

FACILITATING SPRINGSHED REVIVAL WITH COMMUNITIES

Stories from the ground



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**Shared by paraworkers from
Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh**

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WOMEN ARE NOT INFERIOR TO MEN

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Key strengths – Community mobilization, SHG formation



This is the story of Bhandolikalan, a small village in Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh. Like most other villages, this village was also a citadel of misogyny as the village elders had a very low opinion of the village women. They wanted them to remain confined to their homes and not talk to men. As a paraworker, I started mobilizing women. I told them that by starting a self-help group and doing small savings, they could accumulate a big amount for use during a family crisis, or for further investment.

I told them that it is like a household bank, operated by the chosen office bearers, like a secretary and a treasurer. The women agreed to form a self-help group (SHG).

Slowly it became a bigger group and a substantial fund got collected.

The women started making and marketing many products and they started a rural mart with the help of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). Soon, they became self-dependent and started earning well. This boosted their self-esteem and confidence.



Today, these women are proudly and successfully carrying out many activities for village development as well, like organizing awareness campaigns, springshed development, and cleaning *bowries* (springs). They are coordinating with the Forest, Water Works, and Animal Husbandry departments through the SHG, proving that women are not inferior to men. They are as good as men.



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SALGA'S WOMEN WATER WARRIORS

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Key strengths – **Community mobilization, empowering women**



Salga, a beautiful, hill village in the Dehradun district, has three water sources. Chargad is the main spring that is used by most villagers for their domestic needs. Over the years, its discharge decreased and it would take long time to fill a bucket of water from this source. This left the women with no time for household chores, personal care, and family. It would also lead to petty quarrels at home. Belonging to this village, I decided to work for this cause to help myself and the other women in the village.

I had heard about the PSI's work on spring rejuvenation, which helps to increase the spring discharge. I approached the organization and requested the team to visit my village and meet the gram pradhan (village head). But the men in the village were adamant and opined that the spring discharge can never be enhanced. It is an impossible task and the villagers should not be given false hopes, they said.

“When people discourage you, take it in a positive way, have faith in your abilities and work patiently.”

Although I was disappointed by their attitude, I did not give up and decided to motivate the women. I started meeting and talking to the women as they are the ones who are primarily responsible for fetching water. After a series of meetings over three months, the women gathered courage. They decided to work under the guidance of the PSI team. They started digging trenches. This motivated the men too and they also came to help the women. Within a few days, more than 500 trenches were dug.



A significant increase in spring discharge was noticed after the rains that year. This excited the women. The next task was to bring this spring water, located several kilometers uphill, close to their homes through a pipeline. For this, I approached another Dehradun-based organization, HESCO. They responded positively and provided support for the pipeline work.



The efforts of the women of Salga village made the seemingly impossible possible. Now, there is a pipeline, attached to the spring that is yielding a sufficient amount of water. The enhanced water flow is not just meeting domestic needs but is also being used for minor irrigation. This is a story of women's empowerment, yielding a fruitful result on the ground.

If we don't stand up and take action ourselves, others will not understand our problem. We must not think that there is no solution to a problem. Women can be water warriors and change makers.



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THE NEED FOR WATER RESOLVED CONFLICT BETWEEN TWO VILLAGES

HAMEER SINGH CHAUHAN

Jal Sahayak, People's Science Institute (PSI), working in Bisoi, Chakrata, Dehra Dun

Key strength – Community mobilization

This is the story of Kotikorwa village in Kalsi Block of Dehradun district in Uttarakhand, where the Jaunsari tribal community resides. As the name suggests, the village is divided into two *toks* (hamlets), Koti and Korwa. Koti is downhill and is dependent on the spring water flowing from the two springs uphill in Korwa.

Over the years, the spring discharge decreased but the water was still sufficient for Korwa. However, Koti was not receiving sufficient water because of reduced flows. Even after several attempts, the people of Korwa were not willing to share their spring water through the pipeline. A decade passed with the people of Koti struggling for water.

About four years ago, in 2019-20, the PSI team was working on spring rejuvenation work in the other villages of Kalsi block. They heard about Kotikorwa facing a severe water scarcity problem and conflict between villages. They measured the spring discharge and also visited people in both hamlets. They assured the villagers that it is possible to increase the discharge of springs in Korwa so that Koti too could receive sufficient water downhill.



“Joining hands with the community makes development work easy.”



But the recharge area for spring treatment was located in Korwa. The work could begin only when the conflict was resolved.

The PSI team made frequent visits to resolve the conflict. Meanwhile, the panchayat elections were about to be held. After their continued efforts, the villagers unanimously came up with a solution. And it was a historical decision.

The Koti villagers proposed that in the upcoming panchayat elections, there will be no candidate from their village so that the Gram Pradhan (Village Head) gets elected from Korwa without any opposition. In return, Korwa would allow spring treatment work and the use of overflowing water.

Korwa agreed and after winning the elections, it carried out spring treatment work under the guidance of PSI. I was a part of this venture as a paraworker. Trenches were dug and Napier grass was planted in the recharge area. After the completion of the work, when it rained for the first time, the trenches were filled with snow along with the water.

Gradually, the spring discharge increased and water started flowing downhill to Koti. After a year, Koti constructed a storage tank to collect overflowing water for minor irrigation. In this way, the need for water resolved a decade-old conflict between the villages.



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REVIVING SPRINGS THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

NITIN BHARTI

**Jal Sahayak, People's Science Institute (PSI) & SARTHI Foundation
working in Hawalbag Block, Almora**

Key strength – Community mobilization



Located in the pristine Himalaya, about 5 km from the famous Kasar Devi Temple in Hawalbag block of Almora district, is Dhaneli village. This is a village of 80 Dalit families.

A few years ago, these families were facing an acute water scarcity because the only source of water in their village – Mungaru Dhara had become seasonal. People would queue up from early in the morning to fill a bucket of water. Although there was a government water supply scheme, the supply was irregular. Most often it was only twice a week.

When the villagers learned that a grassroots organization SARTHI Foundation was working in their village, they contacted them for help. SARTHI, in turn, contacted the Dehradun-based PSI, which is known for springshed development work. The team was invited to visit the village.

“Community work is highly motivational. It can revive springs to save the hills.”



After the geological survey, PSI observed that the spring could be revived but people would have to participate actively and take up some responsibilities. They were asked to dig trenches and pits, plant saplings in the spring recharge area, and also take care of this area.

The Mahila Mangal Dal (women's welfare group) took up this task, carried out the work, and erected a fence around the recharge area.

Soon the result was visible and the village water tank started overflowing after the rains. This also motivated the youth in the village to revive other springs around their village.



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NEGOTIATING LAND OWNERSHIP ISSUES FOR SPRING REVIVAL

SUNIL KUMAR

Jal Sahayak, Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development (CORD) working in Nagrota Block, Himachal Pradesh

Key strengths – Spring discharge and rainfall measurement

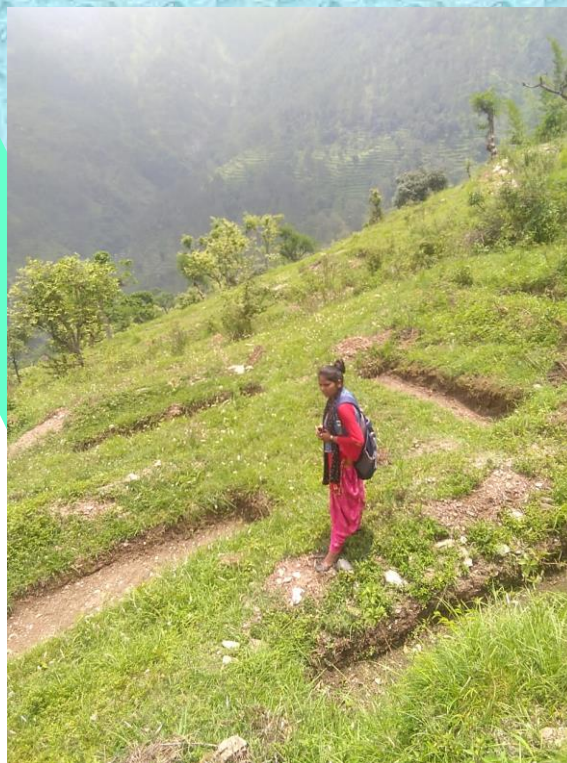


Village Sarotri lies in the Kangra district, about 50 km from the famous Jwalaji temple. During summers, the villagers suffer from extreme water shortages, as all water sources dry up. Even the livestock have to go to a distant water source to quench their thirst. It is very cumbersome for the women to collect water as they have to climb up the steep hills. They have to go to a distant stream to wash clothes. The only hand pump in the village yields red water, that too very little. It takes 20 to 25 minutes to fill one bucket.

In 2022, the villagers decided to contact CORD for help. CORD organized a field visit with the PSI team. The teams discussed the issues with the villagers, visited the water sources, and informed the villagers that the springs could be revived. The villagers readily agreed to do whatever was required.

“Small problems in life teach you big lessons. Try to overcome them with courage and hard work.”

Soon a Water Users' Group (WUG) was formed. The work began, but soon the issue of land ownership emerged. A part of the spring recharge area belonged to the Forest Department (FD) and the rest belonged to a few individuals. They were unwilling to allow trenching work on their land. After regular meetings and requests, the FD agreed but the individuals were still adamant. The women and the WUG members started pressurizing these landowners to give permission for a noble cause as it would free the villagers from acute water stress and thirst.



Finally, they agreed. The work started again and about 100 trenches were dug by the women followed by plantation work. A youth was trained by the PSI team to collect the spring discharge data fortnightly.

The villagers have dug some more trenches this year. Now, they are waiting for the rain and then, hopefully, they will get water.



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SPRINGS AND OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

SUMIT BHATT

Jal Sahayak, People's Science Institute (PSI), working in Jaunpur Block, Tehri Garhwal

Key Strength – Community mobilization

Springs have significant importance in the lives of people. They are inalienably aligned with our culture and tradition. Springs are believed to emerge where the goddess dwells (Devithan). These are important places of worship in our country.

Uttarakhand is known as *dev-bhumi* (the land of gods), where many temples attract pilgrims and tourists. One such temple is Devalsari Koneshwar Mahadev temple in Moldhar village, Jaunpur Block, Tehri Garhwal district. Devalsari is a famous tourist place, and also a sacred forest, having tall, dense deodar (*Cedrus deodara*) trees.

Till about a decade ago there were many springs and streams in Moldhar village. But due to developmental activities, changes in land use, and the introduction of piped water supply scheme, people stopped taking care of their natural water sources. Consequently, most of the springs either dried up or became seasonal. One of these springs was Upla Shiwani situated close to the Koneshwar temple.



“Our future generation would also need water. So we must not forget to take care of the natural assets in our villages for water security and to sustain our culture”.



This spring was a sacred destination for newlyweds in the village. As per the ritual, the new bride would fill a bucket with spring water and carry it home for prosperity.

With climate change the rains reduced and the agricultural fields lost their soil moisture. The Upla Shiwani spring also became seasonal, which affected the rituals and caused drinking water scarcity. Many people migrated from the village for better livelihood, employment, education, and medical facilities. Then, a team from PSI visited our village. After several such visits, surveys, and interactions with the villagers, they decided to revive this spring with the support of ICIMOD.

I worked under the guidance of PSI for this noble cause. A water user group was formed.

The villagers participated actively in digging trenches in the recharge area identified by PSI. This was followed by plantation work and monthly monitoring by the group. After just a year, not only we got sufficient water but good grass and crops as well. This was possible through community participation.



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COMBINING TRADITIONAL WISDOM WITH SCIENCE

VIJAY LAXMI

Jal Sahayak, People's Science Institute (PSI), working in Chamba Block, Tehri Garhwal

Key strengths – **Community mobilization, skill development**



“Just do it and let not the fruits of your action be your motive.”

About a decade ago, about 60 households were residing in Dantasali village of Chamba block, Tehri district of Uttarakhand.

The villagers used to suffer from drinking water scarcity even in April, as all the water sources in the village had dried up. The perturbed elders went to the Pradhan (village head), Kamla Devi, a well-aware and forward-looking woman, to discuss the matter. They all agreed that they would have to revive at least their main water spring, Byaltha Pani. But the big question was how?

Through their traditional wisdom the villagers knew that where there is good vegetation, there are good sources of water. They realized that their village land had become barren due to deforestation. This gave them the idea of growing as many plants as possible on the barren land. It would help in the conversion of barren land into forest land and the revival of the water bodies.

I was a member of the Mahila Mangal Dal in the village and we got more women involved in planting trees. Around 500 saplings were arranged by us and planted along the stream.



Just after a year, the results were visible. The barren land had turned green with grass around the trees planted. There was a slight improvement in the spring discharge as well. This motivated the villagers and they started looking for help to undertake proper recharge work.

The Pradhan played a key role in getting the work done under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The villagers constructed 130 check dams, and 500 trenches, and planted more trees. This not only increased the discharge of the spring in the village, but also of other water sources, downhill. The other benefits were in terms of better fodder availability.

Later, with the technical support of PSI, work was done on the Peepal Pani spring in Korigad village, about 5 km away, on Uttarkashi Road. Here, 725 trenches were dug by the women followed by tree plantation work. The villagers are happy and so is the Gram Pradhan.

I believe that these types of work should be routinely carried out in the village. This highly rewarding work was the result of mutual cooperation, combining traditional wisdom and modern science.

“Anything done with dedication and belief can lead you to success.”



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