

Lessons Learnt from Sri Lanka Stove Programmes



**Extract from
Profiles of ICS Programmes in Asia:
Sri Lankan ICS Case Study
R.M.Amerasekera, Executive Director, IDEA**

**USP- Urban Stoves Programme
RSMP- Rural Stoves Marketing Programme**

Introduction

Sri Lanka's stove programme can be identified as one of the few successes in the developing countries. The stove dissemination is fully commercialised and there is no doubt that it has reached sustainability. At present 300,000 stoves are produced by 127 potter families and marketed by a network of private traders scattered throughout the country just like any other commercial product without any outside influence or interventions. However, to reach this level of success, several strategically structured moves with consistent efforts were employed over a period of nearly 25 years by several organisations as recounted in this article.

Lessons Learnt

Commercialisation of stoves, unlike in the commercialisation of other consumer goods, needs a mix of strategies to accommodate a host of socio-economic, cultural, equity factors and aspirations of a traditional society as well as modern marketing strategies.

Despite the involvement of several organisations with different objectives and strategies adopted, Sri Lanka has been able to learn from each other's experience and each phase of development so that every stage was initiated where the other left with a wider set of

objectives and a broadened vision to accommodate diversity. So there was continuity and not much repetition or stagnation.

Facilitation of access to international funding and experience, sharing of experiences and transfer of technology were important factors for the success of the programme in Sri Lanka. This is the role played by ITDG, FAO/RWEDP and ARECOP in the Sri Lankan programme.

While the involvement of the government, non government and the private sector involvement is necessary at various stages, the participation of non government organisations in the team is particularly important for reasons of the need to focus, guide and facilitate on equity concerns. The government or the private sector may not be much interested as the stove is very much related to several micro concerns which fall outside the government policy and private sector interests. The strategies adopted in the rural marketing programme to reach the poor women users and to empower potter community and the community based organisations are examples. Sri Lanka programme has also demonstrated that these equity concerns can be accommodated in a commercial programme despite the commercial bias.

The design of a suitable stove is fundamental and the most important stage in a stove programme. It needs considerable time and resources because it has to suit not only the user but the producer and the distributor as well. Several stoves have been designed namely the IDB, NERD, CISIR and Sarvodaya but apart from the Sarvodaya the others were not popular. This experience indicates the stoves designed for technical perfection alone may be not the stove the user wants but which addresses many other user needs. The efforts and the methodological approach adopted to understand the user needs and perspectives in the design of the Sarvodaya paved the way for its popularity which was later modified to suit a commercial market. In a commercial programme the stove has to be simple and low cost so that the user will find it easy to use and purchase, the producer will find it easy to produce and the dealer will find it easy to transport, store and deliver. The Anagi 1 stove promoted in the USP was not popular as it had three pieces making its use, production and transport difficult which reduced the demand for it. Apart from the established benefits, the popularity of the Anagi 2 was also due to the flexibility of its use. It can be used as it is, mostly preferred by urban users for short cooking or as a liner preferred by the rural users for long periods of cooking. It can use a wide variety of biomass and can also be self installed or installed by a skilled artisan if the user is aesthetically minded.

Although equity is the main concern of NGOs implementing stove programmes, in general providing a subsidy at the initial stages to facilitate popularisation or commercialisation of ICS will not realise in a sustainable programme as shown in the Sri Lankan Dissemination programme. Therefore low income users should not be the initial targets of a stove commercialisation programme. However strategies to reach the poor must be accommodated outside the commercial network through empowering CBOs to

provide credit, establish revolving funds and introduce stoves as an entry point to other health and social development programmes.

The subsidised dissemination programme of the CEB prior to the commercialisation programme established the atmosphere to create awareness of the stakeholders namely the users, government and non government organisations, private sector and donors of the need for their involvement and participation in stove development activities which created the platform for the commercialisation programme. Therefore the provision of subsidies for R & D and pilot dissemination prior to commercialisation is desirable.

Sufficient funding is also required for incentives that have to be given to producers and distributors to promote and cover certain risks such as breakages in the initial stages. Although subsidies are a negative intervention in a commercial strategy, incentives to users, producers and dealers are favourable interventions in a promotion campaign. Sell four get one free, providing moulds free of charge, establishing revolving funds are such examples. In the USP and RSMP the funds allocated provided as much as 10% of the total budget for promotion and providing incentives.

Although controlling the price of a product is not favourable in a commercial strategy, establishing a pricing policy is necessary to discourage setting a high price at the beginning of a project.

The success of the USP in terms of meeting targets, which was carefully developed and implemented with a text book approach for commercialisation, did not sustain after some time despite the project activities being carried out perfectly and the infrastructure for production and marketing being established and the project target of marketing 60000 stoves being met. The success was really due to the project push which created the momentum which later gradually disappeared. The reasons for this situation can be attributed to several reasons.

- (a) There was no mechanism or provision to monitor the activities after the completion of the project. The continuity of the success was taken for granted..
- (b) The failure was not in the lack of demand but a gradual decline in production of stoves. The potters employed for production did not like to work within a rigid factory environment. By nature traditional potters enjoy their independence. This indicate that there can be conflict of interests in efforts to integrate the formal and the informal sector. At present the two new tile factories producing stoves have overcome this problem by making the potters partners in production not employees. This has been done by facilitating the potters to work within their own village environment by delivering the prepared clay to the village and buying the unfired stove to be fired in the factory kiln.
- (c) Tile producers have a lucrative business in selling tiles. The stove production brought only a marginal return compared to tiles which is why the tile factories did not

bother to waste their time to solve problems related to stove production after the project push was over.

In contrast to the USP the success of producing and marketing stoves in the RSMP has been continuing for the last 10 years without any outside interventions. The involvement of the informal sector and facilitating their involvement within their own working environment are major reasons for this success.

In contrast to the formal sector tile factory involvement where stove production provided only a small profit compared to tiles, in the case of potters, stoves are either the main income or a sizable proportion of the family income which provides motivation and above all makes stove production a matter of survival thus ensuring the sustainability of production.

The objectives of the stove development activities were changed to suit the social realities, social needs and donor perceptions. It first addressed the energy and environmental issues but later were expanded to cover health, gender, income generation for the poor, and social aspects. Thus the stove programmes was able to attract many stakeholders and donors creating a wider interest which was necessary for the continuity of stove programmes.

It is the decentralised production strategy which has led to the success of producing a large number of stoves amounting to about 25000 stoves a month. Creating a single or a few producers to cater for such a big market would not have been possible as experienced in the USP. The original intention of the USP was to train one tile factory to produce 5000 stoves a month but later eight factories had to be trained which too was not successful.

Efforts must be made to encourage individual producers at subsistence level to produce to cater to their own market outside the commercial network as sustainability can also take place within small scale units outside the commercial network. It also helps to penetrate a larger geographical area.

The success in the marketing of stoves were due to using existing channels of wholesale dealers without attempting to create a new network. Thus all what the project did was to facilitate linkages with the existing pottery traders and making stoves an item in their mix of pottery items.

The role of IDEA as an organisation fully committed to stove promotion activities and its continuous involvement and the dedication of the project staff in carrying out project activities have being identified as major factors which contributed to the success.

Provision of credit for improved stove producers to be paid back by stoves is observed to be a novel and effective credit program. It is effective as they are forced to produce certain number of stoves for the repayment and encourages the producers to get engaged in ICS production. Also

the repayment can be made in time as they need not wait till they sell the produce to repay by cash and in turn it ensures that the loan is effectively utilised for the given purpose.

In the absence of a national policy and a responsible organisation to take the responsibility and institutionalise stove development activities, the continuous involvement of a committed person or an organisation is necessary to play the role of the project developer, coordinate and link the different phases of the programme until its conclusion. In the case of Sri Lankan Programme continuous involvement of an individual who was able to influence and coordinate the linking up of the different phases without allowing the momentum to fade is observed to be a significant factor for the success in Sri Lanka.