

Plantation of Jethropa: an innovative initiative by Aajeevika SHGs

Aajeevika is short name of Uttarakhand livelihood improvement project for the himalayas(ULIPH). It is being implemented in 11 blocks of 5 districts (Tehri, Almora, Bageshwar, Chamoli and Uttarakashi) since 2005. In Jaunpur ULIPH started in 2006. Kheda Nyay Panchayat of Jaunpur block, apart from Aajeevika activities, did exceptional efforts in Jethropa plantation which covers 21 villages. The Plantation was done by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of women in convergence with Bio-fuel Board under Ratanjot Forestry Project (RFP).

The process of contact and coordination:

Mr. Mahesh Rawat the block coordinator in Aajeevika for Jaunpur block contacted the officials of Bio fuel Board and talked on potential of convergence with the activities of Aajeevika aiming at livelihood improvement of poor families in Aajeevika Project area. That done a proposal prepared under guidance of Dr. H.B. Pant, Project Manager, DMU, Aajeevika Tehri Garhwal and was submitted to General Secretary Uttarakhand Bio fuel Board and Divisional Forest of Massore consequently. Board officials evaluated SHGs and looked into their records and discussed at length on action points. The officials also discussed on strategy and modus operandi with Aajeevika staffs working in Jaunpur block. The Staffs narrated the objectives and corresponding initiatives of Aajeevika and the progress so far.

Modalities:

Being satisfied the officials explained the process of implementation by saying that the technicalities of Jethropa Plantation will be imparted to the SHG members by technical experts of B.F. Board and each member will have the responsibility to plant in at least 1 ha. of barren land. Pits will be prepared during March and April and the plants will be made available during rains for plantation. It was said that there will be 2250 pits in 1 ha. land. After plantation a sum of Rs. 3825/- will be provided @ Rs. 1.70/- for each plant after physical verification. Next Year a sum of Rs. 1125/- @ Rs. 0.50/- for each plant will be awarded for weeding and hoeing. It will continue in 3rd year. Thus a beneficiary if plants in 1 ha. land will get a sum of Rs. 6075/- in 3 subsequent years.

According to Board official's single Jethropa plant produces 1 to 3 kg seeds in 3 years. if plants are taken good care. The producers will have to collect and dry the seeds. The producers need not search for market because the forest Development Corporation will itself purchase the produced seeds @ Rs. 4 to 6 per kg. In coming years rate of seed may go up but at present the agreement will be signed @ Rs. 4/- for 1 kg seed. Even if the farmer can manage to survive at least 2000 plants in 1 ha and gets 0.5 kg seed from one plant, S/he will get Rs. 4000/- in one year. It was said that plant survives for more than 40 years. Board even will circulate income card to its farmers.

After discussions both the parties (Board officials & Farmer's group) agreed upon to take forward the project together and consequently Mr. Mahesh Rawat (BC of Aajeevika Project) was asked to conduct baseline survey. It was done in 21 villages of Kheda under joint Supervision of said BC and supervisors of the Board. Of these 21 villages, 15 are those where Aajeevika is being implemented since 2006 (Year-2) and rest 6 are under the project since 2007(year-3). The baseline reflects as tabled below: -

Sl. NO	Name of Villages	Name of SHG	NO. of Beneficiary	Total Area (in ha.)	Plantation Target	I st Payment @Rs. 1.70/ plant	II nd Payment @Rs. 0.50/ plant	III rd Payment @Rs. 0.50/ plant	Total Payment
1	Kheda (Serva)	Khushi Aajeevika	10	20	45000	76500.00	22500.00	22500.00	121500.00
2	Budkot	Naag Devta Aajeevika	10	10	22500	38250.00	11250.00	11250.00	60750.00
3	Durga pul	Swati Aajeevika	5	10	22500	38250.00	11250.00	11250.00	60750.00
4	Papra Malla	Sangam Aajeevika	10	10	22500	38250.00	11250.00	11250.00	60750.00
5	Kinshu	Bhagwati Aajeevika	12	24	54000	91800.00	27000.00	27000.00	145800.00
6	Kakdu	Kali Mata Aajeevika	5	10	22500	38250.00	11250.00	11250.00	60750.00
7	Sodi	Sodi Aajeevika	16	16	36000	61200.00	18000.00	18000.00	97200.00
8	Tikri	Santla Aajeevika	18	18	40500	68850.00	20250.00	20250.00	109350.00
9	Lalotna	Sidhi Aajeevika	15	15	33750	57375.00	16875.00	16875.00	91125.00
10	Kheda Malla	Baal Ganga Aajeevika	13	26	58500	99450.00	29250.00	29250.00	157950.00
11	Geid	Pargati Aajeevika	29	29	65250	110925.00	32625.00	32625.00	176175.00
12	Kainth	Chandrabadni Aajeevika	8	16	36000	61200.00	18000.00	18000.00	97200.00
13	Aeri	Santoshi Aajeevika	10	20	45000	76500.00	22500.00	22500.00	121500.00
14	Sunao	Rajeshwari Aajeevika	10	10	22500	38250.00	11250.00	11250.00	60750.00
15	Ontan (Sirwa)	Devi Aajeevika	8	8	18000	30600.00	9000.00	9000.00	48600.00
16	Banasari	Aalknanda Aajeevika	12	24	54000	91800.00	27000.00	27000.00	145800.00
17	Bangsil	Koneshwar Aajeevika	10	10	22500	38250.00	11250.00	11250.00	60750.00
18	Papra Talla	Bagwati Aajeevika	10	10	22500	38250.00	11250.00	11250.00	60750.00
19	Chanan Gaon	Gorja Aajeevika	14	14	31500	53550.00	15750.00	15750.00	85050.00
20	Kheda Talla	Gangotri Aajeevika	12	12	27000	45900.00	13500.00	13500.00	72900.00
21	Naya Digon	Naag Aajeevika	14	14	31500	53550.00	15750.00	15750.00	85050.00
Total			251	326	733500	1246950.00	366750.00	366750.00	1980450.00

With the information from baseline, NOC, Village Maps, availability of barren land and note on geographical condition were also submitted to the Board. Finally MOU was signed.

Tripartite Agreement:

Prior to plantation a tripartite agreement was signed by Uttarakhand Bio-Fuel Board (Party-1), SHGs (Party-2) and Forest Development Corporation. It gives buy back guarantee to the producers and clearly narrates roles and responsibilities of all the three parties. Accordingly, the Board will provide plants for nursery, technical know how and will conduct monitoring and evaluation at regular intervals. It will also pay against plantation after physical verification. The 2nd party SHG has the responsibility of plantation, weeding, hoeing, seed production and collection. The 3rd party FDC will purchase the seeds from the producers.

Benefits to Aajeevika Groups:

Jetropa Forestation Project will benefit around 251 women SHG members. The Project aims to cover 326 ha. of land with 7,33,500 Jetropa plants. Subsequently a sum of Rs. 12,46,950/- will be awarded to these members as 1st installment by August 2008.

Again Rs. 3,66,750/- will be paid in 2nd and in 3rd year. **Thus the Aajeevika groups will obtain a sum of Rs. 19,80,450/- in 3 years.** Apart from this amount the producers will earn money by selling the seed. The money will be transferred directly to the separate bank accounts of SHG members for which every member will have to open bank account if not opened so far.

Account opening by each member was very difficult and Block Coordinator and District Management Unit representative conveyed the same to the Board officials. Alternatively it was suggested that the money can be transferred to those account of SHGs whose members are part of the (RFP) project. A letter of this concern was sent to the Board, which agreed with the suggestions. The idea as said in the letter was to encourage SHG members to increase saving so that they can undertake another business activities by Aajeevika Project. Additionally this saved women from formalities of separate account and arrangement of Rs. 300/- for separate bank account.

Raising Jethropa Nursery:

As per project components 7,33,500 plants are required for plantation in 326 ha. of land. In case the plants are raised outside the Board will have to pay Rs. 1.25 for each plant. The Board was ready to give this sum to Aajeevika groups if they were ready to raise nursery of Jetropa plants.



Consequently Khushi Aajeevika SHG of Kheda (Sirwa) village and Alaknanda Aajeevika SHG of Banasari village agreed to raise the nursery and a proposal of that purpose was submitted to UBB. The General Secretary talked to the proposing SHG in Dehradun and being satisfied signed the agreement there with the groups. It was agreed that the Board will provide seed, fertilizer and technical know how and @ Rs. 1.25 for each plant will be given to the SHGs in 3 installment being 25%, 25%, 50% as 1st, 2nd, and 3rd installments. Both the SHGs will thus obtain Rs. 3.75 lakh each from Board for nursery raising. The Board itself will arrange rest of the plants. The 1st installment of Rs. 1,10,182/- was to be given at the time of seed germination which has been transferred to the accounts of both the SHGs. 2nd installment will be given at the time, when the plants will reach to 1 feet height. The last installment (45.7%) will be given at the time of transportation of plants.

Both the said groups started the work collectively and realized that the volume of work is bigger than their capacity. So they further engaged some members from other SHGs and completed the first round of work and raised the agreed nursery. With the money of 1st

installment they have paid to the other members against their work. With this work done each SHG earned Rs. 12,000/- with 71.7% of the total amount left.

It's an innovative effort, which has been widely appreciated by the people and their representatives in the region. This is the first Govt. scheme of this kind taken up by women SHG members. Most of Projects for grassroots are implemented by NGOs, other agencies or Gram Pradhan and other Local people's representatives. Village women had no say in these schemes. It is expected that with the implementation of this collective approach and management skill of SHGs, the Board officials are very much hopeful that the project will attain success and will prove a millstone in the livelihood improvement of poor women in this region.

=====