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Hill Women of India's Himalayas Chart Path in Fight against COVID-19 Impacts for Isolated Communities

Project Funded by Adaptation Fund and Implemented by NABARD Had Established Women's Self-Help Groups that are Helping Meet Shortfall of Masks During Crisis

Washington, D.C. (May 29, 2020) --Women's self-help groups (SHGs) who are part of a project funded by the Adaptation Fund (AF) [in India](#) within a vulnerable sub Himalayan region have been stitching thousands of protective masks to meet emergent community needs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To help address a shortage of protective masks in isolated hill communities of Goshani Village and adjacent villages within the State of Uttarakhand, SHG member **Ms. Shri Sai Sangh** got together with eight other local women under the leadership of **Ms. Pratibha Verma** to take the initiative to respond positively to the situation by preparing masks locally in their village.

It is a good example of a project adapting to directly help with the COVID-19 crisis. The establishment and promotion of SHGs as an adaptation measure within the project had created enhanced livelihood opportunities for these women, which enabled them to respond to the situation.

The AF-funded project, "[Climate smart actions and strategies in North Western Himalayan region for sustainable livelihoods of agriculture-dependent hill communities](#)", is being implemented by the Fund's national implementing entity in India, NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development), in District Champavat of the North Western Himalaya region.

According to NABARD, the region is faced with many development challenges including harsh climates, fragile ecosystems, geographical isolation, and dependence on climate-sensitive livelihoods in agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries. Other challenges include migration of able-bodied men to other cities in search of jobs, a degrading natural resource base and enhanced hardship of women left behind in these hill communities.

Under the project, climate resilient farming models that help communities adapt to the changing climate are being fostered to benefit 800 hill families from 10 villages. As an initiative to empower women in these vulnerable communities, the Executing Entity of the project, [BAIF](#), promoted the establishment of the innovative microfinance women's SHGs. Each group consists of up to 20 members in the project areas to encourage saving earnings, pooling and lending money to better help them meet their financial needs.

"The normal livelihood activities got disrupted due to the COVID 19 pandemic and consequent lockdown situation. The economic uncertainty had impacted daily sale of local produce from these



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villages, such as milk, vegetables and other products, as markets and hoteliers remained shut and the supply chain got affected. Many daily wage earners and farmers had to stay at home without any work and income,” said Mr. **B. Suri Babu**, General Manager of NABARD in Mumbai, India.

Since they were dependent on the market to obtain seeds for the next crop cycle in April, polyhouse farming unit owners who cultivate vegetables under controlled, protected conditions were also affected and had to miss the season due to restricted supply. Reverse migration also occurred with about 250 men in project villages being quarantined for two weeks starting in late March. As a preventive measure, the Government of India advocated wearing of masks by the public to prevent spread of the pandemic.

However, there was a shortage of masks due to the sudden spurt in demand and transportation lockdown. This resulted in lack of masks in villages, unaffordable masks and limited or completely closed access to available markets due to transport restrictions.

This is where Shri Sai Sangh and the other women in her SHG decided to take action. They began making protective masks to meet these emerging challenges and provide them for the community.

“They learnt and perfected the process of stitching masks by watching tailored videos on YouTube and started production of triple-layered, reusable cotton masks,” said Suri Babu. *“What started as a small activity initially to meet local requirements expanded into production of more than 7,300 masks catering to the requirements of adjoining villages. With several agencies and government institutions including those from adjoining districts placing more orders for masks, the women’s group is continuing the production of masks.”*

The masks were priced at US\$ 0.20 (INR 15), which is affordable for the local population. The mask-making activity further provided supplementary income for the women, with each member earning US\$ 100 in a situation where their livelihoods were adversely affected due to the pandemic.

“This is a nice story of an Adaptation Fund project adapting within the challenging environment of the COVID-19 pandemic to directly help a community in need,” said **Mr. Ibila Djibril**, Chair of the Adaptation Fund Board. *“The women’s self-help group that had been fostered by the project volunteered generously to apply their skills to make needed protective masks for these isolated hill communities in a time of crisis, and continues to do so.”*

It is further an AF [Direct Access](#) project, which empowers country ownership in adaptation and helps build national capacity to adapt. It also reflects AF’s environmental, social and [gender](#) policies that foster equal opportunity for women and men, and the most vulnerable groups.

“It is an excellent example of an Adaptation Fund project helping vulnerable communities build resilience to climate change, as well as to health and economic challenges,” said **Mr. Mikko Ollikainen**, Manager of the Adaptation Fund. *“Some of the inherent measures of the adaptation project, such as promoting the empowerment of women’s self-help groups and creating*



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alternative livelihoods were instrumental in creating the resilience capacity in place to be able to help respond directly to the crisis.”

ABOUT the ADAPTATION FUND

Since 2010, the Adaptation Fund has committed about US\$ 720 million for climate change adaptation and resilience projects and programmes, including 100 concrete localized adaptation projects in the most vulnerable communities of developing countries around the world with more than 8 million direct beneficiaries. It also pioneered Direct Access, empowering countries to access funding and develop projects directly through accredited national implementing entities.

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