

A succour for the rural masses

THE MID-HIMALAYAN WATERSHED PROJECT HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN RAISING THE STANDARD OF LIVING OF THE RURAL MASSES IN CHAMBA ESPECIALLY WOMEN, AND THOSE LIVING BELOW POVERTY LINE, THROUGH ITS VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME

Mahesh Pathania Chamba

When Pushpa's husband, who was working in Cham-era Hydro Power Project, in Chamba died six years ago, she was not able to think as to how to look after her small children and manage their education. Hailing from a small village of Brangal in Salooni block of Chamba district, there was a ray of hope for Pushpa, when few officers of Mid-Himalayan Watershed Project and the Panchayat pradhan of the area nominated her name in the training programme undertaken by the Project.

This initiative aims at raising the standard of living of women, people living below poverty line, schedule castes and tribes through its women vocational training programme.

Today, she is a happy lot earning around Rs. 4000 per month by knitting and has managed to get the admission of her elder son in an engineering college. Besides, she has be-



>> *The project has empowered several women like Vimla Devi of Barngaal*

come a master trainer and is imparting training to jail inmates to weave woollen socks. She is not the sole example, there are many other widows like Pushpa who are today leading a graceful life.

It was in the year 2005-06, when HP Mid Himalayan Watershed Development Project was launched in 46 Panchayats of Chamba district.

Initially, as a confidence building measure, series of meetings were carried out and the women were convinced to form Self Help Groups. These women were motivated to understand each other and were pre-

pared for working in a group. Once they understood the group dynamics and confidence building among them, they were prepared to start small and part time livelihood activities like knitting, weaving, backyard poultry, goat rearing etc. These activities were started just to supplement their income for improving their living standard. "Plumber training from Mid Himalayan people had turned fortunes for me and my family. I am earning Rs 4500 per month in my own village and supporting my family, my widow mother, three sisters and a younger brother" says Dinesh Kumar

of Barangal village.

Similarly, Lambi Devi had been travelling 15 Kilometres daily from her village Dhar in Gawalu Panchayat to learn knitting at one of the training centres of the project and is earning Rs 1500 per month.

Presently, 148 Self Help Groups of women in 46 Panchayats of Bhattiyat and Salooni block are engaged in livelihood activities and inter-lending among themselves. 131 user groups are maintaining the assets created by Mid-Himalayan Project like water harvesting structures, plantations, *boulies*, foot bridges, foot paths etc. Self Help Groups of similar activities are grouped into clusters for better marketing and purchase of raw material at discounted rates. These clusters have further been united into one federation known as Pargati Sangh, at Banikhet.

"The marketing of products prepared by villagers is not an easy task due to competitive and qualitative market. To overcome this problem, HP Mid Himalayan Project Chowari, has developed 3-tier linkage for marketing i.e. at local level, through federation's outlet at Banikhet and with bulk purchasers at Chamba and Dalhousie," says Pardeep Kumar Gupta, Divisional Watershed Development Officer. Assets created by project are managed by community by contributing in their creation and money saved is deposited in their joint account for future maintenance by themselves.

