A SOCIAL BUSINESS INITIATIVE

BIC and CARE

The BIC Group seeks to go beyond the conventional sales model, reconciling today’s social objectives with the business objectives of tomorrow. It was able to take advantage of its recent presence on the conventional retail circuits in Bangladesh to try out an innovative distribution model that makes simple, affordable, good-quality products available to the inhabitants of remote areas. The project also offered an opportunity to identify the needs and expectations of Bangladeshi consumers and, in a broader sense, to prepare for the Group’s future in emerging countries.

In May 2011, BIC launched its first Social Business initiative in Bangladesh by joining the NGO CARE’s “Rural Sales Program,” now called JITA in honor of the self-employed women entrepreneurs called Aparajitas (“those who never give up”), who are the backbone of the project. Launched in 2004, JITA fights poverty by promoting entrepreneurial ventures among the poorest women. Under the program backed by BIC, they sell simple products (shavers and soon pens) door-to-door in the most remote and impoverished rural areas of Bangladesh. The local BIC distributor and CARE teams provide sales training and coaching on the features and use of the products and shaving practices. The Group sees JITA as an appropriate long-term solution for these women, giving them the means to overcome poverty and social isolation, as well as a feeling of pride and a new role in the community.

In 2013, the JITA program involved more than 4,000 Aparajitas reaching 20,000 consumers. The program has developed new marketing tools conceived to boost the Aparajitas’ sales: advertising, including TV ads, and vehicles in the BIC colors that tour rural areas providing information on the use of shavers. Also in 2013, the Group reviewed the success of its products in the various platforms developed by CARE. For the few platforms that have not generated economic development, the decision was made to halt distribution in order to concentrate on zones where the products are better adapted to the local needs. At the end of the year, test sales of pens were introduced to expand the range of products offered by the Aparajitas.

In collaboration with the Group’s partner CARE and its local distributor, a feasibility study was conducted on a similar distribution model in Ghana, with the goal of duplicating the model developed in Bangladesh taking local parameters into account. The study examined the need, the adaptations to be made in the model, and the population in order to identify the groups who would most likely be able to achieve the desired economic development through the sale of BIC® products.

BIC estimates that in 2014 its products will be sold by approximately 5,500 women in Bangladesh. The number of Aparajitas is lower than the original projections, which allows each one to reach a greater number of consumers and generate more income. In addition, the range of products offered for sale will be expanded with the addition of the BIC® Evolution™ pencil and the RS2 ballpoint pen, two products that are well suited to the market.