

SHGs of Jharkhand are leading way for hygiene promotion and manufacturing low-cost soaps

With UNICEF's technical support more than 800 women members of 89 Self Help Groups from rural areas of Jharkhand are promoting handwashing with soap and established low cost soap manufacturing units in seven districts.

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Background

COVID-19 Pandemic presented unique challenges for all of us, it guided us to adapt to new normal and reminded us the importance of maintaining basic hygiene behaviours such as handwashing with soap. In Jharkhand first case of Covid -19 was reported in March 2020, to date Jharkhand has reported total 1,21, 608 cases, out of which 6844 are currently active. During initial phase whole state was under complete lockdown, due to restriction of movement and fear of infection availability and supply of soap was constrained especially in rural and hard to reach areas. Handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is the single most effective practice to prevent spread of Covid-19 and it is the first line of defense against the infection. In addition to Covid, handwashing with soap can prevent many other diseases. Therefore, it is one of the key practices included in Covid appropriate

Behavior (CABs) and Government, UNICEF and other organisations organized several campaigns to promote handwashing with soap. During lockdown hygiene products such as sanitizers and soaps were in short supply specially for poor and marginalized families which impacted practice of handwashing as well. UNICEF and other organizations distributed soaps through NGOs and government frontline workers in urban slums of Ranchi and some other places but those were not enough to resolve the problem in long-term. Therefore, it was felt that manufacturing of soaps should be localized to ensure uninterrupted supply and local community groups should be engaged in manufacturing low cost soaps which will not only ensure availability and accessibility of soap but also provide employment opportunities for local people. Manufacturing of soaps by local community groups will also help in promotion of handwashing because manufactures will also be engaged in promotion of handwashing within their communities. UNICEF advocated with the government to train local groups in soap manufacturing with materials and capital support from government.

Production of low-cost soaps and promotion of handwashing by Self Help Groups

Self Help Groups are community-based organizations and connected directly with the families. In Swachh Bharat Mission, SHGs played crucial role not only in construction of toilets but also in promotion of hygiene practices including handwashing with soap. UNICEF Jharkhand has good experience of promotion of sanitation and hygiene under Swachh Bharat Mission through SHGs. Jharkhand State Livelihood Mission (JSLPS) works till grassroot level and promote formation and nurturing SHGs, JSLPS has formed more than 200,000 SHGs across the state. Building on experience of Swachh Bharat Mission, UNICEF in collaboration with Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS), Department of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand, took a joint initiative to engage SHGs of JSLPS in manufacturing of soaps and promote hand washing. The primary objective was to promote handwashing with soap by ensuring availability and accessibility of low-cost soaps produced by SHGs. Secondary objective was to link SHGs with sustainable income generation source and develop entrepreneurship skills of members.

UNICEF Jharkhand and JSLPS initiated soap manufacturing units on pilot basis with five SHGs in July 2020. UNICEF provided technical and partial financial support for capacity building of SHGs and JSLPS supported in installation of Soap Manufacturing units and raw materials in five districts. After completion of training and receiving raw materials SHGs started production of soaps. The focus of process was to maintain the quality with low-cost so that products manufactured by SHGs could compete with products of other companies. UNICEF also trained SHG members in promotion of handwashing practices and provided IEC materials to them.

Branding

Since the competition of SHGs is with large FMCG companies who have large established brands of their products. Brand helps to maintain identity of products and develops sustainable customer base which is important for long term sustainability of project. **Palash** is the state flower of Jharkhand and associated with folk traditions and indigenous identity of its people, Many folk literary expressions describe Palash as the forest fire. Considering this Department of Rural Development, Government of Jharkhand decided to brand all products manufactured by SHGs as **Palash**,

Quality, Costing and Marketing

The primary objective of initiative was to promote handwashing with soap by ensuring availability and accessibility of low-cost soaps produced by SHGs and provide them sustainable income generation opportunities which was a challenge during the lockdown and post lockdown and channelize their community linkages for long term behaviour change. Therefore, it was important that products of SHGs should be of good quality, lower cost and easily available. To ensure that, UNICEF and JSLPS trained SHGs to manufacture products in different varieties as per market demand and keep the cost low to make it affordable for all. Therefore, SHGs produce soaps in three varieties (aloe vera, rose and lemongrass oil) and in three sizes 50 gm, 75 gm and 100 gm each with a price tag of Rs. 15, 20 and 25. These varieties and sizes helped to cater differential needs of the community. Since manufacturing units were at village level, products were marketed through SHG marketing platforms called "Palash Mart" and through local shops. UNICEF and JSLPS also linked SHGs with government departments and guided them to secure large orders.

Promotion of Handwashing

UNICEF trained SHGs in promotion of handwashing practice, provided them IEC materials and motivated them to promote handwashing within their communities through SHG meetings and house to house visits. Promotion of handwashing through SHGs is sustainable because they are from the same community and people trust them. To date SHG members have reached out to more than 1,00,000 women with correct messages on handwashing. The messages on handwashing are also displayed on all Palash Marts and outlets across Jharkhand.

Results so far

The pilot project was started with five SHGs from Giridih district, today more than 800 women members of 89 SHGs are producing nine varieties of Palash soaps in seven districts. Total 5,00,000 soaps produced to date. Recently Department of Health has placed an order of 2,00,000 soaps with SHGs. This helped to build the production and marketing capacities and reached out to larger population with messages on handwashing.



Training of SHGs



Training of soap Manufacturing



Soap Manufacturing in process



Palash Brand



Palash Soap Manufactured by SHGs



Demonstration of handwashing



Hygiene promotion by SHG members



Palash store

Way forward

This pilot project has created a movement and showed a sustainable model to address both demand and supply sides of handwashing, it has shown a path for self-reliance to SHGs. The journey, which was started with one district, has reached to seven in one year and now JSLPS has decided to scale up in ten more districts. The intervention has linked promotion of handwashing with entrepreneurship skills. This not only helped to promote handwashing but also provided sustainable livelihood to women. This model is self-sustainable and scalable which can be replicated in all districts and other states as well.

Media Coverage

दीदियों ने साबुन बनाना शुरू किया

खूटी | संवाददाता

तीरपा प्रखंड में विश्व हाथ धुलाई दिवस के अवसर पर तपकरा सोएलएफ द्वारा हर्बल साबुन बनाने की प्रक्रिया शुरू की गयी। शुरुआत में सखी मंडल की दीदियां साबुन के आधार में मूल्यवर्धन कर रही हैं और उनके द्वारा उत्पन्नित आवश्यक हर्बल पदार्थों का मिश्रण किया जा रहा है।

इसके तहत शुक्रवार को जेएसएलपीएस द्वारा महिलाओं को

विधि बताई

- महिलाओं को दो से तीन प्रकार के साबुन बनाने की विधि बताई
- बनाये गए साबुन को प्लाश की तरह ब्रांड किया जाएगा

साबुन बनाने की प्रक्रिया के सम्बंध में प्रशिक्षण दिया गया। इस दौरान उन्हें दो से तीन प्रकार के साबुन बनाने की विधि बताई गई। इसमें सोप बेस, सुगन्धित तेल

(लेमनग्रास), रंग व आइसोप्रोपाइल अल्कोहल आदि का निर्धारित स्टैंडर्ड रूप से मिश्रण करने की जानकारी दी गयी। बनाये जा रहे साबुन को प्लाश के तहत ब्रांड किया जाएगा।

जेएसएलपीएस के डीपीएम शैलेश रंजन ने बताया कि महिलाओं को आजीविका समर्थन हेतु ये प्रयास सार्थक सिद्ध होंगे। प्रारम्भिक रूप में इसका सीधा लाभ 30 महिलाओं को मिलेगा। साथ ही बाजार उपलब्ध कराने हेतु कार्ययोजना भी तैयार की जा रही है।