



Rodi Bai –Village Umaria:



Rodi Bai is in her early fifties and lives in village Umaria. She is a woman of strength because she rose about her hardships and constraints. She has been able to create a platform for her fellow women and has worked hard towards the collective benefits for all. Her story rightfully denotes the fact that people from any backgrounds can provide leadership.

When Rodi was young she could not have access to education. She would look after her younger siblings and do household work as her mother had tuberculosis. Rodi got married when she was 14. Her husband had only a half-hectare of land, which could not produce enough for subsistence. Therefore he often migrated for work to neighboring cities. Rodi also had to work very hard to make the two ends meet. Despite the difficult circumstances Rodi took great interest in social issues of her village. In 1994 she began to participate in village meetings organized by Seva Mandir.

Although Rodi's husband supported her for whatever she did but a few members of her family did not like her participating in village-issues. Since Rodi was very active in meetings and showed great concerns in social issues, soon she became the leader of the village. With the support of Seva Mandir she began to mobilize women of her village and created a platform for her fellow women to discuss their concerns. Upon receiving various trainings from Seva Mandir she began to raise awareness among women about health and hygiene. Later she received special training for reproductive health of men and women. Her efforts to get women together gave her deep insights about the constraints women face and the possible ways to ease these constraints.

Rodi had also played an important role in vacating an illegal encroachment from a village pastureland (grassland). Recently a couple of years ago some influential people of nearby village encroached upon a common pastureland of village Umaria. Rodi strongly resisted their action and organized a Panchayat (Village Council) meeting to discuss it. In the meeting the influential men were found guilty and they agreed to vacate the encroachment.

The village was very happy at the decision but soon after this another encroachment took place. It was Nathulal a resident of Umaria village had himself encroached upon the same pastureland. Rodi again tried to resist it but before she could do anything Nathu Lal brought a No-Objection Certificate by bribing the Panchayat Revenue Officer.

Rodi continued to mobilize people of her village to speak to The Revenue Officials for canceling the No-Objection Certificate. In the meantime the villagers vacated the encroachment. It was a daunting task but it became possible because 1) Rodi was there to motivate everyone and 2) the villagers had also gained confidence from their previous experience with the influential men encroaching their pastureland.

Rodi says –“ It has been a difficult journey and getting people together in the beginning was very difficult. Today people respect me and even when I am not around other women readily take charge of any issues to resolve it.”



Rodi speaking during a Health Campaign

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