

Brijmohan of Dhari village

Take the instance of the young agriculturist Brijmohan of Dhari village. He supplemented his meagre incomes from agriculture by taking up petty contracts. He did not have many hopes about the prospects of agriculture. But three trips to Solan later, he was convinced that agriculture, even on the smallest of plots, is profitable if planned properly. For the first time in his life, he has planned in detail the crops that he is going to grow cyclically on his plot.

Farmers in this region now consider agriculturist Mahveer Chand of Naini village an important source of technical knowledge. He is an expert horticulturist and has mastered the techniques of nursery raising, pruning and so on, knowledge which he uses to improve his own life as well as those of other farmers.

A positive attitude to agriculture has come about in this region due to HARC's intervention. In this process, the farmers of Himachal Pradesh have been influential. At the same time, the farmers here have decided not to let the weaknesses of the Himachal region come into their area. For instance, the HP farmers are over-dependent on external forces and markets, due to which they often incur heavy losses. After coming in contact with the farmers of the Chayal region of HP, the Rawain farmers decided to cultivate only one crop. The practical experiences of Gladioli cultivation convinced them of this.

The direct contact that the women established with the women's associations of HP's Rajgarh region convinced them of the utility of forming associations. Inspired, these women took up seriously the cause and lobbied to strengthen and build the MMD's. After two years of constant effort, 60 MMD's federated to form the Rawain Mahila Manch.

Direct contact with experts has raised the general level of confidence of the women. Before HARC came to the area, Lalita Bijlawan of Idak village would hardly ever speak in public. After becoming a HARC motivator, she traveled far and wide and got in touch with many people. This gave her enough confidence to successfully stand for the Panchayat elections. Today she is considered one of the most skilled Panchayat pradhans in the Nowgaon Block, a living testimony to the ability of women to do better what conventionally men are supposed to do.

Meeting the Secretary of the National Commission on Women (NCW) has bolstered the confidence of the women tremendously. The Rawain Mahila Manch forced the

local authorities to take action against the electricity board for harassing a Harijan woman by raising the issue with the NCW.

In general, we feel that our strategy of bringing people face to face with each other is very crucial and is paying rich dividends. We need to streamline and develop this as a software, with modules on exposure trips, meeting rural experts, interacting with the bureaucracy and elected representatives and so on. The expertise of the technical experts needs packaging in the idiom of the villagers.

In this context, it was felt that it would be useful if some HARC representatives and villagers, especially women, attend one of the camps organised bi-annually in Mendha-Lekha village, Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra by social worker Mohanbhai Hirabhai Hiralal. In these camps, subject experts come and stay in Mendha-Lekha, sharing the lifestyle of the villagers for a fortnight. The intense interaction of the villagers with the experts benefits both, as each group learn from the other. Enriched by this experience, the next effort will be to hold similar camps of experts in the villages in our area.

Also, we feel it is necessary to research the indigenous systems, structures and modes of communication and use these to spread the development message/create awareness.