

Making bricks empowers rural Orissa women

'There was a time when our family hardly got two meals a day. Now we are financially self-reliant,' says a tribal woman in a brick-making unit in an Orissa village.

In a bid to generate some income, the tribal women of Lataput village in Dasmantpur block, 60 km from Koraput town, formed a self-help group (SHG) in 2004, reports Grassroots Features.

Nineteen women from the 50 Kondh families set up the Thakurani SHG. But mismanagement dismantled it in a year's time.

Disheartened, the women returned to work as daily labourers, until a Unicef team identified the SHG during their village-planning programme in 2005. Subsequent meetings motivated the villagers to restart the SHG and a brick production unit.

With initial guidance from Unicef, the tribals' lives have now taken a new turn. They are earning much more than they used to as labourers.

'During our village planning programme, we identified the SHG,' said Biranchi Paikarai, a block coordinator of the Unicef-backed Ankur, a programme for women's empowerment.

'At that time the SHG was defunct. We motivated them to restart and launch a cement brick production unit,' he added. 'The group was imparted training in brick making.

'Initially, all the raw materials required to make cement bricks were supplied by the District Water and Sanitation Mission (DWSM). They were provided 200 bags of cement, 10 trucks of sand and stone chips each. They were also provided five sketches to make the bricks,' Paikarai said.

Once SHG began making bricks in March 2006, it never looked back. It now makes about 500 bricks per day. It supplies them to different schools for building toilets with the help of DWSM.

The SHG has also opened a bank account at the Utkal Gramin Bank of Dasmantpur. Each member earns about Rs.3,000 a month.

'The income I now get was beyond my imagination,' admitted SHG secretary Kandhuni Jani.

'Now I am able to meet the household expenses of my family. Most importantly, I have got a regular income source round the year. Today my family has the security of two square meals a day,' she added.

Satyanarayan Pattnaik (© IANS / India eNews)