

Empowering Her: Advancing Women's Development

Axis Institute of Higher Education (AIHE) launched the "**Empowering Her: Advancing Women's Development**" project in the academic year 2021-2022 as part of its outreach activities. This initiative aims to uplift rural women through skill development, health awareness, and social empowerment. The project focused on three villages in Kanpur Dehat district—Bhadasa, Salempur, and Maholi—where various training programs, awareness campaigns, and health initiatives were conducted to improve the quality of life for women and the broader community.

Objectives of the Practice

1.Skilling & Entrepreneurship: The project's primary goal is to equip rural women with skills to earn a sustainable livelihood. Training in candle making, bag making, and Agarbatti (incense stick) production aimed to empower women economically, fostering self-reliance and entrepreneurship.

2.Awareness of Social Issues & Women's Rights: The initiative also focuses on educating rural women about social issues such as gender inequality, domestic violence, and legal rights, encouraging them to actively participate in societal development.

3.Capacity Building in Health & Hygiene: Promoting health and hygiene among rural women is vital for their well-being. The project emphasized awareness of hygiene practices, preventive healthcare, and adopting a healthy lifestyle, with special attention to menstrual hygiene, breast cancer awareness, and general health camps.

Context

The "Empowering Her" initiative was officially launched on October 11, 2021, at AIHE. The villages—Bhadasa, Salempur, and Maholi—were selected based on proximity to the institute and the identified needs of the communities, particularly the women.

Village Profiles:

1.Bhadasa Village: Located 30 km from Kanpur Nagar, Bhadasa has limited access to healthcare, with the nearest community health center over 10 km away. The village has one government primary school and two private primary schools but lacks secondary education facilities. The female literacy rate is 58.42%, significantly lower than that of the male population.

2.Maholi Village: Situated 35 km from Kanpur Nagar, Maholi has a female literacy rate of 63.28%. The village has primary schools but no secondary schools, posing a challenge for girls' education beyond the primary level.

3. Salempur Village: Salempur, 26 km from Kanpur Nagar, has a female literacy rate of 49.88%, the lowest among the three villages. The village has both government and private pre-primary,

primary, and middle schools but lacks secondary educational facilities. A primary health center is located within 5 km, offering basic healthcare services.

Reasons for Selecting These Villages

1.Low Female Literacy Rate: The literacy rate among women in these villages is considerably lower than the overall literacy rate, highlighting the need for educational interventions.

2.Lack of Secondary Schools: The absence of secondary schools limits educational opportunities for girls, often leading to early dropouts and marriage.

3.Inadequate Healthcare Facilities: The villages face challenges in accessing quality healthcare, particularly for women, who often have limited mobility and access to health services.

4.Proximity to AIHE: The geographical proximity of these villages to AIHE facilitated regular visits by students and faculty, ensuring sustained engagement and monitoring of the project.

Practice Implementation

The "Empowering Her" initiative focused on four key areas:

1.Education: AIHE conducted awareness programs under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, encouraging women and children to pursue education and emphasizing the importance of literacy in daily life.

2.Health & Hygiene: AIHE organized health and hygiene awareness programs, including free health camps, menstrual hygiene workshops, breast cancer awareness sessions, and yoga classes. These initiatives promoted a culture of health and wellness among rural women, helping them lead healthier lives. The program also played a crucial role in socio-economic development by empowering women and promoting family planning education.

3.Livelihood Earning: To foster economic independence, AIHE conducted training sessions on candle making, bag making, and Agarbatti production. These skills were chosen for their marketability and income-generating potential, enabling women to contribute financially to their households.

4.Sustainable Environment: AIHE introduced programs related to environmental sustainability, such as rainwater harvesting, organic farming, vermicomposting, and plantation drives. These activities not only contributed to environmental conservation but also offered women opportunities to engage in eco-friendly practices that could supplement their income.

Evidence of Success

The "Empowering Her" initiative led to several notable outcomes:

1. Entrepreneurial Ventures: After training, women in these villages began small-scale entrepreneurial activities. Regular visits by AIHE students and faculty revealed that many women had achieved economic independence.

2. Diwali Carnival Participation: During AIHE's Diwali Carnival, rural women from these villages set up stalls to sell products they made, such as candles and bags. This opportunity provided them with income while boosting their confidence and visibility.

3. Employment at T-IDENTI-T: Several women from the villages are now employed at TIDENTI-T, an incubated Company in Sand Tank Startup Foundation partner of Axis Educational Society, showcasing the long-term impact of the training and the practical benefits of the skills they acquired which make them financial independent.

4. Vermicompost Setup: A large-scale vermicompost project was established in the villages, promoting sustainable farming practices and providing a steady income source for the women involved.

5. Recognition from Healthcare Centers: AIHE received letters of appreciation from Community Health Centers in these villages, acknowledging the improvement in health indicators and the positive impact of the health awareness programs.

Problems Encountered and Resources Required

The project faced several challenges:

1. Permission and Rapport Building: Gaining permission from village authorities and building trust with rural women took time and required persistent efforts.

2. Logistical Challenges: Traveling to remote villages, setting up infrastructure, and finding appropriate physical spaces for training and meetings were significant hurdles.

3. Resource Mobilization: Ensuring adequate resources, including materials for training and health camps, was crucial to the project's success.

Despite these challenges, the "Empowering Her" initiative made significant progress in advancing women's development in the adopted villages, laying a strong foundation for continued progress in the years to come.