

Women's Livelihood, Global Markets and Citizenship

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March 2008

Abstract

The underlying assumption of an integration of economies as epitomised by globalisation is that it would lead to greater economic participation, simultaneously, leading to enhancement of livelihood opportunities. Economic participation in the global economy manifests in largely two ways, either as MNCs accessing local production for global marketing or/and as local marketing of goods that are more globally produced. This is said to increase livelihood opportunities for the poor and those hitherto excluded from the market. What possibilities for market penetration create more sustainable livelihoods for rural women? By adding sale of products produced by other companies, do SHG members maintain a stream of income? As rural women's SHGs get integrated into the global markets, what implications does it have for their own identities? Do they see themselves as a part of the global marketplace, with important links to the global economy? Or do they continue to maintain local, nationalist identities? When these women, integrated in the global marketplace, need to organize to claim their rights, who do they turn to? Do they ask governments to mediate? Do they consider MNCs as their obligator? What kinds of organizing efforts evolve for such claim making purposes? This article attempts to answer these questions through an analysis of an initiative, Project Shakti, promoted by the Indian State in collaboration with Hindustan Unilever Limited.

I. Introductionⁱ

The second great era, Globalisation 2.0, lasted roughly from 1800 to 2000...shrank the world from a size medium to a size small. In Globalisation 2.0, the key agent of change, the dynamic force driving global integration, was multinational companies....Globalisation 3.0 is shrinking the world from a size small to a size tiny and flattening the playing field at the same time...Globalisation 3.0 – the thing that gives it its unique character – is the newfound power for individuals to collaborate and compete globally (Friedman, 2005: 9-10).

In recent years, globalisation has led to interconnections across the world as never before and has brought into prominence new actors, multinational corporations, global governance institutions, civil society and individuals as change agents, transforming the landscape of governance, politics and the economy. Most visible in its economic sense, globalisation has led to a closer integration of the world's economies, through the reduction of barriers to the movement of goods, services and capital across the world. Associated with this has been the increased competition between firms, availability of consumer goods from any part of the world in local supermarkets, expansion of technologies, communications and globalised, often similar and homogenous, lifestyles that people across the world aspire to. This view on globalisation sees increased homogenisation and interdependency all over the world in the cultural, social and economic dimensions. Market logic and the political support required for the continuation of this market logic have led to greater interconnectedness across nations and communities.

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manifests in largely two ways, either as MNCs accessing local production for global marketing or/and as local marketing of goods that are more globally produced. This is said to increase livelihood opportunities for the poor and those hitherto excluded from the market.

Globalization is also seen as an opposing relationship between the global and local. Although identifying the trend towards global markets and politics, it also highlights an increased diversity and importance to regionalism (in a sense the local) and community as well (de Haan, 2000). Although the process of globalisation would bring about new opportunities for livelihood for some, some have questioned whether global processes would be able to eliminate social and economic exclusion. Economic programmes that are based on market liberalisation, privatisation and reduced government controls often benefit only those who already have a fixed place in the economy. For those who are already excluded from the economic processes, it may add new obstacles in the constant search for a sustainable livelihood.

The dominant experience, in the context of globalisation and global institutional frameworks, so far has been the active participation of national governments and their agents as the primary interlocutors with global institutions. This is the domain of statist politics in the global arena. The second dominant modality is to treat citizens of nation states as mere producers and consumers of goods and services in the global marketplace. This is the domain of transnational corporations and capital.

This paper attempts to analyse how citizens engage with global processes while retaining their local roots and the possibility of mutual re-enforcement of engagements at these two levels. The paper also examines the impact of such citizen engagement in global processes on the meanings and practices of citizenship, given their locations in diverse historical and cultural settings. This analysis is through the initiative of Project Shaktiⁱⁱ, promoted by the Indian State in collaboration with Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL)ⁱⁱⁱ the Indian division of Unilever, a multinational corporation.

Before providing the data on Project Shakti, the next section provides a brief overview of the key theoretical debated that set the context of this paper. This is within the framework of the wider research programme on the Local-Global Citizen Engagement theme of the Development Research Centre programme on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability, based in the Institute of Development Studies. This wider research includes trade policy, health, agriculture, environment, migration, environmental health and occupational disease, education and livelihood. This paper will focus on the issue of citizen

engagements in livelihood in the global context. The following section summarises key background information on Project Shakti, a public-private partnership promoted by HUL. Project Shakti promotes income generating capabilities of underprivileged of rural women by integrating rural women as local retail agents of HUL. This sets the framework for further discussions on the nature of spaces within which citizens mobilise locally, nationally and globally given the existing power relations. The final section concludes by raising questions on the potential for livelihood promotion activities by MNCs and the effectiveness of such citizen engagements to positively alter these global economic processes.

II. Conceptual questions on sustainable livelihoods, global governance and global citizenship

Development is about people, about enhancing their ability and power to direct their own lives, in the context of their environment, their history and aspirations for the future. Development is not about catching up with other people. But it is about an enlarged range and quality of choices, of lifestyles, of occupation. It encompasses better nutrition, health, education and freedom from oppression and poverty. The process of development involves structural transformations in the organization of society and the economy. Such a process cannot take place without altering relationships of dominance and subordination, or affecting the interests of different groups within society. Therefore, questions regarding the character, direction and pace of development are fundamentally political questions (Krishna in Krishna, 2007: 3-4).

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels, in the short and long term (Chambers and Conway in Masika 1996: 8). The concept of sustainable livelihoods is based normatively on ideas of capability, equity and sustainability. Sustainability in this context, in addition to promoting environmental sustainability also looks at social sustainability, the ability to maintain and improve livelihoods, while maintaining and enhancing local and global assets and capabilities on which livelihood depend (ibid: 12). Sustainable livelihood is therefore, not equivalent to mere employment and has to be seen as synonymous with social inclusion (de Haan 2000:13).

Livelihood promotion is contingent to the requirements of the situation based on a systematic analysis. It goes well beyond enhancing incomes. The goals of livelihood promotion may also incorporate creating assets or wealth, increasing food security, reducing risk, reducing variances in income, reducing rural to urban migration, organising producers to have greater control over their

livelihoods, enhancing the money that circulates within the local economy (Fisher and Sriram 2002: 74).

In India, self-help groups (SHGs) and micro-finance are seen as the medium for promoting livelihoods, especially within the rural context.^{iv} The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), one of the earliest organisations working on women's livelihoods, identified that lack of access to credit as a major source of constraint for women working in the informal sector (Mayoux 2003). The tool of micro-credit gained popularity as a means of providing the poor and the very poor with access to credit. Micro-credit is seen as the disbursement of subsidised loans and other financial services and products of very small amounts to raise their income levels and improve living standards. Subsequently, the concept of micro-credit was broadened to form the concept of micro-finance, which includes a broader range of services like credit, savings and insurance.

There is evidence that micro-credit and micro-finance contribute to women's empowerment.^v However, this is not automatically an outcome of women's access to savings and credit or group formation per se. In many cases, the benefits are marginal. Women are seen to be more conscientious and docile and hence, a convenient, cost-effective and comparatively risk-free savings base (Mayoux, 2003:4-5). Given that there are vast differences in the quality and nature of groups promoted throughout the country, SHGs provide spaces for women to address processes of social change only if the agenda within the group is nurtured and directed in that direction.^{vi} Although there have been groups that have taken up the issue of social evils on their own, the legitimacy of the space and processes to take up such issues has been largely an outcome of the promoting organisation itself and its willingness to invest in such long-term goals. Only when such enabling spaces and processes have been provided are the women able to sustain social transformation regarding their status within the community and in society (ibid.).

A majority of the existing groups are limited to material short term gains and do not extend to challenging their status as a vulnerable and marginalised group. Access to financial services can and does make important contributions to the economic productivity and social well-being of poor women and their households; it does not 'automatically' empower women. In terms of closing the gender gap on issues like the ownership of and control over assets, custody of income, gaining access to domestic and community economic and other resources, decision making within the household and above all, women's productive and reproductive roles, the outcomes of the SHG movement have been limited.

Assumptions are made about the contribution of micro-finance in catalysing a series of mutually reinforcing 'virtuous spirals' of economic empowerment, increased well-being and social and political empowerment (ibid: 7-8). An increasing reliance on female-targeted micro-credit/finance has led to initiatives which focus on narrow definitions of empowerment and a decrease in funding for explicit strategies to achieve actual empowerment. Often, micro-credit/finance programmes focused on targets, figures and results suffer from short-sightedness, missing out the potential of micro-financing in empowering the poor with capacities which would enhance their competence to access and manage resources, expand their options for sustainable livelihoods and enable them to participate actively in community development (Pant, 2004: 39-40).

Income generation programmes, popular during the 1980s, have led to women's enterprise generally remaining concentrated in a narrow range of low-profit activities with few assets and consequently, low productivity. The expansion in income earning activities for many women is not compensated by greater contribution by men to unpaid domestic work. Women are able to increase their productive role through decreasing leisure time, time for their children and social and political activities. Evidence on women's control over assets is also scarce. Women's ability to increase their income is limited largely due to restrictions on women's interactions with men outside the household and responsibilities for unpaid household work or childcare, which undermines their negotiating power within markets. Even where they control their own incomes, this is commonly used for household consumption rather than for investment (ibid: 31).

Supplementary, part-time work in and near the home, which could be combined with women's domestic work, these programmes have built upon women's traditional skills and not sought the introduction of new skills or prepared women to enter 'male' areas of expertise. They have been carried out through separate women's projects. A more long-lasting effect may have been possible through a combination of separate women's production groups and collectives, which also address gender issues and integration of women into 'male stream projects'. Evaluating women's income generation merely in terms of 'social welfare' may not be sufficient, the evaluation of such income generating programmes has to be through a more rigorous assessment in terms of both income earned and effects on gender inequality (Mayoux in Masika 1996: 6).

The underlying assumption that engagement in economic activity would lead to economic empowerment as promoted by micro-credit/finance programmes is a step towards gender equality, but again, is not synonymous with it. Literature has shown that the extension of credit to women may not have the same returns for them as their profile of activities is very different from that of men. It has

further been observed that in South Asia, a high proportion of individual loans targeted at women are co-opted by men (Goetz and Sen Gupta in Masika, 1996: 5). The commercial viability and sustainability of such programmes were not taken into account and in effect, perpetuated women's dependence on men (Masika, 1996).

Micro-credit, therefore, is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for micro-enterprise promotion. The challenge for micro-finance practitioners is, therefore, that micro-credit must be coupled not only with business support to individual enterprises among their borrowers, but also integrated within sectoral based technical support, which can develop a large number of productive and sustainable livelihoods. The assumption on which the micro-finance industry works is that by its initiatives it can shift many people out of poverty.

One of the ways to address the question of sustainability has been to integrate SHGs with markets. In so doing, it is assumed that the production of women's groups could be marketed globally, thereby realizing better returns and higher incomes for women. Another route towards similar outcomes is seen to be the marketing of goods and services by women's groups as opportunities to expand businesses and make additional incomes. Under what situations does such an assumption hold true? What possibilities for market penetration create more sustainable livelihoods for rural women? By adding sale of products produced by other companies, do SHG members maintain stream of income?

Additionally, globalisation of economic activities brings in large multinational corporations (MNCs) into play. Many of these MNCs have been seeking new markets for their products. By leveraging women's SHGs, they enhance their market share and profits. In the process, women themselves may get higher income. But in today's global economy, MNCs are supranational actors without adequate regulation. MNCs have been supportive of market-enabling regimes, like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which have been instrumental in liberalising international trade (Levy and Prakash: 133). The location of the monitoring, enforcement and sanctioning authorities of these regimes play an important influence on MNC behaviour. Generally, MNCs have fought to keep regulatory authority for environmental and social issues at the national level depending on their perception of their influence as compared to the other actors in the given situation (ibid.:138). Globally, there have been efforts at developing a code of conduct for multinationals which do not have any mandatory compliance either from the signatories or the governing authority (like the UN Global Compact (UNGC)) raising doubts on the effectiveness of these self-regulatory codes of conduct.^{vii}

As rural women's SHGs get integrated into the global markets, what implications does it have for their own identities? Do they see themselves as a part of the global marketplace, with important links to the global economy? Or do they continue to maintain local, nationalist identities? When these women, integrated in the global marketplace, need to organize to claim their rights, who do they turn to? Do they ask governments to mediate? Do they consider MNCs as their obligator? What kinds of organizing efforts evolve for such claim making purposes?

The concept of global citizenship has been debated in literature largely aspirationally and philosophically. Globalisation has led to a rethinking of the notion of citizenship as moving beyond the limits of the state. According to some scholars, the human spirit has the capacity to empathise with distant and unknown others; human beings are emotional and moral beings and are, therefore, able to share essential humanity with other humans. Cosmopolitanism as it is called in some studies (Held & McGrew, 2003) argues for the active agency of humans to expect and demand universal claims by all people. Falk (1993) talking of "democracy without frontiers" proposes that global citizenship is human calling. In this formulation of the democratic principle, the sovereignty of citizens is posited to be supreme, not the sovereignty of governments. This is what has been variously called as the "democratic internationalism" (O'Brien, 2004) or "transnational democracy" (Held & McGrew, 2003). March & Olsen (1995) have argued that citizenship as civic virtue, as the liberal ideals of liberty, freedom and equality, is universally rooted, and is able to transcend the "moral significance" of state borders for expressions of solidarity.

Underlying these arguments is the assumption that global citizenship identity is feasible. A decade ago, writing to define the base of global civil society, Olivera and Tandon (1994) described the concept of "planetary citizenship"---an aspirational world of global humanity. Heater (2002) has elaborated the contours of "world citizenship" which is based on the notion of multiple identities, from local to global; his argument is based on the belief that each "citizen of the world" shares a common ethical and moral code. He goes on to further elaborate the notion of "civic patriotism, a form of patriotism which is without nationalism and exclusion. Rosenau (2003) presents a cogent argument to articulate the concept of "distant proximities", a concept that argues for the ever faster processes by which the distant and different developments become proximate, closer to one's home.

The meaning of citizenship in a global domain is particularly taxing, as there is no one understanding of 'global citizenship' (as there is no single understanding of the conventional notion of citizenship). There are many concepts that co-exist within this broad notion of 'global citizenship'. Three main dialogues seem to be

dominant within this: a civic republican dialogue that emphasises concepts such as awareness, responsibility, participation and cross-cultural empathy, a libertarian dialogue that stresses on international mobility and competitiveness and a legal dialogue that emphasizes legal rights and responsibilities of transnational actors. The first essentially subscribe to self-identifying global citizens who imbibe the notions of social and political awareness, responsibility and participation attempting to promote the same in the international arena. The second tends to highlight the desirability of un-impeded movement across the globe and has been criticized. And the last emphasise whether non-state actors such as transnational citizens, multinational corporations and collectives have rights and responsibilities in international law.

Therefore, this debate on global citizenship needs to be empirically rooted. Do processes of global integration generate global citizenship identities? How manifest are meanings of globality in the daily practice of local citizens when they are part of a global economic enterprise? Or do they continue to understand their rights and obligations largely in the sub-national 'domestic' sense? What are the intermediation agents in this global chain? What kinds of pressures and issues confront intermediary actors? This paper is based on an empirical investigation of women's livelihood programmes which build market integration with an MNC, and interrogates the above questions in that reality.

III. Empowered mothers^{viii}

Project Shakti is unleashing the potential of rural India and thus changing lives. It is ushering in prosperity and more importantly, self-respect (Hindustan Unilever Limited).^{ix}

One of the best and sustainable ways Unilever can help to address global social and environmental concerns is through the very business in a socially aware and responsible manner (Unilever).^x

Everybody wants brands. And there are a lot more poor people in the world than rich people. To be a global business and to have a global market share you have to participate in all segments (Keki Dadiseth, erstwhile Chairman, HUL).^{xi}

Project Shakti was begun by HUL in the year 2001 with a purpose 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. It aimed at transforming this underprivileged household woman to an entrepreneur. HUL envisions the creation of 1,00,000 Shakti entrepreneurs covering 5,00,000 villages, and touching the lives of 600 million rural people by the year 2010.^{xii} According to the company, such income-generating initiatives are successful and sustainable when they are linked with the company's core business and are mutually beneficial to both the population for whom the programme is intended and for

the company. For HUL, Project Shakti was started as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) endeavour. According to HUL, Shakti is a pioneering effort in creating livelihoods for rural women and improving living standards in rural India. Shakti provides critically needed additional income to these women and their families, by equipping and training them to become an extended arm of the company's operation.^{xiii}

In India, with the SHG as the medium of the micro-finance system, the viability and sustainability of livelihood promotion activities, according to senior HUL personnel, need a transformation of micro-credit agents into micro-entrepreneurs, for which it would be necessary to develop further skills. Despite training centres being set up by the governmental machinery in each district to facilitate this transformation from micro-credit to entrepreneurship, it was not very effective. The Government of Andhra Pradesh (GoAP) faced a unique problem, a situation where they had resources to market products, but did not know how to do so.^{xiv} HUL, at the same time, looking at the Grameen Bank model of Bangladesh as a possible approach for sustainable rural development, approached the Andhra Pradesh Government for possible collaborations.^{xv}

In December 2000, HUL entered into a public-private partnership (PPP) with GoAP to initiate Project Shakti in fifty villages of Nalgonda District. A pilot was initiated in 2001 and subsequently, operations were scaled up from 2002. It has since been extended to Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Chattisgarh and Orissa. Currently, in Andhra Pradesh, there are 3,077 Shakti entrepreneurs spread across 22 districts (ibid.).

A national-level livelihoods and marketing support agency providing market led solutions, Marketing and Rural Team (MART),^{xvi} was employed by HUL to work in its programme with the State Department for Rural Development's AP Rural Livelihoods programme in Nalgonda District to identify market-driven PPP opportunities. It explored the local opportunities and presented HUL with the idea of retailing their products. After detailed discussions with HUL representatives and field visits by HUL's senior staff, details of the collaboration were worked out. HUL, MART and the GoAP, through the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) were jointly involved in the selection of the Shakti Amma(s) as the Shakti entrepreneurs are called in Andhra Pradesh. In some cases, DRDA staff and the mandal (block) officials have also been instrumental in the selection of the Shakti Amma(s).

Project Shakti has been implemented in villages with a population of approximately two thousand. HUL did a survey on the feasibility of the Project and expected sales, based on which Project Shakti was launched. For example, it ascertained the amount of money rural people spend on products of daily use

like soaps, detergent and cosmetics. They found that a household would spend roughly Rs 100 on such products. They asked the Shakti Amma(s) to note the families known to them and list them as their customers. The Shakti Amma(s) were then asked to sell goods worth Rs.100 to each of these families. This, according to HUL, made it achievable for her. Villages with less than two thousand population were to be seen as satellites that would be tapped into by the nearest Shakti Amma.

According to HUL, a typical Shakti Amma conducts a steady business, which gives her an income in excess of Rs 1,000 per month on a sustainable basis. As most of these women live below the poverty line, and hail from extremely small villages, this earning is very significant, and almost twice the amount of their previous household income. In addition, it involves health and hygiene programmes, which help to improve the standard of living of the rural community (ibid.).

HUL also envisaged that along with economic independence, there would be a marked change in the woman's status within the household, with a much greater say in decision-making. HUL felt that the most powerful aspect about this model is that it creates a win-win partnership between HUL and the consumers, some of whom will depend on the organisation for their livelihood, and builds a self-sustaining cycle of growth for all (ibid).

Project Shakti also includes Shakti Vani^{xvii} which is a social communication programme. Women, trained in health and hygiene issues, address village communities through meetings at schools, village *baithaks* (meetings), SHG meetings and other social forums. iShakti, the Internet-based rural information service, was launched in Andhra Pradesh in 2003, in association with the Andhra Pradesh Government's Rajiv Internet Village Programme. iShakti has been developed to provide information and services to meet rural needs in medical health and hygiene, agriculture, animal husbandry, education, vocational training and employment and women's empowerment (ibid).

Project Shakti has been implemented through different modes across the country - in collaboration with the state government, through NGOs, financial institutions and directly through individuals. In various districts of Andhra Pradesh, five NGOs partnered with HUL to implement this project.^{xviii} The NGOs were Byrajju Foundation, Girijana Cooperative Corporation, Greens, Peace Foundation and Star Youth Organisation. In two blocks (Anantpur and Srikakulam) Project Shakti was implemented through the government programmes of District Poverty Initiatives Project and Integrated Rural Development Services respectively. HUL approached NGOs already involved in promoting micro-credit with the strategy on Project Shakti which appealed to

them. These NGOs were instrumental in promoting individual women entrepreneurs within their areas of intervention.

In the beginning, the Andhra Pradesh Government helped in facilitating the project. District Nalgonda was recommended by the Government for the pilot phase of the Project as it is one of the most backward districts of Andhra Pradesh. The Commissioner for Women and Child Development was instrumental in identifying SHG members and groups, who could function as entrepreneurs. According to senior government officials, there were negotiations between the Government and HUL with respect to the benefits accruing to the women in the Project, though the current incumbent of the concerned office was not able to share the exact details of the negotiations, nor was she able to state whether there were any differences of opinion between the two parties.^{xix}

The idea of implementing Project Shakti through the SHG federation was explored, since it afforded a bigger scale of operations. Yet, practical difficulties were encountered. The federation was not willing to bear all the expenses that would be incurred in this process, which would include infrastructure costs for the retailing unit. Federation members were also unwilling to remunerate members who would manage the business. It was then, decided to encourage individual members to take up this initiative on their own (APMAS, 2006).

The field research for this paper was carried out in the districts of Nalgonda and Medak in Andhra Pradesh. The key stakeholders involved in this research study were HUL personnel as representatives of the MNC, government officials, from both the state and district levels, heads of NGOs collaborating with HUL in promoting the initiative, key personnel of micro credit institutions and the main actors, the Shakti Amma(s). Open-ended questionnaires were administered to 40 Shakti Amma(s), 20 each from Nalgonda and Medak districts. There has been a deliberate attempt to have an equal mix of Shakti Amma(s) selected by HUL with the help of the GoAP and those promoted by the NGOs associating with HUL on Project Shakti.

The majority of the Shakti Amma(s) interviewed were between the age group of 25-45. The educational qualification of most was matriculation. Though some were illiterate, some had studied till higher secondary and a couple were graduates. The spouse of the Shakti Amma(s) was largely matriculate with some having studied beyond, though some were illiterate. Some Shakti Amma(s) could not state their spouses' educational qualifications. Most belonged to the backward or Scheduled Castes while a few were from the forward castes. There was a sole representative from the Muslim community. Most of the Shakti Amma(s) interviewed were below the poverty line.

HUL had mostly approached women who were, either individually or whose families, already running *kirana* shops (14 women of the 20), whereas the NGO collaborating with HUL on Project Shakti approached women who had no livelihood options (14 women of the 20). Of the latter, SHGs had nominated half of the Shakti Amma(s).

Most of the Shakti Amma(s) have had some amount of training largely provided by HUL or by the NGO associated with Project Shakti. On an average, Shakti Amma(s) have had about one to five trainings on accounting, marketing strategies, minimising expenditure, maximising profits and how to convince people to purchase HUL products. A few of the Shakti Amma(s) have claimed that they have not received any training from either the MNC or from the NGO. A couple of the better performing Shakti Amma(s) have been felicitated for their performance at company functions held in Bangalore and Tirupati.

One of the marketing strategies followed by HUL was to have a Shakti Day. Shakti Day is a platform for introducing the Shakti Amma to all the people in the area and making all products available to the people by creating an artificial outlet for HUL products. The company helps the Shakti Amma set up a stall at a central place in the village, displaying all the products. On that day, the customers are given a special discount. HUL generally conducts a Shakti Day within 10-15 days of a woman entrepreneur becoming a Shakti Amma.

IV. Implications for citizenship through citizen engagements in global processes

"I thought I would be employed so I took this initiative." - Lakshmi, Medak district

"My family needed some financial assistance." - Ratnamala K., Medak district

"There were too many expenses at home and I wanted to increase my family income through this initiative." - K Sreelatha, Nalgonda district

"I gave my gold chain as collateral for a bank loan to start this dealership" - V. Lalitha, Nalgonda

"I thought I would be the only one in the village selling HUL products, I would be able to make a good profit" - K. Vijayalakshmi, Nalgonda^{xx}

Enhanced incomes?

On average, women entrepreneurs have invested Rs 10,000 in purchasing stocks from HUL. The NGO collaborating with HUL on Project Shakti, in addition to nominating the Shakti Amma, also provided money to a few Shakti Amma(s) for this initial investment. Some Shakti Amma(s) were given loans by the SHG through their savings and credit schemes within the group, but most of the Shakti Amma(s) generated their own funds for the investment required for the dealership. The profits on the investment were between Rs 1,000 to Rs 3,000 per month depending on her sales turnover. The average expected turnover from each Shakti Amma is approximately Rs 10,000 per month. The Shakti Amma(s) earn a profit of Rs 1,000 - Rs 3,000 per month only if their turnover is Rs 10,000 - Rs 30,000 per month.

For about half the Shakti Amma(s), the profits they earn now have doubled as compared to the profits they earned when they began the dealership. For a few Shakti Amma(s), the increase in the profits has not been significant, while for some, the profits they earn now are less than the profits that they were getting initially. About four Shakti Amma(s) interviewed have stopped the dealership. Two major reasons for these have been a drop in sales and an increase in the number of retail outlets in the villages. A few Shakti Amma(s) were unable to say what their profits were at the time of the study. According to HUL, Shakti Amma(s) make a minimum of eight to nine per cent profit on their turnover.

HUL had worked out the margins for Shakti Amma(s) depending on the clientele. A Shakti Amma could distribute goods to the shopkeepers in the village (*kirana*), with a margin of three per cent. To other SHG members, they give goods at six per cent margin and when they become retail outlets, the margin is nine per cent. Though on the whole, Shakti Amma(s) have followed the margins set by HUL, quite a few of them have used their own logic in fixing margins for various customers. For instance, a few of them have given products to other SHG members at a five per cent margin; there were Shakti Amma(s) who sold products to other SHG members at the market price too. Shakti Amma(s) have also sold products to the *kirana* shop at varying margins. At their own *kirana* shops, most of the Shakti Amma(s) sold the products at the maximum retail price (MRP). HUL admits that although the company advocates margins for selling their products to different consumers, they leave the final decision of the margins to the Shakti Amma. Some of them were innovative enough to even sell the free gifts along with some products!

Almost all Shakti Amma(s) interviewed have stated that they are happy to be a part of this initiative. Many women entrepreneurs have stated that prior to the initiative they were housewives, teachers, working in their field or the family shop. After the initiative they have started earning money of their own and now contribute to the family expenses. They feel that they are able to do so even within the confines of their homes. Some have stated that running the initiative has increased their confidence and their knowledge about their surroundings. One Shakti Amma went on to add that the fights between her and her husband have increased ever since she became an entrepreneur as both are working now and come home tired! Only four have expressed dissatisfaction regarding the initiative. One Shakti Amma felt that since the initiative was not doing well, especially since she did not have any experience in running a business, she had to stop the dealership. Another has stated that a similar inexperience had led to a loss of Rs 20,000 as she had taken products worth that amount which remained unsold. A couple of the Shakti Amma(s) have stopped the dealership as the main distributor for HUL products was shifted from Bongir to Ghatkesar, which proved more expensive in terms of transportation charges. Those who had stopped the dealership were keen to start it again but only if HUL was willing to shift the distributor to Bongir once again.

Socially, almost all Shakti Amma(s) have stated that they have got more respect and recognition within the village. A few have claimed to establish good linkages with the teachers, sarpanches and other important members in the village after becoming the Shakti Amma. A few have also stated that in the village it is the surname of a person that is important. But villagers have started recognizing them through their first names and this has given them immense sense of pride and satisfaction. One even stated that the villagers may not know her as a Shakti Amma but if one asks in the village for the person who sells soaps, they are quick to name her!

Of the political benefits for the Shakti Amma(s), only three of the women interviewed have contested elections to the local self-government institutions (two have won the elections while the third lost). Roughly, three have supported candidates who have contested elections to the local self-government institutions. One stated that she would not be averse to contesting elections if she were given the chance to contest but has not pursued it actively. Another stated that politically her role in the village is limited as she is a 'daughter' of the village. Only the 'daughter-in-laws' can contest local body elections as daughters are expected to leave the village. Yet another stated that contesting elections would mean that the business would suffer leading to a reduction in sales.

During the previous elections, the reduced sales resulted in increased pressure from HUL and she did not reconsider contesting elections.

Costs involved in Project Shakti

According to a case study, in 2004 there were two hundred thirty one Shakti Amma(s) who had been promoted by either the government or the NGOs (APMAS 2002). According to HUL, over the years there have a five percent dropout of Shakti Amma(s). Right now there are about one hundred forty nine Shakti Amma(s) in Nalgonda District.

With profits from the dealership largely depending on the sales of the HUL products in the village, Shakti Amma(s) have felt that it is too much of hard work for the kind of profits that they are making. Only where the Shakti Amma is already a shopkeeper is the initiative running well, as it has higher margins. HUL claims that there are no fixed targets for a Shakti Amma. She sells whatever she can on her own initiative, while they simply give directions and guidance. According to some Shakti Amma(s) the target of achieving a turnover of Rs 10,000 is found to be high and they are unable to reach them. Amma(s) even today find it difficult to increase sales.

The time spent by Shakti Amma(s) on the dealership varied between 2 to 8 hours. For most of the Shakti Amma(s), the dealership could not be handled on her own, without the active support and participation of the entire household. Husbands or sons are for the marketing of the products in the satellite villages. This would involve getting orders for various products from nearby villages. This is largely because the husbands or sons are employed outside the village or have means of transport by which they can easily access other villages and take orders. Shakti Amma(s) rely on either her children, especially daughters, or other relatives to cater to customers in her absence. She is also helped by other family members in the household chores thereby, giving her the time to take up the dealership more actively. The success of the Shakti Amma is then also dependent on the active participation of the entire family and is successful when there is aggressive marketing by all.

In some villages, SHG members competed with each other to become the Shakti Amma in the village. Almost half the Shakti Amma(s) faced opposition from the traditional small shopkeepers in the village, who feared reduction in their sales and profits. Initially, Shakti Amma(s) would go door-to-door in an attempt to increase their outreach. The petty shopkeepers were apprehensive that this

Box 1: A typical Shakti Amma and her engagements in Project Shakti

K Shreelatha is a 40-year-old woman, staying with her in-laws. Her husband works in a factory. She has studied till the 10th standard. She has two children, a daughter studying in the 7th standard and a son studying in the 9th standard. They do not possess any agricultural land. She has been a member of a SHG for the past 12 years and has been a Shakti Amma for 3 years. She feels that joining a SHG provided her a space to talk. She is the only Shakti dealer in her village. After she has become a Shakti Amma she has had more interaction with the villagers. Villagers now recognise her as a Shakti Amma. She feels that there has been no opposition from the other SHG members with regard to her success as a Shakti Amma. Initially the 5-6 petty shopkeepers in the village had created problems for her. PEACE provided her an initial amount of Rs 10,000 for purchasing stocks. She feels that being a Shakti Amma is a household initiative. The reason for her success is that her husband goes out to get orders. Her mother-in-law and at times her daughter also interact with the customers in her absence. She feels that her family has provided her with immense support in this endeavour. So far she has had a turnover of about Rs 32,000–42,000 per month though her personal profit is on an average between Rs 1,000 to Rs 3,000. She feels that there have been many problems associated with the Project and is hopeful that HUL would be able to resolve these problems. She identifies more with PEACE and has no linkage with HLL apart from that of a dealer. Being a Shakti Amma has had positive effects on her status as a SHG member. PEACE has given her power to be the cheque authority for 5 SHGs. Given the opportunity to contest Panchayat elections she would like to but is reluctant seeing the current situation of the Panchayats. But being a Shakti Amma has not helped her in building linkages with financial banks as currently, she is not able to access big loans from banks.

would affect their sales. There were also differences regarding the margins at which the women entrepreneurs would sell the products to the petty shopkeepers. Shakti Amma(s) have also found it difficult to sell HUL products since there were duplicate products available with names similar to the branded products at lower prices. Villagers preferred to buy those products rather than buy the HUL products.

Politics of Intermediation

Power relations between different actors involved in Project Shakti are an indication of the representation, the legitimacy and the accountability of these different actors. HUL is clearly the main actor in the initiative. CSR has in the recent years become the buzzword for the corporate sector. CSR, seen as a business strategy, focuses on finding opportunities to work out market solutions to public problems. Pursuing CSR, for a corporation, results in productivity gains, cost savings and new markets for new products. Along with this would be brand enhancement and protection of its reputation. Hence, for the survival of the corporation, it is essential to develop markets that could be done only if the

incidence of poverty is reduced and more are included within development.^{xxi} HUL has not really been forced into a position of accountability to any stakeholder, neither the Government of Andhra Pradesh with whom they had negotiations regarding Project Shakti, the NGOs who were the implementing agencies nor the Shakti Amma(s).

GoAP, through the DRDA, was keen on taking up the initiative, because the benefits of the initiative were to percolate to the group. The assumption in collaborating with HUL in this Project was that new ideas would be brought into the SHG movement. But this enthusiasm on the part of GoAP has waned over the years. It withdrew from the role of the facilitator 2-3 years (government officials were not able to state exactly when the process of withdrawal by the state was initiated, hence, the ambiguous time period of 2-3 years) after the Project was initiated. Concerned government officials felt that since the Project was now in place, both the Shakti Amma(s) and HUL could manage on their own. Although the government officials are very confident that women would approach them if they faced problems in the initiative, there has been no active interaction with the Shakti Amma(s) to ascertain whether there are problems associated with the Project. Problems individually communicated to the government officials at the lower levels may not have been considered as common to a majority of the Shakti Amma(s). The government admits that on their part, currently, there is no monitoring of the Project.

In developing countries, the state is still a significant player in the changing relationships brought about by the processes of globalisation. Even in developed countries, the State has played the role of setting the basic acceptable standards of public action within the society. In addition, it has also played the role of mediator between conflicting interests and is expected to act as a negotiator for the marginalised and excluded sections of society. To a large extent, citizen's engagements have never been direct, but almost always through the medium of the state at the global, national and local levels.

With the process of globalisation, the state has withdrawn from its welfare role. The state is trying to find solutions to promote welfare measures, and one such means is PPPs. The state views itself largely as the facilitator in the implementation of such PPPs. In a developing country like India, the state cannot abdicate its responsibility towards its citizens. The primary stakeholders of any PPPs, like the Shakti Amma(s) in Project Shakti, and other actors of such initiatives are not entering into such PPPs as equal partners. And it is the mandate of the state to ensure that the terms of such PPP are not harming those that are not so powerful actors in such initiatives. It seems that State never questioned the objective of HUL in starting this initiative but took the philanthropic objectives for granted.

GoAP needs to look at the Project objectively. The GoAP could have aggressively pushed for is the marketing of products made by the SHGs. There were no efforts to use the skills of the members and nurture them. Neither were there any efforts at asset creation linked to resource sharing for a more sustainable development. The lack of monitoring by the government does not bode well for the weakest actor in the initiative, the Shakti Amma(s). The State needs to listen to civil society assertions which reflect the need for incorporating people's agenda in the scheme of governance (Tandon and Mohanty, 2003).

The representation of the Shakti Amma(s) in decision-making processes of Project Shakti has been virtually non-existent. Some of the Shakti Amma(s) are quite unsure whom to turn to for resolution of problems in the dealership. Those selected by HUL with the help of DRDA do identify with HUL but do not approach them for resolution of problems. Those Shakti Amma(s) that identify with the NGOs, as they were promoted by them, look towards the NGO to mediate for them with HUL. For most, there seems to be an implicit trust on the State that whatever it would promote would be in the interest of its citizens. The Shakti Amma(s) stated that they looked towards the government to give women more employment and livelihood opportunities for their social and economic development. They wanted the government to give subsidies/loans for underprivileged women, provide them training to start their own small industries, and most importantly, help in the marketing of such kind of initiatives. NGOs should, according to them, focus on vocational training, especially in the preparation of household products, which might be useful for the villagers to enhance their livelihoods.

The Shakti Amma(s) look towards HUL for credit facilities to facilitate the dealership. A couple have also expressed a desire that HUL provide them with two-wheelers to make them mobile and hence, increase the opportunities to take up satellite marketing. A few wanted the company to advertise the dealership more so that Shakti Amma(s) are able to increase their sales. A few have also asked for higher margins for the products being promoted under this project. A couple also wanted the company to re-establish a distributor in Bongir and help the Shakti Amma(s) to restart the dealership. Some Shakti Amma(s) felt that though HUL has started a good initiative, but it has not put the proper structures in place to enable the smooth functioning of the Project.

Dynamics of mobilisation

Though Project Shakti may have brought the Shakti Amma(s) outside the ambit of their private spheres (their homes and to a limited extent, their villages), it is really doubtful whether Project Shakti has given them the exposure of beyond the village, the district or the state, let alone that of the global. At the most, Shakti Amma(s) are aware of HUL as a producer of 'good quality soaps and detergents'. It is, therefore, a very nascent awareness of processes beyond their immediate spaces. Engagements with HUL may not have led to an adequate, let alone a greater, understanding of the global processes as embodied by the HUL.

With reference to a sense of global identity, ability to access and participate in trans-state institutions and decision making fora, Shakti Amma(s) do not come across as being 'globalised'. The existence of a sense of global citizenship among Shakti Amma(s) is very weak. The terms of their engagements with global processes in production and consumption have been mediated and negotiated upon by either the state government or through NGOs, with no direct involvement of the Shakti Amma(s). The effectiveness of such engagements is not then enriched with the lived experiences of those involved in the engagement.

Identity formation among the Shakti Amma(s), as a collective, engaging with global economy processes, has not been either promoted or developed as a result of such engagements. This is largely due to the fact that this space for the collective has not been created either by the company or by the state. HUL has not taken the initiative to ensure regular interaction among the Shakti Amma(s) within a specific region to ascertain their opinions on the Project and ways to improve the existing processes. And assuming that Shakti Amma(s) would have an autonomous sense of agency to change the terms of such engagements is thrusting upon them a responsibility for which they are ill equipped.

Shakti Amma(s) have had problems in adjusting to the demands of running a business, for instance, understanding margins and keeping accounts at the start of the initiative. All the Shakti Amma(s) interviewed stated that there were no negotiations between HUL and them regarding the margins of discount. The idea of credit was not encouraged by HUL either for the Shakti Amma(s) or for their clients. Shakti Amma(s) have felt that given the rural situation and their economic background, the idea of credit needs to be explored. A few Shakti Amma(s) have, on their own initiative, given credit to other SHG members to promote the initiative within the. Customers would often take products on credit and the Shakti Amma(s) would have to pursue the customers to collect her dues. It was difficult to convince the villagers to purchase their monthly or daily requirements from them. They would have to specifically tell them that they would give the villagers a discount before convincing them. One Shakti Amma stated that even the SHG members would not buy the products from her, and it

was difficult to convince them. Another Amma also claimed that since she was giving a discount on the products, villagers were doubtful about the quality of the products. In some places, where mandal headquarters was close, villagers would prefer to purchase their required products from the mandal headquarters rather than from the Amma.

Shakti Amma(s) have also faced problems with the process of retailing. Although HUL had agreed to take back unsold stocks, they have not done so. Shakti Amma(s) often faced a problem of storing stocks, which could mean either an investment on their part for constructing a shed to store the products or store them in the otherwise limited spaces of their houses. According to the Shakti Amma(s), small quantities of the products are required in rural areas, but the quantities sent by HUL are in excess of those ordered by them. They also feel that products that have no market in rural areas are dumped on them. The fact that they are not allowed to sell other branded products is, according to them, a hindrance in achieving greater profits.

Delivery of stocks by the HUL representatives has also posed problems. HUL's rural sales person (RSP) would not take orders regularly from the Amma(s). Shakti Amma(s) have also stated that there have been delays in the delivery of stocks, or the delivery of stock was in instalments, whereas no such leeway was given for payment of the stocks. In addition, new products were sent without consulting them about the feasibility of the product's sale and HUL was reluctant to take back products that had low sale turnovers. Shakti Amma(s) have also said that the RSPs forced them to purchase stocks valued at more than Rs 10,000 with the promise that they would get gifts, but they have not received any gifts so far. An entrepreneur has also stated that she was given bills on a blank sheet of paper and not the company receipt which should have been the correct procedure. Moreover, the Shakti Amma(s) also feel that the frequent replacement of the HUL marketing personnel is a deterrent in the smooth functioning of the Project. The NGOs had asked for similar subsidies for the Shakti Amma(s) as given to the distributor. Since the subsidy given to the distributor is high he is able to keep stocks worth a lot of money, the Shakti Amma on the other hand, is unable to do so and hence, the subsidy given to her is low.

The third sector, civil society, through its popular representative the NGOs, attempts to provide a voice to the marginalised and excluded by challenging the existing power structures in society. The corporate sector, in its attempt to undertake CSR as a business strategy, relies to a large extent on NGOs, as they feel that NGOs possess a better understanding of the dynamics within rural India. Even the NGOs involved with the implementation of Project Shakti,

though have discontinued association with the Project, have not come together linking issues on which they seemed to have a difference of opinion with HUL.

The NGOs, though an actor involved in the partnership, have not been included in the negotiations between HUL and GoAP. Subsequently, all five NGOs disassociating with Project Shakti have raised questions regarding the sustainability of the initiative, and critiquing the assumptions behind Project Shakti. They have stated that Project Shakti as an income generating activity cannot be synonymous with livelihood promotion. A sustainable livelihood involves the promotion of assets and its maintenance and enhancement for the coming generation along with benefits to other livelihoods. According to the NGOs, HUL has used the SHG model to build the entrepreneurial skills of women, which cannot amount to a livelihood activity. There are no additional activities of production based on the existing livelihood opportunities available in the area, which is mainly an agricultural context. Questions have also been raised regarding its sustainability. One NGO head had requested all SHG members to buy from the Shakti Amma. He feels that this kind of 'requesting' can be done only for a month but not for a length of time. If it had to be continued for a longer period, the same resources could be invested in other initiatives which would have better chances of sustainability.

The NGOs also suggested that HUL take the financial burden off the Shakti Amma(s) and become a kind of guarantor for them. As it is a registered body, it could provide surety for stocks given on credit to Shakti Amma similar to the credit given to the distributors. This suggestion by the NGOs was not incorporated into the initiative. HUL has accessed the infrastructure promoted by the NGOs and their time in promoting Shakti Amma(s) NGOs have also felt that as part of the Project HUL had promised much to the women but have not actually delivered. According to the NGO heads, HUL had initially promised to provide training on bookkeeping to the SHG women but did not do so. It had also planned on starting six-month literacy classes for the SHG members and the villagers along with the concerned NGO. The SHG members who were illiterate did not come forward for the course. The idea was that those who were literate would come forward and then teach the other SHG members and villagers. The honorarium that was being provided for these women would be Rs 200, which a NGO head thought was too less. The project was stopped abruptly by HUL. If the NGOs, which were instrumental in the implementation of the project, had been made a part of the negotiations along with the government and HUL, the terms and conditions of the economic engagement may have been different.

The process of data collection during the research has also hinted at other challenges involved in mobilising new alliances around this issue. While trying to meet the local representatives from HUL and explaining the research study,

the research team was requested to seek permission from the district level HUL personnel working on Project Shakti for undertaking the research. The district level personnel in turn asked the team to seek permission from the regional level Project Shakti staff who in turn requested to get in touch with the national level business representative of HUL. During an hour long conversation with the concerned person, there were questions raised on the need and authenticity of the research outcomes. After the conversation with the national level HUL personnel, the research team then contacted the regional level personnel who claimed that before extending his support for conducting the research he would have to ascertain from the national level personnel whether it was alright for him to do so. And this process of seeking approval was followed by each level of staff.

During the interviews of the Shakti Amma(s), the local in-charge of Project Shakti accompanied the researcher in one instance and on hearing the questions being posed to the Shakti Amma(s), took strong objections to some. It was said that the research team has no right to enter into and ask questions regarding their domain. He requested us to forward the questionnaire that the research team had formulated. During the particular round of interviews, he stopped the researcher from asking certain questions pertaining to the problems associated with the Project. PRIA staff then, spoke to the concerned staff to re-assess the problems the questions as perceived by the HUL representative and were told that if those particular questions were not changed or totally scrapped, HUL would withdraw support from the study and ensure that the Shakti Amma(s) would not interact with the research team. Upon much reassurance of the genuine intentions of the research study, the concerned staff later made a change in one of the questions in the questionnaire.

The research team was impressed upon to share with the HUL representatives any report which was to be put in the public domain. When the draft report was shared with the local representatives of HUL, he initially seemed reluctant to meet the team to provide his feedback on the findings. Finally, over a telephonic conversation, the concerned person stated that he did not agree with some of the findings of the report. He stated that the information that the research team had got about these 'supposed' problems in Project Shakti were incorrect. As the implementing agency, HUL should be the main actor to which the research team should have spoken to and not sought information from other sources, which may be a fabrication of the facts.

Dynamics and process of inclusion and exclusion

For most companies rural India remained an abstract concept. Over the years, HUL and its distribution system has been the envy of every other marketing

organisation in the country. Yet, its traditional distribution system was directly catering to one fifth of India's villages. A fall-out of the uneconomical last-mile logistics, HUL was unable to reach out to nearly 87 per cent of India's villages, which have a population of 2000 or less. Retailers in these villages had relied on the wholesale channel. The products that did get through to these villages were only the fast-selling ones. There was a need to open up the rural markets for the sale of all the brands names under HUL.^{xxii}

Although HUL representatives claim that Project Shakti has not generated an income equivalent to the investment in the Project, let alone profits, Project Shakti has been an opportunity to build its brand in hitherto untapped and therefore, unsaturated markets. It has increased its visibility in these areas and generated further markets for the company. HUL has come across as the more powerful actor in this PPP. Some have pointed out that HUL has ridden piggy back on a system that was promoted by the government, investment costs of which were borne by the government and not HUL. Earlier, retailers used to stock only the faster moving items like *Lifebuoy* and *Rexona* (brands of soaps). Now, with the Shakti Amma(s), the company achieved popularity and growing sales for other items like *Pepsodent* (brand of toothpaste) and *Annapurna* (brand of iodised salt). HUL also launched Shakti Vani, to increase awareness on health and hygiene through public service demonstrations. This emphasis on health and hygiene, in turn, was expected to increase demand for its personal care products. Although HUL has brought about economic independence to some women in areas with incomes as low as Rs 650-1000, for the company there is much at stake with the success of Project Shakti. It is believed that Project Shakti can be as large as the current size of HUL in a decade. In 2006, the size of the business was a little over Rs 100 crore, the targeted size was to be Rs 1000 by the end of 2007. Even as part of its CSR, critics point out, Project Shakti as a social enterprise cannot be equated solely with either enterprise or social work. Although CSR has its positive aspect, it may not be sufficient as a number of issues are excluded from the ambit of CSR, for instance, changing gender relations within society.

Shakti Amma(s) were to be the primary stakeholders in this engagement with market forces. Yet, they have come across as the object of the Project. They have not been given the importance of an active partner along with the state and HUL. Moreover, there has been no feedback mechanism to inform HUL's senior representatives the problems associated with the implementation of Project Shakti. HUL's interaction with the Amma(s) at best is at the lowest level through

Box 2: Empowerment of a Shakti Amma

Jalla Sujata from Nalgonda district used to sell bangles from home. Then she joined the Mutually Aided Thrift Credit Co-operative Societies (MACs). DRDA had told her about HUL and Project Shakti. The concerned government official asked her if she would be interested. As a leader of 17 SHGs, she was chosen by the SHGs to become the Shakti Amma.

Today she has been named as the Best Indian Rural Marketing Person in Project Shakti. She has been able to achieve a turnover of Rs 50,000 with the help of her husband and her son. She is one of the few who have met the senior representatives of HUL. Since she has become the Best Indian Rural Marketing Person she has had a fair share of visiting dignitaries. She was also given a computer as part of the iShakti initiative. She wants HUL to undertake the insurance of the Shakti Amma(s) who are doing well. Her personal opinion is that there should be a union of Shakti Amma(s) to deal with the problems of the Shakti Amma(s). She also wants HUL to undertake the education expenses of at least one child from every family of every Shakti Amma.

During the previous round of elections she had supported a mainstream political party. She has also had a tele-conference meeting with the then Chief Minister. The Sarpanch of her village has given her the responsibility of making a school in the village, old age pensions of the village. She monitors and supervises the attendance in the school from the head master to the teachers. She is the only Shakti Amma interviewed who was able to formulate an opinion on the economic trends within the country. But how many more such empowered Shakti Amma(s) has Project Shakti been responsible in promoting is questionable?

the RSPs, who are given vast territorial areas to cover, and hence, have tremendous pressure to meet their targets. Only a few of the successful Shakti Amma(s) actually get to meet the senior representatives in HUL, the District Manager(s) and the Regional Manager(s). These senior representatives have unofficially agreed that the feedback mechanism from the women is virtually non-existent.

By creating income-generating capabilities for underprivileged rural women and by making her an entrepreneur from a household woman, Project Shakti assumed that this economic independence would lead to better rural living standards. The levels of empowerment witnessed by Shakti Amma(s) have been rather varied. Economically, Shakti Amma(s) have contributed to the family income leading to an enhancement of self-worth among the Shakti Amma(s). Greater social recognition and respect for all the Shakti Amma(s) have led to an increase in their confidence and knowledge of business processes.

Yet, empowerment as freedom of choice and action to shape one's life along with control over resources and decision is not an evident result of the Project. As was indicative in earlier in the paper that often benefits of micro-credit enterprises were appropriated by men, similarly, there are many Shakti Amma(s) who have the dealership in their name, but the actual running of it is in the hands of the husband. The limitation in their mobility could be one of the reasons for a limited empowerment of Shakti Amma(s). There is also a feeling that the women in their effort to climb the social ladder are in reality subsidising themselves and their time, a fact that is often ignored and not taken into account as a cost of the project. A negligible number of Shakti Amma(s) have actively taken up participation in the political life of the community. It has been pointed out that the overall existing structures within the village and society at large are not empowering for the women.

Critics point out that opportunities for exposure to experiences out the village are very limited, and when some villagers do move beyond the village, others perceive them to be empowered. If from earnings of Rs. 1000, the village women spend Rs. 300 on soaps and consumer items, then, the women, as well as the villagers, see it as empowering process. Questions can be raised as to whether this is true empowerment. It has been pointed out that the overall existing structures within the village and society at large are not empowering for the women. HUL has provided opportunities that are empowering, but if the structures within which those empowerment opportunities are provided given are itself problematic then, there cannot be empowerment in the more encompassing sense of the term. HUL has not been interested in changing the structure of society. By increasing the capacity of women to purchase '*Fair & Lovely*' (a skin whitening cream, a very popular brand of HUL) is not empowering women. The Shakti Amma(s) are not in a position to make informed choices regarding the avenues for enhancing their quality of life. For the Shakti Amma(s), selling HLL products might not be the best option for them but there are no other actors providing them with better options.

The Shakti Amma(s) can be seen as the rural equivalent of the 'Avon lady' in Western countries. As the 'Avon lady' (door-to-door sales lady) sells the concept of feminine beauty through the Avon cosmetic products, the Shakti Amma markets the concept of health and hygiene, an important aspect to HUL's products. Associated with this sense of cleanliness are also the sense of modernity and a 'modern' notion of feminine beauty as is epitomised by *Fair & Lovely*. The idea that as Shakti Ammas, these 'hygiene ladies' are now contributing to the family income has definitely increased their sense of worth, an enthusiastic shift from a housewife to an entrepreneur. It has lead to the greater social recognition and respect within the confines of the village or the district.

Although at the start of the Project, an engagement through the SHG was the idea, in the practical implementation of the project, it was easier to deal with individuals rather than with the group as a whole. Hence, the position of the SHG has been undermined to a certain extent in the process. There is no active involvement of the group in the Project and there are no efforts at reduction of poverty through group savings and credit, one of the aims of forming a SHG. There are, limited as it may be, traces of jealousy among other group members of the economic gains from the Project, diluting the social cohesion that might have existed within the group in its savings and credit form. Since some of the Shakti Amma(s) were already from a trading background, the Shakti dealership is a safer option for them, which may have been rather daunting for the others. The Shakti Amma(s) do not feel that they as members of SHGs have given much back to the group. Some have stated that they have made cards for the SHG members who can then take products from the Shakti Amma(s) on credit along with a 5 per cent discount. A couple of Shakti Amma(s) have also stated they would give loans to the SHG members in case they asked for them. A Shakti Amma has also stated that she has given other SHG members moral confidence to take up the initiative and become Shakti Amma(s) in their own right. A few Shakti Amma(s) have felt that the SHGs have indirectly gained in recognition. The leadership of the SHGs as promoted by the government has in some cases shifted to the Shakti Amma(s) who due to the dealership were unwilling to give the group the leadership and dynamism that were essential to the SHG.

The NGOs now seem to be caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, having collaborated on this initiative, they have in some senses, agreed to the basic principles of such PPPs. On the other hand, problems in the actual implementation of the Project have raised doubts regarding their perceived role in the promotion of such PPPs. There is a perception among them that the initiative may not be suitable for all the places and even for all SHG members. One has to keep in mind that a large number of SHGs are being formed through various projects and the quality of the SHGs also varies in the areas. Due to this treatment of SHGs as a uniform entity across the state many such initiatives have only led to failures. One such initiative was the Apna Bazaar promoted by the Commission for Women and Child. A large number of supermarkets were set up which failed. Large sums of money from SHG members were wasted as a result. This particular initiative seemed to be more suitable to those women who are not involved with any other activity like working in their agricultural lands or as daily wage labour.

Although not a direct player in this initiative, such engagements with global processes also affect the family. The sphere of the family has always marked the

distinction between the public and the private realms. The public realm has been one dominated by the male members of the household while the women remain restricted to the private realm, highlighting their reproductive role rather than their productive abilities. Project Shakti has to a certain extent promoted this understanding of the distinction between the private and public realms though the effort was to remove this distinction. It has looked at the husband of a potential Shakti Amma assuming that as a man, the husband would be more capable of undertaking the initiative. And as has been stated above, in many cases it has been the husband or other male members of the family that have assumed the mantle of running the dealership.

The community is also an indirect stakeholder in the Project. The Project had no space for active engagements on the part of the community. In fact, Project Shakti had led to initial opposition from the other small shopkeepers in the village and some male members in the community. The shopkeepers were opposed to Shakti Amma(s) as equal competitors in their traditional occupation. The male members of the community were opposing the initiative being targeted only towards women. There is no scope in the Project to bring about greater social and economic cohesion or integration within the community. There are no sustainable livelihood opportunities, in the form of asset building or resource sharing generated by the Project that would lead to the overall development of the community as a whole. During the groundwork for the start of the Project although there were opportunities for incorporating the community as a whole within the process of production and not merely consumption, there was no attempt to do so. Suggestions to source castor oil from this region to boost local incomes and the manufacture of low-cost detergents locally were not taken up.^{xxiii}

V. Conclusions

Globalisation 3.0 is going to be more and more driven not only by individuals but also by a much more diverse – non, Western, non-white – group of individuals. Individuals from every corner of the flat world are being empowered (Freidman, 2005: 11).

In summary, the research provides evidence that globalisation has offered livelihood opportunities to rural women, in this particular instance, as marketing agents for the MNC. But such livelihood promotion opportunities may not be sustainable as it depends on the vagaries of global markets. Through this MNC initiative, Shakti Amma(s) have been able to increase their income and gain some social status within their limited sphere of the village or district. But this initiative is not without costs to most of the stakeholders involved, especially the primary stakeholder the Shakti Amma. Shakti Amma(s) have faced many problems in the actual running of the dealership under Project Shakti, the lack of

credit to purchase stocks from the MNC, meeting targeted turnovers for marginal profits and so on as detailed in the paper. The success of the Shakti Amma(s) can largely be attributed to the combined efforts of the entire family. Every member of the household, even the children, put in their share of handling the customers as and when required. In this sense, it is a household initiative and the engagement is that of the whole household. Despite the global economic chain, women continue to view their identity locally; they are, however, differently perceived as 'hygiene amma(s)' in the villages, bringing the message of cleanliness along with aspirations of modern and popular notions of feminine beauty as the use of the MNC products is purported to do (an example of this would be the use of *Fair & Lovely*, leading to greater success in professional and personal lives).

Although the initial intention was the implementation of the initiative with the SHGs, practical problems necessitated the initiative as one where individual members were chosen from the SHGs to run the dealership. With the Shakti Amma(s) becoming the more prominent person in the village, and sometimes in the district, the SHGs have lost its strong leaders to Project Shakti and the Shakti Amma(s). More involved in promoting the dealership to achieve the targets set by the MNC, the Shakti Amma(s) are not very active in local political engagements through panchayats or inclined to deal with larger social issues that were often taken up by the SHGs.

The actual running of the dealership has often been in the hands of the men folk of the appointed Shakti Amma(s), an indicator that benefits from income generation activities targeted towards women are often appropriated by men (Goetz and Sen in Masik, 1996). The male members of a household become the key instruments in the aggressive marketing in the satellite villages, on behalf of the Shakti Amma(s) bound by the social norms of mobility and interaction outside the village. The MNC through Project Shakti sought an empowerment of women by creating income generation capabilities for underprivileged rural women. But it may have, to a certain extent, perpetuated the existing gender relations in the larger society.

The State government helped the MNC build the linkage between individual members of the SHG and their core business, and then washed its hands off. This is the consequence of shifting global authority and weak regulation of MNCs by national/provincial governments. NGOs have become the midwives of market penetration; in some cases, they have disappeared without any accountability to Shakti Amma(s) they were instrumental in creating and in others, questioning their role in the partnership and attempting to resolve a sense of helplessness these partnerships. Either way, the role of the NGOs has made it difficult for the Shakti Amma(s) to negotiate with the MNC or the state government.

Clearly, globalisation has opened new points of influence for shaping policy but who gains access to those points and how different actors exercise influence remains unclear. The research has raised questions on various aspects to such citizen engagements in global processes and its consequences on meanings of citizenship in a globalised world. Have these engagements led to the state of Globalisation 3.0 as Friedman (2005) had envisaged? Do these engagements lead to an inclusion of the hitherto excluded, to a citizenship 'from below' (Dagnino in Kabeer, 2002)? Are such engagements leading to sustainable livelihoods that in turn lead to development as being about people and their enhanced ability and power to direct their own lives (Krishna 2007)? What are the factors that would enable the citizen to engage in global processes while simultaneously keeping in touch with their roots? How can the state invest in providing accountability to the citizen? Who decides whom to include and whom to exclude in these engagements? Whose body of knowledge are framed and given legitimacy in global/national/provincial fora? Are there networks emerging around the issues that are relevant to sustainable livelihoods in a globalised world? Are there resources for campaigns on these issues? What are the factors that enable or constrain activism around such issues?

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ⁱ We acknowledge and thank the contribution of K. Rakesh in data collection and Shri Nimmaiah, Director of People's Action for Creative Education (PEACE), for facilitating meetings with Shakti Amma and Pavan Kare and Santoshi R. for their support and help in the study.

ⁱⁱ The word 'shakti' means strength. In broader sense it relates to empowerment.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hindustan Unilever Limited was previously known as Hindustan Lever Limited (HLL).

^{iv} Targeted at women by providing them with access to credit and financial services, the SHG were initially were promoted by NGOs, but over the years, the government, mostly state governments, and banks like Reserve Bank of India and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) have also promoted the formation of SHGs in the country. The southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu account for almost 54 per cent of the SHGs and almost 75 per cent of the bank credit (Ramesh, 2007).

^v Empowerment refers broadly to the expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one's life. It implies control over resources and decisions. Empowerment can be seen as the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. An empowering approach to poverty reduction is grounded in the conviction that poor people themselves are invaluable partners for development, since they are the most motivated to move out of poverty (Narayan, 2006).

^{vi} Source: <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/mf/cr/cr-se-mf-gen-25050701.pdf> (accessed at time of data collection)

^{vii} More than 3,000 companies in about 120 countries, including Unilever and therefore by extension, Hindustan Unilever Limited, have signed on to the UN Global Compact (UNGC), a framework of ten core principles to guide business behaviour in areas such as human rights, the environment, labour practices, and corruption (Schwab, 2008). Launched at the forum in 1999, the Global Compact is not a regulatory instrument – it does not “ police”, enforce or measure the behavior or actions of companies. Rather, the Global Compact relies on public accountability, transparency and the enlightened self-interest of companies, labour and civil society to initiate and share substantive action in pursuing the principles upon which the Global Compact is based. Source: <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html> (accessed at time of data collection). The UNGC has become a powerful force for promoting good corporate governance, even though it is strictly voluntary and based on self-assessment. Companies that lag in reporting their progress are delisted; last year, 500 were cut (Schwab, 2008). Unilever has a code of business principles which describes the operational standards that everyone at Unilever follows, wherever they are in the world. It also supports its approach to governance and corporate responsibility and covers all stakeholders. Source: <http://www.unilever.com/ourvalues/purposeandprinciples/ourprinciples/default.asp> (accessed during time of data collection)

^{viii} Shakti Amma as the woman entrepreneurs are called in Andhra Pradesh, the word 'amma' in Telugu language means mother, portraying an image of the woman entrepreneur as a mother figure

^{ix} Source: www.hllshakti.com (accessed at time of data collection)

^x Source: www.unilever.com/Images/es_Project_Shakti_tcm13-13297.pdf (accessed at time of data collection)

^{xi} Source: <http://www.icmrindia.org/casestudies/catalogue/Marketing1/MKTA008.htm> (accessed at time of data collection)

^{xii} Source: <http://www.hllshakti.com/sbcms/temp1.asp?pid=46802171> (accessed at time of data collection)

^{xiii} Source: http://www.hll.com/citizen_lever/project_shakti.asp (accessed at time of data collection).

^{xiv} Source: Interview with Regional Manager, Project Shakti, HUL, 23rd November 2006

^{xv} Source: http://www.hll.com/citizen_lever/project_shakti.asp (accessed at time of data collection).

^{xvi} MART provides end-to-end solutions- market research, feasibility study to handholding business development services, market access, training and documentation to both development agencies and corporates. Source: http://www.martrural.com/mart_brief_history.htm (accessed at time of data collection)

^{xvii} The word 'vani' means public speech, implying the spread of the message of health and hygiene through public speeches.

^{xviii} Source: <http://www.hllshakti.com/sbcms/temp12.asp?pid=46802101&stid=24682102&ht=Y#partners> (accessed at time of data collection).

^{xix} Source: Interview with Director, Self-Help Groups, Commission for Women and Child Development, 24th November, 2006

^{xx} Source: Personal interviews with Shakti Amma(s), 28th November to 14th December, 2006

^{xxi} Source: http://www.itcportal.com/newsroom/press_25apr_05.htm (accessed at time of data collection)

^{xxii} In 1999, HLL had invited its employees to provide suggestions on its future growth opportunities. One of the suggestions that came up was loosely termed as 'rural' while the other was the idea of alternative channels, like the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh. The growing SHG movement in the country provided the impetus for trying something hitherto untried. http://www.itcportal.com/newsroom/press_25apr_05.htm (accessed at time of data collection).

^{xxiii} Interview with Director PEACE, 19th November, 2006, Source: http://www.itcportal.com/newsroom/press_25apr_05.htm (accessed at time of data collection).