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A STUDY OF CHANGE IN LIVES OF SHAKTI AMMAS IN SELECT DISTRICTS: INFLUENCE OF HUL PROJECT SHAKTI

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For empowering the rural poor the corporate enterprise like HUL approximates itself to the use of bottom of the pyramid marketing. This paper focuses mainly upon the working of this model called project shakti, its pre requisites & problems and its operational view & How is the project shakti influences and changes the life styles of shakti ammas in select dist.

Keywords: Project shakti, Operational view, Life style changes, Influence of HUL

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, a detailed presentation on Project Shakti covering details of its birth, operation and benefits to participants is made.

HUL has been proactively engaged in rural development since 1976 with the initiation of the Integrated Rural Development Program in the Etah district of Uttar Pradesh, in tandem with the company's dairy operations. This program now covers 500 villages in the district. Subsequently, the factories that HUL continued establishing in less-developed regions of the country have been engaged in similar programs in adjacent villages.

VISION

The Grameen bank of Bangladesh did pioneering work on Shakti - empowering women. Taking cue from this model study, the NGOs and government

agencies in India have worked to establish Self Help Groups (SHG) for rural women in villages and arrange micro credit to them. A crucial lesson learnt was that rural uplift depended not on successful infusion of credit, but on its guided usage for better investment opportunities. This is where HUL's Project Shakti is playing a role in creating such profitable micro enterprise opportunities for rural women.

OBJECTIVES OF HUL

The objective of Project Shakti is to create income generating capabilities for underprivileged rural women, by providing a sustainable micro enterprise opportunity, and to improve rural living standards through health and hygiene awareness. Under the project, HUL offers a range of mass-market products to the SHGs, which are relevant to rural customers.

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Benefits

The benefits of Project Shakti to the rural women are significant.

Business opportunity

Skill development

Income generation.

Improved status

Better quality of life

This paper focuses upon the views and working of Sakthi entrepreneurs on various aspects like profile of respondents, occupation, income, number of villages covered, etc.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has following objectives:

- To explain the formation and functioning of Project Shakti of HUL.
- To analyse the socio-economic benefits of the working of Project Shakti on Shakti Ammas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The different aspects of the methodology adopted by the study are explained in detail in the following lines.

Area of Study

In order to fulfill the objectives proposed, field investigation has been undertaken in the study area comprising the Chittoor and Anantapur districts, both of which together fall under Southern Andhra Pradesh. These Rayalaseema Districts are bounded on the North by Kadapa, Potti Sramulu-Nellore and Kurnool districts of Andhra Pradesh, and on the East, West and South by Karnataka and Tamil Nadu States respectively

Data Sources

The data for the study was drawn from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are the members of Project Shakti group of Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) and the Rural Sales Promoters of the company. The secondary sources are the print and electronic media. Different write-ups in journals, magazines, news papers, etc., constitute the print media sources.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The questionnaire was designed to obtain information on the role of SEs as distributors of HUL. The aspects covered in the questionnaire come under the following six categories of data: Demographic-socioeconomic data, Shakti dealership, HUL initiatives, Marketing efforts, business results, and impact on personal life. Validity of the SE's responses is established by cross checking with the respondent on a later date either by oral or telephone conversation in a casual chat. This "recall method" helped in getting clarifications and reaffirmations of the key data. Another source of validation is the local Rural Sales Promoter of the company.

SAMPLE

The convenient sampling method has been adopted and the samples of the study are chosen based on the conveyance facility to that SE point. This is because of the reason that the SE points are very remote in nature. The final sample drawn constituted 60 from Chittoor district and 153 from Anantapur district, representing 60% and 51% in the total of SE points in the districts respectively. Thus a total 213 SE points are included in the study.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data were converted to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences: version 11.0: 1999) for statistical analysis. Data obtained from the responses to questionnaire are tabulated and analysed using descriptive statistics like percentages, means and standard deviations.

In this paper, the data obtained by conducting survey of opinions of 213 Shakti Ammas (60 from Chittoor district and 153 from Anantapur district) re analyzed and presented to understand the working of Shakti Ammas and the benefits they have got from their enterprise.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of all the respondents (the combined samples of SEs from Chittoor and Anantapur districts).

Age

The sample is dominated by elders of above 30 years. A good majority of them (75.2%) are in the 30-45 years category. Only 8.4% of them are in the below 30 years age group and 16.4 % of them are in the above 46 years age group.

Education

Most of the Shakti Entrepreneurs (SEs) are reasonably educated. Only 11.7% are in the primary educated group. About 56.8% of them had "upper primary" school education. About 26.8% are in the high school educated category and 4.7% had college education.

Marital Status

It is found that most of the SEs (96.7%) are married. Only a meager 3.3% are unmarried.

Family Size

The respondent SEs are characterised by normal family size. As against the expected norm of 6 members consisting of husband and wife with 2 parents and 2 children, a good majority of the respondent SEs (77%) have family size of 3-5. Out of the remaining 23% of the respondents, about 6.1% have small families with less than 3 members. Only 16.9% of the respondents have large families of 6-9 members.

PREVIOUS OCCUPATION

The information about the occupations of Shakti Ammas before taking up the Shakti dealership is given in Table 2. They are inquired to know whether they have more than one occupation. About 28.6% of the respondents have no occupation. Of the remaining 71.4% of them, about half (37.1%) have single occupation. The remaining 34.3% have two occupations. Agro based occupations dominated in both the categories.

HUSBAND'S OCCUPATION

What kind of occupation do their husbands have? Table 3 shows the details. The first observation is that all of them are engaged in one or more occupations. About 53.8% of them have single occupation and the remaining 46% of them have two occupations. The interesting point is most of them are engaged in business oriented occupations. In view of this, a natural inquiry point that arises is: whether the husbands were helpful to them in their venture?

INCOME

What is the economic position of the Shakti entrepreneurs? The SEs' average monthly household income is analysed in terms of three groups: up to Rs. 5,000, Rs. 5,000-10,000 and

Factor	Categories	F	%
Age (Years)	< 30	18	8.4
	31-35	31	14.6
	36 -40	99	46.5
	41 – 45	30	14.1
	Above 46	35	16.4
Education	Primary	25	11.7
	Upper primary	121	56.8
	High school	57	26.8
	Collegiate	10	4.7
Marital status	Yes	206	96.7
	No	7	3.3
Family size	< 3	13	6.1
	3 – 5	164	77.0
	6 – 9	36	16.9

Type	Occupation	F	%
No Single	Total	61	28.6
	Agro based	43	20.2
	Skill oriented	3	1.4
	Business related	33	15.5
	Total	79	37.1
Multiple	Both Agro based and skill oriented	21	9.9
	Both Agro based and business oriented	23	10.8
	Both Skill oriented and business oriented	26	12.2
	Agro, skill or business oriented.	3	1.4
	Total	73	34.3

>10,000. Table 4 shows that the latter two groups together comprise the highest proportion (93%), the rest being represented by the SEs of up to Rs. 5,000 category (7%).

The other income components comprising of consumption, savings and reinvestment levels of the different income groups are analysed in Table 5. From this table, it is evident that income from Shakti is as at 30-40% for many of the respondents and it is sufficient for their consumption purposes.

VILLAGES AND RETAILERS

The sample represents SE points from villages with different population sizes. The villages, where the SE points of our concern are located, are shown in Table 6. The SE villages with a

population of 1,000-2,000 are more being 46.94% in the total sample. Next to this category come the proportions of the SE villages with population categories of 2,000-3,000 (32.86%), <1,000 (17.37%) and >3,000 (2.81%).

In the same table, the number of retailers operating is given. The number of retailers in the villages with a population of <1,000 is <4, 1,000-2,000 is 4-8, 2,000-3,000 is 8-12 and >3,000 is 12-16. Though the retailers are more in number, there is a need for the introduction of SE in that village because of various reasons like:

Table 3: Occupation of Husbands of SEs (N=213)

Type	Occupation	F	%
Single	Agro based	20	9.2
	Skill oriented	13	6.1
	Business related	82	38.5
	Total	115	53.8
Multiple	Both Agro based and skill oriented	30	14.1
	Both Agro based and business oriented	56	26.3
	Both Skill oriented and business oriented	6	2.8
	Business and others	6	2.8
	Total	118	46.0

Table 4: Average Monthly Household Income (N=213)

S. No	Amount (Rs)	F	%
1.	Up to .5000	17	7.0
2.	5001-10000	99	46.5
3.	> 10000	99	46.5
Total	213	100.0	

Table 5: Average Monthly Household Income (N=213)

S. No	Amount (Rs)	Income from Shakti	Income from other sources	Consumption	Education expenditure
1.	Up to 5000	<2000	<3000	<2000	1001-2000
2.	5001-10000	2000-3000	3000-5000	2001-4000	1001-2000
3.	> 10000	>3000	5001-10000	2001-4000	1001-2000

- The retailers may not have all types of products in various ranges.
- The quality and the price ranges of the products required by the consumers may not be present.
- Promotional offers given by the HUL to the SEs are not offered to the retailers even.
- The villagers mostly look for the reputed company products as well as the quantities of products offered in sachets and other ranges.

EXPERIENCE AS SES

Since how long the respondent SEs are with the Project Shakti? Table 7 shows the details. The recent entrants are small in number. About 10.3% of the respondents are associated with Project Shakti recently and have not gained even one year experience. The remaining 89.7% have more than

one year experience. Those with 1-2 years of experience constituted 43.2% and those with more than 2 years of experience represented 46.5% of the total sample.

REASONS FOR BECOMING SES

Why have the village women become Shakti Entrepreneurs? The following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: Women have become Shakti Entrepreneurs due to the influence of programme benefits

The reasons given by Shakti Entrepreneurs are listed in Table 8. ‘Program benefits’ topped the list with 69.5% of the respondents mentioning it as the single reason and another 29.1 % mentioning it along with their family background.

Table 6: Population of the SE Village and No. of Retailers (N = 213)

S. No.	Population	F	%	Number of retailers
1.	< 1,000	37	17.37	<4
2.	1,000-2,000	100	46.94	4-8
3.	2,001-3,000	70	32.86	8-12
4.	> 3,000	6	2.81	12-16

S. No	Duration	F	%
1.	Less than one year	22	10.3
3.	1-2 years	92	43.2
5.	> 2 years	99	46.5

'Family background' and 'community pressure' are mentioned individually by a negligible proportion of SEs. As such the hypothesis is proved right. Women have become Shakti Entrepreneurs convinced by programme benefits.

INITIAL INVESTMENT AND SOURCES OF FUNDS

Table 9 shows the initial investment made by the SEs on the Shakti project. As a matter of fact every Shakti Entrepreneur has to make an initial investment of Rs. 10,000. When such investment cannot be made, the Rural Sales Promoter (RSP) may allow one week credit to the Shakti Entrepreneurs and initiate them into the business. Table 9 shows that 70.4% of the women have invested Rs.10,000. About 27.7 % of the respondent SEs could invest between Rs 5,000-

10,000. Those who could not pool up even Rs. 5,000 are a small minority being 1.9%. It shows that the programme has reached those who could not invest Rs. 10,000 as stipulated. It can also be observed that most of the respondent SEs (53.1%) have invested from their own funds. The remaining 46.9% have availed loans from banks and SHGs. While 30% of them availed loans from SHGs, the remaining 17% obtained bank loans for starting their business.

HUL SELECTION AND TRAINING INITIATIVES

Two factors appear to have influenced selection of women for Shakti Project. According to Table 10, they are: membership in SHG in the case of almost all the respondents. Education along with memberships in SHG is found to be the selection

S. No	Reason	F	%	Rank
1.	Programme benefits	148	69.5	1
2.	Family background	2	0.9	3
3.	Community pressure	1	0.5	4
4.	Both Programme benefits and family background	62	29.1	2

criterion in the case of 30.9% of the SEs. Hence it can be said that membership in SHG is the prime criterion for selection. The table further indicates that HUL did not extend any loan to the SEs. While training is said to be a value addition that HUL provides to selected members, about 19.7% of the respondent SEs have reported that they did not receive any training. However, the remaining 80.3% had received training. As per the charter, HUL officials have to conduct meetings. It is reported by 94.8% of the respondent SEs that meetings are held yearly. Very few reported about quarterly and half yearly meetings. How about visits by HUL officials? According to the guidelines, RSPs have to visit SEs and help them in sales. All the SEs agreed that HUL officials visit them. However, differences of opinion are observed in the case of frequency of visits. About 55.9% of the respondents reported “once in fortnight” visits. According to 37.6% of the respondents, ‘once in a month’ is common. In the case of 6.6 % of them, it is “once in 3 or 6 months”.

ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

It is proposed to find out the attendance of SEs at

the meetings held by the company. Table 11 shows attendance particulars. About 41% of the respondents attend meetings “always” without fail. Among the remaining, 30% attend most of the times. Thus about 71% of the respondents take meetings seriously and attend. About 29% of the respondents do not attend meetings as expected. There are about 10.8% of the SEs who never attend meetings, while 18.3% of them attend such meetings sometimes.

REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING MEETINGS

The SEs who never attended the HUL meetings were asked to specify the reasons for their inability to do so during the course of interview with them. The SEs advanced 5 types of reasons. The main reason is that the meetings are held at far off places. This reason was advanced by 52.2% of the 23 respondents who never attended the meetings. The other reasons are: ‘nothing significance take place’ (26.1%) and ‘no time to attend meetings’ (17.4%).

Table 9: Initial investment (N=213)

S. No	Amount (Rs)	F	%
Investment	Up to 5,000	4	1.9
	5,001-10,000	59	27.7
	> 10,000	150	70.4
Sources	Own funds	113	53.1
	Bank loan	36	16.9
	SHG loan	64	30.0

Table 10: Selection and Support by HUL (N=213)

Aspect	Response category	F	%
Selection	My membership in SHG	146	68.5
	My education background	1	0.5
	Both membership in SHG and education	66	30.9
Loan	Yes	0	0
	No	213	100.0
Training	Yes	171	80.3
	No	42	19.7
Frequency of meetings	Quarterly	5	2.3
	Half yearly	6	2.8
	Yearly	202	94.8
Visit by HUL officials	Once in fortnight	119	55.9
	Once in month	80	37.6
	Once in three months	8	3.8
	Once in six months	6	2.8

MARKETING EFFORTS

What kind of support HUL is giving to SEs? How do the SEs go about in selling the products? A hypothesis is stated in this context.

H2: Awareness and acceptance of HUL products are high among consumers.

BRAND ACCEPTANCE

The starting point for marketing is consumer. It is

for this reason that the perceptions of consumers about HUL products is inquired on a 5-point scale of agreement. The positive statements that 'HUL products are acceptable to consumers' and 'HUL is very much known to consumers' are accepted by the respondents. The mean values on agreement scale are in the range of 4 indicating agreement. Accordingly, it can be said that the second hypothesis is proved right.

S. No.	Attendance	F	%	Rank
1.	Always	87	40.8	1
2.	Mostly	64	30.0	2
3.	Sometimes	39	18.3	3
4.	Never	23	10.8	4

S. No.	Reasons	F	%
1	No time to attend the meetings	4	17.4
2	Meetings are held at inconvenient time	1	4.3
3	Meetings are convened at far off places	12	52.2
4	Nothing significance take place in the meetings	5	26.1

Disagreement is evident in the case of negative statements as shown by their lower mean values being less than 3.0 as in Table 13.

- HUL products are considered more expensive (2.25)
- Some products of HUL are not suited to water (1.00)
- Consumers prefer substitutes of HUL products (2.34).

From these findings, it is obvious that HUL products are acceptable to consumers both quality-wise and price-wise.

MODES OF SELLING

The modes of selling of the HUL products by

Shakti dealers is shown in Table 14. The predominant single mode of selling followed by the SEs is “door to door and sale at own house” (41%). An equal proportion of them (42%) carry on by multi-mode sales (door-to-door, retail outlets, and own house). The remaining respondents (16.9%) adopt 1 or more of any of the modes. From the table, it can be observed that 87.7% of the respondents go door-to-door and 51.7% sell at own house and 51.5% sell to retail outlets.

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS COVERED

The number of households covered by the SEs during a day is shown in Table 15. More than 50% of the SEs visit more than 60 houses a day. About

Table 13: Level of acceptance about HUL products (N=213)

S. No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	HUL is very much known to consumers.	3.99	0.505
2	HUL products are considered more expensive	2.25	0.615
3	Some products of HUL are not suited to water	1.00	0.00
4	Consumers prefer substitutes of HUL products.	2.34	1.046
5	HUL products are acceptable to consumers.	4.03	0.835

Note: Scale: 5-Strongly agree. 1-Strongly disagree.

Table 14: Modes of selling by Shakti dealers (N=213)

S. No.	Mode	F	%
1.	Door to door	5	2.3
2.	Sale at own house	11	5.2
3.	Retail outlets	4	1.9
4.	Door to door and sale at own house	88	41.3
5.	Door to door and retail outlets	5	2.3
6.	Sale at own house and retail outlets	11	5.2
7.	Door to door Sale, at own house and retail outlets	89	41.8

39.7% of the SEs visit 46-60 houses. Evidently, most of the SEs go round the villages and cover more than 40 villages.

ADVERTISING BY HUL

Table 16 portrays advertising of HUL products through different media: visual, print, electronic, etc. The SEs were asked to identify the media

type used by HUL to advertise the products. All of them agreed that HUL uses all the media. The media recalled by many are: Electronic media, hoardings and wall paintings.

INCENTIVES OFFERED TO SES BY HUL

Table 17 shows that the bulk of the SEs (89%)

Table 15: Number of households covered (N=213)

S. No.	Number of Houses	F	%
1.	< 15	3	1.4
2.	16 - 30	6	2.8
3.	31 - 45	13	6.1
4.	46 - 60	83	39.0
5.	> 60	108	50.7

responded saying that the incentives offered to them by the company were non-monetary in nature. A small proportion of SEs (8.0%) however said that the company incentives received by them were both monetary and non-monetary types. Very few of them (3.3%) expressed that they had received only monetary incentives from the company. It is clear from the analysis that the company generally offered non-monetary incentives to the Shakti dealers.

BUSINESS RESULTS

What is the turnover of the Shakti ammas? Table 18 provides information on turnover of Shakti ammas' enterprises. The business is good for many of the Shakti ammas. About 76.1% of them have achieved a turnover of more than Rs. 10,000. Only 22.5% of the SEs could the turnover of around Rs. 5,000-10,000.

Table 16: Advertising of HUL Products (N=213)

S. No.	Media	F	%
1	Electronic Media	4	1.87
2	Hoardings	7	3.28
3	Wall paintings	8	3.75
4	Electronic Media & Hoardings	24	11.2
5	Electronic Media & Wall paintings	21	9.8
6	Hoardings & Wall paintings	17	7.98
7	All	132	61.97

S. No.	Types of incentives	F	%	Rank
1.	Monetary incentives	7	3.3	3
2.	Non-monetary incentives	189	88.7	1
3.	Both	17	8.0	2

MAJOR FINDINGS

The main points emerging from the study are summarized as under:

Rural distribution initiatives: The current trend is starting malls in rural areas. ITC–e-Choupal with Choupal Sagar, DCM's Hariayali Kisan Bazaar... Among the Private-people participation model two significant experiments are ITC e-Choupal and Project Shakti of HUL.

Birth of project Shakti: HUL has been proactively engaged in rural development since 1976 with the initiation of the Integrated Rural Development Program in the Etah district of Uttar Pradesh.

The Grameen bank of Bangladesh did pioneering work on Shakti -empowering women. Taking cue from this model study, HUL's Project Shakti is conceived. The objective of Project Shakti is to create income-generating capabilities

for underprivileged rural women, by providing a sustainable micro enterprise opportunity - HUL offers a range of mass-market products to the SHGs, which are relevant to rural customers. The model was piloted in the year 2000 in 50 villages of Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh.

In order to impact both livelihood opportunities and living standards of rural communities 'i-Shakti' - an IT-based rural information service has been developed. Another program, Shakti Vani enables the appointment of women as Pracharinis of social causes.

Structure: The HUL constituted a number of administrative areas ranging from 5-6 in each of the 15 states of the country where the project Shakti is in operation. Each area comprises 4-5 districts headed by an Area Sales Manager (ASM) under whom work a Sales Officer (SO), Territory Sales Incharge (TSI), Divisional Rural Sales

S. No.	Categories	F	%
1.	Upto Rs .5,000	3	1.4
2.	5,001-10,000	48	22.5
3.	> 10,000	162	76.1

Promoters (DRSP), and Rural Sales Promoters (RSPs) / Junior Rural Sales Promoters (JRSPs).

Selection of Shakti entrepreneurs: The opportunity to obtain business dealership of the HUL without any initial deposit, and a profit of 6-11% over the business investment of the group (wholesale, retail business benefit – 3%) is given to women in rural areas provided they are members of Self Help Groups and be able to make an initial investment of at least Rs. 10,000. Only uncovered villages will be approached for choosing a person for appointment as SE.

Training and rewards: The new SEs are given training on product awareness (brand booklet), pricing (RD invoice) margin (price sheet), retail (sales Rs. 2000) and home (Rs. 500). A Rural Sale Promoter (RSP) has to explain about the product and different price ranges for each product as also its entry in the invoice. At the same time he has to show the price sheet to the SE and demonstrate about the margin on each of the home/retail sales. Further, he has to take her to all the retail outlets and complete the sales for Rs. 2,000. Also he has to take her to 10 homes known to him, introduce them to her and complete the sales for Rs. 500.

Functioning of SEs: The SEs are categorised into four groups: New recruits, Silver SEs, Gold SEs and Diamond SEs. . While new recruits depend on RSP, the other three will be on their own and cover more villages and make sales above Rs. 8,000. They make sales at their home (SE point) or by visiting households and retail outlets.

Promotion events: The key activation programs expected to be undertaken are: Group meetings, Shakti day, Brand activation, Home-to-home drive and Medical camps.

How is the project working?

Data is obtained on the working of project Shakti from 213 respondents. Many of them are above 30 years, educated, married and have families of 3-5 members. They have one or two occupations, mostly agro based and their husbands are also engaged in one or more occupations. Their average monthly household income is above Rs. 5,000. They are selected from villages with a population of 1,000-3,000. Most of them are having more than one year experience.

Selection and operations: The respondent SEs reported that they chose to be SEs by understanding 'Program benefits' and motivated by 'Family background'. In most of the cases the initial investment is Rs. 10,000 as required. There are about 29.6% of SEs who invested less and given time to raise investment funds. The factors that influenced their selection were: membership in SHG and education. About 59% of SEs do not attend meetings regularly. The reasons for absenting are: meetings are convened at far off places and nothing of significance takes place at the meetings.

Most of the SEs agreed that HUL products have market acceptance. The modes of selling are door to door and sale at own house. For some, retail outlets are another choice. More than 50% of the SEs visit more than 60 houses a day. SEs are aware that HUL products are advertised through different media: visual, print, electronic, etc. SEs reported that they receive in most of the cases non-monetary incentives.

The business is good for many of the Shakti ammas. 76.1% of them have achieved a turnover of more than Rs. 10,000. 22.5% of them could make it around Rs. 5,000-10,000.

DISCUSSION

Problems and Actions:

The problems raised by SEs are brought for discussion. They are

- (i) Loan on credit is not given by HUL,
- (ii) Delays in delivery of stock; and
- (iii) Brands which are asked for are not supplied.

Loan on credit: It is not given to the SEs because, the company is taking several steps to help SEs receive stocks in time and make sales at the earliest. The facilitators are:

- The stocks are delivered to the SE at the door point
- The transportation costs are incurred by the company to move the stocks from the distribution agency to the SE point.
- The SE is given some time to pay the amount on stocks.
- Some schemes are offered especially to the SEs on the products by the company.
- Extra percentage of commission is given to the SE when compared to the retailer.
- Promotional schemes are also offered to the consumers who purchase products from SEs so that the respective SE may have increased sales compared to the retailer.
- The products or stocks which are not sold may be returned to the respective agencies.

Delivery delays: They are minimum. The process of sending the stocks to the SE point goes like this: "The Permanent Journey Plan (PJP) of RSP is planned in such a way that the dates of PJP coincide with the dates of visits of stock delivery vehicles from the distribution agency in

the route of those SE points covered in PJP of the RSP'.

The stock delivery is delayed in certain cases as follows:

- The absence of the particular SE at the SE point when the stock delivery vehicle arrives at the point. Her absence may be due to personal reasons or she may be out for door-to-door sales. SE point is not a retail outlet where we can expect the retailer to be present in the shop from morning till night.
- When the SE gives an order after the vehicle has departed/left station or just the next day after the vehicle has already covered the route on the previous day, the company cannot respond as it will become expensive.
- When RSPs change, delays may take place. It takes time for the newly appointed RSP to cope with the situation.

Brands not supplied: The brands asked for, by the SEs are not supplied due to two reasons: the non-availability of the stocks at the factory itself, or because of orders from other units for more stocks.

CONCLUSION

- Rural marketing needs innovative approaches to reach the remote villages and bottom of the pyramid consumers. The experiments of HUL and ITC-e-Choupal are commendable. The empowerment of village women as rural distributors in project Shakti make it a unique experiment.
- The project took off very well and is working in many areas successfully as per the reports. The present study found its working in two districts: Chittoor and Anantapur and found that

the project is doing well.

- The Project Shakti is, therefore, not only conceptually sound but also operational. However, there are some problems to be sorted out to make it more effective.

SUGGESTIONS

Loan Facility

Certain members of the SEs seem to be enthusiastic in expanding their business. But they do not possess the matching finances. Hence they deserve to be encouraged by providing appropriate credit facility in the purchase of the products, after a careful examination of their financial capabilities and resources as well as track record in the sale of products. Such select SEs may be placed under the strict vigilance, supervision and responsibility of the respective RSPs.

Reviving Inactive Units

A number of SE points are reported to be not so active as expected by the company. Appropriate immediate steps may be initiated to tide over the situation and to make them functional.

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