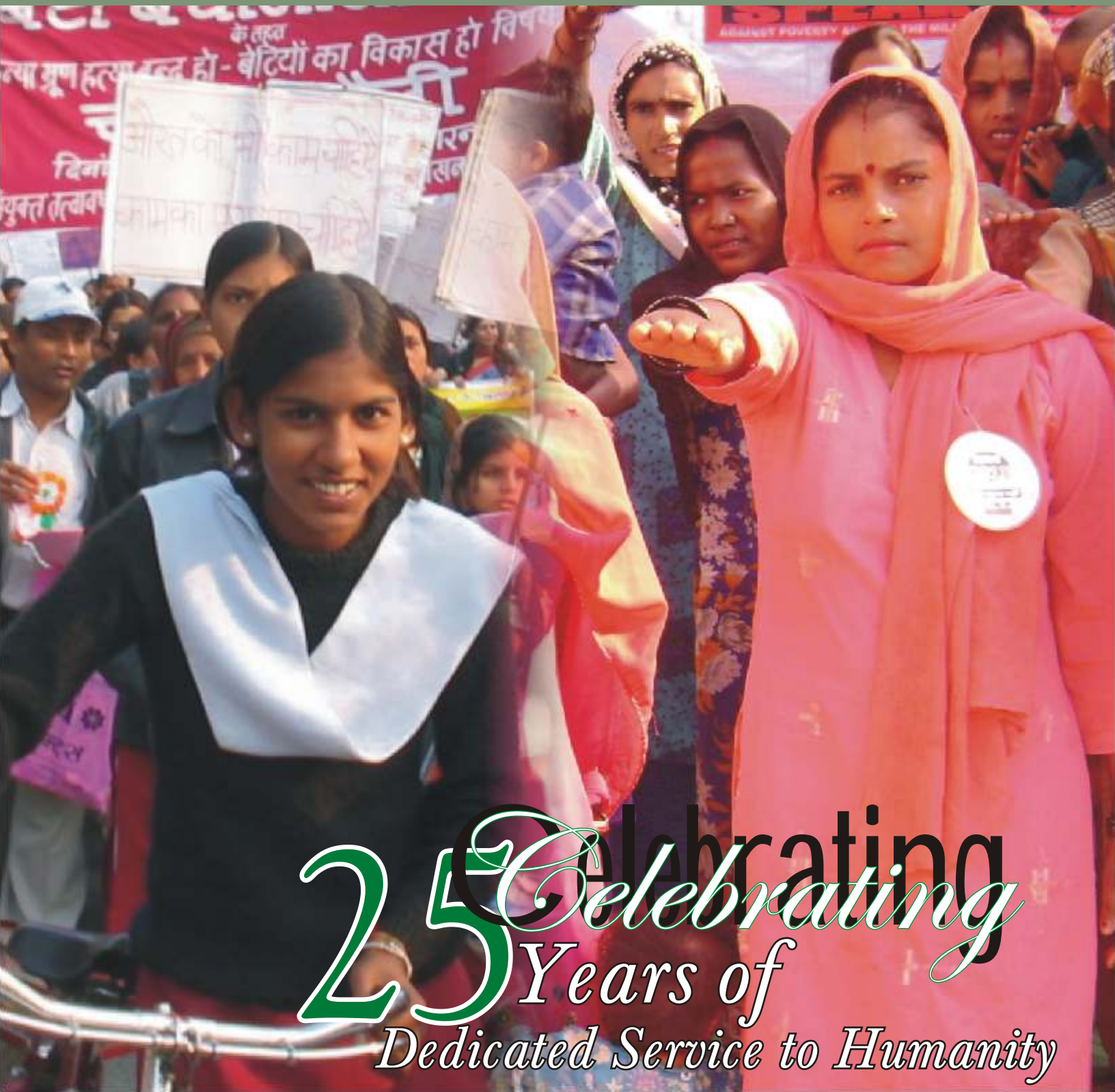




DISHA

Social Organization



Celebrating
25 *Years of*
Dedicated Service to Humanity



Disha Factsheet

Disha Factsheet

Our Vision

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

Our Mission

To mobilise women, poor, marginalised and weaker sections into sustainable groups so as to achieve their social, economic and political empowerment

Our Objectives

- To strive for women empowerment and gender equity and equality
- To mobilise the community into sustainable community based groups
- To address poverty through a rights-based as well as economic development approach
- To struggle for integrated development social, economic and political of the poor and marginalised
- To promote communal and social harmony
- To collaborate with various like minded organisations and networks

Our Values

- Dedication and professionalism
- Innovation and respect for the needs of our partners in change
- Social responsibility
- Honesty and transparency
- Accountability

Our Outreach

- Two States: Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand
- Four Districts: Saharanpur, Dehradun, Uttarkashi and Hardwar
- Twenty-two districts with campaigns in both Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand
- Eleven development blocks
- Over 500 villages
- Over 4 million people

Message

Disha Social Organization completes 25 years of service. When we reflect on these 25 years, we feel satisfied that we have been able to change lives of the people we chose to work with (women, dalits and minorities) with varying degrees. But this satisfaction does not make us complacent as there still is so much to do to realise our vision.

Five years ago when we completed our two decades, we brought out a document titled '20 Years of Disha' chronicling the history. On the occasion of our Silver Jubilee we again are doing the same. This document, however, is entirely different from the earlier one as it uses less text and more photographs and is more concised. It is divided into five major sections (Beginning, Expansion, Consolidation, Diversification and New Horizons), each dealing with five years.

In our journey so far numerous people and organisations have associated with us and extended valuable support. We take this opportunity to thank them all.

When we see around ourselves, we find that despite so much of our efforts, there still is poverty, illiteracy and violence (against women). People are still being denied their rights and dues by the very same organs of the society which are expected to be with such people.

Our struggle will continue in the years to come.

Poornima Jain
Chairperson

KN Tiwari
Director



Beginning

Disha Social Organization was formed in 1984 in Sultanpur, a semi-urban area in Saharanpur district, to address concerns of the vast rural population, particularly women, dalits and minorities.

The initial activities included training to traditional weavers at Pather village, organisation of *baan* workers (who are dalit landless), stitching training school (for dalit and Muslim women), education centres for women and men, and health training. These activities forged a relationship with the community. This relationship grew stronger as the time passed.

Soon a problem of greater magnitude in the shape of water logging in 15 villages came to the organisation's notice. Disha motivated and guided affected people to take up the issue with the relevant government department. This led to reclamation of nearly 16,000 hectares of land, improving the quality of life in the villages.

This laid the foundation of work tackling broader issues before the people.

Ghad Kshettra Mazdoor Morcha

In 1995, year Disha specifically concentrated on *baan* workers, most of whom are Scheduled Castes. *Baan* workers reside below Shiwalik hills and eke out their livelihood by making *baan* (rope) out of *bhabbhar*, a wild grass growing in the hills. *Baan* workers traditionally enjoyed rights over *bhabbahar*, but with the increasing commercialisation and coming up of the Forest Corporation, their rights were usurped and their livelihood was threatened.

Disha organised *baan* workers under the banner of Ghad Kshettra Mazdoor Morcha (GKMM) in 1985. GKMM led several struggles for restoring traditional forest rights of *baan* workers by taking up the issue with the Forest Department and Forest Corporation.

GKMM and another community based organisation (CBO) Mahila Mazdoor Evam Laghu Kisan Morcha (MMELKM) formed three years later launched several successful agitations. Till date they are engaged in solving problems of people whom they represent.



Communication Team

As the work progressed the need was felt to reach more and more people. What a better idea to do it could be to use folk media communication, including street plays and puppet shows. A communication team of local young men and women was formed in 1985 and intensive training for the team was organised with resource persons from national level voluntary organisation specialising in communication.

Soon the communication team started staging street plays and puppet shows in the villages, creating awareness on different issues among the people. So far this team has staged over 2,000 performances not only in the operational area of Disha, but also elsewhere in Uttar Pradesh and other States of the country.

The themes on which the communication team has performed have touched almost all the themes on which Disha works. Particular mention may be made of women related issues, including violence against women.

Communication team has won several awards for its performances.



Mahila Jagriti Samitis

In 1986, six Mahila Jagriti Samitis (MJSs) were formed in as many villages. Each MJS had its own governance system and bank account to deposit membership fee. The meagre membership amount collected proved to be a great source of for the members. 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.

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 made of MJS at Sultanpur and Pather. 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. This ultimately led to formation of Mahila Mazdoor Evam Laghu Kisan Morcha (MMELKM).



Expansion

In 1989 unorganised labour, particularly agricultural labours, were paid much less than the minimum wages recommended by the Government, then Rs 20 a day. Moreover, women labours were paid almost half of what men were paid. Because of increasing awareness, women labours went on flash strike during *kharif* harvesting season, demanding equal and minimum wages. All attempts to break their strike proved futile and the strike expanded to new areas. A convention of women labours and small farmers was organised on December 27, 1989, to give further impetus to the ongoing struggle, leading to birth of Mahila Mazdoor Evam Laghu Kisan Morcha. Gradually landlords fell in line and improved women labours' wages, though equal wages are still a dream.

The same year 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. Along with adult women, adolescent girls, particularly those belonging to Muslim community, also came to the classes in large numbers. Disha decided to provide educational facilities to such adolescent girls. At present over 10 educational centres for adolescent Muslim girls are operational.



Uttarkashi Foray

In 1991 an earthquake devastated Uttarkashi city and adjoining rural areas, killing over 1,000 people and causing widespread loss of property. Disha not only provided immediate relief work, but also started demonstration of earthquake resistant construction technology by building a few community structures. It also restored irrigation canals at a village, enabling the villagers restart agricultural operations. Association with the villagers led the organisation conclude that only by managing natural resources, their holistic development could be thought of. Several initiatives were later taken up in this regard.

Back in Saharanpur, Disha became partner in Mahila Samakhya programme of the Government of Uttar Pradesh. This led to expansion of operational area from a few villages to 60 villages Sarsawa and Sadholi Qadim development blocks of Saharanpur district. During the meetings of *mahila sanghas* (village level women's organisation), instances of violence against women started pouring in. Later, combating violence against women became one of the core activities of the organisation. But by the end of 1994, relationship of Disha with Mahila Samakhya programme ended following change in the Government's plan regarding the programme.



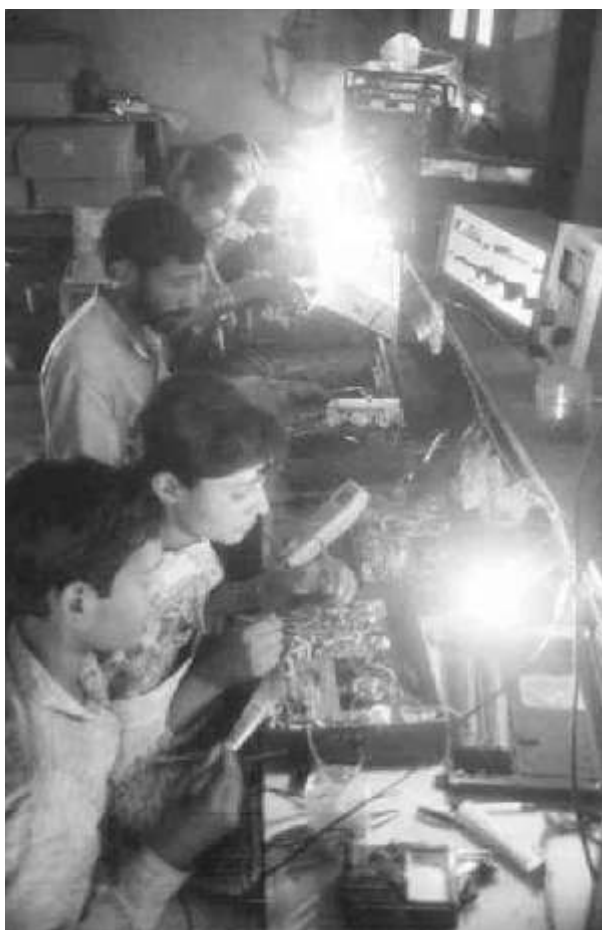
Legal Aid Programme

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 was aimed at making the people, more particularly women, aware of the laws concerning their lives.

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.

To address the issue of landlessness, GMMM, MMELKM and Disha jointly surveyed the area for such instances and launched a campaign to tackle the issue. The campaign included petitioning before the authorities and filing court cases. Several instances of landlessness were successfully tackled during the ensuing years.

For economic empowerment of women an electronics programme was taken up. But this proved to be a wasted effort and the programme was abandoned three years after it was taken up.



Training Centre

By 1992 Disha had completed eight years and 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.

Financial 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.

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



Anti-liquor Agitation

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.

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, but did not meet its promises for the next three years.

On March 31, 1993, the women of Pather stormed the shop and sat on an indefinite dharna before it. 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.

Later on the intervention of the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, the vend was shut on July 2, 1993.



Consolidation

Soon after the passage of Seventy Third Amendment to the Constitution of India, Disha started making efforts to strengthen panchayats, since 1995. While on one hand it motivated its morcha 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. 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.

In the same year, Disha implemented Total Literacy Campaign, aimed at making all adults in the age group 15-35 years literate by the year 2000, in 22 villages of Buddakhera and Bargaon nyaya panchayats of Saharanpur district. Through this activity nearly 10,000 illiterate people, including 6,500 women were made literate.



Self Help Groups

Another beginning of far reaching consequence was in the shape of formation of self help groups of women. What began with the modest target of 60 SHGs in 1995, later grew by leaps and bounds. In about 10 years the number of SHGs crossed 1,500 with impressive savings of nearly Rs 2 crore. But loans from banks did not match the expectation of SHGs and this paved way for the coming up of Disha India Micro Credit, an associate organisation of Disha.

Disha visualises SHGs not merely as instruments of savings and credit, but as a mean of overall empowerment of people. Many groups are taking action on social development issues with considerable success.

A training centre-cum-office complex was conceptualised at Devidhar in Uttarkashi district. But the construction was delayed because of several reasons beyond the control of the organisation. Ultimately the original layout was scaled down and the building was finished with one training-cum-meeting hall, one office room, and a few other amenities. Only non-residential training are held at this training centre.



Support to Other Organisations

Beginning 1996, Disha started supporting individuals and small organisations of Uttar Pradesh to enable them to take up voluntary work. This was in follow up of a study carried titled *A Study on Issues and Priorities of Development in Various Regions of Uttar Pradesh*, carried out by a state level resource organisation.

This was followed by 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 VO's and four more CBOs were supported. In the third year the number of VO's supported dropped to three while the number of individuals increased to three. This year no support was provided to any CBO.

Over the three years five voluntary organisations, 13 CBOs and three individuals were supported. The support included both financial and educational support.

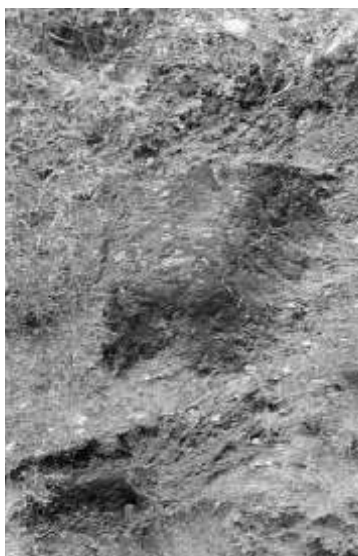


Watershed Development

Up in the hills, watershed conservation and development project was taken up in a 1,200 hectare watershed, covering seven villages, in Uttarkashi district. This watershed was developed over a period of next five years.

In neighbouring Tehri Garhwal district an intervention was started with *ringal* artisans, who eke out their livelihood by producing artefacts from *ringal*, a variety of cane. The ringal artisans were facing problems following a Central Government ban on all kind of harvesting in forests at altitudes over 1,000 metres in compliance with a Supreme Court order. A 30-member Ringal Dastkar Samiti was formed and this committee acquired panchayat and private land for *ringal* cultivation.

To give to people 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 in six forest ranges Uttarkashi district, covering 19 villages. Necessary community structures were created as a part of intervention.



Diversification

In 1999, Disha became partner of Uttar Pradesh Diversified Agriculture Support Project (UPDASP). This project expanded the operational area on an unprecedented scale as it covered all the villages in five (of 11) blocks of Saharanpur district.

Several kinds of groups were formed under the activity. The most prominent of these were self help groups (SHGs) as almost 1,000 SHGs were formed. Another set of groups was farmers's interest groups (FIGs) espousing for farmers's interests.

Though training of farmers was a major component, much emphasis was 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.

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.

The same year Disha took up relief activities among earthquake victims of in Tehri Garhwal district, which along with Chamoli and Rudraprayag districts were rocked by an earthquake in March. Disha constructed shelters for 100 earthquake victims.





Green Revolution

A major study titled *Green Revolution, Equality and Environment Protection: A Study on Western Uttar Pradesh* was started in October 1999. The six month study revealed that the farmers of the area felt threatened and harassed by growing uncertainties of green revolution agriculture; and economics of agriculture worked out quite differently for big farmers and small farmers. The study recommended that an initiative be taken up to popularise organic farming.



To implement the recommendations of the study, a small intervention was initiated in 2002 for demonstration purposes that crops can be raised without use of fertilisers and pesticides. This experiment was done on a piece of land measuring about 1 hectare. 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. Multiplied seeds of chilly, pumpkin, brinjal and tomato were distributed among 25 progressive farmers.



A number of meetings were held with the farmers so as to motivate them to adopt sustainable agriculture techniques.



Nari Adalat

In 2000, a woman cell was created to provide space to the work being done among women. The Women Cell was provided an equipped office accommodation and 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). Prominent people from the area of victims are invited to Nari Adalat to seek a solution to the problems being faced by victims. Often the Women Cell solves cases forwarded to it by the police.



Advocacy for women rights was re-organised in 2000 and efforts were started at the local, regional, national and international levels. The organisation's director visited The Netherlands in 2002 to present a paper *Violence against Women in India: Suffering Continues Despite Progress All Over* at the International Conference on Social Welfare.



Health, Education and Income Generation

In 2002, an intervention with support of ITC Ltd. was initiated 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 resulted in numerous problems before the residents, particularly related to health, education and income generation. Of these particular concern was access to health services, more particularly mother and child healthcare (MCH) as nearest primary health centres (PHCs) from the villages are situated at distances ranging from 7 to 22 km from the villages.

Under the project, health concerns were addressed by providing training to traditional birth attendants (TBAs) and activating government health service providers. For improving educational standards, government primary schools were provided infrastructural support as well as students were imparted additional teaching in the shape of coaching. A number of income generation training were organised.





Dehradun Foray

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 included taking out *yatras* and holding *melas* (fairs) to create awareness among the residents of the area on the issue. Campaign material in the form of pamphlets is distributed and small corner meetings were held during the *yatras*. The *yatras* gave 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. Legal literacy camps were 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.



Dehradun too has considerable number of adolescent Muslim girls, who are untouched by education, despite the fact that Dehradun district has one of the best literacy rates in the country. In view of this, education for adolescent girls was also taken up.



This was formal entry of the organisation in Uttarakhand. This entry was necessitated to coordinate the organisation's entry in the newly created hill state.





New Horizons

In the year 2004 Disha became a partner of Oxfam GB in 'We Can' campaign. Probably one of the largest ever campaign to be initiated, this campaign has been launched in six countries of South Asia: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. The goal of the campaign was to reduce social acceptance of violence against women across these six countries of South Asia.

Disha spearheaded the campaign in 13 districts of Uttarakhand in partnership with 25 local voluntary organisations. The campaign activities included building alliances with civil society, sensitising them on the issue of violence against women through folk media communication, seminars, workshops, rallies and morchas, reaching out to the youth in schools and colleges, etc.

The campaign encouraged people to take up the role of Change Makers in the society by standing against violence on women. Disha and its associated organisations made almost 5,000 Change Makers. Three of these Change Makers were selected for national Change Maker Award.



20 Years

Disha completed two decades of its work in 2005. This occasion was used to pause and reflect on the past, and plan for future. A function was organised on March 15, 2005, to mark the occasion. Present and past associates and friends of Disha were present at the function.

The highlight of the function was a seminar on the topic *Role of Voluntary Sector in Women Empowerment and Prevention of Violence against Women*. Nearly 200 people from voluntary sector, government organisations, community representatives and eminent people from the area participated in the event. An exhibition of achievements of the organisation was also held on the occasion.



Aaroh Campaign

In 2006, Disha became partner in Aaroh Campaign. Disha is spearheading the campaign in 14 districts of western Uttar Pradesh in collaboration with as many voluntary organisations.

Aaroh is a campaign for asserting rights and demanding justice for women farmers in Uttar Pradesh. Women farmers represent one of the crucial development forces in the world. They grow, process, manage and market most of the food and natural resources. They are the largest workforce in India.

In UP 72 per cent population is involved in agricultural activities. Though women constitute 48.5 per cent of the total population of the state, women in agriculture are still a neglected workforce.

The three-phase campaign seeks to ensure the rights of women farmers and enhancing their decision making roles in the agricultural production system. Social and legal aspects, hindering the rights and identity of women farmers are being addressed by the campaign.

In the first phase the campaign has created environment and facilitate processes for access of women farmers to information (land, legal, extension, etc.). In the second phase the people will be motivated for joint legal ownership of both husband and wife of land. The third phase of the campaign will bring about a change in the mindset of people and create an environment where women are identified and respected as farmers.



Vocational Training and Enterprise Development

A vocational training and enterprise development project was started in 2006 in four villages of Jhabreda block of Roorkee, Hardwar district. Lands of farmers of these four villages were acquired by AIS Glass Ltd. for setting up its factory. AIS Glass Ltd., YouthReach, and Disha are jointly providing alternative means of livelihood to the villagers whose land has been acquired to set up glass factory.

The project has three components: Capacity building in income generation activities, computer training and personality development to educated youth and vocational training to youth. Necessary tie up with relevant businesses is part of the project so people completing courses and training are engaged in gainful employment.

Massive mobilisation efforts have preceded the activities. For organisation SHGs of women have been promoted, though loans to SHGs from banks are yet to materialise. Women in the villages are being organised and events like celebration of International Women's Day are instilling a sense of unity and solidarity among them.





Disha India Micro Credit

In 2005, a major policy level decision was taken that Disha will itself don the mantle of Micro Finance Institution (MFI) to make credit available to SHG members. Negotiations started with almost all possible banks with positive responses. Experimental lending started in June 2006 with a sum of just Rs. 2 lakh. By next year funds from the banks had started pouring in and the work started expanding rapidly.

In 2007, micro finance activities were brought under the umbrella of Disha India Micro Credit (DIMC), a non-profit company. After this micro credit activities have expanded on a brisk pace. They now cover Saharanpur district with five branches and Dehradun district with two branches. So far about loans worth about Rs 4.5 crore have been disbursed.

Necessary infrastructural and management systems are being developed even as DIMC moves ahead with its agenda of providing timely credit to the people.

Though DIMC is working on commercial lines, ideals of Disha are always kept in mind. Our social concerns have always been high on our agenda and they will remain in years to come.





Looking Ahead

Looking Ahead

We have every reason to be satisfied with our achievements during the last 25 years.

Times are changing fast. We also have to change according to changing times, otherwise we will lose relevance. We have done so during the last five years or so.

The most notable change is the appearance of Disha India Micro Credit, a microfinance institution. DIMC came into existence to meet small credit needs of the poor, who despite best of our efforts were largely denied credit by banks. In the very few months of the existence of DIMC 2,131 people were provided loans (March 2008 figures). In the ensuing months, this figure rapidly grew.

But this does not mean that we will lose sight of the issues that have been dear to us during the last 25 years. Disha Social Organization will continue to work on these issues this is our commitment. Their shape may, however, change with changing times.

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