



ARPANA SERVICES

Supporting the Dreams of Rural Women and Marginalized Farmers



Arpana's Programs for Health & Development in Himachal Pradesh April 2020 to March 2021

ARPANA RESEARCH & CHARITIES TRUST

Headquarters: Arpana, Madhuban 132037, Karnal, Haryana

Himachal Pradesh: Arpana Medical & Diagnostic Centre, Upper Bakrota
Arpana Socio-Economic Centre, Gajnoi

Our Founder and Inspiration - Param Pujya Ma



Motivated and guided by Param Pujya Ma, who saw the Lord in every person, Arpana members reached out to the underprivileged and vulnerable women and farmers in 60 villages of Himachal Pradesh.

With the motif of service with respect, dignity and love to each beneficiary, Arpana facilitated 81 women's self help groups and 20 Farmers' groups in Himachal leading to awareness, self esteem and financial security.

Ma's spontaneous words, flowing with wisdom and devotion, along with her extraordinary life of service, continue to inspire and motivate Arpana members.

Backdrop

Arpana has been working in the remote, under developed villages of Chamba District in Himachal Pradesh for the health, wellbeing and development of rural communities for nearly 3 decades. Poverty and unemployment are particularly acute in the district due to the nature of the inaccessible, semi-arid, mountainous, rocky terrain as well as the scarcity of means of communication.

Continuous development inputs have strengthened the foundation of community health from service delivery to that of enabling and empowering the community through community based organizations that build their own savings and credit resources, create their own opportunities and perform and disseminate good practices in health.

Awake, Arise, Ready for Enterprise!



Vikarma Devi is a resident of village Lohri. Vikarma Devi's family is poor, and after counseling, she joined Shardha SHG, facilitated by Arpana. She began savings in a small way and now after two years, has taken a loan of Rs. 30,000 from her group to purchase a jersey cow.

The cow yields more than 8 kg milk daily and Vikarma sells 5 kg milk every day at Rs. 40 per kg in local markets, earning upto Rs.6,000 per month. The family finds the burden of poverty has eased and enjoys a better quality of life.

Vikarma Devi and her cow

Sudha is a resident of village Kakela and has been a member of Pinki Mahila Bachat SamooH for some years. Her husband works in a hotel in Khajjiar. On account of the Pandemic and Lockdown, all hotels were shut and Sudha's husband lost his job. The wheat harvest was ready: both husband and wife decided to take a loan of Rs.50,000 from her group and they purchased a thresher.

This wise decision enabled them to rent out their thresher for harvesting, to farmers from three villages- Kakela, Mihari and Manhattoo. This thresher enabled them to earn Rs.18,000 during the difficult months of the lockdown.

Sudha's Wheat Threshing Machine!



Health Initiatives in Himachal 2020-21

The Arpana Health Care & Diagnostic Centre

Arpana's Centre is a great boon to the hill folk in the surrounding area. A free outpatient clinic is held by a qualified doctor at the Medical Centre in Upper Bakrota on a daily basis. Laboratory tests are done and about 3000 to 5000 patients are seen annually.

In 2020, Arpana's Health Centre was required to shut down for some months, as per Government orders to deal with COVID-19, and only 2700 patients were seen and treated.

Speciality Camps – a Lifeline for Hill Folk

Arpana usually holds 8 to 10 free Speciality Camps for poor patients every year. However, due to COVID-19, this program was not possible except for a Gynae Camp.



The one special free Gynae camp was held at Satyam Hospital, Sultanpur (Chamba) during the months of April and May, spread out in compliance with government guidelines.

Patients were treated and operated upon at Satyam Hospital, by Dr. Hemant Sharma, MD, Obstetrician/ Gynaecologist.

This free Gynae camp thus enabled poor patients to get the operations they required but could not afford.

Patient Champa Devi, wife of Vipan Kumar from Village Pajja, Tehsil Salooni, District Chamba

Meetings on Health for Self Help Groups (SHGs)

Arpana's community development workers held monthly health meetings with SHGs on:

- Seasonal & chronic diseases
- Covid precautions, symptoms, referral
- **Sanitation** and hygiene
- Pregnancy care, safe delivery,
- Breastfeeds, weaning foods, infant care
- Diarrhea and oral rehydration

Health meeting on ANC care & safe delivery



Thus, self -help group members get regular reinforcement of information and learn about practical measures for the wellbeing of their communities, putting the information to good use for the health of their village folk.

Sanitation for Village Environments

Arpana's outreach team has worked with women's self help groups (SHGs), educating and motivating them to undertake collective sanitation drives of their villages, which 12 years ago, were dirty, with open defecation making village environs foul and unhealthy.

The 81 women's SHGs undertook 1,296 collective sanitation drives in their villages, with 85% of SHG women participating in these cleaning activities twice a month for 8 months.

Over the last 5 years, Arpana's outreach team focused on educating SHG members on the importance of building toilets and their proper and full utilization.

Now 99.9% women have built toilets which are being fully utilized and maintained

Empowering Rural Women & Marginalized Farmers

Women's Self Help Groups – the foundation of Arpana's rural development program.

Arpana has facilitated 81 self help groups (SHGs) with 782 members in 60 Himachal villages.

SHG Meetings: Monthly meetings could not be held during the Covid Lockdown in April, May, June 2020. When regular meetings were resumed, strict pandemic precautions were observed.

Due to persistent motivation by Arpana's community workers, SHG members in all groups:

- Raised their savings from Rs.50 per month to Rs.200 and Rs.500 per month
- They raised their contribution for common expenses from Rs.5 to Rs.10 per head per month.
- They agreed to impose fines on non-observance of corona norms.
- Sanitation drives were conducted on a regular basis.
- Many women took loans for domestic needs as the lockdown meant loss of work for their menfolk.
- SHG members decided to submit a petition for a bank linkage for income generation purposes.
- In March, Arpana's SHG women participated in a Gram Sabha (local Governing Council) conducted in Bhaktpur Panchayat, presenting their petitions for cowsheds, village roads, check dams and concrete drains.

SHG women participate in Governing Council



A Driving Mission! Let's Keep our Villages Clean!

Self help group women are conducting their campaign in their villages by carrying out fortnightly sanitation drives. Thus they keep a fair level of cleanliness in their villages.

Members of Kajal and Sita self- help groups in village Huded joined hands to conduct their village sanitation drives. They pulled in their children, as on this occasion they cleaned the access pathway to their village, clearing all the shrubs that blocked the pathway.

Segregating Waste



Women are now segregating waste. Wet kitchen waste goes for compost. They recycle different kinds of plastic to make seating mats, carry bags and other items for domestic use. Other recyclable waste is collected and sold.

Every quarter, a cluster of SHG groups calls the waste collector who purchases the collected waste items, thus also providing them with some pocket money.

SHG women collect waste items for sale

Push for Plantations

SHG women composed a collective petition for plantation of Ban trees for reforestation of village common land above their villages. They submitted it to the forest Guard Bhorla Ram. Ban trees are good for fodder for cattle. Many SHG groups submitted collective petitions to the District Forest Department and to the Horticultural Department for plantation of trees on their village common lands.

In response, 91,247 trees were planted by the District Forest Department and District Horticultural Department. The village folk provide labour for digging pits and are paid wages. They have pledged undertakings to protect the plantations for a period of 5-7 years.

Skilling for Better Living

The 4 craft and tailoring centers which had begun functioning in March 2020, in 4 remote hamlets in the Jatkari Panchayat, had to be closed on account of the strict Lockdown, with the onset of Covid, near the end of March 2020.



Trainees at village Bankhanda display crochet items to their instructor which they made at home during the Lockdown



Young, enthused trainees show their completed samples for comments from their instructor, in village Dhanota

The Lockdown lifted in mid-June 2020 and permission for centers to reopen was given only in July 2020. The eager batches of trainees joined class with enthusiasm and brought all craft items they had made at home during the lock down.

Farmers Self Help Groups: A Beacon of Hope for the Marginalized!

Marginalized farmers in Arpana's target area of 82 hamlets in Chamba District HP, have experienced a gradual transformation in their lives – a 10-fold enhancement in their annual incomes!

This is due to the continual investment of knowledge and skills related to agricultural and horticultural activity, in farmer groups facilitated by Arpana. This training process is also accompanied by sponsoring participatory Micro Irrigation projects, for farmers.

155 farmers who are members of 20 Farmer's SHGs formed by Arpana Their savings during the year is Rs.105,000. Over 100 members have supplementary incomes from varying livelihood options.

Obstacles Farmers Faced

The first crop of vegetables is usually planted in April. The Covid Lockdown had blocked mobility and transportation, and farmers were unable to get seeds. It was only after the second lockdown was lifted in June-July 2020, that farmers planted vegetables.

Then too, farmers had poor sales as:

- tourist traffic was nil
- hotels were closed.
- cancellation of the great annual fair at Chamba
- cancellation of the great annual pilgrimage to Manimahesh

However, farmers from villages of Miyari, Kakela, Tallai, Kakuara are members of the Gajnoi Farmers Producer Organization formed by Arpana.



They were able to make some profitable sales of vegetables, collectively, in the wholesale vegetable markets in Jessore and Nurpur (approximately 35-50 km away).

Some of the farmers also earn Rs.50,000 to Rs.150,000 per annum to supplement earnings from agricultural activities.



Shri Karam Chand is a marginal farmer in village Badia Kothi and is also a member of the Local FPO (Farmers Producers Organization) formed by Arpana, with NABARD's sponsorship. Karam Chand has planted flowers and vegetable crops, which are on verge of harvesting.

He is seen in his field of Cauliflower, which crop he will sell to the FPO which will market it in the wholesale markets fetching the most competitive prices.

Karamchand now earns Rs.200,000 per year from his vegetable crops.

Dimple Kumar is a farmer from village Badiya Kothi and is a member of the Ravi Valley FPO. Following the advice of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra Scientist, he prepared two pits to nurture vermicelli compost. He uses only this organic manure which results in better, healthier crops, and also saves him money spent on chemical fertilizer. 10 other farmers seeing the benefits of using vermicelli compost, are also digging pits required for preparation of vermicelli compost. Advantages of vermicelli compost:

- Saving money used on chemical fertilizer
- Getting healthier organic crops
- Making optional use of natural resources.



Preparing Vermicompost pit

At Last – a Glimmer of Hope for Jatkari Hamlets!

In 15 remote hamlets of Jatkari Panchayat, despite ongoing training sessions over recent years, women's and farmer's Self Help Groups despaired of enhanced incomes through agriculture activity, due to their sole dependence on rain fed irrigation. They grew only one crop of maize at virtually no profit. Much of their land was left uncultivated.



Hope soared amongst farmers and women of 4 villages of Huded, Chabri, Bankhanda and Dhanota when Arpana held discussions on irrigation with community members.

Arpana presented the possibility of irrigation systems, including tanks and piping, being built with the support of faraway friends.

Monthly meeting of Farmers Group in Huded

The Participatory Process of Development

The first set of community meetings focused on irrigation projects, were held in villages of Dhanota, Bhankhanda, Chabri and Huded.

- The farmers and SHG women identified perennial springs not too distant from their hamlets.
- They discussed and decided on sites for intake tanks and irrigation tanks.
- They pledged to contribute voluntary labour for cartage, stone cutting, clearing tank sites and other necessary tasks.

Irrigation Systems Put in Place!

Both of Arpana's community workers stayed in the villages by turn, overseeing work on all 4 sites. All SHG women in Huded, Dhanota, Chabri and Bhankhanda participated with diligence and enthusiasm, as did the farmers. They all fulfilled their commitment to provide labour.

All 4 tanks and irrigation systems were completed in October 2020, holding the promise of new crops in 2021 and enhanced incomes. Farmers are registering with the Farmers Producer Organizations formed by Arpana and the sale of their vegetable produce will be collectively marketed by the FPO.



Irrigation tank being constructed in village Huded



SHG women stand proud around their new irrigation tank

Farmers from all 4 villages look forward to the coming year with the hope and optimism. The security of the irrigation facility enables them to grow vegetable crops which means better incomes. Farmers are now registering with Badhiyankothi FPO, which will market their vegetable produce in the coming year.

Irrigation Tanks and a Fresh Crop of Optimism in two more Remote Hamlets!

Two additional tanks and irrigation systems, made in October 2019 in the hamlets of Dadar & Naini, enabled farmers to grow vegetables for the first time in May 2020.

A small survey in Dadar and Naini shows that, in 2020, farmers, for the first time, were able to plant profitable vegetable crops. Their earnings gave them hope for a better future, as they plan to increase the cultivation of vegetable crops on their land and thus, to grow their earnings.



Exposure Visit

Arpana, in partnership with the Farmers Outreach Program (KVK), Chamba, arranged an exposure visit for 24 farmers in March 2021 to Palampur Agricultural University to promote traditional agricultural practices focusing on organic farming.

An agricultural scientist conducted a training session on vegetable crops. They then visited the agricultural museum, seeing many varieties of agricultural equipment and their implementation.



Seeing new varieties of crops on their exposure visit to Palampur Agricultural University

They saw fields of diverse varieties of seasonal vegetable crops, including peas, mustard and cauliflower. They were also shown organically grown wheat and garlic. They learned important methods of maximizing harvests.

They were also taken to the horticultural sector and shown how grafting is done. The next stop was the dairy farm and finally the seed sale center.

On 3rd March, the farmer's stopped at the KVK Saru, Chamba, for a final training session

Farmers Producer Organizations

Arpana, with NABARD as a partner, has formed 2 Farmers Producer Organizations which are gradually growing in strength. The membership of the Gajnoi and Badhiyankothi Farmers Producer Organizations has grown steadily over the year, despite the 3 months lockdown during which meetings were not held.

- From January 2020 to March 2021, FPO memberships increased from 181 to 321 farmers.
- The savings of the FPOs has grown from Rs.45,000 to Rs.90,000 in 2021.
- Soil health cards have gone up to 146 and Kisan credit cards have increased to 68.

Each month both FPOs held their monthly meetings during which the Executive Committee members and Arpana facilitators discussed the ongoing challenges of:

- Collection and sale of farmers produce during the Covid pandemic
- Mobilizing farmers in remote villages to join the FPO for collective sale of crops.
- Getting soil samples tested and explaining its practical use to farmers.
- Promoting the composting of natural manure to all members in the progress towards organic produce.



Conclusion

This past year, due to Corona Virus and lockdown, fewer patients were able to attend Arpana Health & Diagnostic Centre and Arpana's Specialist camps were not possible. However, the Centre was open for the other six months, attended by the doctor and with laboratory facilities for patients.

782 women members of SHGs raised their regular savings amounts substantially as well as raising their group contributions. They also conducted Sanitation Drives every fortnight in their villages. SHG women are participating in Local Governing Councils and having their petitions to the Gram Sabhas implemented.

321 subsistence farmers, now members of Arpana's Farmers Producer Organizations (FPOs), are improving their yields with good quality seeds, modern irrigation and new farming methods. The FPOs are using collective marketing methods. These activities are increasing the income of the farmers.

Deep Gratitude is Extended to...

The wonderful friends and institutions who are supporting these rural development activities which have improved the quality of life for thousands of families, who previously had little scope for growth and wellbeing.

Add Your Support to Empower Underprivileged Women and Poor Farmers

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