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Trust programme for Gaddi tribe bears fruit

Sets up vocational training centre and Community Development Centre under PREWALE to educate and empower women

RASHPAL Chambial
Palampur, July 13

TAKING UP the cause of the downtrodden and underprivileged, the S.M. Charitable Trust, Palampur, has taken up a number of community-based social projects for slums and villages in and around the town. These include setting up health care centres with special health meals for specific killer diseases and a community development centre to educate and train women to develop skills to fend for themselves.

The Trust has started a major programme, Poverty Reduction by Empowering Women and Locally Excluded (PREWALE) for the Gaddi community living in the hills of Kandbari and Kandi, the villages on the foothills of Dhauladhar mountains, whose standard of living was abysmally lower than that of the townsfolk here. The children of these villages still have to cover miles of distance on foot to reach their schools.

The Gaddi tribe was on the verge of extinction but neither the local administration nor the government was bothered to preserve their rich culture and heritage.

It was just four years ago that the Trust, under the guidance of Dr. Madhav Mehra, undertook the task of transforming the face of these villages. Consequently, the Trust has set up a vocational training centre and a Community Development Centre under the programme PREWALE, to educate and empower womenfolk of these fast-vanishing tribes. "Eventually, these



Members of the S.M. Charitable Trust interacting with women. HT PHOTO

two villages covered by the Trust have started bearing results as a group of 30 women empowered in leadership skills prevailed upon the menfolk to stop drinking. Ultimately, they planted a barren hill with full blooming pine trees," revealed regional manager of the Trust Sanjay Bhardwaj.

The Trust also organised mobile health clinics under PATHIC (Prevention Action for Health Information and Counselling). During the entire course, doctors from Delhi were invited to treat patients in these villages. The village was empowered to form civil society groups, which could lobby with the government for the procurement of basic amenities like roads, hospitals and schools.

The main objectives of the programme are to involve marginalised women and socially excluded in planning

and implementation of proposals to eradicate poverty, ensure equitable distribution and provide them sustainable livelihood.

The main emphasis of the Trust was to develop innovative schemes for the eradication of poverty and provide sustainable livelihood through eco-tourism and sustainable management of forests and other natural resources. The programme also seeks to ensure the reproductive rights of women and develop support strategies for women on the margins for early detection of cervical cancer and HIV/AIDS.

There are also proposals to inculcate a sense of lobbying among these masses to improve and implement government legislation, campaign and lobby to build public support and international pressure for changes.

*Sanjay Bhardwaj
Palampur (HP)*

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