

Incentivising Traditional Livelihoods: The Case of Women SHG Managed Uppada Dry Fish Unit

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Poor fisherwomen of a nondescript village in Andhra Pradesh have transformed a low-profile, declining dry-fish sale activity into a high-value profitable business, attracting high-end customers in metro supermarkets.



Uppada Fish Delights (A Fish drying and packing unit)
Chapaluppada Village, Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh

FXB India Suraksha is a non- governmental organization working for the rights of children affected by poverty and disease. Responding to the poor social, economic and education conditions in Chapaluppada village in southern India, FXB India has been implementing the Integrated Village Development Project here since January, 2010. Located along the eastern coast, 25 km north of Visakhapatnam, on the Bhimili beach road, Chapaluppada village panchayat comprises seven hamlets namely, the villages of Pedaluppada, Chinauppada, Chapala Debbadapalem, Kotturu, Paturu, Pukkallapalem and Chukkavanipalem, covering 260 acre with a population of above 4000 (2001 census). All these villages are mainly occupied by the poor traditional fishermen community. The adult literacy rate in Chapaluppada village is as low as 13 per cent and has direct effect on their children, resulting in poor attendance in schools, a high drop-out rate and poor academic competencies among the children. Fishing as an occupation is also on the decline as it is no more considered lucrative due to its unpredictable nature, the lack of gainful activity leading to high alcoholism among the menfolk. The

women then bear the burden of fending for the family, many of them resorting to daily wage labour. One of the supplementary activities some of these women take on to augment family income is processing and selling dry fish. Building on this fish-related activity, FXB has brought the women of the village together to work on dry fish processing and packaging. In July, 2011, this women's group launched a branded packed dry fish product in the market -- Uppada Fish Delights. Initially this product was placed in the Spencer's hyper mall in Visakhapatnam and later distributed to other super markets in Visakhapatnam as well as in the three other districts of Prakasam, Warangal and Hyderabad.

The Background

Fishing - a declining occupation: Originally the people of this village were fishermen, but only 44 per cent of the population today is solely dependent on fish related economic activity such as the men fishing and women selling wet or dry fish. (FXB Baseline Survey, March 2010). It was also found that in the recent past there has been a rapid transformation of occupations in the village. Interactions with the community have revealed interesting facts about the change of occupational choices. In the past there were about 40 boat owners in the village who were employing more than 600 people as fishing labour. But presently the number of boat owners has come down to 19, indicating a decline in the population directly dependent on fishing as an economic activity. There are three reasons attributed to this situation:

- Gradual depletion of quantity of fish for traditional boats with increased fishing by mechanized boats and heavy vessels along the coast.
- Erratic income from fishing has discouraged fishermen from continuing with this activity.
- Increased availability of other livelihood options like construction labour where the incomes are higher.

The effect of these changes on women

Among the fishing community in Chapalupadda village, women are forced to take on the responsibility of supporting the family as the men are out at sea for most of the time. However, the income from traditional fishing is inconsistent and unpredictable in nature. In addition, most men spend a major portion of their incomes on alcohol consumption and neglect the family. Due to these pressures, women are forced to take up some economic activity, mostly fish related, in order to sustain the family and children.

Women selling dry fish: Women borrow capital from the local money lenders at high interest rates and buy fish from the harbor. They dry the procured fish in the village and take the loads to sell in the surrounding

villages and village markets. They travel long distances, up to 150 km and stay away from home for a week to ten days in order to sell the fish. During their trips, they keep the stock at one house in the village and sustain themselves on meager amounts of food offered by the owner of the house in return for fish free of cost. They sleep in the corridors of unknown people's homes and spend insecure days to make meager profits of Rs 1,000 to 1,500 per trip. They go on such trips twice or thrice a month in order to provide for the family.

The Consequences

- Women neglect their diet and health when away from home.
- Children are completely neglected as the caregivers stay away from home. School attendance is irregular leading to large numbers of drop-outs. The girl child takes on the role of the caregiver in the mother's absence, cooking and feeding younger siblings.
- The women are exploited by the money lenders.
- They get a poor price for their product as they follow very unhygienic drying processes and suffer losses due to wastage.
- During their trips they live in hazardous conditions and are exposed to risks.

In view of the risks involved, older women consider this job unsafe for the younger generation and mostly keep them away from this economic activity. Now, the majority of the younger women in the village, stay at home without any source of income, in spite of extremely poor economic conditions. Some women however take on daily wage labour to sustain their families. The government fisheries department officials have expressed concern over these women withdrawing from traditional fish-related activity and being plunged into further poverty. What is needed therefore is a holistic solution that

- a. provides enough income to run the family;
- b. allows the women to stay at home and care for the family;
- c. rejuvenates the declining fish-related economy;
- d. improves their overall quality of life.

The FXB India Suraksha Intervention

As part of the comprehensive development project, FXB is implementing various programmes related to water and sanitation, health, education and livelihood promotion at Chapaluppada village. During the start-up interactions with the villagers to initiate income-generation activities, the FXB staff took all the information shared above into consideration. Understanding the diverse nature of the issues and dynamics involved in the fish-related economic activity, the FXB team has carefully developed an initiative that addresses the concerns regarding the livelihood of the women.

Uppada Fish Delights (Fish Drying and Packing Unit)

Dry fish is considered poor man's food as it is generally prepared from left over or spoiled wet fish and available for half the price. Whereas, in actuality, dry fish prepared from good quality wet fish should cost three to five times that of fresh fish because three to five kg of wet fish is required to process a kilogram of dry fish. FXB surveyed the market demand for the quality dry fish and found that there was good demand for good quality dry fish in big super markets from high-end customers but there was no supply.

In February 2010, FXB organized training programmes with the help of the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) for 20 fisherwomen in hygienic fish drying methods. After completing the training, a group of 10 to 12 women came forward to start a unit to produce high quality dry fish products. Meanwhile women went around the village to hire a building for a dry fish unit, but failed to get space since house owners feared the fish processing odour. Finally, in April 2011, the women collectively made a representation to the village president to provide them with space for a processing shelter and built a shed with the support of FXB.



FXB helped the women with the equipment and running capital to start up the processing unit. Meanwhile, FXB has conducted various training programmes for the women in unit management, quality control systems, book-keeping and marketing skills for effective functioning of the unit. In July 2011, this women's group launched a high quality packaged dry fish product in the market with the brand name Uppada Fish Delights. Initially this product was placed in the Spencer's hypermall in Visakhapatnam and later on distributed to other super markets in Visakhapatnam and in the three other districts of Prakasam, Warangal and Hyderabad.

Adoption of Technology to Add Value to the Product

The adoption of CIFT-suggested technical inputs and hygienic processing methods by the women has improved the quality of the dry fish product and elicited a very good response from the market.

Traditional drying	Vs. Hygienic drying
Fish used for drying is already spoiled and not possible for wet consumption	Good quality fresh fish used
No precautions in handling the wet fish	Hygienic methods like cleaning containers with chlorine water, washing the fish, usage of ice
No dressing is done	Viscera is removed and scaling is done
Soaked in poor quality salt	Quality salt applied proportionately
Dried in the sand or road side	Dried on elevated racks
Flies and other insects carrying infection	Lemon spray is used to control infections
Stored in gunny bags outside the house	Stored in clean crates in a dry, elevated place
Final product, unpacked, smelly, mixed with sand other foreign particles, spoils fast, Lot of wastage at time of cooking	Added harmless preservatives, and packed, no outside smell, neat and clean, can be placed with other products, simple and ready to cook
Poor sale price and sold in village markets	Good sale price and sold in super markets

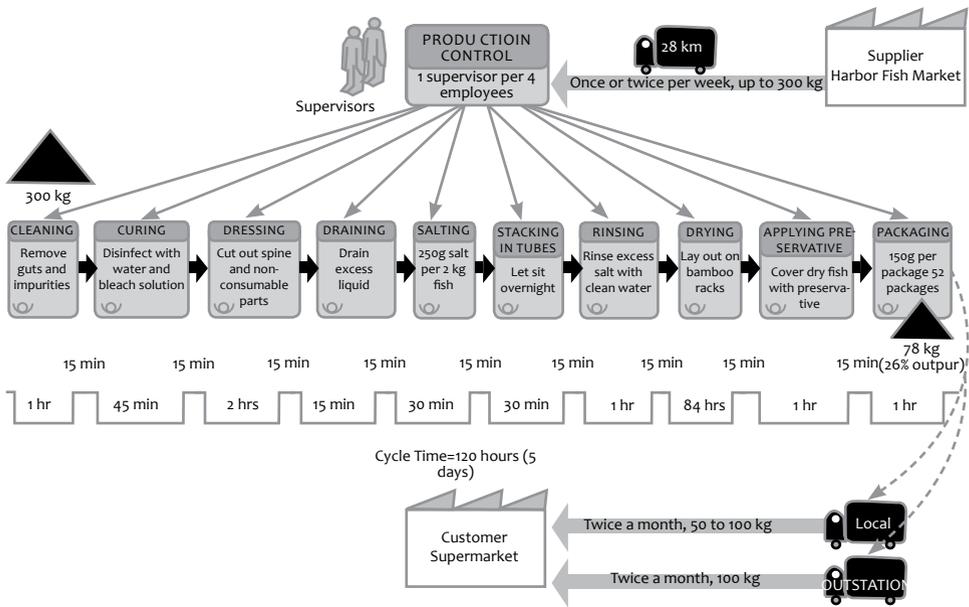
The quality of the dry fish produced with the technical procedure suggested by CIFT was far better than the traditional dried fish. When packed, the fish looked very neat and clean and attracted higher price for the value added.

For example, traditionally dried fish 'anchovy' is sold at Rs 100 per kg, whereas Uppada Fish Delights is sold for Rs 400 per kg in the super markets.

The fish processed and packaged by the Uppada group can be preserved for a long time i.e. for six months due to the hygienic handling, sufficient drying, and proportionate application of salt and harmless preservatives. This reduces the wastage of production due to fast spoiling and insufficient drying.



Figure 1: Quality Drying Activity – Value Stream Map



The Uppada Fish Delights Products

To increase the productivity of the Uppada Fish Delights unit when dry fish processing is halted due to poor supply and higher demand for raw fish, the women have started making other value-added products which are now available in the market. They have been trained in making products like fish/prawn pickles, powders, fish wafers and fast foods.

Impact

- Poor fisherwomen are making a profit of Rs 15,000-20,000 per month staying in the village and taking care of their children and the family.
- Women have reported that their status in the family has been enhanced with more respect being accorded to them by their husbands and other family members due to their involvement in the collective business activity
- The younger generation, who were avoiding the fish-related activity, is now increasingly getting involved as the market grows.
- More than 60 traditional fisherwomen have been trained in hygienic drying of fish and there is visible change in the traditional methods.

Towards a More Sustainable Approach -- FSEMAC Society

In addition to the fish drying and packing unit, FXB India Suraksha is promoting various other livelihood projects for poor fisherwomen in

Chapaluppada village like production of recycled hand-made paper and paper products, making of low-cost sanitary napkins, placement-linked computer training for the rural youth, kitchen gardens and milk collection centers. FXB has registered a community organization under the Andhra Pradesh Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies Act, 1995 -- the FXB Suraksha Entrepreneurs Mutually Aided Cooperative Society Limited (FSEMAC Society) -- with the following objectives:

- Provide corporate status to the women SHG entrepreneurs for entering contracts/partnerships, entitlement for concessions, exemptions, permissions and other benefits from government and associated agencies. Provide eligibility to the enterprise to apply for licensee and taxation as well.
- The cooperative is legally empowered to avail loans so that it can provide financial services to livelihood projects as and when required for expansion.
- The Board of Directors who has been undergoing various training programmes will be able to manage the cooperative society and respective enterprises effectively in future, making the initiatives sustainable for the benefit of the community.

Two leaders from each individual enterprise have been elected as directors. FXB India Suraksha is conducting training programmes for the directors and staff in enterprise development in partnership with ALEAP and the District Industrial Centre (DIC). These directors and the cooperative staff will then be able to manage the society independently in six months time.

Challenges Faced

- Initially, women did face resistance from the community by way of denial for a space to start the activity. Finally they could help from the panchayat and could erect a structure to run their business.
- The supply of raw materials was erratic and unpredictable combined with price fluctuations.
- Initially the group incurred losses due to continuous rains and unfavorable climatic conditions.
- The government subsidy for storing facilities took long in coming and affected their business.
- Initially, imbalance between availability of stock and market demand caused loss when fish was stored for a longer time.

References

1. Uppada Fish Delights SHG women interaction with Dr. Ayyappan DG, Indian Counsel of Agricultural Research and Dr. B.Meenakumari DDG (Fy) appeared in the ICAR website
2. Post graduate business students of University of WISCONSIN, WHITE WATERS, United States has conducted a study on “Sustainability Challenge of Uppada Fish Delights and Solutions for Developing Countries” and provided a decision supporting system template to enable sound decision-making.
3. French TV, a European TV channel has produced a 20-min documentary on the success story of Uppada Fish Delights’ women SHG entrepreneur model.
4. Telugu popular TV news channel ETV 2 has telecast a 15-min documentary programme highlighting the success of the women SHG entrepreneurs called VICTORY OF POOR FISHERWOMEN.
5. Popular Telugu *Eenadu* has published a full page article on Uppada Fish Delights elaborating on the success of the poor fisherwomen SHG initiative.