



20 years of disha

Disha envisions to establish an equitable society where there is no discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion and caste and which provides equal social, economic and political opportunities

This document draws heavily on the Annual Reports from 1984 till date and interviews of some of the senior members of Disha family.

The following have contributed to various stages of development of this document

KN Tiwari took time off his extremely busy schedule and discussed the concept and went through write-ups several times before they were finalised

Suresho Saini, Shaheen Parveen, Rehana Adib and other **women workers** painstakingly selected the photographs for this document from the photo archives

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This document has been edited by **Shachindra Sharma**. He takes this opportunity to thank KN Tiwari and all the members of Disha family.

The word **Disha** and the phrase **Disha Samajik Sangathan** should be taken to mean **Disha Social Organziation** – the name by which the organisation is registered

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Chairperson's Message

IT GIVES me great pleasure that Disha has completed 20 years. My informal association with Disha is as old as the organisation itself is. Formally I became a member of the Governing Board about a decade back.

Ever since I know Disha, it has metamorphosed from just a two-person organisation working in a few villages to a professionally managed organisation working in two states. This is certainly a great change. I hope that this change will come out well in the document '20 Years of Disha' that is being published.

I take this opportunity to thank all our donors, supporters and well wishers.



Poornima Jain
Chairperson

Prologue

TWENTY years ago Disha took first step to bring positive change in the lives of rural populace in an area which was even then considered to be 'developed'. It might have been 'developed' in comparison to other parts of Uttar Pradesh. But we found that a class of people was struggling day in and day out to eke out a living, gender discrimination was at its peak and exploitation of working class was rampant. The area was then remote because of lack of all weather roads.



We took holistic view of the picture. We would not say that we began in a systematic manner. In fact probably no voluntary organisation can make such a claim. But we definitely had this holistic picture in our sub-conscious.

Four issues immediately attracted our attention. The first was the plight of weavers in Pather village. The second was the exploitation of rope makers, who were victim of market, middlemen and the system. The third was plight of girls and women. And the last was the condition of labour class. We made small interventions in all these four issues.

Down the 20 years we addressed many more issues – many with success and some with failures. In the meantime, lives of the area's residents have indeed positively changed. And we have grown into a professionally managed organisation.

In the following pages we present these interesting stories.

KN Tiwari
Director

1984: the birth

DISHA Social Organization was formed in 1984 in Sultanpur, a semi-urban area in Saharanpur district. The setting of the formation of Disha was unique. For a few years a voluntary organisation, Centre for Development of Instructional Technology, Cendit, was actively using communication technology for education and development. During the course of interaction with the villagers, Cendit felt that there should be an independent organisation to take up gigantic task of rural development. Following discussions spread almost two years Disha was born on January 25, 1984.

The initial programmes were particularly targeted at working class, girls and adults. The idea was to build a rapport with the local people as well as to solve their problems, particularly those related to their livelihoods.

A training was organised for traditional weavers in Pather village, some 6 km from Sultanpur, the headquarters of Disha, to enable them to switch over from pit looms to frame looms. Efforts to arrange funds for the trained weavers, however, met only with partial success. Though the weavers' training was organised with support from government agencies, follow-up was organised with support from Oxfam, which till date continues to support Disha.

The next to be targeted were *baan* workers. *Baan* is a rope made out of *bhabbhar*, a wild grass growing in Shiwalik range, foothills of mighty Himalayas. At that time there were almost 40,000 *baan* workers. The *baan* workers are Scheduled Castes and are landless. The *baan* workers enjoyed traditional rights over *bhabbhar*, but with the coming up of middlemen on the scene, the condition of *baan* workers progressively became worse. Disha concentrated on a village with a large number of *baan* workers, Dandauli Khera. While on one hand it started organising *baan* workers into cooperatives, on the other it entered into negotiations with the forest officials. In subsequent years the *baan* workers successfully bargained mode and rate of *bhabbhar* extraction from forest officials.

This aspect is detailed out in section on *baan* workers' movement.

A stitching training was initiated for Scheduled Caste and Backward Muslim women in Ferozabad village. After the training the women were given loans and subsidy. But as in case of traditional weavers, the training was far from complete to enable the women to take up the profession and a



(Top) Sitting on right Manorma Kukreti, sitting on left Jahnvi Tiwari, standing on left founder member Rajiv Jain, standing in middle the then chairperson HK Gupta and a visitor (bottom) a weaver migrates to frame loom

The original objective of Disha read: "To organise people for the socio-economical upliftment and all round development, human and physical, of the downtrodden section...to organise a people's cooperative for different economic programmes and to mobilise the facilities provided by the government".

With the passage of time the language of objective statement has been modernised. It now reads: "To mobilise people, mainly deprived and downtrodden, to form sustainable organisations so as to achieve all-round development – social, economic and political – and empower the powerless with special emphasis on women".

follow-up training was organised with support from non-government support. The follow-up training created confidence among women group.

Three education centres were run at Sultanpur, Abdullapur Ahari and Pather villages. Two of these were for women and one for men. These education centres helped a great deal in establishing relations with the village residents as they started opening up

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about their problems and issues.

Health interventions were also taken up in the first year of Disha's existence. While the organisation emphasised on preventive health education, it did not lose sight of importance of curative aspects of health. It used biochemic medicines, acupuncture and herbs for curative purposes with limited success.

Labour Education

UNORGANISED labours attracted Disha's attention in the very beginning as some of the very initial activities were targeted on them. These labours were exploited by their employers who did not give them wages at statutory rates and paid lesser wages to women labours. There was great challenge to educate these labours so they could be organised for fighting

for their rights. The beginning was made with a labour camp in which just 40 *baan* workers participated. Though this five day camp discussed problems specifically related to a specific category of labours it succeeded on two fronts. One, it initiated a dialogue of labours with officials from KVIC, block and banks. Two, it discussed issues like small savings, family welfare, farming, knowledge of equal wages for men and women and minimum wages, and intricacies of government schemes like Trysem and integrated rural development programme.

In the ensuing years many more similar camps were organised at different locations of the operational area. Increased awareness of labours laid foundation of an agitation of labours. This agitation was successful in increasing wage rate in the area and considerably narrowed gender gap in wages.

(Clockwise from left) A woman peeps out from a window in her home; women learning stitching at Ferozabad village; and women learn a lesson for their health rights



1985: gkmm is born

EVEN as *baan* workers were being organised as a part of joint strategy of Disha and Vikalp, another organisation active in the area, to struggle for their rights, *baan* workers in Dandauli Khera village were contemplating of getting organised under a cooperative to solve their immediate livelihood problems by seeking loans and subsidies from the government agencies.

Soon there was a standoff between *baan* workers and the government agencies over the condition of purchase of a rope making machine. The workers maintained that rope produced by the prescribed machine was of inferior quality and not competitive in the market. After prolonged negotiations the government agencies waved off compulsory purchase of machine and the bank released the loan to the cooperative to enable it to purchase nearly 300 quintals of *bhabbhar* directly from the Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation.

By this time the *baan* workers' cooperative was an unregistered body, though it had its own governing body. Although the cooperative was interested in registering itself, its members were afraid of interference of government cooperative officials. Another option available to them was to get registered with the Khadi and Village Industries Commission as their activity was under fibre industry, which fell under the jurisdiction of KVIC. But in this case too they were afraid of official interference. Then there were problems in the market, dominated by big businessmen, whose cartel decided price of rope.

The *baan* workers continued to debate the mode of registration. In 1988, papers for cooperative registration for Dandauli Khera village were processed and submitted to KVIC Saharanpur for the registration of the society. The *baan* workers cooperative society was to be registered on the same pattern as in other villages of *baan* workers of Sadholi Qadim block. They felt that registration of cooperative or registration with KVIC would only solve part of their problem as the wider issue was entire policy related to *bhabbhar*. They concluded that a registered organisation with smaller membership would hardly be in a position to work for policy level changes. And to do so a large body would be desirable, they felt.

This led to setting up of a front of *baan* workers by the name Ghad Kshettra Mazdoor Morcha. GKMM has been in the forefront of a number of struggles to solve problems of the people, who constitute it, many times in collaboration with another front of people, Mahila Mazdoor Evam Laghu Kisan Morcha.

While the struggle of *baan* workers went on, they did not lose sight of what may be called 'living with the system'. Since the Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation was selling *bhabbhar* only in quantities more than 50 quintals at a time, and since storage of *bhabbhar* in huge quantities was causing problems before the *baan* workers, a decision was taken to construct godown for them in Dandauli Khera village. This godown was constructed in 1987 over half a *bigha* of land and measured 46 ft long, 20 ft wide and 15 ft high and was encircled by a boundary wall. The godown had capacity to store as much as 300 quintals of *bhabbhar*. The godown is operational till date and has proved to be a boon for the *baan* workers.

With the increasing interaction among them, the *baan* workers realised that education of their children was a sure way of

Different stages of *baan* production



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(Top) A function outside the godown for storing *bhabbhar* at Dandauli Khera village and (bottom) *bhabbhar* being sold to *baan* workers outside the godown

improving lot of their future generation. Since the government primary school in the village was almost defunct, they decided to set up a school of own. This was indeed a major decision. The school became functional in 1986. The next year a *pucca* room was constructed with the *baan* workers and Disha bearing half of the cost each. Around five years ago this school was taken over by the government and now a government primary school is being run in place of the school set up by *baan* workers.

Over the years the GKMM has been main bargaining force of *baan* workers. Their prolonged struggles led to fixation of *bhabbhar* prices at Rs 170 per quintal. This was revised to Rs 200 a quintal in later years. Finally, three years ago they successfully bargained that *baan* worker could extract *bhabbhar* from forest by paying a tax of Rs 13 for a head load of the grass. This really was a great victory for them and solved the problem of raw material at least for the time being.

Communication

BY this time Disha had established a certain level of rapport with the people it chose to work with. A strong feeling was, however, developing within the organisation as to how to reach maximum number of people with minimum of resources. One way to do so was to use folk media communication for conveying development messages to the masses. It engaged Alarippu, a cultural group of Delhi, to impart training to its workers in developing scripts based on local issues in local dialect and staging street plays. At the end of the 15 day training a working communication team was in place. Later training was also organised for staging puppet shows. Ever since the first training, for some years every year training for communication workers were organised. Thereafter, the communication team started holding workshops for developing new scripts and rehearsing plays on its own.

Communication team on way to a village to stage a performance in earlier days, and (bottom) a communication workshop in progress in recent years



Plays and Puppet Titles

- *Kahan Hai Aadami*, challenging gender stereotypes
- *Aurat Teri Yehi Kahani*, on the condition of women
- *Panchayati Raj*, on the theme of local self-governance
- *Kisan Nai Disha Ki Ore*, on progressive farmers
- *Batwara*, on effects of division in family
- *Qaumi Ekta*, on the theme of national integrity
- *Bin Baat Ki Baat*, on the theme of much ado about nothing
- *Teesari Jagah*, on the status of women
- *Andher Nagari Chaupat Raja*, a play on the prevailing state of affairs
- *Samajik Sauhardrata*, a show on the theme of social harmony

Till date the team is conveying development message to the people and providing mobilisation support for various activities throughout the operational area. It has played critical role during people's struggles.

With the passage of time performance of communication team has improved a great deal. The team has won accolades from local people, government agencies and visitors alike. It has bagged awards at the state and national levels.

Vikas Volunteer Vahini

THE main objective of VVV, a programme of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), was 'to educate the people for development through credit'. It comprised a body of ordinary men and women, who

have successfully put into practice the five principles of development through credit¹ and have volunteered to disseminate these principles among the rural people. An institution called 'Friends of Banks' or Vikas Mangal was established in the villages under the activity.

Area or specialist volunteers were chosen from amongst the borrowers themselves. The area volunteers acted as an extension worker for the banking system in the village. The launch of the programme brought top district and bank officials face to face with the villagers.



Functions of Vikas Volunteer Vahini



Tackling problem of Water-logging

NEARLY 15 villages close to Disha's headquarters were affected by water logging and flooding because of their location between two rivers Maskara and Gangro. These two rivers originate in Shiwalik hills and drain into Yamuna river. Because of continued rise of bed, the rivers flooded vast tracts of land during rains making agricultural operations during rains impossible and only winter crops could be raised.

Further observation and interaction with the villagers revealed that to overcome problem of water-logging some *kutchha* drains were dug during the British period. But overtime these drains too became useless because of silting. This provided a clue that if the drains could be restored, the problem could be contained.

Disha raised the problem of water-logging at various levels in quest of solution to the problem. It motivated small and marginal farmers to form an action committee to pressurise the relevant government department to solve the problem. Following intense advocacy and lobbying with the state government drains were restored and nearly 16,000 hectares of land reclaimed. As a result life in the villages improved and these are among the most prosperous villages in the area.

¹ The principles were: (i) Credit must be used in accordance with the most suitable method of science and technology, (ii) The terms and conditions of credit or techno-economic parameters must be fully respected, (iii) Work must be done with skill so as to increase productivity and income, (iv) A part of the additional income created by credit must be saved, and (v) Loan instalments must be repaid in time and regularly so as to recycle the credit.

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1986: mahila jagriti samitis

BY now Disha had worked with women for almost two years by running a stitching and weaving centre. It also ran an adult education centre for backward Muslim women. During this period, it got an opportunity to learn issues and problems of women. This led to realisation that if something has to be done for women, they first need to be organised and then need to be made aware of their issues, problems and rights.

To begin with women organisations Mahila Jagriti Samitis were formed in six villages. Each of the MJS had its independent governance structure and bank accounts to deposit membership fee. The meagre collection through membership fee later proved to be a great source of strength for women. These MJS later became torch-bearers of Disha's activities with women, who later on came to occupy most prominent place in the organisation's work.

Soon after the formation of MJS, the first camp for generating awareness among women was organised on January 25, 1986. After this a series of camps were organised and became almost a regular feature. As camps of women were held, membership of MJS started growing. Demands also came in from other villages to set up similar samitis in their villages.

Each MJS progressed in its own unique way. All of them set up women relief funds ranging from Rs 400 to Rs 2,000 for providing ready cash to the needy members. They engaged in a number of economic activities and social actions. Special mention needs to be MJS at Sultanpur and Pather villages. Sultanpur MJS showed strong feelings towards atrocities on women and exploitation of women of weaker sections at all levels. This MJS and Pather MJS became deeply involved in creating awareness among the landless women labours for their wage rights.

For the first time a *sammelan* (congregation) of all the MJS was held on March 22, 1988. Nearly 500 women from labour and weaker sections participated in the congregation. The congregation passed a resolution demanding equality for women in the society, reservation in jobs, end to exploitation, better education and health facilities and social justice for women.

In an action MJS of all the villages staged a demonstration at the local Gandhi Ashram and bank branch to protest against the attitude of local bank officials, who were not cooperative and had negative attitude towards women. The demonstration succeeded in its purpose and emboldened the women. This was the first major action of women against the prevailing situation and laid foundation of some of the bigger actions in the years to come.

Women woke up and get organised to assert for their rights



1989: equal wages struggle

Birth of Mahila Mazdoor Evam Laghu Kisan Morcha

Up to 1989, agricultural labours were paid much less than the minimum wages recommended by the Government – Rs 20 a day. Moreover, women labours were paid much less, 25 to 50 per cent less than their men counterparts. Because of increasing awareness, women started murmuring why not they be paid minimum and equal wages. During the kharif harvesting season, women labours refused to work on low wages and demanded equal and minimum wages. When they were pressurised, women labours of Sultanpur went on a lightening strike. Soon the strike spread to other villages too.

After a month, the powerful landlords tried to break the strike by enticing small and marginal farmers to join their bandwagon. They got striking women labours intimidated through their men. They would not allow the striking women to cut fodder from fields' boundaries or village common lands.

Women bravely faced these threats. They sent their cattle to the forests to forests below the Shiwalik range in the overall control of Ghad Kshettra Mazdoor Morcha. In several homes there was no grain. Those who had surplus took their care by contributing to the common pool.

Striking women asked the small and marginal farmers not to oppose their struggle as the latter were themselves labourers. They said if they won the struggle they (small and marginal farmers) would also be benefited. Small and marginal farmers saw the point and sent a proposal to the landlords for a dialogue. But the landlords backed out

at the eleventh hour.

The striking women then unilaterally declared that they would continue their struggle till they got minimum and equal wages, but would work on the fields of small and marginal farmers at the rate of Rs 15 a day. Offended by this declaration, the landlords approached the police for help. Because of stiff opposition from the striking women the police did not help the landlords, but they did not help the striking women either.

To give further impetus to the struggle, Disha organised a Mahila Mazdoor Evam Laghu Kisan Sammelan on December 27, 1989. Despite various hurdles created by the landlords, the Sammelan was a grand success. It passed a 19-point charter of demands and on January 2, 1990, it was submitted to the district authorities. It is at this Sammelan that Mahila Mazdoor Evam Laghu Kisan Morcha was born.

Gradually the landlord fell in line and started paying men and women labours equal wages, though minimum wages fixed by the government are still a distant reality.



A glimpse from the Annual Congregation of Mahila Mazdoor Evam Disha's Annual Day and marks solidarity for the rights of dalits, back

Education for Adolescent Girls

SIX education centres for adult women were started in five villages for promoting literacy among adult women. A total of 15 to 20 women were imparted functional literacy skills in each of these centres. The text books for use in these centres were arranged from the

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Laghu Kisan Morcha. This day also marks wards, minorities, women and working class



An instructor taking a class of adult women and (below) adolescent girls displaying their talents

Literacy House, an educational resource organisation in the state capital Lucknow, while other material was arranged locally. Barring one, all the centres functioned for just one year.

The most notable observation of the activity Education for Adult Women was that along with adult women, adolescent girls came to the classes in large numbers. Expectations of adolescent girls, particularly those belonging to the Muslim

community, were especially high. To meet these expectations, Disha decided to provide educational facilities to the adolescent girls. These are the girls who have missed regular schooling because of religious, societal and familial reasons (taking care of younger siblings, assisting mothers in household chores, etc.).

At present education centres for adolescent girls are being run in 10 villages. Instructors in these education centres are

local and highly motivated ones. Education is imparted to the girls on mainstream education system, with certain value additions, so as to prepare them for their lives and higher education, if they wish to pursue them.

Participation of the parents and students is key to the activities of educational centres. Parents of the 'students' in the centres are involved through parent-teacher meetings held



Women display their hidden talents through this drawing



Rural women take to streets to raise their voice, and (below) women from Saharanpur interact with their sisters in Tehri Garhwal district



every month. Instances of absence of 'students' are given considerable importance in the parent-teacher meetings. Students are given freedom to decide their own uniform.

Of late step have been initiated to make education centres for adolescent girls sustainable. The parents of 'students' have started making a nominal contribution of Rs 10 per month to meet out part of expenses of the centres. In addition, they are also arranging stationary for their wards. The books are still being made available by the organisation.

Education for Women Equality, Mahila Samakhya

THE National Education Policy recognised that women were illiterate because of their social, economic and cultural setting. It laid special emphasis on meeting specific requirements of women to give them equal educational opportunities and to remove inequalities. The Government of India started this programme in 10 districts of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka in collaboration with the respective State Governments and voluntary organisations.

Saharanpur was one of the districts in Uttar Pradesh and Disha one of the partners to take up this programme. The programme was implemented in 60 villages of Sarsawa and Sadholi Qadim development blocks. In each village, Mahila Sanghas (Women Forum) were formed. Sakhis (literally meaning friend) were identified from among the community to facilitate the programme activities. On 10 Mahila Sanghas, a Sahyogini (literally meaning a person extending cooperation) were appointed.

Necessary training inputs were given to Sakhis, Sahyoginis and other staff associated with the project. A number of capacity building training were organised at the community level. Regular meetings of the Mahila Sanghas continued. All these resulted in awakening the women, who began to open up and come out with their problems and issues. It is during these meetings that instances of violence against women started coming up. In the years to come, combating violence against women became one of the core activities of the organisation.

But several retrograde steps harmed the movement of women's equality to a very large extent. The Government of India had decided to implement the programme through NGOs. But on a later thought, Mahila Samakhya Societies were registered in the states and District Implementation Units were formed in 1991. After the coming into existence of DIUs, the funds dried up. By the end of 1994, relationship of Disha with Mahila Samakhya programme ended.

The movement of women's awakening, however, continued with support from other sources.

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1991: uttarkashi foray

AN earthquake of severe intensity struck Uttarkashi district on October 21, 1991. The earthquake devastated Uttarkashi city and adjoining rural areas, killed about 1,000 and maimed many more. Naturally rehabilitation of victims became a priority for the government and other organisations, including non-government organisations. All of them pressed into service of the victims.

With the progress of the relief operations, it became clear that so much devastation was caused because the residents of the area did not use earthquake resistant technology for constructing their dwellings. In view of this revelation a government organisation, Council for Promotion of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), assigned itself to demonstrate to the residents earthquake resistant construction technology. It decided to do so through voluntary organisations. CAPART chose Disha as one of the partners in this endeavour.

At a tripartite meeting, Disha, CAPART and Uttarkashi district administration a decision was taken that Disha would primarily work in rural area of the district. The meeting also finalised seven villages in Dunda development block where this task was to be taken up. All these villages had a large population of Scheduled Castes and below poverty line people.

Following a survey in the selected villages land was acquired at suitable sites in consultation with the villagers. Construction of model demonstration homes and community centres began a few months after the survey when logistical arrangements were completed. Disha constructed community centres at Udalka, Dunda and Nakuri villages and also a model home at Udalka village. These structures were later handed over to the village representatives.

At Udalka village irrigation canals were broken at several places and the organisation restored them. This helped the villagers restart agriculture operations.

Even as this work was progressing, the organisation's workers stationed there interacted with the villagers and concluded that the latter needed the organisation's presence for some time to come for their development. On the demand of the villagers they organised a few training in stitching and knitting.

But these were only piecemeal arrangements. If the villages were really to be developed, it was concluded, key strengths of the area were to be made use of. The land in all the villages was found to be highly suitable for agriculture and horticulture. A small beginning in this direction was made through raising saplings of fruits and vegetables. The holistic approach was, however, to work on natural resource management and development on watershed approach. These are described later.



(Top) A devastated home in a village; (middle) owners of a home concerned over their fate; and (bottom) children frolic in front of model home constructed in Udalka village

Legal Aid

AS movement of the downtrodden and the poor progressed, vested interests slapped a few cases on the organisation. In view of this a need was felt to know more about the law of the land. Accordingly, a legal aid programme was initiated in the organisation. This programme aimed at making the people, more particularly women, aware of the laws concerning their lives.

A series of training for the organisation's workers in legal aspects were held at the organisation's headquarters. Back in the field a number of camps were organised to make the villagers aware of the laws concerning their lives. These camps addressed issues like land reforms (see below), village common land, minimum wages, equal wages, etc. Laws related to women were given prominence so as to tackle menace like dowry and violence against women. In later years, violence against women became the organisation's one of the major areas of intervention.

Some of the workers soon became quite an expert in police and court procedures as they often went to police stations and courts in connection with numerous cases. They shared their experiences with the villagers and the villagers soon knew what they had to do in case a crime occurred in their villages.

Land Reforms

AMONG the many issues that the two fronts – GKMM and MMELKM – one was the issue of landlessness. The fronts brought before the organisation the irregularities in land distribution by the government on *patta* (lease). It was decided that there was need to intervene to tackle this issue.

To begin the two fronts held a se-

ries of meetings to discuss the issue at Badshahibagh and Rehna villages. These meetings decided that they would contact revenue authorities to visit some of the worst affected villages for an on-the-spot study of land problems. In many of these villages the allottees did not have possession of the land allotted to them.

Later an intensive survey was carried out in the area to build further understanding on the issue of landlessness. A total of 258 cases of landlessness were reported from 10 villages. It was also found that about 200 people in these villages were allotted lands in the beds of Yamuna and other small rivers.

Following this a campaign was launched to tackle the issue. The campaign included petitioning before the authorities and filing court cases. Through the concerted efforts of the fronts and the organisation several instances of landlessness were successfully tackled during the ensuing years.

Electronics for Women

THIS activity was taken up on the initiative of the then Electronics Secretary to the Uttar Pradesh, Rita Sinha, who happened to visit the organisation. She explored the probability of helping women to assemble electronic items near their place of residence.

For the implementation of the activity elaborate arrangements were made by entering into multilateral agreement between Disha, Khadi and Village Industries Commission, Central Electronics Secretary, UP Electronics Secretary and UPTRON, an Uttar Pradesh government undertaking, engaged in production of electronic consumables, more particularly television sets, radio sets and cassette recorders. To tackle management issues, a separate holding organisation – Pragatisheel Gramodyog Sansthan – was



Women assemble radio-cum-cassette recorders at a workshop

formed.

After the formalities, the training began in November 1991. The instructor for the training was from UPTRON. Since the learners did not have formal qualification in electronics, the instructor used novel methods to impart the training. At the end of the three month training, 30 girls qualified.

The trained girls, however, had to wait for three months before radio cassette recorder kits arrived for assembly. But the kits were not those for which the girls had been trained. These kits were sent back. In the coming two years nearly 150 kits of radio cassette recorders came in two lots. The girls assembled them and the product was sent back to UPTRON.

The project failed in its pursuit because it could not generate bulk and the participating girls could virtually earn nothing. The girls lost interest. Because of administrative problems the project was abandoned in 1994.

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1992: training centre begins

BY 1992 Disha had completed eight years, a period in which its activities had expanded considerably. So far it was conducting its activities from a very old structure in the corner of a *bagh* (a mango orchard) on the outskirts of Sultanpur. The space in this structure was very limited and training were held in open. Natural factors like cold, heat and rain hampered the work. Moreover, there was no office space too. A decision was taken to construct an office-cum-training centre complex.

Land for the construction was given to the organisation on a long lease of 99 years by Rajiv Jain, one of the founder members of Disha, and owner of the mango orchard where the old structure stood. Support for the construction was arranged from the donors Bread for the World and Misereor. The construction work began in March 1992. It was completed in several phases as one more donor Cordaid also chipped in.

The training centre as it stands today has got a training hall, three dormitories for participants' boarding, three rooms for resource persons, dining hall, staff quarters and an office building. All the residential training of the organisation are conducted from this training centre. In addition, this facility is used for providing sponsored training. The facility is also used by other voluntary organisations for holding their workshops, seminars and training.

Over the years the training centre has emerged as a premier facility of training not only in Saharanpur district, but also in neighbouring districts. Usual training equipment, computers, photocopier, etc., are available. A number of in-house resource persons trained in training methodologies by resource organisations are available as trainers.



(Clockwise from top left) Disha secretary KN Tiwari lays foundation of Training Centre as wife Jahnavi Tiwari looks upon; organisation workers rejoice the moment by applying colour on each other; and residential block of the centre as it stands today





1993: anti-liquor movement

A COUNTRY liquor vend at the Pather village, about 6 km off Sultanpur, was causing lots of inconvenience to the women of Pather and neighbouring villages. These affected women decided to fight the vend under the organisation's guidance. The agitation spanning 100 days led to the vend's closure.

Despite poverty and illiteracy, life was an easy going one in Pather and adjoining villages till 1989 when a country-liquor vend was opened there in April. In a few days started opposition to the vend from the area's women. When their attempt to persuade the shop employees to shift the vend to some other location failed, they approached the Saharanpur district administration to get it closed. The administration promised to do the needful when the next auction was due. But it failed to honour its promise. Three years passed this way.

Now the women of Pather and neighbouring villages were restless as the ills draining out of the bottle had ruined their

lives. They wanted to get the shop closed immediately. They held a demonstration at Saharanpur on March 24, 1993, the day the auction for the financial year 1993-94 was to be held. But the auction was not held that day.

On March 31, 1993, the women of Pather stormed the shop and sat on an indefinite dharna before it. The organisation's workers were there not only to support the dharna, but also to participate in it and mobilise people for it. In the days to follow, they braved chilly nights, hot days and often strong winds and rain. But they would not budge from the scene till their mission was complete.

On June 23, 1993, when the sun was shining at its peak, the women faced police lathis on their way to the district magistrate's office where they wanted to give him a memorandum demanding the vend's closure. About 50 women were injured in the lathicharge. With broken limbs, the injured women were admitted to district hospital. The police slapped cases on them under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and Criminal



(Clockwise from top left) Agitated women of Pather village force closure of the country liquor vend; under the banner of Mahila Jagriti Samiti women and men sit on a dharna that lasted 100 days; people march in Saharanpur city to meet the district magistrate to demand closure of the vend; activists rent slogans; Sanjay Garg, now a minister in Uttar Pradesh government amidst processionists; police swing into action, beating and cicking activists, particularly women; colleagues wipe out blood from head of a man; injured women in the district hospital; and the victory function at the dharna venue

Procedure Code Act. These cases lingered on in courts for several years. The leaders of agitation feared threat of arrest. That, however, did not materialise was the only consolation.

Finally, their leaders were successful in raising the issue before the Governor who visited the city on June 29. The district administration tried to mislead even the Governor. But on his orders the vend was ultimately closed down for good on July 2. That was a red letter day in the history of Saharanpur and a feather in the cap of the organisation's workers.

So many women suffered so much during the agitation. They faced wrath of their families who did not at all like their participation in an activity like that. There was threat to them from the local goondas and the henchmen of the liquor contractor. On one point they also faced the threat of being kidnapped. Three women lost their children during the agitation.

Within a year after the vend was closed life in Pather improved drastically. Calm returned to homes, lanes and streets. People were fast progressing towards prosperity. There were instances

in which certain shopkeepers who got hooked to liquor and ruined their business revitalised it.

A year after the Pather agitation, villagers from another village Haria came to the organisation's workers to tell them they too wanted to launch an agitation against the liquor vend in their village. After mutual consultation the organisation's workers and Haria villagers gave January 13 as the date of the commencement of the agitation. But well before the declared date, the vend was abandoned for good.

The spread effect of the anti-liquor agitation continues even today. In the beginning of 2003 a country liquor shop was opened again in Pather village as a branch of liquor shop located in Chilkana. The shop was causing a number of problems for the residents, particularly for women. The villagers led by morcha members went in delegation to the district magistrate with an application and got order of closure of the shop in February 2003. This shows the strength of collective leadership.

1995: panchayati raj

SOON after the passage of Seventy Third Amendment to the Constitution of India, Disha started making efforts to strengthen panchayats, the institutions of local self-governance in rural areas. While on one hand it motivated its front members to contest panchayat elections with a view to get hold of positions in panchayats, on the other hand it provided training to elected panchayat representatives. It also held workshops, organised interface of panchayat representatives and government officials, and contributed to research and advocacy efforts in collaboration with the state level organisations. In addition, it spread awareness among the common villagers regarding latest developments in the panchayats.

Training in panchayati raj were focused on salient features of panchayati raj regime and rights and duties of panchayat representatives. Gender was an integral part of all the panchayati raj training and special emphasis was given on the role of women in panchayats. Training are still organised from time to time when some new development in panchayati raj regime takes place.

Disha organised workshops on various panchayati raj themes and participated in such events at the state and national level. One of the workshop topics in the past was role of voluntary

organisations in panchayat elections. Interfaces included the divisional commissioner and other officials.

Interventions in panchayat elections included awareness drives among the villagers to vote in large numbers and elect 'upright candidates'. The emphasis of the awareness drive

was on gram panchayat members as they were people's representatives at the grass roots and were nearest to their fellow villagers. Other interventions included solving problems of candidates in filing nomination forms and arranging caste certificates, authorisation certificates and other formalities. During the 2000 elections, about 400 candidates were provided assistance in filing their nomination forms and meeting other formalities.

One of the achievements of the intervention in panchayati raj was official nod to Disha to intervene in the preparation of below poverty line (BPL) lists. This nod came when serious discrepancies came into light in the BPL lists on the basis of which Disha had to facilitate formation of SHGs on the request of the Dis-



Glimpse from a function organised to welcome newly elected panchayat representatives

trict Rural Development Authority (DRDA) of Saharanpur. On inquiry it was revealed that while preparing the lists set norms were not followed and the gram pradhans and gram panchayat development officers (GPDOs) included the names on their will, thus paving the way for inclusion of many non-eligible people in the lists. The matter was raised in the DRDA meeting following which it was decided that Disha would intervene in the preparation of BPL lists.

Total Literacy Campaign

TOTAL Literacy Campaign was an ambitious programme of the Central Government, aimed at making all adults in the age group 15-35 years literate by the year 2000. Disha implemented the campaign in 22 villages of Buddakhera and Bargaon nyaya panchayats of Saharanpur district.

House-to-house survey revealed that there were over 10,000 illiterate people and out of them nearly 6,500 were women. Training of resource persons for

Awareness efforts among the panchayat residents have started cleansing up governance at the village level:

- When pradhan of Khera Mewat Gram Panchayat asked bribe from four beneficiaries of Indira Awas Yojana they lodged complaints with the district panchayati raj officer (DPRO) with affidavits. An inquiry carried out by the DPRO found the Gram Pradhan guilty and appropriate action was taken against him
- In the same Gram Panchayat there was dispute over construction of the school building. When the villagers agitated, the dispute was resolved and construction of the building was finished expeditiously

20 Years of Disha

the campaign was held at Literacy House, a state level literacy resource organisation. The resource persons trained master trainers, who in turn imparted training to volunteers. The volunteers set up literacy centres in the villages. On an average 15 adults attended each centre.

Massive mobilisation efforts backed the campaign. The communication team staged 30 plays in the villages. This was followed by literacy rallies. People in large numbers over their bicycles participated in these rallies.

The programme only had provision of learning kits for the learners and no arrangement was made for lighting arrangements. For this the learners collected 50 paise each per month and with the money thus collected, the organisation approached the district administration for allocation of kerosene quota.

As a fall out non-school going children in the age group 6-14 years evinced keen interest in the campaign. That it was impossible to accommodate them in the education centres was another story.

On the operational part it was found very difficult that the learners completed all the three books provided in the kits in six months. Moreover, there was always shortage of suitably qualified volunteers.

Mobilisation activity for Total Literacy Campaign



A training of self help groups in progress

Self Help Groups

IN the beginning of mid-1990s highly motivated women of the operational area repeatedly mounted pressure on Disha to provide them some economic options so their lot can improve. The organisation experimented with certain conventional economic activities, but they fell flat, because they were based on the

top-down approach. Around the same time concept of SHGs was taking roots in the country and Disha decided in 1995 to experiment with the formation of 60 SHGs in as many villages of the then operational area.

Initially the going was tough because women were suspicious of financial transaction with any one as at that time non-banking financial institutions had duped investors of millions of rupees. But once a few SHGs were formed and started giving financial scope to the women, the caravan started moving. Soon SHGs of men, farmers and non-farmers also came up.

What began as a small step, later grew by leaps and bounds. By the end of the year 2003-04 there were 1,445 SHGs with a total membership of 17,110. These SHGs had savings of Rs 1.62 crore and had accrued loans from different bank branches to the tune of Rs 1.95 crore. The total sum available with the SHGs was thus Rs 3.57 crore. Per member availability of money was Rs 2,088.50 while per SHG availability was Rs 24,727.84.

Of late the government has

recognised potential of SHGs in economic betterment of the deprived sections of the society. It has linked SHGs to its various welfare/ development schemes and taken policy decision that benefits of the government schemes would accrue only to the SHGs and not to individuals. Thus SHGs are being looked as the ultimate mean of empowerment.

Much attention was given to capacity building of SHGs. For this training of SHG office-bearers in minutes writing and accounts keeping were organised from time to time. Since many SHG members were not literate enough they were unable to derive benefit of these training. In these circumstances they adopted innovative approaches like using services of some of the educated girl for written work related to SHGs.

Besides training Disha provided support to SHGs according to their requirement for it understands that each SHG is different from other and tailor made training cannot address to the needs of each SHG. To name a few, these supports included giving inputs on holding meetings, opening of accounts in banks, getting advance limits sanctioned and providing skills in income generation activities.

Efforts were made to ensure that SHGs were not just a forum of transaction of money. SHGs are viewed as a vehicle leading to not only economic empowerment, but also to social and political empowerment, whose attainment is Disha's vision.

Recently efforts have started to organise SHGs into associations. Each association is to have 20 SHGs as its members. At a later stage an overarching federation of associations of SHGs will also be formed. Once this structure is in place, it is expected that the associations and federation will be a force to bargain from the society and the market its due place.



Training Centre at Uttarkashi

Uttarkashi Training Centre

EVEN as work in rural areas of Uttarkashi district progressed, it was realised that the organisation was going to be there in the area for a long time to come. With this revelation, a need was felt to have a training centre-cum-office complex in Uttarkashi. Land for construction of the centre was purchased at Devidhar, a place central to all the villages in which the organisation was working. Construction work began with initial funds from CAPART. But because of several reasons beyond the control of the organisation, the construction work was on hold for several years. Ultimately the original layout was scaled down and the building was finished with financial support from Oxfam. The single floor structure has one training-cum-meeting hall, one office room, one kitchen, one store, two toilets and one bathroom. Only non-residential training are held at this training centre.

Association with SHGs has changed many lives for better. The entire area is full of such success stories:

- Saroj, a member of Sagar SHG in Dashamajra village had some land which she used to lease out for agricultural purposes. After she became member of the SHG, she decided to cultivate her land on her own. She is doing so for the past two years and earning handsome profit.
- Six women of Himmat SHG in Badgaon village took 15 *bighas* of agricultural land on rent and are now collectively raising crops on that land.
- Rampyari is a member of Ankur SHG in Panjbangar village and is landless. She borrowed money from her SHG and got a groceries shop opened for her son. After she paid back the loan she again borrowed money from the group and got vegetable business financed for her husband.
- Sheela is a member of Sathi SHG in Raghunathpur village. With the loan from her SHG she entered into production of incense sticks – she produces incense sticks and her husband sells them at various shops. The family is now earning over Rs 150 per day, a big sum for a family which was till a few years ago dependent on meagre income from labour.
- A relatively younger SHG in Mahmoodpur is engaged in addressing health and social problems, apart from the routine activity of savings and credit. Members of this group have done commendable work in raising awareness about Pulse Polio campaign of the Government. They have ensured that all the children in the village get polio drops.

20 Years of Disha

1996: development initiatives

Disha Supports Individuals and Small Organisations

ORIGIN of this initiative lies in forceful echoing of the development situation of western Uttar Pradesh while responding to queries posed to it during *A Study on Issues and Priorities of Development in Various Regions of Uttar Pradesh*. Following the study a strategy was chalked out for intervention in five geo-economic regions of the state. Disha was selected as nodal agency for western Uttar Pradesh.

The activity began with intensive contact with the voluntary organisations and development oriented people in the western Uttar Pradesh. In the first year three voluntary organisations (VOs), nine community based organisations (CBOs) and one individual were given financial support. The next year two more VOs and four more CBOs were supported. In the third year the number of VOs supported dropped to three while the number of individuals increased to three. This year no support was provided to any CBO. Details of VOs, CBOs and individuals whom support was provided are given in the box below.

Support to the organisations and individuals was not just limited to financial support. During the first year six training and workshops were held to enhance capacity of organisations and individuals involved. The number increased to 12 in the next year.

Educational support was not limited to the organisations and individuals who were provided financial support – it was open for all organisations and development oriented individuals from western Uttar Pradesh. A number of supervisory and monitoring visits were made to provide handholding support to the organisations and individuals so as to facilitate their work.



Ringal artisans used to get ringal from forests like above till forests were forbidden for them

Tehri Garhwal Foray

RURAL areas of Tehri Garhwal house ringal artisans, who eke out their livelihood by producing artefacts from ringal, a variety of cane. After the Central Government put a ban on all kind of harvesting in forests at altitudes over 1,000 metres following a Supreme Court order, the condition of these artisans worsened. Disha chose to work in a cluster of seven villages in Patti Hindao of Jakholi development block of the district.

Following mobilisation meetings, the ringal artisans formed a 30-member Ringal Dastkar Samiti. Disha gave the samiti a revolving fund of Rs 10,000. It held meetings every month to discuss and sort out the problems faced by the members.

VOs supported

1. Pratisheel Bal Vikas Sansthan, Bijnore
2. Anand Niketan Society, Pauri Garhwal
3. Tahreek Samajik Association, Saharanpur
4. Men's Institute for Development and Training, Ghaziabad
5. Navjagriti Samaj Vikas Sansthan, Ferozabad

CBOs supported

1. Balmiki Yuvak Mangal Dal, Saharanpur
2. Yuvak Mangal Dal, Saharanpur
3. UP Voluntary Health Association, Dehradun
4. Uttarakhand SBD Organisation
5. Ambedkar Chetna Manch, Saharanpur

6. Pulse Polio Programme, Saharanpur
7. Mahila Mazdoor Evam Laghu Kisan Morcha, Saharanpur
8. Id and Holi Milan Saroh, Bijnore
9. Indian People Theatre Association, Saharanpur
10. Ghad Kshettra Mazdoor Samiti, Hardwar
11. Ghad Kshettra Mazdoor Morcha, Saharanpur
12. Ravidas Mahasewa Committee, Saharanpur
13. Uttar Pradesh Shramjivi Patrakar Parishad, Saharanpur

Individuals supported

1. Yogendra Singh, Muzaffarnagar
2. Aruna Saini, Saharanpur
3. Namita Guha, Saharanpur



Before the interventions began – the degraded watershed

The samiti raised issues and problems of *ringal* artisans with gram panchayat, block and forest department.

To meet the shortage of *ringal*, the samiti on the prompting of the organisation, decided to go in for cultivation of *ringal* for commercial purpose. Since the land is scarce in the hills the samiti approached the forest department and gram panchayat to allocate land for *ringal* cultivation. While the forest department turned down the request of land allocation, the gram panchayat allocated land to the samiti. In addition, the samiti also acquired some private land too for *ringal* cultivation.

With this it was hoped that *ringal* would be available to the artisans in three years time.

Watershed Development

CONSERVATION and development of a watershed near Dunda development block headquarters in Uttarkashi was initiated

in 1996. The watershed measures about 1,200 hectares and covers seven villages. Residents of the watershed area mainly include Bhutias, a Scheduled Tribe, many Scheduled Castes and Garhwalis.

The watershed was named as Bhagirathi watershed. It comprises three micro watersheds and is aligned in north-south direction and oriented towards east. The land in the watershed is second grade, inclined and stony. Agriculture is traditional, based on human and cattle labour. It is entirely dependent on rain, which is mainly confined to four monsoon months. As a result agricultural yield is less than normal and people are dependent on non-agricultural activities like jobs, business and labour.

Necessary community mobilisation structure – Watershed Committee – was formed in the initial stages. It included two or three members from each village with due representation of Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and women. Watershed Committee was the nodal body to undertake several important jobs including formation and capacity building of user groups and self-help groups. Necessary arrangements were made for just distribution of benefits and

maintenance of assets created under the activity.

To take care of the implementation aspects, a Watershed Conservation Team of the organisation's staff associated with the activity was formed. This team received capacity building training from various organisations across the country.

A mix of strategies are being used on the implementation side. These include awareness generation, plantation, trenching, construction, training and exposure. The major emphasis is on vegetative treatment of the watershed and there is less emphasis on creation of engineering structures.

Detailed information about various components of the activity has been painted on information boards. These boards have been displayed on panchayat bhawans and other public places.

Physical achievements

- 72,284 saplings of fuel, fodder and timber planted
- 9,803 saplings of fruits planted to promote horticulture
- 1,550 trenches dug for water retention
- Defunct water pipeline in Kurah village restored; 400 metres of new pipeline laid
- 376 metres of new pipeline laid in Balla village
- Three water tanks one each in Jakhari, Dunda and Kurah villages constructed
- 12 SHGs of watershed residents formed
- Three training – two for management and accounts keeping of SHGs and one for nursery raising – organised
- One exposure trip
- 24 meetings of Watershed Committee and Watershed Conservation Team organised
- Rs 1,85,402 contributed by watershed residents through labour as part of 20 per cent contribution

20 Years of Disha



(Clockwise from top left) Trenches ready for water retention and plantation, saplings of different species of plants outside one of the several nurseries set up in the watershed area just before transportation, and construction of a bund in progress



1998: jfm

TO give to residents residing in and near forests rights over forest produce, the forest department started a joint forest management project and Disha became one of the partners in this endeavour. A spearhead team comprising of an official from the department and two motivators – one male and one female – was formed. Of the three kinds of forests in the district (reserve, civil and soyam) the organisation worked only in reserve forest area. The work began in villages of four forest ranges and later villages in two more forest ranges were included, covering a total of 19 villages.

Operational strategy included preparation of microplans, based on participatory rural appraisal (PRA). These microplans listed priorities of the villages. The activities included awareness generation, meetings, health camps and training.

Some construction activity was also undertaken. This included construction of a safety wall and check dam along a river to arrest soil erosion. In Siri village a mule path was also constructed to provide the villagers an easy link to the nearest motor road. A nursery was also raised to enable the residents to plant saplings and to increase forest cover.

To sustain joint management of forests, village forest committees (VFCs) were formed in each of the villages the activity was taken up at the very start of the activity. VFCs in all the villages made voluntary labour contribution to the tune of 10 to 20 per cent of the costs involved and deposited the same in village development funds (VDF). This amount would be used for maintenance of assets created during the implementation phase.

1999: agriculture diversification

B EING carried out in all the villages of five blocks of Saharanpur district, namely, Punwarka, Sadholi Qadim, Nakur, Gangoh and Nanauta, this activity aims at diversification of agriculture, thereby increasing income level of the farming community by forming their groups and linking

the groups with the financial institutions. It also aims at implementing the government's agricultural strategy to accelerate growth and alleviate poverty, strengthening the delivery of agricultural services, supporting the expansion and rehabilitation of rural infrastructure, integrating project investments with policies and legislative regulatory framework and fostering panchayati raj institutions, voluntary organisations and beneficiary participation.

The activity involves collection of information of the villages through PRA methods and baseline surveys. PRA and baseline surveys have revealed that major identified needs of the farmers pertained to grain production, post harvesting activities and horticulture.

Awareness about the activity is being generated through a mix of means like street plays, posters and pamphlets, wall paintings, and formal and informal meetings. Sub-activities take care of farming systems, integrated plant and nutrient management, integrated pest management, input supply, market linkages, post harvest activities, food processing, credit linkages, bio-fertilisers, savings of groups, etc.



Cucurbits being cultivated on scaffoldings

Though training of farmers is a major component, much emphasis is given to entrepreneurship development training. As a result of entrepreneurship development farmers are engaging themselves in activities like mushroom cultivation, preparation of dairy products, seed selling, pickle, fruit processing, bakery, etc.

As a part of capacity building a number

of farmers have been taken on exposure visits to suitable places so they could widen their horizon and on coming back use the learning in their fields. These places include Pantnagar, which has an agriculture university, and Lucknow and New Delhi, where agriculture exhibitions are organised from time to time.

By the end of 2003-04, Kisan Credit Cards worth Rs 8.77 million were issued to 2,500 farmers and cash credit limit worth Rs 8.0 million was sanctioned to 225 group members. With the easy availability of credit the farmers marched towards betterment of their economy. Another achievement was adaptation of bio-fertilisers, which provided two-fold benefit to the farmers – one, improvement in quality of land and, two, saving of farmers' money which would have otherwise been spent on fertilisers.

A number of farmers have switched over to organic farming. To promote organic produces, a shop and a milk vend have been opened in Saharanpur city. The vend sells oxytocin free milk. Oxytocin is a hormone injected to cattle to get milk quickly.

- Women SHGs engaged in producing paper bowls, candles, pickles, *namkeen* (a salted mixture), vermi compost, etc. A few SHGs are also engaged in bee keeping, mushroom cultivation, etc
- Strawberry being cultivated by 25 farmers on about 18 hectares of land
- Floriculture being done on about 50 hectar of land
- Techniques like integrated pest management, integrated plant nutrients management, nadep, vermi composting introduced
- Cucurbits cultivation on scaffolding and tomato cultivation with staking introduced

20 Years of Disha

(Clockwise from top left) Farmers take demonstration of low tunnel polyhouse; a farmer trapping insects from his paddy field; women preserving apple; a farmer being honoured; high officials visiting a farmer's cabbage field; and a strawberry field



Tehri Earthquake Relief

AN earthquake of severe intensity struck Tehri Garhwal, Chamoli and Rudraprayag districts on the night of March 28-29, 1999. Immediate relief for the victims became need of hour. Disha decided to construct temporary shelters for 100 earthquake victims. Dehradun-based organisation People's Science Institute prepared the design of these temporary shelters. It was called 'four-in-one room' set, that is, one set was meant for four families.

Disha worked in Laini and Pangaria areas of Hindao Patti of Ghansali block of Tehri Garhwal district. This area is so remote that no one reached there to undertake relief work. The organisation had old association with the area as it worked with *ringal* artisans. Help from the committee of *ringal* artisans came in handy.

The area had 403 earthquake hit families. Since the organisation only had provision for 100 families, a selection of worst hit families was made by holding open meetings in the villages.

There was problem in getting land for the temporary shelters. People were ready to part with land for individual construction, but they were not ready for group shelter. This problem was sorted through intervention of gram panchayat and *lekhpal* (the local revenue official) and formal agreements were entered into.

One more problem that cropped up was that of level land measuring 40 ft by 20 ft. To sort out this problem at a few places one, two and three room sets were constructed. The total number of shelters thus constructed took care of 100 families. All the shelters were completed by July 1999 and handed over to the villagers for their use.



Temporary shelters for Tehri earthquake victims

Research on Green Revolution

A STUDY on 'Green Revolution, Equality and Environment Protection' in context to western Uttar Pradesh was started in October 1999. The primary data for the study were collected from five representative villages in five districts of western Uttar Pradesh. The data collection involved several unstructured interactions with the villagers and was done in collaboration with five voluntary organisations active in these districts.

The study report revealed that the farmers of the area felt threatened and harassed by growing uncertainties of green revolution agriculture. It noted that the threat from pests and disease to crops was increasing in recent years. It found that the economics of agriculture worked out quite differently for big farmers and small farmers. A big farmer faced free market conditions, while this was not so in case of a small farmer because he had taken loans from the trader. The study made enough information available to start action on an experimental basis.

The study report was released at a largely attended function organised at the Training Centre.

Glimpse from a function to mark release of green revolution study



20 Years of Disha

2000: women cell, nari adalats



A glimpse from Nari Adalat, (right) victims narrating their tales

A WOMAN Cell was created in the organisation to provide space to the work being done among women. The Women Cell was provided an equipped office accommodation. The workers associated with the activity legal aid were transferred to the cell and a few fresh workers were recruited. Both old and new workers were given orientation to meet new challenges.

Soon after formation, the Women Cell started devising strategies for interventions being carried out in extending succour to the harried women. The most notable of this was the mechanism of Nari Adalat (Women Court). Initially Nari Adalats were organised on 24th of every month, but later the date was changed to 10th. Prominent people from the area of victims are invited to Nari Adalat to seek a solution to the problems being faced by victims.

Ever since the Women Cell came into existence, it is laying great emphasis on documentation. Each case is duly 'registered' and proceedings, including happenings during field visits to verify the facts, are recorded in detail. This helps in fol-

low up of cases. The Women Cell keeps an up-to-date repository of cases. It has also engaged a woman lawyer to advise it on legal ramifications of various cases. This lawyer also contests cases in courts, if necessary.

The Women Cell helps women in particular and people in general who are victims of violence. The largest chunk of cases that are brought to it for solution pertain to family violence – violence committed on women by their husbands, fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law and brothers-in-law. The reason of such harassment range from not bringing enough dowry in marriage to looks of women to extra-marital relations to suspicion of theft to anything possible under sun. Women Cell classifies instances of violence under identified broad heads of rape, domestic violence, dowry, suicide, murder, mental violence, civil violence, kidnapping, health violence, torture and others.

In most of the cases dialogue by the Women Cell functionaries solves the problems of women. But still there are many instances in which such dialogue did not yield results and the cases were taken to the competent authorities in quest of a

solution.

Often the Women Cell solves cases forwarded to it by the police. Yet the relations with the police are not very cordial because the cell functionaries keep a vigilant eye on the functioning of the police (often because of corruption) in cases of violence against women. Normally in such cases it is able to mount pressure on the local police by taking up the matter with the higher police officials, and if that fails, with the National Commission for Women, the apex national level body promoted by the government.

Advocacy for Women Rights

IN THE recent years considerable emphasis is being given to advocacy for women rights. This does not mean to say that this is something new – earlier the efforts were largely unorganised, now they are more organised. Advocacy is being carried out at the local, regional, national and international levels.

At the local level the Women Cell continued to liaise with local, state and national level media. As a result, the organisation is now finding due place in news. In addition news clippings related to women issues are maintained regularly. These clippings are a vital learning source about the issues concerning women. Recently the Women Cell has begun utilising electronic medium as a tool of advocacy. The coordinator of the Women Cell went to the head office of news channel Star News with a women victim on September 12, 2003, to present her before the news channel.

Disha has developed good relations with the women organisations working at the state and national level. Regular participation in their events helps the organisation reach voice of women far and wide. Apart from this Disha jointly holds events with them. A mention needs to be made of Disha's participation in a study on magnitude of violence against women in Uttar Pradesh. The study was carried out by Vama, a network of women organisations based in the state capital Lucknow, and another women's organisation, Aali.

On the international level, the organisation's director visited The Netherlands in 2002. He presented a paper *Violence against Women in India: Suffering Continues Despite Progress All Over* at the International Conference on Social Welfare. While presenting the general scenario of violence against women in India and Disha's experience in fighting the menace, the paper concluded that violence against women was endemic in India because women were highly vulnerable owing to poor quality of life indicated by rampant poverty, lack of education, high under five mortality, poor health status, high fertility rate and high maternal mortality rate. Societal mindset also contributed to the violence against women.

(From top) Training for advocacy for women rights in progress; women take to streets to press for their rights, and women observing National Day for Violence against Women



20 Years of Disha

2002: sustainable agriculture

ALL effects of indiscriminate use of fertilisers and pesticides in the country and more particularly in western Uttar Pradesh were highlighted in a study titled *Green Revolution, Equality and Environment Protection: A Study on Western Uttar Pradesh* carried out during 1999 and 2000. To implement the recommendations of the study a small intervention was initiated for demonstration purposes that crops can be raised without use of fertilisers and pesticides.

The experimental farm measuring nearly 1 hectare is situated next to the Training Centre. Seeds for raising cereals, vegetables, spices, timber plants, fruit plants and flowers were sourced from different people and organisations. Special care was taken to get traditional seeds raised without the use of fertilisers and pesticides. Seeds were sown in stages according to seasons appropriate for them. The crops were monitored carefully so as to prevent any disease inflicting them.

Seeds of chilly, pumpkin, brinjal and tomato were distributed among 25 progressive farmers of the villages situated near the organisation's headquarters. Many more farmers evinced interest in organic farming, but they were hesitant to adopt them for the fear of getting less yield from the crops.

A number of meetings were held with the farmers so as to motivate them to adopt sustainable agriculture techniques. In these meetings the farmers were apprised of the harmful effects of indiscriminate use of fertilisers and pesticides and the decreasing health of the soil. The farmers were given technical information about preparing better compost and other bio-fertilisers like vermi-compost and also means to control diseases and insects without applying harmful chemical pesticides.



A variety of pumpkin being grown organically

Mother and Child Healthcare

THIS activity is being carried out in 10 villages of Sarsawa block. These villages are very remote and situated between three rivers Yamuna, Old Yamuna and Maskara. Every rainy season the villages are cut off from the rest of the district because of gushing water of the rivers. This peculiar situation of these villages has resulted in numerous problems before the residents. One area of concern is access to health services, more particularly mother and child healthcare (MCH).

Nearest primary health centres (PHCs) from the villages are situated at distances ranging from 7 to 22 km from the villages. Similarly nearest primary health sub-centres (PHSCs) are situated at distances ranging from 1 to 4 km. For getting a public transport residents in six out of 10 villages have to cover distances ranging from 0.5 km to 4 km. It is

obvious that accessing health services is a Herculean job for the villagers.

At PHC and more particularly at PHSCs the facilities are not available and even if they are available they are generally not made available to the patients.

In this rather bleak scenario, a number of quacks have opened their 'clinics' in almost all the villages. These quacks are playing with the lives of the hapless mothers and fleecing them. Instances of patients losing their lives at the hands of the quacks are not very uncommon.

Being implemented with support from ITC Ltd., a leading corporate house of the country, this activity makes an attempt to address these problems. Ten village health workers (VHWs), one each for each village have been selected and trained. The VHWs are the nodal persons in their respective villages. Contacts have been established with the government's health department. The VHWs work in close association with the government health workers and take

active part in pulse polio, immunisation of mother and child and family planning.

Health camps are organised not only for mothers and children, but also for general people. The highlights of the camps are:

- Proper check-up of registered patients
- Timely immunisation of pregnant women
- Immunisation of children
- Timely check-up of malaria

Elementary Education

DESPITE considerable progress in the realm of education, a considerable fraction of children are still out of school and the dropout rate is quite high. The situation is worrisome in 10 villages situated in the area between three rivers Yamuna, Old Yamuna and Maskara. Out of the 10 villages only four have schools situated in the villages.

To address this situation, Disha is promoting elementary education in these villages through 10 education centres. Nearly 300 children, who would have been otherwise left out of schools, have been admitted to these schools so as to prepare them for regular schooling. After one year of schooling aimed at developing basic reading and writing skills these children will be admitted to the primary schools.

Attempts are being made in these villages to add value to the existing primary schools. Under this uniforms, textbooks and exercise books are being provided to the poor needy children. Since these children start their education in a disadvantaged position, extra teaching for them has been arranged at the education centres to bring them at par with rest of the children.

The teachers at these educational centres are local and have been provided training in education by Disha.

Income Generation

ANUMBER of initiatives have been taken up in recent years to provide to the villagers options in income generation. One such initiative is imparting training to women and adolescent girls in the trade of readymade garments. Four batches of 30 trainees have successfully completed the training, each lasting six months. Many of the trainees have entered into trade after tying up with the traders in Saharanpur city.

Another area of developing income generation skills was in agro sector. The beginning was made with preparation of traditional items. Later, however, items like mushroom cultivation, incense sticks, etc., were taken up.

(From top) An *Imam* administering polio drops to a child; children studying at an education centre; and trainees display their produce at an exhibition



20 Years of Disha

2003: dehradun foray

Campaign to End All Kinds of Violence against Women



(From left top in anti-clockwise direction) Women's fair at Kedarawala village; gathering of women at the fair; a glimpse from workshop of voluntary organisations of Uttaranchal; and Member of the National Commission for Women Nafisa Husain during a function

PLAIN areas of Dehradun district are endemic to violence against women. According to an estimate violence is committed against women in almost 60 per cent of the families in the area. Disha started a campaign on prevention of violence against women in a part of the plain areas of the district in January 2003.

The campaign builds on taking out *yatras* (journey with specific purpose) and holding *melas* (fairs) to create awareness among the residents of the area on the issue. The *yatras* are taken once in a month in a cluster of five villages. Campaign material in the form of pamphlets is distributed and small corner meetings are held during the *yatras*. The *yatras* give message that

physical violence (against women) is not the only type of violence – it can have different forms such as denial of education to girl child, denial of proper food and nutrition, sexual and mental harassment, etc. After the conclusion of *yatras* in a cluster, a *mela* is held the following day. Village leaders, prominent persons of state and national repute, media, etc., are invited to these *melas*. Instances of violence against women are tackled during the *yatras* and *melas*.

Legal literacy camps are organised to sharpen skills of women leaders identified in *yatras* and *melas*. The focus of legal literacy camps is on means to combat various forms of violence committed on women.

To spread the theme of the issue, media has been involved. Media involvement began with holding a conference on the issue 'forms of violence against women and role of media'. The mediapersons were main participants in this conference. As a result, news stories about violence against women have started getting prominent place in the print medium. As a follow-up meetings and media conferences are held from time to time.

And to further spread the work, networking and alliance building with other voluntary organisations working in the area has been done. Joint events are held with these organisations.

Following the maxim 'to catch them young' students in schools and colleges of the area are being reached. They are shown plays and distributed pamphlets to motivate them towards gender just society. Events like debate, drawing competitions are also held.

Special events like International Women's Day are regularly celebrated in the area to express solidarity with women and shun violence against them.

Education for Adolescent Girls

ELEVEN education centres for imparting literacy skills to adolescent girls are being run in rural areas of Dehradun district of Uttaranchal. These girls are mainly those who never went to schools, or dropped out from schools because of family 'responsibilities'. Most of them are from among Muslims and some from among Scheduled Castes.

The curriculum followed in the education centres is based on formal education system of Uttaranchal government. It is designed in such a way that education from standard 1 to 5 is com-



(From top left in clockwise direction) A gathering of women to observe International Women's Day on March 8; Jahnvi Tiwari and Naseema reading out the declaration; and a view of training of instructors of adolescent girls

pleted in three years duration.

While teaching the girls it is ensured that the teaching is not confined to textbooks alone. Practical knowledge about health and nutritional aspects, which is quite important in the coming years in the lives of girls, is also given with a view to break the vicious cycle the women are at present caught in.

The girls are made aware of the issue of prevention of violence against women and gender equality. Since normally Muslim girls are not allowed to attend school and they are not allowed any kind of exposure, they are likely to face

violence at home and gender discrimination. The education centres thus are emerging as a platform where the girls can acquire reading and writing skills, and also learn how to fight for their rights.

Parents' meeting are organised every month to discuss progress of their daughters in classrooms. During these meetings they are motivated and mobilised to understand the importance of education so as to ensure that they sent their other children to school.

Each centre caters to on an average 30 girls and their age varies from 12 to 18 years.

20 Years of Disha

Epilogue

IN THE preceding pages we have chronicled our 20 years. Compartmentalisation of history is a rather difficult task for one event unfolds from the other. This event unfolds into another. This event builds upon the other event. Events lead to growth of the organisation. Events force the organisation to learn and probably de-learn too.

Looking back at 20 years, we find there were several events, which really shaped our destiny. The first was coming up of Ghad Kshettra Mazdoor Morcha and Mahila Mazdoor Evam Laghu Kisan Morcha. These fronts established and strengthened our bonds with the community. Later these fronts struggled for the community whom they represented. And these struggles made us a household name in the area and took our name to distant places in the state and the country.

The next was our association with a central government sponsored programme Education for Women Equality. This association expanded our presence from just a few villages to almost 70 villages in two development blocks of Saharanpur district. Later we got a real taste of government style functioning when following a change in programme strategy we were asked to hand over our structure related to this programme to the government established Mahila Samakhya Samitis. We refused. We searched alternative funds and got them from an international donor.

The earthquake of Uttarkashi in 1991 took us there for demonstration of earthquake resistant construction technology. Since then we are present there. We constructed a few structures and handed over them to village representatives. Then we turned our attention to other things water, land and forest – so vital for a hilly area. We later implemented a joint forest management project and are at present busy in developing a watershed area.

Five years later in 1996 we entered Tehri Garhwal district. Though our intervention was very small one it created some community based structures, which came very handy when we had to rush to the area with relief after an earthquake struck the area in 1999. The year 1996 was an important milestone for us in another way. This year we were selected as a lead agency for working with other voluntary organisations, community based organisations and

Eminent Gandhian Nirmala Dehpade during the function to hand over godown to *baan* workers; (middle) chairperson of Disha Poornima Jain distributing certificates to successful trainees; and a view of a training on advocacy for women rights



Views from some of the workshops that the organisation has held from time to time



development oriented individuals in western Uttar Pradesh. We got exposed to organisations and individuals of all hues and worked with some of them. We were able to reach our ideology to an area as wide as western Uttar Pradesh.

Three years down the line in 1999 our first formal full scale evaluation was done. The evaluation report suggested a perspective planning, a dose of organisational development exercise and formalisation of organisational structure. We did that in the coming three years. This really helped us strike a balance between activism and professionalism. Five years down this evaluation we are now a professionally managed organisation.

Year 1999 was important in another way. We got involved with a government sponsored activity aimed at diversification of agriculture. This activity resulted in our outreach widening from about 100 villages to almost 600 villages. Of course this also led to problems on the administrative side.

Last year in 2003, we made a beginning in rural areas of Dehradun district to combat violence against women and to impart education to adolescent girls. By this time Uttaranchal had also come into existence by separating hill areas of Uttar Pradesh into the new state. This nascent state provides ample opportunities to work. Technically we can say that we are at present working in two states of the country.

During these years we have earned banquets as well as brickbats. A number of honours and awards to the organisation and its individual workers are testimony to this. We have bagged prizes for promoting self-help groups. Our communication team has bagged prizes for its performances at several venues. Our workers Ram Rati and Rehana have bagged prizes for their exemplary work. Our director KN Tiwari has won several laurels, including prize for social bravery. He has reached voice of the people we work with to international community.

The powerful lobby of vested interests is still not to terms with us. They see in us a rival out to 'destroy' power equations in the area we work in.

Now it is the time for us to pause (is that really possible) and look ahead. Though we have made visible impact, sheer number of people who are in a disadvantaged state does not allow us to rest. Therefore, our struggle to bring about positive change in the lives of people will continue. That is our commitment.