

Research, Network and Support Facility (RNSF)

“Support to enhance livelihoods per people dependent on informal economy
and improve social inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable persons”

Good Practices and Lessons Learned

RESEARCH QUESTION	3- Direct actions in communities
SUB-TOPIC (Research matrix)	<u>Entrepreneurship: Capacity strengthening on starting, improving, growing economic activities (3.2)</u>
REGION - COUNTRY OF IMPLEMENTATION	Asia - Bangladesh
GOOD PRACTICES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Diversification of income-generating activities to enable vulnerable populations to be less dependent on natural resources in protected areas (Bangladesh). 2) Providing start up input to help beneficiaries immediately utilize their new skills acquired through the project thus enabling them to start earning incomes right after completing their training. (Often only training is provided so beneficiaries are not able to implement what they have learned)
PROJECT NAME	<i>Social and Economic Security for Traditional Resource Users of the Sundarbans</i>
YEAR	-
FUNDING AGENCY	European Commission
IMPLEMENTING AGENCY	Relief International-UK (RI-UK)
KEY TARGET GROUPS	Informal workers in rural areas
SUMMARY OF THE ACTION	
<p>In some circumstances, the only option for enhancing the livelihoods of vulnerable populations dependent on the informal economy is the diversification of their income-generating activities. This is particularly important in rural areas where agricultural activities occupy the population for only a few months per year leaving them unemployed or underemployed for the rest of the year. The same applies to populations who lived and worked in areas that are now protected due to the depletion of natural resources and excessive pressure on fragile ecosystems.</p> <p>Populations whose economic life consisted of extracting natural resources often lack alternative skills to escape from poverty.</p> <p>The Sundarbans mangrove forest in Bangladesh has been declared an environmentally critical site due to the existing damage to its biodiversity. The traditional resource users of local communities of the national mangrove forest in Sundarbans have thus seen their primary income source endangered. The project that Relief</p>	

International implemented provided such people with alternative skills. In addition, advocacy was conducted with local government to liberate the population from the corrupt practices they faced when obtaining official permits to access the forest and to strengthen environmental sustainability.

People from the local communities are no longer forced to illegally enter the Sundarbans mangrove forest to earn a living. The new skill sets of the informal Sundarbans workers diverted their economic activity away from the natural resources of the forest. They have either been directly given livelihood assets such as vans and sewing machines or assistance with setting up small businesses such as in the cloth trade, betel trade, or a furniture shop. Other activities include fish cultivation, homestead vegetable gardening, duck rearing, honey collection and preservation, small business development and maintenance and goat rearing.

Such support has provided them with diverse sources of income for survival. The boosting of local trade was further achieved through an increase in the variety and quality of local products. The population is now able to regularly earn incomes and is no longer dependent on the Sundarbans mangrove forests.

The community members selected and obtained the different types of context-specific livelihood assets that they needed and desired. During the project inception phase, a participatory household survey and Individual Household livelihoods assessment were conducted among the communities. These assessments helped the project team to understand and identify community and household-needs. The project also conducted a pre-assessment survey, which helped provide an understanding of the varying needs and choices of the target populations with regard to livelihood assets. The survey found, however, that many beneficiaries themselves had no clear notion of what they needed or what would be suitable in their socio-cultural and economic context. A repeated sensitization dialogue was necessary to explain the options that could be made available and to address the misconception of the beneficiaries that animal husbandry and gardening skills come naturally to people.

Most trainees acquired vital knowledge and information about different trades for the first time and pledged to share the information with other community members. This has ensured sustainability of project activities via a positive multiplier effect.

If the beneficiaries had been left unmonitored with their productive assets they might not have been able to make appropriate use of those assets. The provision of start up input helped them immediately utilize their newly acquired skills thus enabling them to start earning incomes right after completing their training.

Project officers visited beneficiary households to verify if they were utilizing the assets in a profit making manner and rendered mentorship support and advice on a needs basis. Ensuring and monitoring the use of newly acquired skills, were key for success.

Since most beneficiaries did not have access to basic education, and would face problems keeping track of their income and expenditure after receiving their livelihood assets, they were given simple bookkeeping and accounting lessons. Such training helped them to keep records of their income and expenses. Informal workers have thus been made accountable and are able to keep records of what they are doing with the skills they have acquired.

Simultaneously, confidence was strengthened through competence and empowerment using life skills training. During the learning and improving employment skills process, informal workers acquired various life skills, which can be used in all other areas of their lives. They have become aware of laws and regulations, learned

<p>how to manage their finances, track the calendar, and now feel responsible for the environment.</p> <p>Last but not least, the network of Informal Workers' Unions (IWUs) was established in the target zone and undertook network training, network meeting, and rights and services training. Training sessions were open to other members of the community, and not exclusively to project related group members. This was done with a view to strengthening the capacity of the informal workers to shield themselves, their rights and the rights of other community members. After network training sessions, the IWU group members and leaders all collaborated to hold meetings among themselves to discuss the information and knowledge they had acquired. The participants also identified different and effective ways of recycling their knowledge and information to maximize the benefit of resource-poor communities. It was also ensured that IWU leaders reminded beneficiaries how to maintain their livelihood assets to reinforce the project team's follow-up support.</p>	
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	Develop diversification of income-generating activities and related skills training accompanied with provision of assets, inputs and follow-up services. Include life skills training and awareness raising of the importance of organising and networking on a larger scale. Emphasise the usefulness of networking with people having similar interests and concerns.
SOURCE	RNSF Research Volume 4.1: https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/iesf/document/rnsf-research-volume-41-gp-and-11-33-projects-funded-european-union
RESOURCE(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bangladesh-Relief International-UK (RI-UK) "Social and Economic Security for Traditional Resource Users of the Sundarbans" (Project Final Report)