

## **Exposure visit inspires communities to take up spring revival in Uttarakhand**

The SCA-Himalayas Project of SDC runs a spring initiative in the four Indian Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Manipur. The initiative aims to establish community model sites for springshed management so that they can be scaled out after the project's completion. For action research in Uttarakhand, the village of Moldhar in the Jaunpur block of the Tehri Garhwal district was chosen. One of the springs being revived in this location using the six-step protocol is Upala Shivani Dhara. Approximately 80 households rely on this perennial spring.

According to hydrogeological analyses, Upala Shivani Dhara's recharge area is located in privately owned terraced agricultural fields. These terraces were abandoned due to water scarcity and are now used for fodder collection and seasonal open grazing. Toe trenching was one of the methods suggested to the landowners to increase the recharge of Upala Shivani Dhara. Communities were initially very sceptical and refused taking such measures. They were concerned that digging would reduce the amount of fodder produced, destroy their lands and make it unsafe for their cattle.

The People Science Institute (PSI) team in Moldhar decided to raise community awareness before recommending any additional actions. Many other areas of Uttarakhand have seen the spring revival work implemented by the PSI. There are many examples where the PSI successfully worked with private agricultural landowners to carry out recharge measures like toe trenching. In an attempt to change the community's perception, the PSI spring initiative team planned an exposure visit for Moldhar community members. They were brought to Kalsi, Dehradun, to a location that PSI had previously treated as part of another project. The para-hydrogeologists/CRPs in Kalsi explained the spring revival measures to the villagers, detailing the various activities as well as their effects on spring discharge. They also held extensive discussions with the community in Kalsi, which helped improve their understanding of the entire spring revival process. The visit played a crucial role as it not only trained the community but also motivated them to initiate treatment measures in their barren farmlands in the recharge area of Shivani Dhara. While addressing the issue in Moldhar, the male members of the community were found to be more sceptical than the female members. Hence the exposure visit played a crucial role in convincing the men in the community who then went ahead and undertook the spring implementation work in Moldhar.

By December 2022, the women from the participating households had built around 700 toe trenches in roughly 3.5 ha of land. Villagers have already observed a slight increase in spring discharge as well as an increase in the amount of natural grass growing close to the trenches. The villagers now have a strong desire to extend these initiatives. They are more aware of groundwater sources and have taken the initiative to protect their recharge areas. They seem interested to cultivate these lands that have been left barren for the past 10 years due to water shortage. Women are significantly more interested than men because of two key advantages: increased access to water and increased fodder production. Women are traditionally responsible for collecting water and fodder, so they appreciate any intervention that can increase the availability of water and the production of fodder.

Community involvement is essential for the success of the spring revival process. Very often the recharge areas of important springs lie on private property, and landowners are hesitant to carry out structural measures like trenches or recharge pits. However, if they can be convinced of the advantages through real-world examples of success, they are willing to give it a shot, as in the case of Moldhar village.



On-field training during exposure visit in Kalsi, Dehradun



Discussion with community in Kalsi, Dehradun



Community members participate in the construction of trenches (recharge pits)



Women groups plant fodder grass in an abandoned farmland