

Women's Empowerment in Uttarakhand (Kanchan Bhandari)

Kanchan has been an IFA Fellow since 2014. She started working on social issues in 2001 when she and her husband founded the organization *Vimarsh* for the empowerment of women and children. Their activities are spread over 4 blocks of Nainital district. *Vimarsh* also runs a state sponsored child helpline program that covers the entire district.

Objectives:

- Empowering women socially, financially and politically to promote gender equality.
- Sensitize community, Panchayats, public representatives and administration to raise voice against gender-based violence.
- Organizing Social Security programs and '*Kaam Maango Abhiyan*'.
- Organizing village level meetings to empower Panchayat representatives and the *Gram Sabha*.
- Organizing Public Awareness programs to ensure the better and safe future of children.
- Working with government representatives and officials to push for their accountability towards the community.

Target Groups:

Women, women- farmers, laborers, schedule casts women, women affected by violence, women public representatives, children, youth, administration, police, media and other groups of the operational area.

This work is currently impacting positively around 10,000 people while 15, 000 are being impacted indirectly.

2021 Highlights

Covid related problems continued as in 2020. The severe rainfall in October 21 was another major natural disaster. Despite these obstacles, Kanchan and others continued their work with regular meetings and community interactions focused on:

1. Making people aware of the various government schemes available for those affected
2. Vaccination awareness and facilitation particularly of women and senior citizens

Social Security Schemes and Kaam Mango Program

1. These programs were conducted in 20 Panchayats. **400 laborers (men and women) were enrolled with the e-Shram cards** making them eligible for various benefits. Hundreds of workers got MGNREGA work.
2. **290 poor children were connected to e-Mukhyamantri Vatsalya Yojna and received Rs.3000/month per child.**
3. **10 persons were helped with getting pension.**
4. **Covid relief materials were provided to 700 families.**

Programs against Sexual Offences

Several such programs were organized on special occasions such as Women's Day, International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women, Human Rights Day etc. A 16-Days program was separately conducted to raise awareness of this issue.

Tuition and Sport centers

These are training 141 children in Tadi, Badarkot, Pangkatara, Simalkha and Songaon. Subjects include thematic learning, general knowledge, personal health and hygiene, child rights, social and gender inequality and laws related to children. Traditional festivals such as Teej are celebrated and the village's history is also taught.

Computer Center (Simalkha)

This center is providing basic computer knowledge to **36** children of High School, Junior High School, and Inter-Mediate.

Vimarsh Youth



Divya Bohra from *Songaun* village is member of a women's group formed by Vimarsh. She is an active participant in their campaigns and meetings. She was part of Vimarsh workshop training in how to make cotton sanitary pads. These don't harm the environment and are more durable and comforting than regular pads. They can be made at home that also helps eradicate

the taboo associated with menstrual hygiene. She made 300 such pads during the lockdown and distributed them to adolescent girls and women. She also trained others in her village and the surrounding villages. She works regularly at the tuition center operated by Vimarsh.



Meera Jeena from *Simalkha*, is a graduate from Kumaun University, Nainital. She is associated with Vimarsh for one year and teaches in the computer center operated by Vimarsh. **36** children are being trained. After the lockdown was imposed, she participated in the campaign organized by Vimarsh to raise awareness

about Covid and steps and measures to prevent the virus. She also trained the adolescent girls in making masks. With the help of the computer center, she helped the laborers of the unorganized sector and registered 200 of them for the *E-Shram* card providing them benefits from the various welfare schemes.

--IFA Liaison: Vandana Master