

FINISH – Assessing its impact: Is FINISH income generating? Does it empower women? Create Awareness and enhance knowledge?

By Britta Augsburg (19.02.2010 – while waiting at Delhi airport for a flight back to London after having been three weeks in India for set-up of baseline surveys in Gwalior and Orissa)

The United Nations University (UNU/Merit) together with the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS, UK) is responsible for the evaluation of the programme interventions; programme partners believe that the impact of sanitation on various levels including health, income, and general well being needs to be demonstrated at local levels and on a sufficient scale. For example, generally the rural poor do not yet regard sanitation as an income generating activity. Though, if their sanitation situation improves, their (sanitation related) health expenditures should decline and their free disposable income will increase. Such hypothesis will be tested through a rigorous impact evaluation study.

Over the last few months the implementation of this evaluation study started: Three baseline household surveys were set-up and are currently undertaken. In November 2009 a survey team was trained in Tamil Nadu and started data collection beginning of December, in February, another team underwent training in Gwalior and will start the fieldwork in tomorrow (20.2.2010) and the last day of training for the Orissa-team will start tomorrow. These teams of 40-60 students/recent graduates/teachers/... have to interview 2,000 households each, collecting extensive information on household composition, education, economic activities, income sources, assets, sanitation facilities, behaviour and knowledge; in addition, the main women of the household is interviewed separately; stool, and blood tests are undertaken, anthropological measures taken and finally, village/slum information is collected.

In about a year's time, the same households will be interviewed again, by then, half of them will be residing in FINISH implementation areas (and potentially beneficiaries of the programme) and the other half will not (yet). So, we will then be able to compare the two groups over time and assess the impact of the project.

But, let's see what we can say up to now with respect to the questions raised in the title of this brief update – concentrating not on the direct effect but let's call them 'by-products' of FINISH:

Is "FINISH" income generating?

Through the survey work, about 150 people have been and are employed for a period of approximately 2.5-3 months. Most of these, have not earned any income previously (or less), so that we can safely say that yes, FINISH created income. The caveat would be: it is a short-term employment so not fulfilling the goal of sustainability. Nevertheless, all successful participants will receive a certificate for their work which is believed to have great value for them when entering the job market. In addition, they learned new skills and received knowledge that should be beneficial in their future.



The survey team in Gwalior



Some of the investigators in Tamil Nadu

Does “FINISH” empower women?

In Tamil Nadu, as well as Gwalior, the training for interviewers was a 6-day residential training. Especially in Gwalior, the fact that it was residential raised some issues. In the words of Dr.S.K.Singh: “It [the residential training] had very significant change in attitude and knowledge of the participants. It was not easy for several girls to stay away from home since their parents did not find it acceptable. But later most girls stayed and only one girl was exempted from staying overnight. From the feedback forms it emerged to be a very positive and informative experience.”

For most of these girls it had been the first time in their life that they stayed away from home for several days.



Heating water for the shower – training Gwalior



Conducting practise interview in the field (TN)

Does “FINISH” create awareness/enhance knowledge?

The previous paragraph gives already evidence that the answer to this question can be - at least when looking at the impact of the FINISH evaluation – answered with ‘yes’. Another anecdote gives further indication: In Tamil Nadu, as well as in Orissa, we collaborate with academic institutions to get their students involved. In Tamil Nadu, this is female students from the Department of Women Studies, Bharathidasan University, Trichy (under Dr. N.Manimekalai) and in Orissa the students from Affinity Business school (our contact there being Mr Barada).

As part of the training, the team was given sessions on different sanitation systems, how they need to be installed to be safe and the like... This was done so that they have an understanding of the topic since many questions in the questionnaire are of course related to sanitation facilities. So, in order to be able to collect the right information (for example, which type of toilet a household has) they needed to be trained on this. After the session in Bhubaneswar, the students asked to get more training on the issue since they found it extremely interesting. So, now the idea is to grant their wish and hence give business students (imagine students who pay lots of money for their education, wear ties and suits, are usually not used to fieldwork...) another lecture on sanitation related issues – outside the FINISH evaluation training.

In a bit more than year from now, we will be able to analyse (in a statistically sound way, with lots of data at hand), the impact of the FINISH intervention on a range of outcome indicators, including the ones discussed above.

But, I think it is safe to say, that many people have already been impacted through FINISH related activities – such as this survey work. This includes myself who learns so much from the interaction with the teams, and also the interaction with the FINISH implementing agencies, whose staff has been throughout extremely supportive!