SKILL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING IN MUKKUDAL, TIRUNELVELI

ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS FOR WOMEN ROLLING BEEDIS

CANCER INSTITUTE (WIA)
ADYAR, CHENNAI

BACKGROUND

Tobacco control has been recognized as a key intervention to control cancer. Approaches like tobacco cessation for users, awareness for the public, and policy changes aligned with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, are all currently being implemented nationally in India. An area needing emphasis but grossly neglected lies upon promoting economically viable alternatives to tobacco production as a way to prevent possible adverse social and economic impacts on population whose livelihoods depend on tobacco production. One such sector is the beedi production in Tamil Nadu. In India, at least 4.5 million workers are employed in the beedi sector. According to Ministry of Labour and Employment, there are 509128 beedi rollers in Tamil Nadu. (PIB, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Govt of India) Although the large part of the workforce is home based, involving women and children, beedi manufacturing is considered highly labour intensive. Article 17 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) emphasizes the importance of promoting economically viable alternatives to tobacco production. This approach aims to mitigate the adverse social and economic impacts on populations whose livelihoods depend on tobacco production. Such strategies are recognized as effective supply reduction measures to curtail tobacco usage within communities.

In an effort to shift beedi rollers to alternative healthy livelihoods, the Cancer Institute (WIA) with support from HCL Foundation initiated a series of activities, beginning from creating

awareness on the occupational health hazards of working in the beedi industry. Two districts (Tirunelveli and Vellore) were selected for the same, as the proportion of beedi rollers was high as compared to other districts. In order to sensitize the beedi rollers, a number of awareness programs were organized in various locations since 2015. Through these awareness programs, nearly 3000 beedi rollers were sensitized on the risks and ill-effects associated with their livelihood. Following the awareness campaigns, the institute conducted a survey among 1000 beedi workers from Vellore and Tirunelveli. About 78% of the surveyed beedi workers were found to suffer from one or the other ailment namely respiratory disorders, chronic cold, cough and skin diseases. Also, 80.4% of them expressed their willingness to shift to an alternate livelihood. (Josephine, S., The Hindu; 2019)

SKILL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

In an effort to transition these beedi workers towards healthier livelihoods, the Cancer Institute (WIA), with support from HCL Foundation initiated various skill development training programs at Mukkudal, Tirunelveli as Phase I in association with the Labour Welfare Department, Government of India. The training programs were conducted at the Central Beedi Hospital, Mukkudal, Tirunelveli, at no cost to the beneficiaries.

The training includes:

1. **Coir products (Handicrafts)** in collaboration with the Coir Board, Government of India.
2. **Tailoring programs,** supported by the HCL Foundation.
3. **Wig making training,** supported by Skill India, NABARD and HCL Foundation. Training and employment provided by Exodus Pvt Ltd

SKILL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING FOR BEEDI ROLLING WOMEN IN MUKKUDAL, TIRUNELVELI

PERIOD: JANUARY 2020 – JANUARY 2024
INITIATED BY: CANCER INSTITUTE (WIA), ADYAR, CHENNAI

SKILL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING	BENEFICIARIES	SUPPORTED BY
TRAINING ON COIR PRODUCTS (HANDICRAFTS)	20	COIR BOARD, GOVT. OF INDIA
TAILORING	1,020	HCL FOUNDATION
WIG MAKING	25	TAMIL NADU SKILL DEVELOPMENT CORP
WIG MAKING	60	NABARD
WIG MAKING	84	CANCER INSTITUTE (WIA) & EXODUS EXPORTS PVT, LTD.
TOTAL	**1,209**	

Until now, the training on coir products has been successfully completed with 20 beneficiaries. Efforts are underway to sustain these participants in alternative livelihoods. Similarly, 34 batches of tailoring training program, each with 30 participants, have been completed successfully. A total of 169 beedi rolling women have been trained on wig making by the Exodus Exports Pvt Ltd. To prevent workers from returning to beedi rolling during the training period, a stipend of INR 3,000 per head per month has been provided by the Coir Board, NABARD, and Skill India for the respective training programs.

In order to understand the effectiveness of these trainings, the Cancer Institute conducted a survey among 148 trained women, which revealed that 106 successfully stopped engaging in beedi rolling, while 32 still continued to do so. The remaining 10 were not reachable due to various practical reasons. Of the 106, 24 women are working with the wig making unit while 11 have started tailoring at their homes. Nearly 33 women are now employed in different sectors ranging from cattle rearing to teaching. The remaining 38 women, although not currently employed in any sector, reported that they were neither interested nor willing to continue beedi rolling as well, as they are now well aware of the health consequences. This is achieved only by the repeated awareness, education and motivation by the Cancer Institute team, in the communities.

OBSERVATIONS

Despite low wages and occupational health risks, many women remain engaged in beedi rolling as they perceive it to be a convenient job, with materials provided at their doorsteps, allowing them to balance household work. However, after the awareness programs, participants have reported greater vigilance regarding the health hazards and exploitation by the beedi industry. The skill development training programs initiated by the Cancer Institute (WIA) have been well-received by the beedi rollers, who are now highly sensitized to the benefits of a healthier livelihood. Considering the strong need among beedi rollers to shift to an alternative livelihood and the limited employment opportunities in the locality, it is high time to create viable alternatives. Industries and employment sectors can consider expanding their units to such localities, where there is huge availability of human resource and labour force. This will serve as a model for shifting and sustaining them in an alternate healthy livelihood.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

To ensure sustainability, efforts are underway to create self-help groups among the trained beneficiaries to access benefits under women entrepreneur development schemes of the Government. Additionally, steps are being taken to collaborate with manufacturers, banks, industries, and export companies to provide employment opportunities post-training. This holistic approach aims to ensure a sustainable shift away from beedi rolling and establish a model for healthier livelihood options.

SUCCESS STORY:
FROM BEEDI ROLLING TO TAILORING

Name: Mrs. Essakiammal
Age: 38 years
Location: Mukkuda, Tirunelveli

"Switching to tailoring has transformed my life. Not only am I healthier, but I also feel more secure about my children's future. I am grateful for the training program and hope more women like me find a way out of beedi rolling."
-Mrs. Essakiammal

Mrs. Esakkiyammal was rolling beedis since 14 yrs of age. She engaged in beedi rolling as a means of helping her mother, by discontinuing her education. After a while, she continued beedi rolling for financial reasons. Mrs. Essakiammal frequently suffered from respiratory issues, back pain, and chronic fatigue due to prolonged sitting and exposure to tobacco dust. Despite these challenges, she continued because it allowed her to earn an income while staying at home to care for her children. Following the awareness, she enrolled herself in the tailoring training program organized by the Cancer Institute. After successfully completing the training program, she started practicing tailoring at home, while continuing beedi rolling simultaneously due to challenges in meeting the financial needs of the family. Later, she joined as a trainer for the tailoring training program for beedi rolling women in the locality. As this promised a steady source of income, she reported that she has abstained from engaging in beedi rolling for the last 6 months. Mrs. Esakkiyammal feels that she is now gaining leisure quality time in the evenings, which she is able to spend with her children. Since shifting to tailoring, she reported noticing significant improvements in her health and considerable increase in her monthly income. She no longer experiences the chronic cough and fatigue. Now, she feels empowered as she can now provide a healthier environment for her children. Mrs. Essakiammal is proud to be a role model in her community, encouraging other women to explore alternative livelihoods.

SUCCESS STORY: FROM BEEDI ROLLING TO WIG MAKING FOR CANCER PATIENTS

Name: Mrs. Malathi
Age: 38 years
Location: Mukkuda, Tirunelveli

Mrs. Malathi was identified as a beedi roller through a door-to-door survey conducted by the Cancer Institute (WIA). For over 15 years, she rolled beedis to support her family. Although the work provided a steady income, the constant exposure to tobacco dust left her with persistent coughs and respiratory problems. Despite the health risks, she continued because it allowed her to earn money from home while taking care of her children. During an awareness session organized by the Cancer Institute (WIA), she learned about the severe health hazards of beedi rolling, not only for herself but also for the countless consumers who develop cancer from tobacco use. Determined to make a change, she enrolled in to tailoring program after which she enrolled in the advanced training program which is wig-making, held at the Central Beedi Hospital, Mukkudal.

"I used to roll beedis, which I know contributed to people getting cancer. It was a job that harmed not only me but also others. Now, I am proud to make wigs for cancer patients. I feel like I am finally making a positive difference in people's lives. It's truly rewarding to know that my work brings joy to someone who is fighting cancer."
-Mrs. Mahlathi

Over the course of the 6-month training, Mrs. Malathi learned to craft high-quality wigs, especially designed for cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. She was supported with a stipend of INR 3,000 per month during the training, which allowed her to focus on learning without financial pressure. Upon successfully completing the wig-making course, she was employed at Exodus Exports Pvt. Ltd., a wig producing unit. She now takes immense pride in her work, knowing that the wigs she creates help restore the confidence of cancer patients who have lost their hair due to treatment. Since transitioning to wig making, Mrs. Malathi's health has improved significantly. No longer exposed to harmful tobacco dust, her chronic cough has disappeared. Her family life has also changed for the better; she earns a stable income, and her children are proud of her new work.

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