

IDS RESEARCH SUMMARY

Research findings at a glance from the
Institute of Development Studies

IDS WORKING PAPER 336
OCTOBER 2009

Women's Livelihoods, Global Markets and Citizenship

This research analyses Project Shakti, a Hindustan Unilever Limited initiative (HUL), to answer questions on how the local marketing of goods, globally produced by multinational corporations (MNCs) affects rural women, their identities and their claims to rights. Does this economic model increase livelihood opportunities for the poor and hitherto excluded?

In the context of globalisation and global institutional frameworks, two dominant models have emerged: the active participation of governments engaging with global institutions, and the treatment of nation-state citizens as producers and consumers. This paper supports a different model, focusing on citizens rather than on the state, capital or transnational corporations.

Project Shakti promotes the income-generating capabilities of underprivileged rural women, by integrating them as local retail agents of HUL. In examining Project Shakti, the paper looks at the ways in which changing patterns of power and governance affect the meaning, experiences and practices of citizenship in a globalising world.

The authors provide a brief overview of some key theoretical debates that set the context for the research, before laying out background information on Project Shakti. The implications of this initiative are then discussed, and the paper concludes by highlighting points

for consideration regarding the potential to increase the inclusiveness of governance.

The authors offer a definition of what development is, and what it isn't, and then present three dominant dialogues on global citizenship. The civic republican dialogue emphasises citizenship as participation in decision-making processes, made manifest through citizen action. Global civil society is regarded as a way to make global processes visible and accountable; it is the 'people's voice'.

The authors consider the question of sustainable livelihoods and the role of self-help groups (SHGs) and micro-finance in achieving this in India. As stronger market linkages are built, the aim is that women's collectives have more opportunities to expand. This is heightened by large MNCs entering domestic markets, and also gives rise to notions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate governance.

Fieldwork was undertaken in Nalgonda and Medak districts in Andhra Pradesh (AP), where Project Shakti was initiated before it was scaled up to seven other states. The project was initiated by HUL in 2001, with the aim of creating income-generating capabilities for women, and to improve living standards through health and hygiene awareness.

Project Shakti has been implemented in collaboration with the state government, through NGOs, financial institutions and through individuals. The research asks what the implications are for women's livelihoods and their identities, and if following this model of marketing globally branded products provides a sustainable source of income. How do these women claim their rights in a global marketplace, and are these kinds of initiatives, when linked with the company's core business, beneficial to both parties?

“Global civil society is regarded as a way to make global processes visible and accountable; it is the 'people's voice'”

“ How do these women claim their rights in a global marketplace, and are these kinds of initiatives beneficial to both parties? ”

Key research findings:

- Profits for about half of the Shakti Amma (the women approached by HUL) have doubled. For some, profits have not been significant or have fallen.
- There was some opposition from village shopkeepers, and difficulties in selling HUL products where duplicate products existed at lower prices.
- Almost all the Shakti Amma felt happy to be a part of the project, enjoying earning money and the respect that came with this.
- However, an identity formation among the Shakti Amma as a collective engaging with global economic processes has neither been promoted nor developed.
- The idea of credit was not encouraged by the HUL either for the Shakti Amma or their clients. Delivery of stock and HUL's retailing process was also problematic.
- Despite Project Shakti's CSR identity, HUL is not really in a position of accountability to the other stakeholders (Government of AP, NGOs or Shakti Amma).

Despite increased income and better social standing, the Shakti Amma continue to view their identity locally, and are limited in their capacity as actively engaged global citizens. SHGs have been somewhat undermined by Project Shakti, and to some extent, it has not tackled gender inequalities. Opportunities were missed by civil society actors in this project, to increase engagement of Shakti Amma with state and market actors.

MNCs need to be regulated by the state through government policies, and NGOs need to be more discerning about the partnerships they form with MNCs, particularly when MNCs promote themselves as being philanthropic entities.

Key policy lessons / implications of research

- NGOs formerly involved in Project Shakti should work collectively to influence HUL in reforming project operations.
- NGOs need to be more involved in negotiating processes at the outset.
- Rather than taking MNCs' philanthropic objectives at face value, the state needs to acknowledge civil society's concerns about citizens' welfare.
- Shakti Amma need to be better represented and treated equally in decision-making processes.
- Although CSR has its positive aspects, it is not sufficient alone to bring about societal change.
- Project Shakti would benefit from a better feedback mechanism to generate a collective response to shared problems.

Credits

Julie Thekkudan¹ and Rajesh Tandon², 'Women's Livelihoods, Global Markets and Citizenship', Research Summary of Working Paper 336, October 2009

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDS or any of the other institutions involved.

Readers are encouraged to quote or reproduce material from issues of IDS Working Papers in their own publications. In return, IDS requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication.

The full text of this IDS Working Paper is available from the IDS Bookshop:
www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop

¹ Julie Thekkudan currently works for the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India. She is a political scientist by training and received her doctorate from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi in the field of gender and law. A recent practitioner of participatory research and development, she has written on issues of gender in development. Her current themes of interest are social accountability and participatory governance.

² Rajesh Tandon is an internationally acclaimed practitioner of participatory research and development. He founded PRIA, a voluntary organisation providing support to grassroots initiatives in South Asia, twenty-six years ago, and has been its Chief Functionary since 1982. A PhD from Case Western Reserve University, he has specialised in social and organisational change. He has contributed to the evolution of new thinking and methodologies in people-centred development through his research, practice and writings. His studies, writings and training programmes have helped to advance the concept of strengthening civil society and reforming governing institutions for citizen participation worldwide.