

Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Project transforms rural economy

July 18, 2010: The mountainous terrain and fragile eco-system of Himachal Pradesh has resulted in limited opportunities and avenues for the people of State. This, in turn shrivels their source of income. The State making constant efforts towards creation of income generating activities that are in perfect harmony with environment. The World Bank funded Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Project is making a positive quality of life of the people. Within 5 years of its inception, this Rs 365-crore project has increased return on farmland and solved the problem of fuel and fodder to a large extent.

Recently, World Bank Mission Team visited Kullu & Mandi Watershed Divisions and conducted review of the project. It interacted with PRIs, Communities, project staff, and Self Help Group members to have on the spot assessment of the implementation of project activities. The project is a canopy of multitude of activities such as plantation, soil conservation, harvesting, horticulture, sericulture, pisciculture, agriculture and other income generating activities. The project is in line with Participatory Natural Resource Management through Gram Panchayats and other village level institutions. This is enabling people to supplement their income. There is hardly any area that doesn't come under the ambit of Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Project. According to a report of the World Bank, the project has empowered many villages by ensuring sustainable management of land and water resources.

The project covers around 272 Micro-watersheds spread over 602 Gram Panchayats, 42 blocks and 10 districts (excluding Kinnaur and Lahaul & Spiti). The project will benefit around 25,000 target poor families in the project area. 11 sub-divisional areas falling in 10 districts have been selected while covering 602 Gram Panchayats for implementation.

After implementation of the watershed project, the average household income has increased by 50 percent and crop yield by 20 percent. Crop diversification, too has improved from one and two to three and four crops. The availability of water has increased by increasing its storage through construction of water harvesting structures. 7664 such harvesting structures have been constructed so far and 6809 Hectares area has been brought under assured irrigation.

The project aims to reverse the process of degradation of the natural resource base and improve the productive potential of the rural resources. This in turn will enhance the incomes of the rural households in the project area. Under the project, 579 Watershed Development Plans were completed and 1953 Self Help Groups, 2814 Users Groups and 686 Common Interest Groups have been constituted so far.

The project has brought about transition of 5% BPL families to APL status. The area under high value crops too has increased by 26%. Similarly, production of vegetables and main fruit crops has witnessed an increase of 43% and 11% respectively.

Apart from carrying on development projects in various parts of the State, Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Project is extending incentives by rewarding the Gram Panchayats for good performance in the area of Watershed Management. Recognition and reward is motivating people and is acting as a catalyst for achieving objectives of the project.

For "Shreshth Jalagam Panchayat Puraskar", all Gram Panchayats under Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Project project activities (including orientation phase) have been started at least two years ago from the year of Award, are eligible for award. Scores obtained by the Gram Panchayats through the instrumentality of the Performance Measurement Framework will be used in deciding the Gram Panchayats to whom incentives would be extended.

Under State level Awards, an incentive/reward of Rs 4.00 Lac is given to the Shreshth Jalagam Panchayat ranking first, Shreshth Jalagam Panchayat ranking second is given an incentive/reward of Rs 2.50 lac, whereas Shreshth Jalagam Panchayat ranking third is given an incentive/reward of Rs 1.50 lac.

Similarly incentives are also extended under Divisional Watershed level incentive/reward scheme. For Shreshth Manu Panchayat, 11 rewards of Rs 1 lac each division are given. Rs 1 lac per annum is kept separate to organize events, and the prize money is to be utilized by the Gram Panchayat only for Infrastructure activities in the particular Gram Panchayat.