

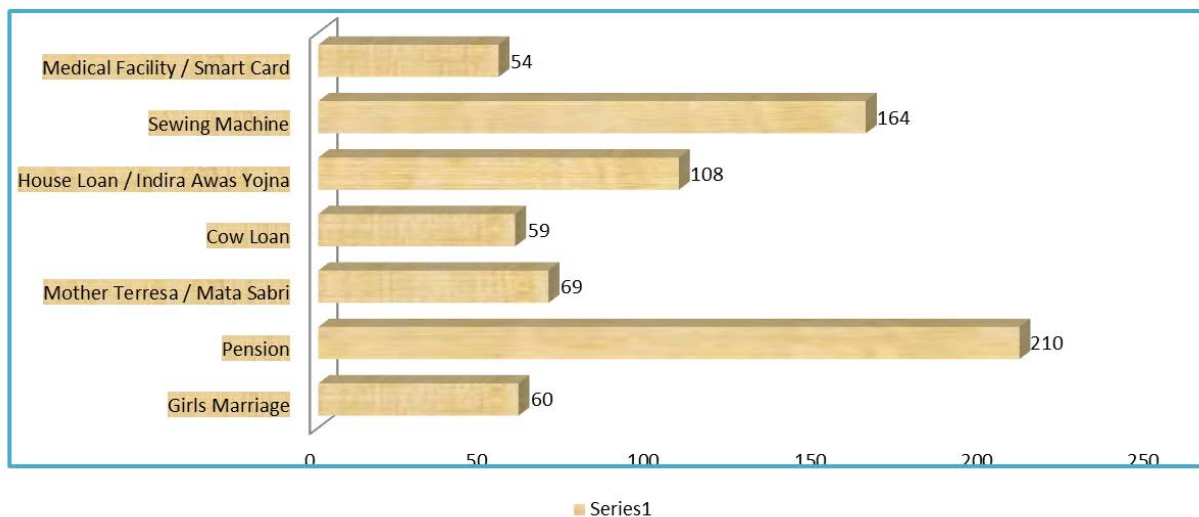
## Nishtha Single Women Activists Report: April 2017 – March 2018

2017-18 has been a very active and successful year for our team of 6 Single Women Activists.

<b>Single women Yearly Data 2017-18</b>				
<b>Blocks</b>	<b>Total paid up Membership</b>	<b>New Members</b>	<b>Beneficiaries of Schemes</b>	<b>Attendees of Health Camps</b>
Kangra	642	33	216	62
Dharamsala	932	91	240	78
Nagrota	800	18	95	328
Rait	1,087	38	173	176
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,461</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>644</b>

The work of the single women activists is to contact all the single women in the 90+ panchayats of the 4 blocks: Rait, Kangra, Nagrota and Dharamshala in which we work. Village leaders are approached first in order to gain a good rapport with the local elected officials. Each activist organises and holds 8-10 village level meetings a month in order to inform women about the work of the Single Women's Program and how it can benefit them. Our most outstanding achievement this year has been that we have been able to directly help 724 women benefit from various government schemes:

### Total Beneficiary single women 2017-18



Each activist spends at least 4 days a month organising the Nishtha health camps which are one of our most direct ways in which we can benefit not only the single women of the village but all the local women, alerting them to the existence of the Single Womens organisation. She attends the monthly planning meeting at Nishtha at the beginning of each month during which the women organise the health camp rota, and the program for the coming month as well as discussing cases and managing their accounts. Often these meetings include work on the farm and short training sessions to increase their awareness and capacity.



Dr. Kusum holding a Health Education Meeting in one of the village homes.

The activists spend considerable time dealing with legal and domestic violence cases which are brought to their attention during the village meetings. The hardships and injustice particularly the widows are subjected to is intolerable. Local officials regularly won't sign the paperwork required for them to apply for their pensions, asserting they should be looked after by their families. If the family has no interest in doing so then the women are left quite destitute. Here are a few of the widows pension cases we have helped this year.

- 20 years ago Satya's her husband passed away after a long illness, since then she has been living with her three sons who are married and work as labourers. The Patwari denied her application for a pension because of the employment of her sons. After two years of continuous effort, our brave Activist completed all of her paperwork and guided her through the ccomplicated process so that she finally succeeded in getting her pension.
- Kola Devi joined the single women's group in 2012 when she was 70. Her family had disowned her, forcing her to live in a cattle shed and providing nothing for her to eat. The Pradhan of her Panchayat refused to sanction her old age pension because of the land owned by her son. When Radha came to know about the situation she spoke to the

newly elected Pradhan and helped her make the application for her pension. She also got her into a meeting with the local MLA. She received her first pension in March 2018!

- 25 years ago Chamela's husband passed away and since then she has been living with her four children who are all married and are working privately. She approached the Gram panchayat Pradhan many times for her widow's pension but was never successful. In 2013, she met the Nishtha activist Shilpa Devi and requested her for help and together they succeeded in getting her widow's pension. The Dharamsala SW Activist also organised for her to have her cataracts operated in the free eye camp in Dharamsala. She says: "Ekal Nari Sangthan is like my family, it has provided me with a platform where I and other single women can easily express our views to the highest level."
- Ten years ago, Kanta Devi's husband passed away. She has 5 daughters and 2 sons, all married, and the sons have their own businesses. Despite having very little land, she didn't get her widow's pension. When she attended the single women's meeting she met Shilpa Devi who assured her to have patience and she will take care of it. In 2018, she got her first pension.

One of the main objectives of conducting single women meetings both in the villages and during the quarterly block meetings is to inform the women about campaigns to improve the situation of single women in the State and Country. These campaigns link with national level social justice campaigns as described in the following monthly account of the single women's activities through the year.

#### **APRIL**

On April 7th and 8th, the single women and other Nishtha staff members attended yoga classes at Nishtha. These were held by two very expert older women which gave us confidence and energy to perform yoga.

On April 12th and 13th, Radha and Kummo went for the first quarterly meeting of the year at Sutra. The meeting was conducted to review and account for the work done in the previous quarter and to plan the coming activities for the next quarter. Each quarter the single women activists have specific agendas to work on at the panchayat level.



On April 3rd, Mahila Gram Sabha – the Women's Panchayat meeting in which only women participate and talk about their problems was

conducted in every panchayat in India.

The Single Women activists along with the Single Women of the panchayat raised the issue of Swayat Nayay Panchayat – a system of dispute resolution at village level. The members passed the resolution from the panchayat to the Government for approval.

During the last week of the month, the Single Women activists assisted Sunita (a single woman in a very critical condition) in the hospital.

## **MAY**

On May 2nd, the Single Women's staff meeting was conducted at Nishtha and was attended by Puja Anand (Nishtha Trustee). As a single women she was interested to understand the problems of rural single women and asked them to describe it to her. This raised some useful discussions about the problems they face working in the villages and how to manage them.

Preparations were underway for International Widow's Day on 23rd June. The preliminary work is always to mobilize women through the Panchayat and Block Meetings. New cases were prepared so that single women with problems could be ready to present their issues and needs to the respective government officials in Dharamsala.

## **JUNE**

International Widow's Day was celebrated on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 160 women from four blocks attended the rally which marched from the main Post Office in Dharamsala to the DC's office. Swayat Nayay Panchayat and the need for re-definition of "Separate Women" were the main points on the memorandum handed in to the District Commissioner. 15 cases were presented to the SDM for his assistance and intervention.

This month the activists were busy organising the Block meetings which are held every quarter. These were held as follows:

April 15<sup>th</sup> – Nagrota Block – held in Yol – attended by 40 women.

April 16<sup>th</sup> - Kangra Block - Held in Sidhpur – attended by 60 women

April 17<sup>th</sup> - Rait Block – held in Shahpur – attended by 30 women.

The main agenda for the block meetings was to explain to the women about the campaign to restore Swayat Nyaya Panchayats to facilitate poor rural women to get justice at a local level. In addition Sutra sent their representative to the meetings to inform them about the UN 2020 Goals.

## **JULY**

In Rait block, Single Women Activist, Kummo met with a single woman who came to the meeting with her 19 year old mentally challenged daughter. Kummo talked with her and urged her to attend the meetings regularly so that she can keep her updated about latest government schemes for single women in order to help her in every way that Nishtha can.

On July 9-11, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarterly meeting Sutra presented last year's annual report, prepared for the coming Rally and press conference on sustainable development to be held in Shimla.

On July 28-29 Radha, along with 25 other people from 10 states attended a Land Rights Meeting held in Gujrat. The meeting was led by Jheelam from West Bengal, Som Lata and Sushila Prajapati, Director of the Single Women's Forum). They talked about the importance of single women's lives, sexuality and land rights.

A review of the 15 cases presented to the SDM on international widow's day revealed that all 15 complainants had been attended to and all necessary action has been executed successfully. These included 7 widows who got their pensions, 6 women who received the Indra Awas yojna, and 2 were awarded medical help - a girl with paralysis and an old women with gall stones.

## AUGUST



On August 16-17, a meeting about sustainable development was held in the panchayats, to create awareness about women's health, the human right to food, the widow's pension, women's land rights, Swayat Nyay Panchayat, "define separate women", and housing for single women.

On 22 Aug, a district level press conference was held at Magic Masala Club about how the government plans to fulfill this 2022 vision of sustainable development.

Kummo was successful in the case of a 19 year old single woman who lives with her grandmother. After her husband abandoned her she became semi paralyzed. When Kummo met her she told her about her dream of becoming a tailor and being self-employed. They visited the ADC and submitted her request as a result of which she was given ₹5000/- instantly to help her set up her business.

## SEPTEMBER

This month Panchayat level meetings on Women's Land Rights and Health Reforms were conducted.

Sutra created a questionnaire to be filled by single women on health and the changes in the conditions of medical facilities in Government hospitals and the activists spent a good deal of time getting women to fill them out. These forms were later submitted to the Central Government.

Kummo was invited to Dehradun by *Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch* (Forum For Women Farmers' Rights) for a meeting to talk about the problems faced by farmers and the rights of women farmers. Only 13% of women in the country own the land they work on whereas 60-80% of all farming work is done by women.

## OCTOBER

On Oct 12-13, Kummo and Radha attended third-quarterly Block Meeting at Sutra.

11 active single women members of Nagrota block attended a one-day workshop on social issues faced by women at Sambhavna. Every year they invite single women and provide them a platform where they meet and communicate with experts. Ultimately, it's imperative for women's confidence and capacity building.

All Nishtha Single Women Activists participated in the School Management Committee convention at Dharamsala. One of the active SMC members shared his experience of how effective the role of these management committees in schools can be. Participants were informed of the rights of a SMC member. For example, SMC members have the right to check the teacher attendance book, the food quality, infrastructure of the building and how funds granted for the school have been spent. In addition to this, SMC members also have the right to complain to higher authorities regarding school management. This information was very useful for our field activists because they can convey it to the single women who are SMC members in the villages

The Nishtha Single women activists conducted numerous meetings with the local women and prepared a memorandum for the coming state assembly election. In this they demanded Swayat Nyay Panchayat, separate women definition, single women's land rights, widows pensions, etc. They met with every local candidate and agreed to support them if they would promise to fulfill the single women's issues.

Kummo, went to Shimla to attend the Women's Land Rights Meeting. The land right bill introduced by the Indian Government does not clearly state the right of single women to possess land. Therefore, the single women's forum is demanding *Kasht kari*, the right for

women to register their name on their husbands land after marriage and be the equal owner of her husband's land. This would mean that one partner cannot sell that particular land without the second partner's consent.

On Oct 28, the single women activists conducted a press conference on the Sustainable Development Program, in which they talked about the re-establishment of Swayat Nyaya Panchayats in villages, kast kari registration, raising the ceiling for family income from different schemes to one lakh, raising the annual Rural Labour Guarantee (NREGA) scheme days to 200 and demanded a separate budget to uplift the social economic standard of single women.

## **NOVEMBER**

This month the single women activists continued their work on the signature campaign for the demands of single women for the newly elected state government. In order to achieve this the single women conducted village meetings in every block on selected sustainable development issues for the women. These meetings were attended by local resource people: Miss Shilla in Kangra and Dharamsala blocks, Meena Sharma in Nagrota block and Ravinder Kumar in Rait block.

On Nov 15, 15 single women were sent to SUTRA for a one day workshop on sexuality. This is a very important issue faced by rural women. Most domestic violence and molestation cases are related to it but people are very hesitant to address it openly, very often because the women are traumatized. These workshops boost women's self-confidence enabling them to take a stand.

On Nov 25, All the Nishtha Single women activists participated in the OBR (One Billion Rising) rally organized by Jagori at Dharamsala.

## **DECEMBER**



On 15-18 Dec, Block meetings were conducted in Darman, Rait block, at Nishtha for Dharamsala block, at Nawana for Nagrota block and at Gaggal for Kangra block. Meena Sharma and Radha Raghwal were the resource people for these meetings which were attended by between 40 and 55 women on each occasion. The main points discussed in the block meetings was regarding the new general sales tax,

demonetization and gas subsidy in order to make the single women aware of these issues which affect them all. In Nishtha, Ravindra talked about the Wenlido training for women and how it how it helps women navigate their lives, encouraging them to join her workshops.

On Dec 26, a memorandum (mang patar) was delivered to DC (CP Verma) regarding these above mentioned issues.

## **JANUARY**

On 3-4 January, Single Women Activists attended their fourth-quarterly meeting at Sutra. The main agenda was to plan for the next three months. Resolutions regarding women's land rights and Swayat Nayay Panchayat were passed in local panchayats.



3 single women participated in the 7 day Advance Wenlido Training held in Nishtha

## **FEBRUARY**



On 13 February, Nishtha Single women activists participated in the One Billion Rising program organized by Jagori Trust in Dharamsala. About 300 people joined the rally, which was from Fuhara chowk to Saheed Samarak, some of participants participated in skits and songs to convey the message that violence against women is intolerable.

This month all the Single Women Activists were busy in the preparation for 8<sup>th</sup> March Women's Day. The activists conducted



meetings in small groups and invited them in Dolatpur panchayat to celebrate Women's Day.

## **MARCH**

On 8 March, 35 Single Women celebrated women's day with a program in Dolatpur, Kangra (anganwari). Radha talked about the single women's program and the vital role played by our organization in Kangra district. She urged them all to take a stand against gender related violence and to fight for their rights.



Later in the month the Nishtha single women activists enjoyed the Nishtha Staff picnic at Barot which formed a fitting conclusion to a very busy and productive year.