

Livelihood generation through women empowerment programmes

Mount Valley Development Association has been promoting agriculture and allied activities in Uttarakhand through various programmes aiming socio-economic empowerment of women



A village-level sensitization meeting on menstruation and menstrual hygiene in progress.

In association with the Swedish Organization for Individual Relief (SOIR-IND), Mount Valley Development Association (MVDA) started the Farming Innovation for Women Empowerment project in October 2017. The project is being implemented in 14 Gram Panchayats of three blocks i.e. Bhillanga, Jukhoidhar and Kirti Nagar of Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, aiming socio-economic empowerment of women through climate-resilient livelihoods and improved access to government entitlements and services.

In the absence of livelihood, connectivity and other infrastructural facilities, migration has become a phenomenon in the area leaving behind women in the family to manage, and a major population is still engaged in agriculture and other allied activities. Despite being known as the backbone of the hill economy, the socio-economic and political status of women is still low in the area. Consequently, with the notion to improve the status of women, the project was initiated and thereby contributing:

- To enhance the income of women by 30%

through conservation and rejuvenation of indigenous spices and condiments.

- To increase the access of rights holders, particularly women, to various government schemes and entitlements.
- To sensitize on the issues of gender discrimination by increasing women's participation in village, block and district level meetings.
- To promote environment-friendly organic farming by highlighting the negative impacts of chemical fertilizers.

Impact

Based on the Self-Help Group model, the project has ensured financial security for nearly 300 women in the forms of savings and inter and intra loaning. These created groups are providing a platform where they are discussing women-centric issues like menstruation and menstrual hygiene management and contributing to create a safe space for discussion. For instance, avoiding public places during menstruation was a common practice in few of the intervention areas but after an open discussion, the practice is under the transitory phase. These groups are platforms

for women to represent their issues and concerns. Furthermore, for the active political participation of women, these groups are creating an initial space to develop leadership skills as there are group representatives. Few of the representatives have also contested in PFI elections last year and of present are a part of the local governance. Under the intervention, the women farmers are opting scientific and organic farming techniques like line sowing, Package of Practices (PoP), shivansh fertilizer, amrit pona, etc.

Work on humanitarian ground

COVID-19 has been an unprecedented phenomenon which is affecting human life adversely. Initially, COVID-19 created a chaotic situation as no one was aware of the do's and don'ts and precautionary measures. Community members were clueless and resourceless to protect themselves from the pandemic. To facilitate the community needs during the lockdown caused by the pandemic, 4,300 individuals were reached out for mobilization and nearly 80 wall paintings were painted at public places for sensitization. In addition to that, 3,604 masks and 703 PPE kits were distributed. As people were out of jobs and there was less source of income and means of nutrients, 376 women farmers received seeds of cash crop vegetables. The community members were also sensitized about government schemes and entitlements.

Sustainability

MVDA has always believed in the sustainable approach of development by keeping women in the centre. The Farming Innovation for Women Empowerment project has also found its sustainability in the ideology of the organisation. The project has established a seed bank for a sustainable availability of seeds for the promoted varieties and also aiming to set up a Farmer Field School (FFS) for constant learning in upcoming months. The project is also connecting women of multiple villages and bringing them under the one umbrella, Unang Swayat Sahakarita - a women-run cooperative for sustainable market linkages, which will ensure the livelihood of those women in the long run. The project is also initiating Village Climate Risk Management Committees at village panchayats for sustainability.

Distribution of cash crop seeds among village women.



A demonstration of line sowing of seeds in progress.

SHARMILA DEVI, an ideal for others

In Indian society, the woman has always been considered as the second wheel of the family. Sharmila Devi, an active farmer from Muthiyasi village, lives with her maternal family. Despite her struggles in marital life, she took a strong decision related to livelihood years ago which changed her life in many ways. Since the livelihood project started in her village, she became a motivation for other groups' members. Despite the difficulties, she has a smile on her face always which shows her positive attitude towards life.

Before the intervention, Sharmila Devi was struggling with wild animals who were ruining her crops every time and thus all the hard work done by her on the field was resulting in very less productivity. So when she learnt that spice cultivation requires less water and wild animals don't eat some spices, she decided to grow these. It was a good decision that she took. This led to not only good harvest but it also gave a good return. Following this, she decided to cultivate spices and condiments like turmeric, ginger etc only. This year, she has earned around Rs 10,000 from agriculture.

Recently, she has also been selected under ATMA scheme as an active farmer and will be benefitted by Rs 10,000 which she can use for agricultural activities/machinery, etc. At the beginning of this year, her woman farmers' group, established through the project, has reached out to NRLM for ginger seeds as it was not available due to COVID-19 situation. Sharmila Devi has been making a significant financial contribution to her family. Women like Sharmila Devi are examples and motivation for every other woman.



Sharmila Devi being felicitated on International Women's Day.

Focus in post-COVID-19 world



The pandemic has adversely affected the economically backward sections of the society. Millions of people lost their livelihoods but it has also created an opportunity to make humankind realize the importance of locally available resources and compelled us to focus on that. The daily-routine life has changed as online-plat forms have become new professional space and people have realized the importance of healthy habits and human relations. We believe that development must be sustainable for everyone and the Indigenous knowledge and products play a significant role in that. Henceforth, with the same belief, we have worked with and for the community and would continue doing that always.

- Anur Singh Nigri
Secretary
Mount Valley Development Association



Distribution of PPE kits.