



Skilling women and youth toward sustained livelihoods and gainful employment

Namchi District, Sikkim

Strengthening Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan and National Service Scheme



युवा कार्यक्रम और खेल मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
YOUTH AFFAIRS AND SPORTS



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ABOUT THE PROJECT

In partnership with Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, United Nations Volunteers Programme (UNV) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the project 'Strengthening Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) and National Service Scheme (NSS)' aims to provide catalytic support to the Youth Volunteer Schemes in the country and facilitate greater youth participation and voice in peace and sustainable development programmes. The project has been initiated to promote innovation in volunteerism among youth in India and strengthen existing volunteering infrastructure, particularly NYKS and NSS. A total of 29 UNV District Youth Coordinators (UNV DYCs) are deputed in 29 districts, i.e. one district in every state, to work on NYKS and NSS programmes and to strengthen youth volunteerism in line with national and international good practices.

GOOD PRACTICE CONTEXT

Namchi district, South Sikkim is emerging as one of the fastest developing regions in the state. However, women and youth in the area lack access to information on taking their rightful place in the region's development story.

While women in Sikkim fare far better than women in the rest of north India in terms of gender equality, they do face bias within the household with regard to financial empowerment. Women from urban poor households of Namchi district, especially homemakers with basic level of education, desire to acquire skills and explore livelihood options so as to be self-reliant. However, they lack the support of programmes like the North East Rural Livelihood Project (NERLP) for rural women. The youth of the region does not have a purpose and is perceived as vulnerable to anti-social activities including drug abuse and trafficking. Productively engaging the youth to serve as useful assets/resources remains a key focus area for the state government. The youth blame lack of resources for their disinterest. Also, most of the existing Nehru Yuva Kendra-affiliated youth clubs are dominated by members 35 years and older who do not wish to let go of the club resources and do not welcome fresh ideas or younger members.

Schemes and policies designed for women and youth do not reach them due to lack of awareness as well as a gap between the policymakers and the implementation agencies. Civil society organizations and community youth volunteers play a critical role in linking women and youth in the remotest parts of the district to government schemes and initiatives that directly benefit them.

STRATEGY



EMPOWERING WOMEN

Door to door mobilization and awareness

Forming Self Help Groups in municipal wards

Building capacity of women in organizing SHG meetings and financial literacy

Skill upgradation training programmes for livelihood promotion

Facilitating market linkages for productive SHGs



EMPOWERING YOUTH

Mobilizing NYKS youth volunteers

Door to door awareness campaigns targeting youth across the district

Strengthening/reforming youth club

Skill upgradation training programmes in collaboration with ITI

Participation in district level NYKS core programme activities



Sangita Dahal
UNV-DYC with NYKS
Namchi district, South Sikkim

Under the guidance of the UNV-DYC, NYKS youth volunteers have conducted door-to-door campaigns to create awareness and mobilize women across municipal wards of the district into self-help groups (SHGs). Much like rural SHGs, these groups are linked with the banks, where the groups open a savings account, in some cases with their own contributions. Once an SHG is mature, the bank also provides them loans to procure resources for livelihood activities. Training resources from other NYK and non-NYK SHGs are used to impart relevant Skill Upgradation Training Programmes (SUTPs) to the SHG members on livelihood skills such as stitching, knitting and making soft toys, soap, pickles and artificial flower arrangements. Awareness programmes on their legal rights as well as financial literacy are also facilitated for the women. Defunct SHGs are being strengthened through timely capacity building programmes. The next step is to link the SHGs with the market, thus, ensuring a sustained flow of income and also through participation in major fairs such as the Jorethang mela.



INNOVATION

The UNV-DYC recognized the need for empowerment of women in urban areas who are financially dependent on their men. She used her past experience in SHG formation and capacity building of women in rural areas under NERLP to form SHGs in the urban municipal wards of Namchi, using the same principles. She has also identified and nurtured potential master trainers among members of SHGs to build the capacity of other SHGs in soft toy and soap making and making pickles and chutneys etc.



Mobilizing youth for volunteerism, skilling and community development activities

Major efforts have been made by the UNV-DYC to promote volunteerism among the youth of Namchi. NYK youth volunteers have been trained on mobilizing the district's youth to form youth clubs, and create awareness on core programmes of the NYKS. These NYK youth volunteers serve as the bridge between the NYKS and the youth clubs. In terms of mobilizing youth to avail existing government schemes, at the outset, the capacity building needs of the youth in the district were mapped through a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) activity conducted by the NERLP. The youth are being linked with the Industrial Training Institute and the State Institute of Capacity Building, which provide customised training on relevant themes and provide free lodging and food as well as a monthly stipend. Youth clubs are also being reformed as per new NYKS guidelines regarding the maximum age limit of members.

Under the UNV-DYC's leadership, NYK youth volunteers have been mobilized to help spread awareness among beneficiaries, especially women and youth, about flagship programmes such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana as well as topical issues such as cashless transactions, financial literacy and legal rights of women. The importance of youth as potential assets of the state is also echoed by the district administration, which aims to mould the youth of the district into useful and socially responsible citizens. Youth volunteers help motivate and counsel idle/ unemployed youth and school/college dropouts to join youth clubs and channelize their energy into productive community development initiatives.

Khem Rai, 18 years old from Melli Dara, is doing a course in stenography in ITI, Namchi. Khem is a recovering drug addict; he first got introduced to drugs at the tender age of 16. As part of his journey toward de-addiction, he joined a youth club in his village, taking part in community development activities which keep him productively engaged. Khem counsels youngsters like himself using the youth club platform to stay away from drugs and alcohol. He aims to become a journalist and highlight social problems and ideate solutions. Khem believes youth are the future of the country and need to be guided and mentored to realize their potential.

“Awareness alone is not the solution. We have to mobilize the youth and women to be part of the action.”

Sangita Dahal, UNV – District Youth Coordinator - NYKS

IMPACT

Rapport with district administration and alignment with government programmes

The UNV-DYC has been able to forge strong connections with the district administration as well as various line departments to ensure aligning of NYK efforts with the government programmes and effective implementation of such initiatives. The UNV-DYC ensures that the District Collector is updated regularly and frequently on NYK plans; programmes are implemented only after due approval of the district administration.



Increased visibility of NYKS

Since the UNV-DYC assumed charge of the programmes in Namchi district, awareness of NYKS has increased considerably (with increased press coverage of the activities) as has stricter implementation of schemes, leading to more uptake of the services provided by NYKS.

Formation and capacity building of women SHGs in municipal wards

Six women SHGs have been created under the Namchi Municipal Area (across 10 municipal wards) which have been further linked with banks and SUTPs for livelihood promotion. The SHGs comprise homemakers including differently abled women. The UNV-DYC has taken the initiative to create linkages between the SHGs as well as to identify and officially recognize resource persons/master trainers from mature and older SHGs to train women in newer SHGs on livelihood activities. The UNV-DYC is planning a meet of all the six SHGs under her to facilitate cross-learning.

There were no SHGs in the urban areas before. Ten of us, all homemakers, formed Grace SHG in February 2016, under the guidance of the UNV-DYC. We were trained on making soft toys, candles, soaps and pickles. The income from selling our products goes into our group's bank account which the UNV-DYC helped in creating. With more SUTPs and support from NYKS, we hope to create a brand for our products and get linked to the market. We want to capitalize on Sikkim's reputation of being a fully organic state and become entrepreneurs. We want to motivate other unemployed women in Sikkim to get trained on income-generating activities and thus add value to their own lives and to society.

Sara, member of Grace SHG supported by NYKS, Dambudara, Namchi

Mobilization of youth volunteers

A total of 12 NYK volunteers in Namchi are guided by the UNV-DYC to implement the core programmes of the NYKS. They implement campaigns to create awareness about women self-help groups, financial literacy and youth participation in government schemes, organize blood donation and health camps and SUTPs, and mobilize and monitor youth clubs affiliated with NYKS. These volunteers also administer youth club development surveys to assess the efficacy of youth clubs in the district.

Formation/reformation of NYKS youth clubs

A total of 30 new youth clubs have been formed and around 30 of the existing 129 NYK affiliated youth clubs in the district have been reformed as per new NYKS guidelines on the stipulated age for membership.

Linkages with vocational training institutes to skill unemployed youth

Linkages have been established with institutions such as the Industrial Training Institute (ITI), Kitchu, Namchi to leverage their existing resources and infrastructure in providing short customized vocational training courses to unemployed youth in the district.

Formation of Awardee Federation

The UNV-DYC has taken the initiative to organize meetings with ex-NYKS youth volunteers and State/District/National Youth Awardees of the district to discuss issues facing the state and formulate next steps. An Awardee Federation of South Sikkim has been formed as part of this initiative.

Use of social media and instant messaging to establish connect and create outreach

A Facebook page has been created to showcase the activities of NYKS Namchi. WhatsApp groups have been created to connect with and update the district administration and the line departments as well as NYKS and NSS volunteers.

Special NYKS training programmes for youth

- SUTP for differently abled people in collaboration with youth club in Temi block in February 2016
- Seven day residential training for 30 students on life skill education in Namthang block in April 2016
- One month residential basic electrical training programme launched in December 12, 2016 at ITI, Namchi for unemployed youth





Hemkumar Gurung, 24 years, is an NYK youth volunteer working closely with the UNV-DYC. He is in the second and final year of NYK volunteership. The high point of his volunteership has been creating an action group in Ravangla block, comprising youth aged 15 to 29 years, including school/college dropouts who would typically waste their time in smoking and drinking. Under his supervision, the action group meets regularly, helps create awareness among the community on key issues and takes part in community welfare initiatives such as cleaning pavements and putting dustbins in the area. Hemkumar feels proud that he was able to change the attitude and get the youth in his block on the right track. Hemkumar dreams of being a youth leader who motivates young people to be part of social change. Although he could easily find a private job that pays him more than the honorarium he gets as a youth volunteer, Hemkumar wishes he could continue his association with NYKS, especially since he has worked hard to establish a productive relationship both with the community and the local government.

WAY AHEAD

The first year of the project has been spent in assessing the situation, mapping the target groups' requirements, and establishing mechanisms for linking NYKS' core programmes with the community. Proactive leadership at the district level combined with the UNV-DYC's regular coordination with the district administration and line departments has created an environment conducive to development and change.

Adequate funding from NYKS till the implementation of NULM, regular capacity building programmes and exposure visits across SHGs for cross-learning can further strengthen the women self-help group movement in the municipal wards of Namchi. For the youth volunteering initiative in the district to pick up momentum and sustain, the next step will be to **identify dynamic youth leaders across blocks who can counsel and influence young people in the community** or who can serve as resource persons in terms of capacity building and coordination.

In terms of programme coverage and monitoring, **providing transport facility** will result in increased weekly field visits and more remote villages like Yangyang block getting covered by the UNV-DYC and NYK youth volunteers, especially in a state like Sikkim with its hard to reach areas and mountainous terrain. Given the lukewarm response from most of the youth volunteers which impacts the overall performance of the UNV-DYC, NYKS, an additional dedicated resource could be explored to ensure that every single village and ward in Namchi is covered, and thus, ensure no one gets left behind in the development story.

*All Images from Project: Skilling women and youth toward sustained livelihoods and gainful employment. Namchi District, Sikkim, India (UNDP 2016)

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