

A Case of SAMARTH: Experimenting With Unique Empowerment Model

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ABSTRACT

This case describes the vision of a founding person who has spent 15 years in the fields and wanted a change in lives of women and girls who were having the second status within their own families. The result of his vision has shaped very well into a movement spread across in many villages discussed thoroughly in the case study. The case's objective is to review the unique empowerment model of SAMARTH through skill development program (free of cost sewing training and handholding) and find how it is developing the skill and confidence of the underprivileged girls and women. Ironically, even today, there is no targeted approach of connecting each and every family with some skills which can support their livelihoods. This experiment of doing the same in the SAMARTH intervention area has actually reflected great socio-economic results. This case shows how beneficiaries have developed a sense of ownership about the intervention and attained an initial level of entrepreneurship. The case is based upon observation, informal discussion with community members, and interviews of ten young women from the field area, and lots of reports made available from the agency's office. Indeed, SAMARTH experiment with unique empowerment model based on skill training and confidence-building has given rich dividends and also created a positive impact in lives of hundreds of marginalized and downtrodden girls and women.

Keywords: SAMARTH, Sewing, Livelihoods, Skill Development, Training and Development, Handholding, Community Development, Women Empowerment, Life Skills .

Adhyayan: A Journal of Management Sciences (2020); DOI: 10.21567/adhyayan.v10i1.8

INTRODUCTION

Society for Advancement of Resource-less by Training and Handholding (SAMARTH) is a not-for-profit organization working for its commitment to work with marginalized sections of the society and empowering them to attain a dignified, quality life. When it comes to unemployment and poverty women are the worst affected group. Without any income, they have to depend on men; the matter becomes worsen when men are also unemployed. SAMARTH always worked on the well-being and welfare of the women in the underprivileged section of society. It firmly believes that empowering women means empowering the whole family; if a woman is empowered enough, then her daughter will also possess the same traits. Rekha (2003) also defined women's capacity and well-being as an integral part of the empowerment process. According to the World Bank Report (2009), empowerment is defined as 'process to increase individuals' capacity to make choices and translate these choices into desired action'.

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How to cite his article: Dwivedi, R. (2020). A Case of SAMARTH: Experimenting With Unique Empowerment Model. *Adhyayan: A Journal of Management Sciences*, 10(1):51-58.

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None

Economic empowerment of women has become a major development priority. Providing opportunities to women to generate income is the need of the hour right now, and it directly affects lot of development indicators. Kabeer (1998) also stressed that empowerment is attained when a woman makes her own decision freely in all aspects in spite of religious and social limitations. Yadav, (2018) Social structure and social-cultural context should be kept in mind before making a process for empowerment. Sharif A (2009) expressed six dimensions of women empowerment,

such as literacy, participation of work, decision making, ownership, control over women reproduction, and participation in political activities. Sen and Batliwala (2000) articulated that women empowerment becomes an important agenda globally, intended to make them socially and economically stronger; according to them, women empowerment consists of two components: self-confidence and conscience, which help women overcome socio-cultural barriers. In the patriarchal society, women's empowerment can enable her personal space and other rights sighted by Malathi (2004). Malhotra et al. (2002) stated that empowerment is a concept which hacks social barriers like caste, communities, and class.

Over the years SAMARTH has provided employment to a vast number of women coming from financially crippling backgrounds. These women are now capable enough to earn their livelihoods and give themselves and their families a better living. Programs conducted by SAMARTH has created a sense of awareness amongst these women and introduced them to the issues that exist in our society, and also guided them as to how to deal with them. Repeated programs and visits in different backward localities and villages were entirely aimed towards the development of life skills of the women living in such places. Johnson (2015) also stressed upon that important ingredients for economic development are developing knowledge and skills related to the prevalent economic sphere. Women empowerment can be achieved when women can make choice on their own with full liberty, which relates to control over resources directly (Smith and Bryon, 2005). Women empowerment can be achieved by making them capable of taking social and economic decisions independently (Samant et al., 2019).

SAMARTH was registered a society in 2016 by its founder Dr. Pravesh Dwivedi with a mission to help and support vulnerable classes of society, SAMARTH's approach consist of establishing small scale interventions and providing research-driven support to community members. SAMARTH has worked with reputed institutions like the World Bank Research Institute, IFPRI, UCSF, LSHTM, University of Stanford, IGNOU and also with other grassroots organizations in various states of INDIA. SAMARTH's primary work has revolved around managing and coordinating large and medium level development projects, conducting research studies as well as organizing training and capacity building programs at grass roots level.

BIRTH OF SAMARTH

After 15 years of journey, Dr. Pravesh Dwivedi got motivated through a "specific incident" in his own words "it was 2015 I working with PHFI; I met with AWW (Aganwadi work) of Bakshi ka Talab block in Madiyaon village for office work. She told me regarding a community where the majority of downtrodden and marginalized girls were in need of money, it was a time of Diwali when Anganwadi Center approached me to provide some work to these girls so that they could celebrate Diwali nicely then I ask her what kind of work girls knew, she told me that they know painting and drawing. Then an idea came into my mind to engage girls in *diya* making initiative so that they might get some money through these ones. I provided them earthen diyas, wax and wicks as raw material. Girls have designed around 2000 diyas. I asked my friends and relatives to buy these *diy*as to help girls in celebrating Diwali properly and happily."

Consistently focusing upon the possible solutions towards helping these marginalized young women, he started consulting his peers and decides to establish some framework to support these village girls in accessible areas of the Lucknow region near his residential area permanently.

He felt the urgent need of sustainable livelihoods initiatives for marginalized girls, and during the in-depth discussion with girls, sewing was found the major area with lots of potentials. Team started working on the model keeping sustainability in mind and SAMARTH SEWING TRAINING PROGRAM (SSTP) came into force during the year 2018. Under the program, SAMARTH SEWING TRAINING CENTER (SSTC) was started in 4 villages. The first center was established in *Diguria* village with 40 girls enrolled in it and 32 dresses were taught to them, including designer dresses like a Gown, Lehengas, Koti, designer Blouse, etc.

He also discussed the challenges come forth during the establishment of the center. According to him, the community's wining faith was one of the major

Box 1.

"A girl named Soni from village Ghaila in SAMARTH work area claimed that earlier when she asked money from her parent they have to borrow it from others but now she is happily earning enough to bear small expenses on her own. Even she is supporting her parents also occasionally depending upon the income from the work sewing work orders.



challenges; he explained that “during the visit team came to know that earlier many other organizations came to the communities and collected 300 to 500 rs for registration, but they never live up to their promises”. A suitable place for the center was other challenge he took up during his interaction and added we establish a center on keeping the safety and security of girls, women, and trainers in mind.

An instance has been quoted by the SAMARTH volunteer which have given a feeling that life of girls have improved a bit and they are not dependent on others (refer box 1). SAMARTH undertakes different type of exposure visit and events in which beneficiaries feel connected with mainstream society and also they feel motivated. The vision of the SAMARTH is to empower the un-empowered section of the society and enable them to stand on their own.

According to the founder of SAMARTH, the vision envisaged is becoming a reality through the smooth functioning of the sewing training program, and all involved girls and women have started earning good money and feeling highly motivated to achieve success on their own. He underlines his philosophy behind the intervention as “Unki ghutan bhari zindagi mein ek khidki khol di taki unko saas lene ki jagah mil sake” (opening a window in their suffocated lives to give them a breathing space). He added that SAMARTH would strive hard to support and handhold women and girls to live with dignity and happiness.

In other words, this movement is gaining momentum and trainees are earning good amount of money by

which their standard of living has increased, also they have started investing towards their personal hygiene and other household expenses.

Case Methodology

The case uses a qualitative data method to show the perception of young girls and women about the SAMARTH initiatives at the enhancing livelihoods at the grassroots level. This research work uses the case based analysis as it was found appropriate for research. Archival data, which included a photograph, videos, reports, news clips, and reports have been used mostly provided by the Samarth office. Also, short interview of the founder of SAMARTH and selected beneficiaries have been conducted to record their views for further analysis.

SAMARTH SEWING TRAINING PROGRAM (SSTP)

SAMARTH has taken a pledge to stand with the beneficiaries and enable them to live a dignified life by providing sustainable livelihoods opportunity in their own habitation. The designed training program majorly based upon the skill sets which are predominantly appreciated and accepted in the village community, such as sewing and crafting. Under the SAMARTH Sewing Training Program, many centers in various villages and slums have been started following carefully planned designed protocols (Figure 1). Core features of the program are listed below:

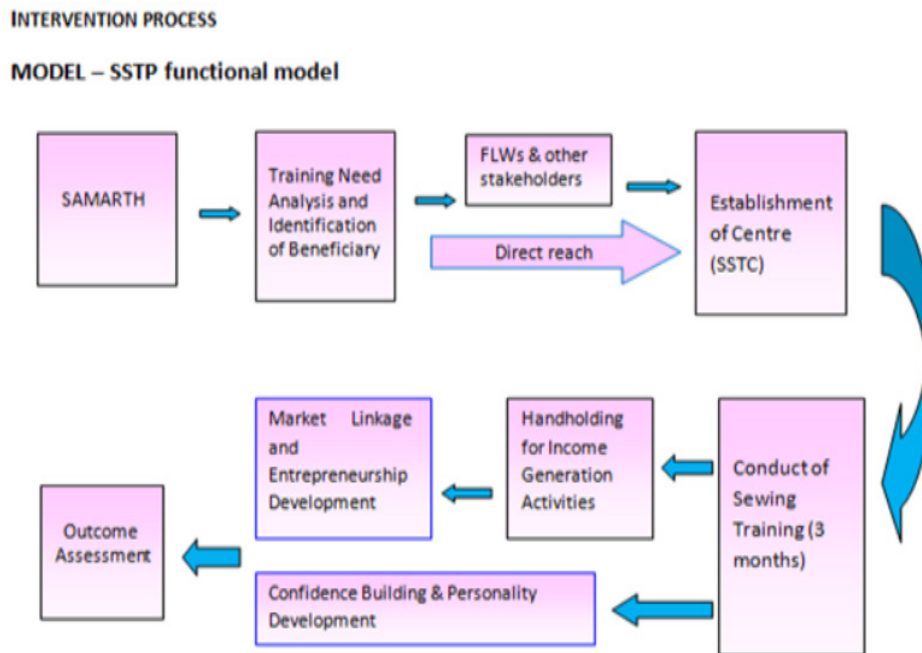


Figure 1: SSTP functional model

CORE FEATURES OF PROGRAM

- Duration, of course, will be 3 months.
- Training will be provided free of cost.
- No age criteria for trainee will be taken into consideration while admission.
- Trainee's number will be fixed at 25 in each batch, if number of beneficiaries exceeds (more than 25) then 2nd batch will be started in same center location.
- The trainer will be appointed on the fixed honorarium.
- Very detailed syllabus has been prepared covering 36 Type of clothes
- Each SSTC will be given 2 sewing machines, one or two mats (as per the requirement).
- Certificates will be given to all the beneficiaries who completed the training.

Training Need Analysis and Identification of Beneficiary

Team first approach many semi urban, slums and rural societies and voluntarily take a round of the community to conduct informal interaction sessions to explore the girl's and women's interest. During the discussion, women express their desire to learn vocational skills, which can supplement their household income. The majority of them give their consent to attend training programs based on tailoring and making designer dresses. Along the lines other village's visits were also conducted, and sewing training was first choice among all. Till date, many eligible girls and women have become a part of SSTP, and total 736 trainees have been trained before the Covid-19 pandemic (refer Figure 2).

FLWs and other Stakeholders

Team again visit the same community and enquired about the FLWs (ASHA and Aanganwadi Workers) of the village with core belief of taking them into confidence as they know the village and its culture very well. Team members interact with ASHAs and AWWs to better understand the village and receive important inputs

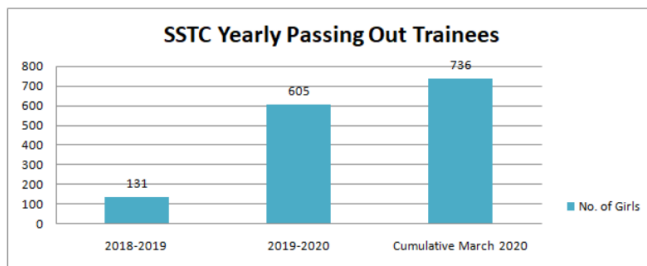


Figure 2: SSTC yearly passing out trainees

Sources: SAMARTH Annual report 2018-2019 & 2019- 2020

** Above data is showing the increasing rate of passing out of trainees per year.

from their side to get more and more girls to be enrolled for the training program. This strategy always paid rich dividends of having influential local person with your side and SAMARTH also got benefitted and ball started rolling. After establishing a good rapport with people and having 2 to 3 meetings at the community level, team convinced largely all involved to send their female members of family to the SSTC where they will be taught the required skills.

Direct Reach

In case the team does not find any FLWs to get linked with the community then the direct approach is taken; team does a household survey and meets each and every woman of the concerned community and prepare list of beneficiares. Many times team has to approach directly and build a relationship with the community in a few meetings.

Establishment of Center (SSTC)

After winning faith of the community and securing good strength of girls and young women, the team start searching suitable place for establishing the SSTC within the community by keeping safety and security of beneficiaries and trainer in mind. Team always selects the SSTC location, which is accessible to all.

Conduct of Sewing Training (3 months)

Most trainers have been appointed from the villages itself after completing the rigorous scrutiny but sometimes out of village trainer have also been given the responsibility to run the SSTCs. Trainers have clear instructions to follow the fixed syllabus decided after the detailed interaction with stakeholders. Training is divided in three phases discussed below in a detailed manner.

First phase

During the first phase, different aspects of basic sewing training are being taught to the trainees such as stitching by hands, cutting, measuring, drafting, marking, and handling sewing machines. With the perspective of instilling sense of ownership, all the trainees have been given the responsibility to take care of the center as well as its equipment such as sewing machine, mats, measuring tapes, pair of scissors and other basic machine tools.

Second phase

During the second phases, trainees almost got the hunch of basic sewing and started preparing beautiful dresses under the supervision of trainer. In due course



trainees are given lessons of making designer dresses also so that they can be easily linked with the market demand. Time to time, SAMARTH monitoring team visits

every center to check the ongoing training progress and collects feedback from each trainee about the conduct of the training program. These visits also boost the morale of trainees and motivate them to do better.



Third phases

During this phase, trainees are given revision sessions bases upon the earlier learning related with earlier phases. On the completion of 3 months training, SAMARTH monitoring team visits the every center to interact with beneficiaries and to listen their experience about the whole training. Trainees do share their happiness and satisfaction with the whole program and its vision. During the farewell organized at the end of the program, certificates are also distributed to all the eligible trainees. The monitoring team also does the follow-up of each center, which have completed the tenure of 3 months.

Handholding for Income Generation Activities

After completing the 3 months of sewing training, the team continuously contacted beneficiaries and tried hard to boost their morale. Even after completion of sewing training, many women and girls cannot manage time out from their household responsibilities, and some of the women have a casual approach towards their work after they completed the training to make them active team continuously motivates them to keep doing sewing to generate incomes. The team had displayed stitched clothes by beneficiaries in the exhibition, SSTC hundreds of women have started earning handsome amount of money by sewing clothes of others. Many girls and women are getting 500-3000 per month. Most of the girls started tailoring and generating incomes.

Market Linkage and Entrepreneurship Development

SAMARTH linked many beneficiaries to the market players and independent designers, and they started

‘समर्थ’ ने लड़कियों को आर्थिक रूप से बनाया समर्थ

लखनऊ, प्रयाग

जिले के बख्शी का तालाब ब्लॉक के भीली, पश्चिम गांव एवं चिन्हट के बसवानपुरवा, फन्खाबाद, पलहरी, रोशनबाद, समाधानपुर और नालहरपुर की लगभग 50 लड़कियां अपने घर पर मास्क बना रही हैं, इसके एवज में स्वयंसेवी संस्था उनकी आर्थिक मदद कर रही है। यह इस तरह से घर वालों की आर्थिक मदद कर रही है क्योंकि कोरोना संक्रमण को फैलाने से रोकने के लिए किये गए लॉकडाउन के चलते बहुत से परिवारों के आय का जरिया बंद हो चुका है। ऐसे में यह लड़कियां अपने परिवारों के लिए रोझनी की किरण बनकर सामने आई हैं। यह सब संभव हुआ है स्वयंसेवी संस्था 'समर्थ' के कारण। समर्थ संस्था विगत चार वर्षों से लखनऊ जिले में कार्यरत है। संस्था ने कोविड-19 के संक्रमण के दौरान विभिन्न विकास खण्डों के कुल आठ गांवों की 50 लड़कियों को



विश्रित करके मास्क बनाने के काम से जोड़ है। संस्था द्वारा इन लड़कियों को विभिन्न लोगों से संकेत करवाकर लगातार कार्य दिलवाकर मदद की जा रही है। इन किरोरियों में भी कई उत्साह है। इस काम को लेकर इससे उनके पास पैसे बच जाते हैं, जिससे आज यह अपने मांकेपन की इस कठिन परिस्थिति में मदद कर पा रही है। इसके साथ ही संस्था ने कोविड-19 से लड़ने के लिए आम जन को मास्क एवं राशन किट उपलब्ध कराने का भी अभियान चला रखा है। संस्था द्वारा लगभग 6000 मास्क बनवाकर

वितरित किया गया है। संस्था यह मास्क पुलिस कर्मियों एवं नगर निगम को भी दे रही ताकि हमारी सुरक्षा कर रहे कोरोना खेदा सुखित तरीके से कार्य कर सकें। संस्था द्वारा अब तक 678 परिवारों को राशन किट देकर भी गरीब परिवारों की मदद की गयी है। संस्था के निदेशक प्रवेश द्विवेदी ने बताया कि संस्था ने पिछले चार वर्षों में लगभग 1000 लड़कियों को निःशुल्क तीन महीने का सिलाई का प्रशिक्षण दिया है। कोविड-19 के इस मुश्किल दौर में लड़कियों को दिया गया प्रशिक्षण उनके लिए मददगार साबित हो रहा है। समाधानपुर गांव की 20 वर्षीय रोली बताती हैं कि लॉकडाउन के चलते हम घर पर ही रहते हैं। हमारे पिता खेती करते हैं। संस्था के द्वारा जो प्रशिक्षण दिया गया उसके बदीलत ही हम आज मास्क बनाने में सक्षम होने के साथ ही मुश्किल वक्त में परिवार की मदद कर पा रहे हैं।



getting orders for Kurtis and Potlis and got a handsome amount of money. During the lockdown period, many women has been involved in the mask-making initiative of SAMARTH and earned good support for their livelihoods. These masks have been appreciated by different government and non-government agencies.

Confidence Building & Personality Development

Exposure visits

Many exposure visits for beneficiaries were organized to build their confidence and mainstream them.

Public place and malls:

Beneficiaries were taken to events held in malls and public places like Cinepolis, SRS and many more where they got a chance to take part in the debates and other events to explore more. Many beneficiaries participated in public speeches and Nukkad nataks in various events like international women's day, women literacy day, earth day, environment day and etc. After those exposure visits immense positive change was visible in the behavior of girls as they look more confident.

Parks

Some girls and women had never visited to the urban parks, so team facilitated and taken them to the urban parks and fulfilled their wish for the sake of their happiness.

Old age home

Beneficiaries were taken to an old age home to make them understand that how people are becoming narrow-minded and leaving their parents. The visit's motive was to make them aware of the prevailing social problems and make them think that leaving parents or elderly people is disturbing.

Different Delegate Visit

The delegates from other international institutions visited SAMARTH field area and met the SSTP beneficiaries and interacted with them about their learning and experience, which has given a lot of motivation.

Participation in social events

SAMARTH team occasionally visits the field areas and takes interactive sessions on various topics like girl's education, menstrual hygiene and sanitation, oral hygiene, women and child nutrition, etc. During the session, girls were involved in certain activities to better understand the issues and groom them well with



Box 2.

After mask making training, girls and young women responded to the Covid-19 very well and prepared 12,150 masks at SSTC till date and continuing.

confidence. Through exposure visits & participation in social events, beneficiaries felt empowered and started sharing their experiences with the team.

COVID-19

Coronavirus is a pandemic that has frightened the world through its fast and rapid spread in human lives and caused lot of deaths. As soon as news started reaching the masses, team realized the urgent need to spread awareness about COVID-19, SAMARTH team started group-level discussion in its work areas and explained the symptoms of the disease and the prevention methods. Immediately mask-making training has been started, and within a few weeks, supplies of masks of different varieties were started to specific government agencies such as Municipal Corporation, Health Department, Police station, DM office etc.

OUTCOME ASSESSMENT

Increased Awareness level

Through this intervention, the awareness level has increased among girls and young women; frequent



meetings and awareness sessions made them realized their identities and strengths in all aspects of life. During a discussion, they were observed that they are making their decisions related to different dimensions of life, such as social, personal, and professional. Also, they have started thinking about their future beyond regular house chores.

Confidence Building

Through SSTP, the self-confidence of trainee has developed. Now they feel that they can live good life ahead because sewing skill is a skill which they can start within their home they don't need to go out to fetch jobs as they can start their own venture. Another viewpoint comes by them they can continue it after their marriage without any restriction.

Feeling of self-reliance

Trainees now possessed with a feeling of self-reliance, as they don't have to ask for money from their family members and their earning levels have gone up to give them freedom of choice. It has increased their purchasing power to a great extent as compared to earlier levels. Some trainees mentioned that they have started contributing money to their family in times of need, and they also expressed their happiness for being able to design and make their regular clothes similar to branded once what they were not able to purchase earlier.

Respect Incurred by the initiative:

Many trainees mentioned that their respect within the community has increased even their family members have started appreciating their work. Now, they are considered a role model for other girls.

Standard of living

It was observed during the discussion with trainees that their standard of living has improved; now they can afford good food and clothes.

Purchasing power has increased

The initiative has increased the trainees' purchasing power as they can buy more freely according to their needs. They started to purchase from the Local markets (haat) and also tried online shopping. Some beneficiaries have purchased sewing machines for earning more and fast.

SUMMARY

At the moment, all the above-discussed interventions and programs are being implemented, and SAMARTH

have got good and sometimes mixed results, but the journey is consolidating in a good direction. Experiment of developing the skills free of cost and giving beneficiaries a new introduction of themselves in the community. Indeed all girls and young women are moving further and building up their living standards by utilizing the earned skill set.

SAMARTH has been successful in providing life skills to a large number of marginalized and underprivileged girls and young women, and till now, 736 trainees have successfully completed the training under SSTP and join the next phase of entrepreneurship development at household levels.

Interventions during the period of covid-19 pandemic have also created a window of earning livelihoods for girls and women by involving them in mask making initiative. It can be seen that the number of trainee have increased drastically which gives a hunch that SAMARTH is determined and moving effectively towards its dream to empower 10,000 girls and young women. By the nature of its empowerment model SAMARTH needs resources and support, guidance and handholding of other likeminded stakeholders, government organizations, and funding agencies so that it can achieve its goal in totality.

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