

HARYANA COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROJECT HELPS WOMEN UNITE



Self Help Groups



FOREST DEPARTMENT HARYANA

EXUDING CONFIDENCE



Chanderkala



Kusum



Jarnail Kaur



Baby Chauhan



Rachna



Babita

HARYANA COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROJECT HELPS WOMEN UNITE

Haryana Community Forestry Project (HCFP) is a community based intervention to reverse the process of degradation and depletion of natural resources through forestry development with the active involvement of people. The project is funded by the European Commission and Government of Haryana and is being implemented by Forest Department, Haryana. The uniqueness of the project lies in its participatory management methodology and approach to enhance the stake of people in the entire process of planning, implementation, monitoring and management of project interventions and sustainability of impact beyond its intervention period. The project has laid emphasis on establishment of community based institutional arrangements such as Village Resource Management Committees (VRMCs) and Self Help Groups (SHGs) to enhance the stake and capability of people, especially women.

For social mobilization of women, who constitute half of the population, Self Help Groups have been formed in 100 villages and this approach has given an opportunity to women to free themselves from

isolation and exploitation. Regular training is conducted to develop and enhance their skills to run their organization.



Project staff interacting with women.

Under the project, formation of Self Help Groups of women have provided them a collective forum and expanded their social relationship network. Initially SHG members have been imparted training on SHG concept and management and skill upgradation. SHG members meet once or twice a month to discuss various issues related to women and overall development of the village. It has led to their economic empowerment through savings and initiation of micro-enterprises at individual and joint level, functional literacy training, organic farming by promoting vermicomposting and capacity building of the women through various training and exposure visits. After an initial six months, if the performance of SHGs is satisfactory, they are provided a matching grant of Rs. 2500 to boost their morale, the only direct monetary benefit given to SHGs by the project.



SHG members learning participatory planning.

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION INITIATIVES

So far about 170 Self Help Groups in 100 villages have been formed with the active support of the project. The total number of members exceeds 2,000 and cumulative savings of the members are Rs. 35,42,769 Cumulative inter-lending among members for productive purposes, emergency needs and domestic needs is Rs. 44,28,375, out of



Cluster president discussing sanitation programme.

which Rs. 25,81,512 has been repaid. Interest earned by members is Rs. 2,74,978. This indicates strong bonding and faith developed among members. Economic independence by savings has generated a sense of security, self-respect and pride to members, of which they had only dreamt before coming into the group. For long-term sustainability and linkage with various institutions these SHGs clubbed themselves into Clusters and Federations. So far one Federation and 10 Clusters have been formed. Janak Federation in Jatusana constitutes 23 groups and they meet once every two months and discuss various interrelated issues of the groups.

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Increased awareness and knowledge about the outside world has brought change in the behaviour and attitude of women members. SHG members

focus on protection of the girl child, mother and child health care, family planning, sanitation, better education of their children, various problems of the village like drinking water, functioning of schools, alcoholism etc. Cohesion and collective strength are their key capabilities. They can influence community, panchayat and service providers easily when they are united. So far members from various Self Help Groups have taken around 100 social or community actions which have influenced the State Government Officials and village for the holistic development of the village and women in particular. Main actions accomplished by women are sanitation awareness in the village, solution of drinking water problems, conflict resolution, help to marry poor girls, improvement in quality of mid-day meals in schools, corrected conduct of school teachers, health awareness camps and linkage with various institutions for the welfare of women etc.

SHG members in village Sundrah in Jatusana Division have collectively corrected the functioning of school staff, although they faced tough resistance from school staff and their husbands. Women noticed the conduct of teachers as they were ignoring the pupils, the staff was not focusing on their classes. The SHG took collective action for





Meeting of Federation members.

the better future of the village children and now the school teachers are conducting classes properly.

The SHG in village Parkhotampur is working for the eradication of social evils in the village. Members are aware about the importance of the girl child and equal status to girls. Whenever there is birth of a girl they celebrate it with equal enthusiasm as they do in case of birth of boys. Similarly the group members in village Asalwas Merheta in Bhiwani and village Dhandardu in Ambala are celebrating the birth of a girl child.

Group members have worked for the reduction in consumption of alcohol in Parkhotampur village. They took collective action against the supply of liquor in the village as some women complained that their families are suffering due to alcoholic habits of their husbands. They contacted district authorities for stopping supply of liquor to the village and were able to remove liquor vends near the village. Now many men have stopped or reduced drinking.

In village Dhana Ladanpur group women intervened to improve the quality of the mid-day meal, supplementary nutrition food for primary education school children supported by Government of India.

ROLE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The SHG women have started taking initiatives for providing justice to village women, especially widowed and poor women. In village Rawalwas Kalan a dispute between the ex-chairman of the VRMC and the present chairman got so serious that their case went to court for decision. Women intervened and resolved the conflict at village level. Similarly in Bharaf village SHG members resolved a conflict between two families. In village Dhana Ladanpur members resolved a conflict between Harijan and Rajput community. In Jatusana Division group members were able to get back land of a poor widow as her relatives were grabbing her land. It



Trying to put their point strongly and collectively.

shows the strength of members for conflict resolution and their spirit for peace and justice in the village.

DECISION MAKING

Members' access to credit has significantly contributed to the process of increasing their presence and recognition at household and community level. Women constitute one-third of the members of the VRMC and they participate right from formulation of the village micro-plan upto implementation and monitoring of the project activities.



Learning to make village development plan.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

The 73rd amendment has been a landmark achievement to promote grassroots democracy. It paid special attention to political empowerment and provided one-third reservation in all three tiers of local level democracy. This gave a platform to women to come out from the confines of the four walls to be a part of development processes.

Social awareness and their enhanced abilities to take decisions have motivated women to contest elections for posts in panchayats and become a Panch or Sarpanch. During State Panchayat



Elected women representatives discussing their powers and responsibilities.

elections in April 2005, 33 women Panches/Sarpanches were elected from amongst the SHG/VRMC members. It has equipped them with power to take major decisions about their community. In Kheri village one woman from Mahalaxmi group is a very active woman, taking keen interest in village affairs. She decided to contest the Panchayat elections and was elected Chairperson of the block Samiti. Saraswati group in Shahzadwala in Kurukshetra Division has also set an example of women empowerment. Out of seven members in the Gram Panchayat, four are women and one of them is Sarpanch of the village. This indicates the confidence and strength of many other women members in other villages also. The project is helping them to acquire knowledge of Panchayati Raj and gender sensitisation.

INCOME GENERATION

Need of SHG members supported by the project has resulted in initiation of Income Generating Activities (IGAs) by women. Vermicomposting has emerged as a major income generation activity that has promoted organic farming along with income to members. By inter-lending members have invested money in agriculture, animal husbandry etc. **So far Rs. 38 lacs have been earned by some 1000 SHG members (upto March 2005)**, out of which Rs. 24 lacs from vermicompost. Other important IGAs are general stores, grocery stores, dairy, sweet box making, cosmetic shop etc.

The 11 women from Bakhtua Mahila Samiti in Bakhtua village got vocational training in sweet box making provided by HCFP. They started their enterprise with an investment of just Rs. 19,000, including cost for training and raw material. Women made sweet boxes and sold them during the Diwali festival and it earned them Rs. 14,000. Being encouraged with this amount, they made more boxes which fetched them Rs. 10,000. Women of the group decided to buy more raw material in bulk

INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES



for making of more boxes. Simultaneously, women of the group engaged themselves in organic farming and social issues. The group has collectively earned Rs. 1,71,000.

As regards Smt Krishna of village Balsamand (District Hisar), who got married at the age of 7, now she is a completely new and confident person. She joined a SHG five years ago with the consent of her family, she got a loan of Rs. 3000 from the SHG and started a grocery shop. At present she is earning Rs. 2500 to 3000 per month from this business which she is expanding regularly. She has opened a bank account also.



Similarly, many more women have upgraded their skills and are engaged in various IGAs like tailoring, soap making, candle making and STD booths etc. All of them have started or expanded their activities by taking loans from the SHGs, which clearly indicates that the poor can save and use the finance productively which will ultimately help them break out of poverty.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING

The uniqueness of the project lies in its efforts towards capacity building of SHGs through training and exposure, particularly in areas of income generation, group and credit management. A majority of the women organised into SHGs have received training and exposure on the entire process of vermicomposting. Members have learnt about organising meetings, accounting system, credit extension and repayment procedures, proceedings writing, reconciliation of money transactions and bank level transactions through various training.

The SHG members are establishing linkages with

various other institutions in the village like VRMC, Panchayat and district administration. SHG members in village Budian contacted the Block Development Officer for repair of streets and were able to get a grant for their repair. In the same village Jarnail Kaur has established a milk society along with other members of the group. They have taken a contract from Milk Vita Samiti to supply milk in the area. Initially men folk of the village ridiculed her, but now they appreciate her for her entrepreneurship. She proudly says that if a woman keeps faith in her own abilities, the rest becomes easy. This wave of milk society is set to spread in other surrounding villages also. She is also trained in artificial insemination of cattle and doing it successfully. From the success and motivation of the first group there are now three SHGs functional in the village, showing the process of replication of the concept of SHGs.

Chando Devi aged about 60 from village Tarkanwali in Sirsa district tells the story of how women organized themselves into one unit by regular training and exposure to the outside world. She says they had not even gone up to Sirsa town before formation of SHG. Along with awareness about environment and plantations they have now started vermicomposting, set up a flour mill by taking loans from the group and all the group members are united for any kind of help to one



another and the society. Along with enhanced identity in the village, group formation has boosted their confidence and status in their families.



Kamala Devi in Parkhotampur has worked hard for maximum spread of organic farming in the village. She attended literacy training and shows great interest to learn at her old age and motivates other women of the village to attend literacy classes.

Women link workers like Somvati, Rachna and Kamlesh from villages Balsamand, Bakrainwali and Banawali in Hisar Division have become resource persons for development projects based on community participation. They are contributing a lot for the holistic development of the community in project villages and also under a JBIC sponsored project in the state. Excellence, spirit to learn more and more is the story of many such members and groups in the project villages.

FUNCTIONAL LITERACY

Rural women who are part of the Self Help Groups were provided support in their functional skills through a literacy programme at village level. Functional literacy intervention is being imparted



through multi-media computer package and is supplemented using primers. Women selected from amongst the interested illiterate and semi-literate have shown great interest and learned with great enthusiasm. So far 700 members from 70 SHGs have undergone literacy training.

Nagli is socially & economically backward village. Major population of this village is Muslims. Literacy level is low in the village. But now, seeing the importance of education, group women decided to send their girls to school and got them admitted. They also talk about it amongst other women of the village and encourage them to send their girls to school.

PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENT AND PRESERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Women members clearly understand the project objective **to improve the natural environment and maintain land fertility through sustainable management of natural resources.** Women have successfully worked for awareness and spread of organic farming. So far about 800 members have adopted it and reduced use of chemical fertilizers. **Sanitation camps are being organized by groups for betterment of environment and a 'no to polythene' message is being spread actively.**



Women practicing social fencing



Women groups have started protecting the plantations in their villages themselves, like the SHG members in village Ganganpur. Women SHGs are engaged in distribution of fruit plants to households. Smokeless chulhas being used by women are proving useful to reduce air pollution and fuel consumption as well as improve health. Women extensively take up vermicomposting and organic farming.



Along with many other members of SHGs in the project area, Chander Kala from village Bewal has



strongly worked for the awareness and spread of organic farming. Chander Kala received training in vermicomposting in 2002. Within four years, she sold Rs. 5.5 lakhs worth of manure and Rs. 50,000 worth of earthworms. Aggregately the group has earned more than Rs. 7 lakhs by selling worms and manure to local farmers and the Forest Department. They also use this manure in their own fields. She also encouraged other women of the village and imparted training to them. Almost 300 women in Bewal are now engaged in this and contributing to their family income. The message has spread and the entire village is engaged in organic farming. Chander Kala is now a confident lady, actively participating in meetings and interacting with Government Officials. Also women from village Bakhtua (District Ambala) and Smt Krishna Devi and Kamla Devi from village Malikpur Bangar (District Yamunanagar) have taken lead in spreading the message of organic farming. So far 800 tonnes of vermicompost has been produced by all groups.

FUTURE PLANS AND VISIONS

Cohesion and collective strength has lead to recognition and self-esteem of women. Along with positive changes in the level of confidence, women



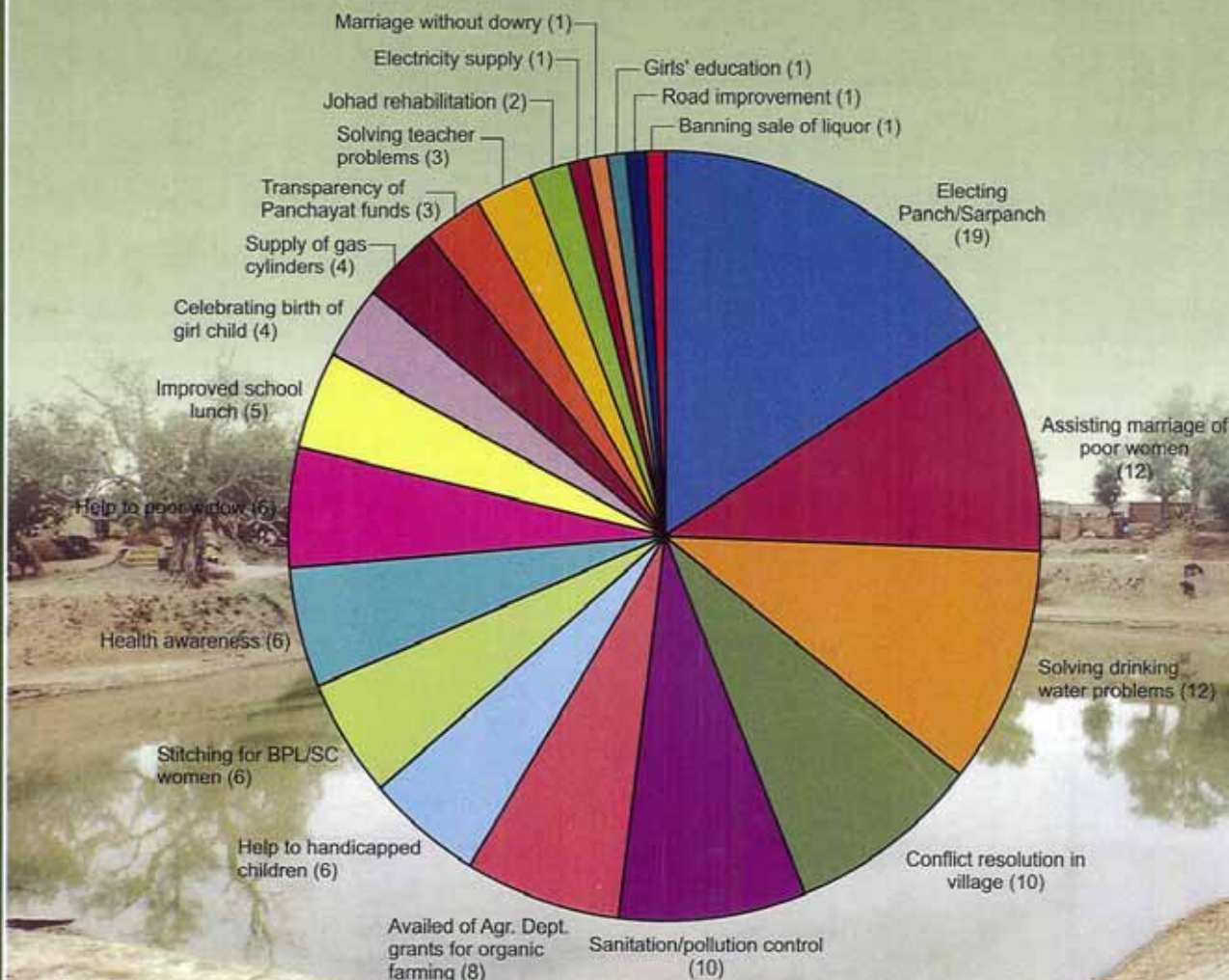
SHG women at sales counter.

have witnessed growth of their groups in terms of group capital, individual savings, income generation, inter-lending and its impact on their social and economic development. They wish to continue and scale up campaigns against wrong social practices and become a force for development in their village. To make their dream come true on a sustainable basis, the project is encouraging them to organise into Clusters and Federations so as to ensure their institutional and financial stability, thus helping them realise the ultimate goal of a self-reliant rural society with self-governance in a healthy natural environment.



Actions taken by SHGs

(with number of SHGs involved)



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