



Women's empowerment through the promotion of cultural entrepreneurship



Woman selling her products © MDG-F C&D Cambodia

Women saw an average overall increase in sales of 33%, or USD 50, which allows for the purchase of school supplies, medicine, salt, clothes, for their families.

BACKGROUND

Rural households in Cambodia are poor and rely heavily on agriculture, which is often not enough to feed a household all year round. Knowledge of entrepreneurial skills is limited in rural areas. Most handicraft producers are women, however women tend to be relatively shy when dealing with buyers and middlemen at the marketplace. The JP sought to build the capacity of women to generate income through traditional handicraft production.

PROCESS

The target population was selected based on a set of predefined criteria including handicraft tradition, willingness to learn, presence of local organizations, and special attention to local livelihood activities (such as avoiding disturbing harvesting periods). Capacity building through handicraft mentorship programmes, development of entrepreneurship skills, financial literacy, business planning, and rural marketing were designed following consultations with beneficiaries in order to evaluate their specific needs.

Outcomes

Capacity building programmes were developed to enable 547 local female producers to generate supplementary income by selling their handicrafts. As a result, sales are up on average by 33% (around USD 50), and women, as producers, own the revenue entirely. Job creation, income generation and women's empowerment have been targeted by training handicraft producers (mostly women) in handicraft production, entrepreneurship, financial literacy and rural marketing, thereby enabling them to produce, cost, market and sell their products from home, and lead community producer groups, instead of selling their labour force on large plantations owned by landlords. Beneficiaries have indicated that they would prefer to earn less and do their own handicraft activity at home, rather than work in other people's plantations, which often means leaving their household for two weeks at a time.

The training has strengthened the capacities of local communities, as women are now not only able to produce handicrafts but also to do their own pricing, marketing and sales. Women are now generating supplementary income, in turn strengthening their position in the family and earning them greater respect from their husbands. This has also brought about a reduction in domestic violence.

Women are now more prominent in their communities. They are leading producing groups, some of which have been officially registered within the Handicraft Association.

Furthermore, this success story demonstrates that development interventions can naturally strengthen the gender agenda, in that a gender-focused approach to a socio-economic goal proved to be efficient and successful.