

A Field Worker's Diary - Part 30

I had previously written about the first program that I had done while I was working in Guntur district under Andhra Pradesh Rural Poverty Reduction Project (Velugu Project) called Rice Credit Line Program.

Under that program, all Self Help Groups (SHGs) members in one village counted how much rice each of their households needed per month and collectively bought rice through the village-level federation or the Village Organization (VO).

The money needed to make the first purchase of rice was provided by our Project through a grant to the VO. Through this program, members not only got good quality rice at lower prices due to collective procurement, but also had the option to pay for the rice in weekly installments instead of paying a lump sum. The program had been pretty successful at that time.



It provided members with the confidence that they didn't have to worry about the rice running out if they couldn't find work for a few days; moreover, as it was a collective initiative, promoted cooperation and solidarity among the members.

Being a program worth lakhs that was solely implemented by women who did not have any education whatsoever, it managed to showcase the talent and leadership abilities of these women. These women had managed to learn so many skills by implementing a program successfully that we possibly couldn't teach in any number of training sessions.

This photo was taken when state and district level officials came to this remote village and sat down with the women involved to study such a successful project for themselves.

On behalf of United Andhra Pradesh Rural Development Department, the CEO of the Society for Elimination Of Rural Poverty (SERP) Shri Vijay Kumar IAS, Guntur District Collector Sri Ramakrishna Rao IAS, our Guntur District Project Director Sri Challa Vijaymohan, Krishna district Project Director Smt Vani Mohan, Prakasam district Project Director Shri Shivakoti Prasad (these people later went on worked as collectors for various districts) along with many state level staff came and interacted with the women. They asked them various questions, such as: how were they implementing the program? What were the issues they were facing? How are they managing them and preceding with the work? They also heaped praise on them.

Seeing those illiterate women answering questions without hesitation about everything from rules and regulations of the program to the income and expenditure, was a moment of great pride and joy for us.

Truth be told, it could have been a routine visit for all the officials who came there that day.

But, I could understand how much impact their presence, even if it was only for a small while, could leave behind. Some of the men of the village, who had until then ridiculed the women SHG meetings and forbade the women off their households from attending the meetings, had stood a little far away from the officials with their mouths agape with incredulity.

After the officials went back, one of those men told me with a pleasantly surprised smile that they had underestimated these women but together they had managed to bring the collector himself to their village.

It was one of those times when we had managed to raise the confidence levels of poor rural women, who were illiterate and had little or no contact with the outside world, on their power and capabilities.

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