also done from the Govt. fund. But once they grasped the idea, they became very enthusiastic and became members. The products made by them was sent to different trade fairs in and outside the State. The response was unbelievable, the Cane artistic products were sold at a cost almost five times the originally they sold. Now a days not a single item lies idle; even people from different areas come to the SHG at Gomafolbari and place orders for the items. Some artisans are even hired by affordable few to their own places and get the artistic products prepared to their choice and of course, the SHG is paid handsomely for such works. The economic condition of the artisans have improved and now steps are being taken to bring more of the scattered artisans in this trade and to form SHGs.

Fish Production at Dabaliapara :-

Fish production and sale is a premier trade of Barpeta District. Earlier there were large numbers of bill fisheries / river fisheries and most of the fisher men were able to earn their livelihood on fishing at the natural fisheries. Now most of the bill fisheries are converted to paddy fields and other activities, the scope of natural fishing has almost vanished from the district . Most of the people involved in the business have now taken up mechanized fish production in their ponds created for the purpose. However the draw back in the industry was the non-availability of echo hatchery for production of spawn / fish ling / fingerlings and most of people had to depend on those items brought from West Bengal which was very costly and the supply was uncertain.

It was noticed that some youths of Dabaliapara Village took echo hatchery for production of spawn / fish ling etc. on experimental basis and was successful. DRDA Barpeta took the initiative and created awareness to organize the interested persons to take the activity in a big way and 202 SHGs have already been formed with this key activity in Dabaliapara , Hajipara, Kumuliapara, Dhanbandha Gram panchayats. Revolving Funds have been sanctioned to 175 nos. eligible SHGs and bank loans have been disbursed 68 Nos. SHGs. About 680 families are benefited under SGSY till date. More and more people are new coming forward and maximum stress is given to produce optimum quantity of spawn / fish ling , so that entire requirement of the District as well as of the the state can be produced here. The echo hatcheries are coming up in cluster basis on both side of Howly Barpeta Road. Any body passing through the road would be impressed to see the rows of ponds on both sides of the road and the fishermen filling the fish lings / finger lings in big aluminum containers for dispatch. The procurement of aforesaid items from West Bengal has already stopped since the requirement of local fish farmers of the district are met by the products of the above areas. These products are now send to Uzan Bazar Market of Guwahati as well as other markets of the state. The producers of Dabaliapara area have formed a co-operative society also with the increase of their production and are now trying to sale such products through the north eastern states. There is large number of families in this trade who are yet to be covered under SGSY and DRDA Barpeta is taking a target to cover all of them by forming SHGs so that financial benefits can be provided to these families engaged in this up coming industry.