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Sangita Dahal

Young women undergoing a skill updrading and training programme on basket making. (UNV, 2016)

Volunteering to foster sustainable livelihoods for women and youth in Sikkim, India

Sangita talks about her volunteer assignment. “Through the project I manage, 12 community youth volunteers implement activities and campaigns to create awareness about women self-help groups, financial literacy and youth participation in government schemes, organize blood donations and health camps.”

“The youth volunteers have conducted door-to-door campaigns to create awareness and mobilize women into self-help groups. These groups are linked with banks where loan options are provided for livelihood activities,” Sangita adds. “Through training sessions, there are skill upgrading programmes on stitching, knitting, making soft toys and soap.”

As part of the National Youth Policy 2014, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, along with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme have partnered for ‘Strengthening Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan and National Service Scheme’ project.

India is one of the youngest nations of the world and is on the cusp of a demographic transition; youth in the age group of 15 to 29 years comprise 27.5 per cent of the total 1.1 billion people living in the country. This project aims to provide catalytic support to the
Youth Volunteer Schemes in 29 states of the country, facilitate greater youth participation and voice in sustainable development programmes, and reach out to over 11 million young people in India.

Sangita’s work is part of the Nehru Yuva Kendra project. “I promote volunteerism among the youth of Namchi district. I am responsible for mobilizing volunteers and training them. And those volunteers who excel in their work can then go to the villages and raise people’s awareness of all the opportunities they have.”

One of the community youth volunteers is 18 years old and is recovering from a two-year drug addiction. He joined a youth club that was formed as part of this project. The youth club became an outlet for positive change. He now counsels youngsters like himself to stay away from drugs and alcohol.

Sangita says full participation of youth is necessary for sustainable human development. “We need to embrace the responsibility of giving back to the community. Awareness alone is not the solution. We have to mobilize youth and women to be part of the action.”

Bimal Chandra Rai, Sub Divisional Magistrate in Sikkim State speaks about empowering youth: “If we want our country to develop properly, our youth force needs to be developed properly. The role of volunteerism is very important. Sangita and her team are helping our youth develop their leadership qualities, get trained in certain skills and become employable.”

*In the last ten years, India has had 354 international UN Volunteers serving with 11 UN partner agencies, and 498 national UN Volunteers serving with seven UN partner agencies, including the 32 volunteers who are currently working on the Nehru Yuva Kendra project.*