

Sanitary Napkin Unit run by SHG members of West Bengal State Rural Livelihood Mission

Introduction:

The story of Kesabchak Srijani Sangh (KSS), Tarakeswar, West Bengal, is that of a handful of young ordinary women with extraordinary dreams and determination to make it a big. Back in 2005, seven women from Kesabchak village in rural Bengal came forward to form a group to work for the cause of menstrual hygiene for women. They decided to manufacture low cost sanitary napkins and to distribute them in rural Bengal.

Background:

Sanitary napkin is an essential product for health and hygiene of adolescent girls and women. It is an alternative to unhygienic cloth pieces used traditionally during menstruation. Yet, napkin has low penetration in India due to its high cost. According to a recent National Family Health Survey, NFHS 2015-16, about 58% of total menstruating women use hygienic (single use) means to tackle menstruation. This figures varies between 78% in urban and 48% in rural areas

It was in 2005 that Keshabchak Gram Panchayat had started forming SHGs with local women. In 2008, eight VOs and twenty two SHGs were formed. A small group was formed with the ambition to make and supply sanitary napkins in the locality at a cheap price. They received support from the Block and the Gram Panchayat. In 2009, Kesabchak Srijani Sangha (CLF) purchased 3.5 katha land in Kulteghori village of Tarakeswar block at a price of Rs. 3.55 Lac. They borrowed money from the newly formed SHG groups and also utilized some of their own funds to purchase land for Napkin Making Unit. Next year in 2010, they built a two storied building on 1.75 katha land at a cost of Rs. 27 Lac.

Details of the Intervention:

For manufacture of sanitary napkin, KSS, Hooghly, needs to get approval from the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of West Bengal. The validity of the approval is for one year and needs a renewal every year. Apart from KSS, the Health Department gave approval to four other agencies. All these units need to depend on the state and district hospitals to get orders. Demand of sanitary napkins depends on number of patients in the hospital. With fixed number of hospital beds there is fierce competition amongst the suppliers. KSS perceives this risk of being dependent only on government hospitals. Hence, to mitigate this risk they intend to enter into open market to cater local domestic customers also. Another segment that KSS is targeting is the government and aided schools where napkin vending machines are installed for dispensing napkins. KSS also intend to supply napkins for this machine.

Impact:

Currently, with the support of West Bengal State Rural Livelihood Mission, KSS has become a CLF Cooperative with 50 women involved in making of sanitary napkins. Apart from napkin making they also provide education, training, and technical assistance to existing and start-up enterprises. It is now a business owned by its members, controlled democratically by its members, and operated for benefit of its members. Further, The Napkin Making Unit has annual revenue of Rs. 44 Lac, and Cost of Goods Sold (COGS) of Rs. 37.6 Lac. This gives a Gross Profit of Rs. 6.4 Lac. The Selling, General and Administrative (SGA) expenses is Rs. 2.25 Lac, and Depreciation is Rs. 34,533. This gives the Operating Profit of Rs. 3.8 Lac. All members believe in ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others. They are one of the five enterprises in West Bengal that have been given government license to manufacture sanitary napkins. They supply napkins to major government run state and some district hospitals.

Source: Ministry of Rural Development. (2018). Hopes On The Horizon: Rural Women In Livelihood Enterprises. Government of India. Retrieved at http://mksp.gov.in/images/Hopes_on_Horizon_Rural_Women_Livelihood_Enterprises_English.pdf. Accessed on 13/10/2020.