

Aamara Biswas

Women Helping Women through Nano Finance

Report and Areas of Operation (Jan. 2009 – March 31, 2010)

Reported by Joyasree Mahanti

Aamara Biswas has helped more than 3000 women by giving mostly Rs 500 as interest free loan through Nano Finance project. It is overwhelming and exciting to see the effect of this project on the lives and spirits of the women. Through the Nano Finance concept, the women can learn how to help themselves, help each other, and work with trust to assist other women who are in distress. The uniqueness of this concept is to use the money they return to give loans to the other women. The initial amount which was invested to give loans has multiplied to nearly double its value in one year. This clearly justifies the basic premise of "**Women helping Women through Nano Finance**".

The trust (BISWAS) is the key factor for the success of this concept. Unless the women return the first loan, they cannot receive another loan, even in emergency.

The women themselves are responsible for the success of the Nano Finance concept and for the existence of Aamara Biswas organization. This concept will not make the women rich but will help them not to be the victims of the money lenders and become poorer. Further, it gives them a sense of security and comfort in the time of emergency. Aamara Biswas gives opportunity to women to dream of earning money to provide better life to their family and making the dream come true.

What is most amazing, the impact of a small help (sometimes less than 10 dollars) which gives the women hope and confidence for the future. When they return for another loan with a smile and tell that they are doing well, it is all worth and the world can be a comfortable place for everybody with a little sacrifice and trust.

A. Financial Report

The total collection was Rs 7,32,000 for the year 2009. Out of this Rs 5,00,000 is kept as a fixed deposit with BISWA mFI. The accrued interest covers a part of the administrative cost of Aamara Biswas. The rest of the amount is used for expansion of the Nano Finance project.

I am always concerned for the sustainability of the organization. The organization can't always depend on donation. The concept of Nano Finance is an interest free loan to help the poorest of poor women. The problem is - how it will sustain in the coming years. It is not possible to get grants all the time. My goal is to have a corpus fund and the interest accrued will cover the administrative cost in the future. Though the administrative cost is small, as the project expands, it needs more funds to cover the administrative cost.

B. Areas of Operation

1. District: Sambalpur (Town)

Coordinator: Sushama Patnaik (Salary – Rs 1500)

Assistant Coordinator: Protima Sahu (Rs 700)

Invested Amount: Rs 4,00,000

Started: November, 2007

88% of the women who took loan in November 2007 have paid back by November 2009. Women who have taken loan in 2008 are more regular in returning the loan. They understand the principles and the importance of the Nano Finance concept and how it benefits them. About 60 % of the loan is given for livelihood purposes. The other 40% loan is given for health care, education, and emergency needs. Most of the women are expected to return the loan though it may take them more than one year. There are genuine cases where they don't have enough money to pay back the loan in time after barely taking care of their family. Sickness is the common culprit in this situation. A large number of women have taken and paid back their loans during this period

2. District: Bhadrak (Villages)

Coordinator: Indu Malick

Invested Amount: Rs 2,15,000

Started: October, 2008, Collaboration with the NGO, Childright

The Nano Finance project was started on October 15, 2008 in Bhadrak district with the collaboration with Childright. Due to lack of communication with Tapan Mohapatra, the Secretary of Childright, the project couldn't progress further. Aamara Biswas did not receive any status report and decided to discontinue the Nano Finance project. About 80% of the money was given as loan to the women of Bhadrak district through the Coordinator and the Secretary. After continuing the project for a few months through the coordinator, Aamara Biswas decided to discontinue the project in Bhadrak District.

District: Nuapada (interior villages)

Coordinator: Biswajit Padhi

Invested Amount: Rs 1,00,000

Started: December, 2008, Collaboration with the NGO, Srusti, Biswajit Padhi, Secretary

Most women in the region are anemic & malnourished. They are brought to the hospital for delivery with as low as 4gms of hemoglobin. Most of them need blood transfusion which cost money. Since there is no blood transfusion facility in the government hospital, they are forced to go to the nearby private hospital or hire a transport to go to the district head quarter . Either way it costs money which they don't have. It was also agree between the beneficiaries that they can repay with a monthly installment of Rs 100 each or they can return the entire amount after getting the Janani Surakhy Yojana cheque of Rs 1400 (every women who goes for institutional delivery is paid an incentive of Rs 1400). Till to-date SRUSTI has used the funds to support 118 beneficiaries. SRUSTI has been focusing on pregnant women for this assistance.

4. District: Jagatsinghpur (Noliasahi and nearby villages)

Coordinator: Itishree Behera (Salary – Rs 1000)

Invested Amount: Rs 90,000

Started: November, 2008

The return is 100%. 50% of loan is given for farming, 35% is given for small tradings (making dried fish, raising goats, chicken farming etc.), 10% is given for education, and 5% is given for health. The total number of transactions until now is more than 300.

5. District: Baragarh (Lebdi and nearby villages)

Coordinator: Surabhi Seth (Salary Rs 1000)

Invested Amount: Rs 70,000

Started: November, 2008

Total number of transaction is 130. Most of the clients paid back their loans in five months. 50% of women have taken loans more than once (2,3,4 times). Return is almost 100%. The purpose of loan is mostly for small businesses. Surabhi is very careful about giving loans.

6. District: Anugul (Nuapada and near by villages)

Coordinator: Kamalini Badi (Salary – Rs 1000)

Invested Amount: Rs 80,000

Started: December, 2008

Total number transaction is 250. Some of the women have taken loans more than once. Return is almost 100%. The purpose of loan mostly is for small businesses (50%) and health care (50%).

7. District: Keonjhar (interior villages)

Coordinator: Unknown

Invested Amount: Rs 25,000 (Through Surabhi Seth)

There was no information from the coordinator. Nano Finance project has failed in this area due to distance and lack of communication with the project coordinator.

8. District: Anugul (Khamara and nearby villages)

Coordinator: Suba Sahu (Salary – Rs 500)

Invested Amount: Rs 45,000

Started: December, 2009

Most of the women took loans for their livelihood. They prefer to return the loan in six months.

9. Dist. Jagatsinghpur (Garam and nearby villages)

Coordinator: Neerupama Barik (Salary – Rs 5000)

Invested Amount: Rs 60,000

Started: December 9, 2009

Most of the women have taken loans for farming and small livelihood trades. They expect to return their loans in less than six months. Many of them have already returned their loans and are ready for another loan.

10. District: Puri (Kumbharapada and Alam Chandi Lane)

Coordinator: Sworna Lata Jena (Salary – Rs 500)

Invested Amount: Rs 30,000

Started: January 3, 2010

Most of the women took loans for their livelihood. They will pay back the loan in less than six months.

C. Solar Lantern Project

Aamara Biswas has invested about Rs 7,00,000 amounts towards this project. This is a difficult project to monitor. The lanterns are given mostly in interior villages of Sambalpur, Keonjhar, and Jagatsinghpur districts under the Nano Finance scheme. Collection is a problem due to the accessibility of the villages. It is more difficult when the project coordinators are not sincere to monitor the project. Maintenance of the lanterns also is another problem. The head office is in Bhubaneswar. Transporting the broken lanterns to Bhubaneswar and bringing them back is expensive and time consuming. Also, parts are not always available. They come from the company which is located in Hyderabad.

I am hoping to recover at least 50% of the total amount. The clients from Jagatsinghpur district have returned some money. Also, the NGO, Srusti, took some solar lanterns under the Nano Finace scheme and has paid back the loan.

Due to all the above problems, Aamara Biswas has decided to discontinue the Solar Lantern project. I wish some NGO can take over this project and provide solar lights to the villages where there is no electricity.

D. Conclusion

The more I think of not expanding the project, the more I expand it after seeing the impact of Nano Finance project on the women, their excitement, their dreams, their encouraging stories, and their coming back for another interest free loan to progress more with the help of Aamara Biswas.

I get extremely positive feedback from the coordinators who never complain about their low salaries and who are always eager to make this project successful. This gives me immense confidence and hope for the women who struggle daily for their existence.