

## Women Empowerment in Agriculture

“When women thrive, all of society benefits, and succeeding generations are given a better start in life” - **Kofi Annan**



### Background & Objectives

Women play a pivotal role in all economic and crop production activities in the hills. In Himachal Pradesh, women farmers are the veritable back-bone of subsistence agriculture. Yet due to gender insensitivity they do not receive the desired recognition. Women farmers' needs and rights have been largely ignored and in many cases their condition is little better than that of farm labour. Therefore, the State felt the need to mainstream women farmers in developmental activities and utilize their potential with adequate recompense.



## **Intervention**

About 80% of the field work in agriculture, from sowing to harvesting, post harvest management and dairy management is done by women farmers. The tasks are laborious and since the woman is unaware of the latest technical know-how, her output and productivity are low. There is need to cut the drudgery of women farmers and make their efforts worthwhile and economical.

To uplift the socio economic status of this group, a project on women empowerment, with an outlay of Rs.372.90 lakhs covering a period of three years was initiated in 2009-10 under RKVY. The prime focus of the project was to mobilize women farmers to form self help groups (SHGs) through awareness programmes, provide them technical assistance through capacity building, and motivate them to generate on-farm as well as off-farm income through various activities.

A total of 1030 women SHGs comprising of 20 farmers in each group have been formed across all the blocks in Himachal Pradesh. From each SHG, a group leader, who is called the link worker, is selected and provided training on managerial skills so as to actively run and mobilize the group activities. The SHGs identify their issues and objectives and the Government provides them requisite technical support

through institutional trainings, demonstrations, exposure visits etc.

Institutional trainings of 2-3 days duration is provided on latest technology and improved practices to get more yields in agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry. Vermi-composting has been a major practice that SHGs have been willing to adopt. This improves soil fertility and minimizes the laborious and often unpleasant task of carrying farm yard manure by head load, vermi-compost being comparatively lightweight. The SHGs are also made aware of the departmental schemes and programmes in these sectors so that they are able to avail maximum benefits therefrom.

Demonstrations are laid out in the fields of SHG members to apprise them about productivity enhancing practices such as use of quality seeds and improved varieties, seed treatment, nutrient management, vegetable cultivation, vermin-composting, plant protection measures, etc.

Specialized trainings in food processing and fruit preservation are organized to help SHGs supplement their incomes. Exposure visits are organized for these groups to state level universities, progressive farmers and other farms. Seed capital of Rs 10,000 is provided to each group and efforts are made to link them with banks.

*Mahila goshtis* are organized annually to exhibit their products, share experiences and interact with experts. This enhances their knowledge, competitiveness and marketing ability.



## **Outcome**

Adoption of improved practices has increased production by these farmers to the extent of 25 -30%.

Interaction with scientists and subject experts during exposure has sensitized them to the benefits of diversified agricultural practices, especially in tiding over lean periods in normal agricultural activities. As a result 190 groups have started vegetable cultivation, 70 groups are involved in mushroom cultivation, 50 in dairy farming and 90 in organic farming, which has increased their income by 4-5 times.

Specialized trainings in food processing and fruit preservation have given a new advantage to their post harvest management practices and SHGs have started making quality pickles, jams, Sheera etc not only for their own consumption but also for sale in nearby markets, thereby adding to their earnings. Members have also taken up other activities like making soft toy, weaving shawls and woollen garments.

Groups were given a small seed capital of Rs 10,000/- to support these income generating activities and 450 groups have already been linked with banks for credit to promote their agri-entrepreneurial efforts. Several members have also switched over to commercial agriculture. Some of these women are now active members of Panchayats, ATMA etc, bringing many more of their sisters into the development fold.

Economic empowerment through formation of SHGs has ensured better life and status for these women, and infused them with new found confidence and decision making ability.