Empowerment of Women through Self Help Groups

In 40 Villages in Haryana, India

A Brief Update of the project being undertaken by

India Development & Relief Fund and Arpana

March 2010

The winter months, as wheat crops mature and mustard fields lie golden in the sun, provide a short respite, for village folk, from the arduous agricultural activities that continue through the year.

Arpana’s rural team takes this opportunity to maximize training inputs for SHG members on issues of importance that impact their:

- Maternal and child health
- Family well being
- Opportunities for economic strengthening
- Laws related to Panchayati Raj

In the months of November and December, twelve teams of Arpana’s rural workers (2 workers in each team) conducted training sessions in villages where new groups have been formed. Antenatal care and the importance of measures for availing of clinical checkups, were elements of the subject covered. 24 villages were covered with an attendance of approximately 500 women.

Arpana is also working closely with MARG, an NGO which works on a national level, to create awareness amongst the poor about laws and people’s rights.

The Government has, since two years, ensured 100 days of employment through the village panchayats. However, very few of the poor target group in Haryana know about the law, about their rights and benefits or about the process to ensure those benefits reach them.

MARG has been promoting advocacy in some villages related to this law (NAREGA) so that panchayats respond positively to people’s collective initiatives.

Arpana arranged for a workshop for its workers so that all SHGs in Arpana’s target area would have the relevant information.
60% of the SHGs in the target area were covered before the Gram Sabha on February 26th. Women were taught how to fill forms, apply to the Sarpanch and do the follow up.

Unfortunately, the District Administration cancelled the Gram Sabha and with village elections coming up in May, the Sarpanches were too occupied by future uncertainties to pay heed to applicants who approached them.

This is a long struggle but Arpana, with MARG’s support, will continue to support the community to avail of their right to 100 days employment.

On January 20th, a large congregation of SHG members, approximately 1,500, from across the target area, gathered at Village Kalram to celebrate their achievements since coming together as a Federation.

Bank managers of banks where SHGs have their accounts as well as Asha and anganwadi workers from their villages were invited. Senior Management representatives from Pfizer Inc. and Pfizer India also attended the event as Pfizer had supported a mother child health care program in some of Arpana’s target villages between 2002-2008. Many groups had been formed and became active agents for promotive health during that period.

The guests were extremely happy to see the boundless energy and optimism of the women which finds expression in their success at many levels of their lives.

In March the second General body Meeting of the Jan Shakti Mahila Vikas Sangsthan (the Federation of Self Help Groups) was held and over 30 new groups became members of the Federation, taking its membership up to 130 SHGs from 97 SHGs.

There are over 40 groups that have taken loans from the Federation which, at present, has a savings of over 28 lakhs. Approximately Rs.22 lakhs is circulating as loans amongst the Federation group members.

Arpana will be ever indebted to IDRF and its founder members for the vision which comprises the support for such developmental initiatives in areas of vital concern and importance to the nation.

The empowerment of the poor, the awakening of the marginalized, is an endeavour that IDRF and Arpana are tackling through this dynamic partnership.

We are profoundly grateful that IDRF support enables us to work for the rural poor women who still live in the shadow of ignorance and denial.

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