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As every good entrepreneur knows, it's not enough to have a quality product. Marketing plays a very crucial role in making any venture a success. In the rural sector, there are plenty of artisans, and agro-producers creating unique items. But lack of access to markets prevents them from building a profitable business. But new avenues have opened up for people of Bahadurpur gram panchayat, Farraka. ACF has supported the community to set up a rural haat, creating a level-playing field for sellers and giving a huge boost to the local economy.



The bustling haat at Bahadurpur gram panchayat, constructed by ACF

The weekly haat, a bazaar stocked with local agricultural produce, handicrafts and homemade items, are an integral part of the rural market system. Haats buzz with buyers and sellers bargaining, and interacting, with no interference from middlemen. Haats supports individual entrepreneurship and yet it is collective in nature.

But for the 22 villages of Bahadurpur gram panchayat, a visit to the haat was

no charming matter. For years, these producers had been trudging to markets held in the distant villages of Tildanga or Ballapur in Farraka or even Kotalkpukur in neighbouring Jharkhand.

Given the small volume of produce, and perishable nature of most goods, traveling to distant haats were a drain on people's meagre resources. Families wanting to buy for their daily needs too found the rates prohibitive.

Our interactions with farmers as part of ACF's agro-based livelihood program revealed a high demand for a rural haat. ACF initiated discussions with Block and village representatives. Issues related to land, maintenance, list of producers, and fees were sorted. In a collaborative move, ACF committed to construct the haat, while the panchayat decided to resolve the other issues.

ACF supported the construction of borewell for safe drinking water, built common sit-outs and designed 64 stalls taking into account the nature of businesses. The haat was constructed, and a committee comprising villagers and panchayat members was set up to monitor, maintain and develop it. It began to be held twice a week. Despite slow beginnings, the haat flowered into a bustling market, with sellers and buyers from across all villages in the gram panchayat and beyond. The haat now provides opportunity for youth to initiate small ventures. Take the case of Intajul Haque of village Ranipur.

As an SRI farmer associated with ACF, he had demonstrated his willingness for innovation and risk. He used to vend cosmetics in different villages to supplement his income. But the rural haat was just the window of opportunity he was looking for to further establish his business.

On ACF's recommendation, Intajul applied for a shop at the haat. Over the past one year, his small cosmetic shop has diversified into household utility items. He does a brisk business at the haat, and has a loyal customer base, charmed by his amicable and humorous nature. Intajul now has a steady source of income, apart from his agricultural earnings.

The haat has been instrumental in changing the face of the economy in the region. But youths like Intajul are able to create lasting changes to their lives. At the same time, ACF has been able to demonstrate how large corporations can play a major role in creating new markets and rejuvenating local economies-through participation of local producers, leading to better livelihoods.



Intajul Haque at his shop at the Bahadurpur Rural Haat.