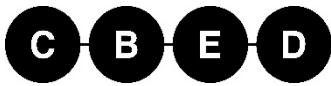


Case study: Enabling refugee livelihoods



“C-BED has absolutely improved the capacity of my team and myself to respond to the livelihoods needs of our community. The quality of our work has improved and it has helped us to formulate new intervention strategies and tools.”



At A GLANCE

CORE BUSINESS OF SOLIDARITÉS INTERNATIONAL

- ▶ Emergency response
- ▶ Hygiene and sanitation
- ▶ Food security and livelihoods

C-BED PROFILE

Within 2 years, SI trained 200 beneficiaries with business related skill sets to become small entrepreneurs in Mae La refugee camp.

Introduction

Solidarités International (SI) has been working in Thailand since 2007. SI provides assistance to more than 40,000 refugees living in Mae La camp who have fled civil war and interethnic violence in Burma. SI aims to improve living conditions of both refugees and Thai host communities, with specific objectives to enhance the health through provision of basic WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene), food security and livelihoods services.

Livelihoods in Mae La: Challenges & Opportunities

Despite SI attempts to support income generation activities in refugee camps for subsistence agriculture, challenges to sustainable impact were identified. In particular, SI staff point to the ‘culture of dependency’ that they and many humanitarian organizations commonly with relief aid in protracted refugee situations.

Around this time, the changing political situation in Burma corresponded with increased donor interest in supporting refugees to gain knowledge and skills useful for sustaining their livelihoods.

Thus, when SI was introduced to the ILO’s Community-Based Enterprise Development (C-BED) suite of entrepreneurship tools, they were in a unique situation to pilot the project as a means of building a successful livelihoods programme.

Programme Design

C-BED is an innovative, low-cost training model utilizing a peer-based methodology to support livelihood skills development in local communities. The curriculum is designed to be adapted to existing projects and services to improve sustainability and impact. SI combined their livelihood training on fish farming with the C-BED modules for Aspiring Entrepreneurs, which resulted in three days covering C-BED material and two days for technical training in upkeep of fish ponds.

In preparation for the trainings, technical staff, especially those with Karen and Burmese language ability, were familiarized with the trainer handbook and provided on-site support and facilitation. During the C-BED training component, SI provided lunchboxes and printed handbooks; these costs were negligible, and

therefore feasible for the SI staff. As documented in other C-BED impact assessments, costs of using the toolkit are also kept low because it can be done without needing a particular built environment. Indeed, SI staff simply used the common space in their own offices, which accommodated up to 35 participants per training session.

Programme Impacts of C-BED

In the two years since introducing C-BED, SI trained over 200 refugees, and 80 per cent of beneficiaries continued running their fish farm businesses after the first harvest, even after SI discontinued financial support. All of these businesses succeeded in turning a profit during the second growth season.

SI indicates that learnings applied from the first cycle of C-BED training were beneficial for future rounds. For example, where participants were unable to read the printed materials, SI facilitators explained the modules verbally, and took notes to ensure that participants could be reminded of the substance of group discussions.

Introducing incentives and competition were also seen to drive motivation- for example, by instituting a policy that participants be required to pay back costs associated with farming materials if they do not stick to their business plans, and establishing competitions between groups. Competition winners received small gifts or sometimes grants to help expand their businesses.

SI also highlights the value of the peer-based learning methodology, which encouraged participants to share their own experiences, building confidence and solidarity among different ethnicities and religious groups.

When business plans were introduced as a required part of competing for funds, participants showed impressive efforts to defend their own businesses, building not only a sense of ownership, but also soft skills that are invaluable for life outside the camps.

Institutional Impacts of C-BED

A shift in the dependency culture was seen- whereas with SI's initial livelihood trainings, beneficiaries had not continue their entrepreneurship efforts after a programme's end, businesses started with C-BED continued to run.

Given C-BED's trainer-less, peer-based learning model, SI expertise in livelihoods was not crucial for the success of businesses initiated. The ease of adaptability of C-BED meant that business models could be used for fish and frog-farming, as well as handicrafts and small shops. The peer-based methodology also resulted in conversations surfacing root causes of past failed attempts - lack of business knowledge, ownership and support, both personal and financial. This ultimately made the work of SI more effective. From one session to another, SI brought past participants to attend trainings and share with the group what they had done since starting their business. Participants provided mentoring and support to each other, which increased SI's capacity to respond to other areas.

Other organizations in the camp also approached SI for information on the C-BED methodology to support refugee livelihoods, and requested SI assistance in promoting C-BED across

9 additional refugee camps. Recognizing their perceived leadership, SI was appointed chair of the CCSPD working committee for Thailand in 2014.

What's in the future?

Unfortunately, the challenges of sustainability in SI's own work continue. While funding was cut with the decision to wind down SI activities in 2016, the simplicity of CBED and its ability to deliver results increase the likelihood of continued use and evolution of the tool.

The skills that SI has been able to share with over 200 aspiring entrepreneurs will continue impacting the community, both as the camps begin to close and as refugees return home with knowledge, skills and the confidence to apply them in business. Says Pyone Cho, a Karen refugee from Hpa-An: 'Now that we learned the business side of it, we can pick it up and do it for a living when returning home'.

Say Lar, a participant in the second fish farming-plus-business skills training, agrees. 'What I learned from the training was to do small business to survive wherever we go'.

“What C-BED brings is confidence building. It's a close community, and you train in a small group, so everyone can talk and that makes everyone feel good. In terms of business skills, they feel that the doors are open...you participate, you are all of it. They are a bit amazed by this.”

