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Students help micro-entrepreneurs brand products

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BENGALURU: Mary Cecilia, a former nursery school teacher, has been selling pickles from her home for over seventeen years. Two years ago, she even got into selling sambar and rasam powder. But despite using the best ingredients possible and spending thousands of rupees on them, the 60-year-old was barely breaking even. This, however, is set to change, thanks to Mallya Aditi International School's (MAIS) Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) programmes, under which students helped her brand and market her products. Having tied up with the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), about 27 students from class 12 worked with nine self-help groups. They came up with individual brand names, brochures, visiting cards and even websites to help these entrepreneurs sell their products without third-party intervention.

“The students told me that the prices I was charging for my products were too low, and even worked out a cost that would ensure my profits increased. It was my dream to get a Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) certificate so that I could sell my products in shops and supermarkets. But when I tried to get one decades ago, I was asked to pay Rs 10,000, which I could not afford. The students helped me get the certificate for only Rs 2,000, and even changed the packaging of my products,” said Mary.

Dr BR Mamatha, mission director, NRLM, said they would take forward the work done by the students. “We try and get women to start enterprises and support them in terms of capacity building. Through this social marketing and rural livelihood programme, the students were able to understand what it is to run a rural enterprise, while the self-help groups learnt how to market their products,” said Mamatha.

The programme was supported by the ICICI Foundation. “The students helped them strategise and come up with brand names for their ventures. We even opened a website through which the products made by these nine groups can be sold. Through this programme, we’ re trying to empower them so that they can sustain themselves by expanding their market,” said Priti Rao, facilitator, SUPW programmes, MAIS.

On Friday, the week-long programme culminated with an exhibition-cum-sale of the products made by these women on the school campus.