

RUCHI

Rural Centre for Human
Interests



Annual Report 2006 – 2007

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Foreword

I am pleased to be able to present our annual report for 2006-07. RUCHI has been in existence for 24 years now and the commitment with which it has devoted itself to community organization is bearing fruits.

I am grateful to my colleagues who worked as a team and always proved to be strong foundation on which RUCHI stands as well as the community people who work with us and who openly share their thoughts and opinions and provide a critical feedback while working with us.

29th May 2007

Dharamvir Singh
Founding Director



1. Introduction

1.1 History

Rural Centre for Human Interests (known as RUCHI, which means ‘interest’ in Hindi) has, true to its name, continued to take a keen interest in uplifting the rural poor in selected regions of India’s Himalayan foothills. It has aimed to achieve this through empowerment - by providing assistance and technical support to the underprivileged, showing them the how to minimize dependence and thus attain a better life – rather than just through charity. RUCHI has focused through the years on promoting sustainable anthropocentric development.

RUCHI’s founders felt there was a need for a committed workforce to initiate the process of development at the grassroots level, encouraging individual and community participation in the process. RUCHI came into being as a non-profit, voluntary organization in October 1980, set up in the Himalayan foothills of the state of Himachal Pradesh. Until it was registered as a Society in the year 1983, RUCHI worked from the isolated village of Chopal in the Shimla District. RUCHI acquired legal entity status on 16 February 1983 under the Societies Registration Act (1860), when it was registered with a head office situated in the village of Shalana in the Rajgarh Block of Sirmour District.

The head office was shifted to the small village of Bandh in Dharmpur Block of Solan District of Himachal Pradesh when the new Technology Resource Centre was founded in 1994. This was achieved through the Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), under the aegis of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. RUCHI is currently working in the southeast part of Himachal Pradesh in districts of Solan and Sirmour, in the Dharampur and Rajgarh development blocks respectively.

Both the environment and a culture of initial resistance on the local people’s behalf posed many challenges and difficulties in the beginning. However, good communication built up the trust of the people and helped overcome the culture of resistance, and systems were slowly developed to overcome environmental hurdles. Twenty-seven years on the organization is every year helping more village’s progress down the road towards integrated, multi-disciplinary and participatory sustainable development.

1.2. Context

To fully appreciate the work that RUCHI does and the significance of the objectives staff work towards, it is imperative that the reader has some knowledge of the environment the work is carried out in. The Himalayan foothills are dry – about 70% of all rainfall arrives during the Monsoon (about three months, from June-August). The terrain is very steep, causing rainfall and with it nutrient rich topsoil, to quickly drain away. The sources of irrigation are very limited with hardly 30% of the cultivable area being covered under irrigation. The continuing threat of deforestation, with native vegetation being cleared to supply a burgeoning population with fuel, fodder and space for agricultural development



creates problems of its own, not least by accelerating the erosion of precious fertile soil. Problems of resource depletion are compounded by mismanagement of the resources that are available to the rural population. Pollution of the environment and depletion of the natural resource base have negative effects not only ecologically but also socially, with the health of the rural population suffering. Because 92% of the population of Himachal Pradesh derives their income primarily from agriculture, the impact of natural resource depletion and degradation is particularly strong.

2. Goals

2.1. Mission Statement and Belief System

RUCHI's Mission Statement: Integrated rural development through people-centered, environmentally sustainable action.

With this in mind (and an eye to social and economic independence), RUCHI introduces technologies deemed appropriate to the conditions, and uses health and resource management education to socially empower and uplift rural communities.

RUCHI believes that

1. People have an inherent capacity to achieve - even in the face of adverse conditions - provided they are provided with help and guidance.
2. Resources, goods, information and technology should be shared amongst and between communities.
3. People should be empowered to demand services by virtue of being human and as a basic human right.
4. Women play an important catalytic role in development.
5. Both development and management should be participatory.
6. Social change can occur through economic stability and independence.
7. Economic stability and independence can be achieved through optimal and *sustainable* use of local resources.

2.2 Strategic Objectives

Twenty-seven years of observation has allowed a wealth of information to be collected about the socio-economic conditions and mismanagement of local resources that perpetuate poor living conditions in this part of the Himalayan foothills. This collective understanding has helped RUCHI staff to focus their long-term objectives.

RUCHI aims to

1. Promote and protect the environment and natural resources, through adoption of appropriate resource management techniques, generally focused at the micro-level of watersheds.



2. Promote education and awareness as a tool to improve the plight of the underprivileged rural poor.
3. Ensure that a participatory approach is used in the conservation and promotion of natural resources.
4. Catalyze the transfer of low-cost agricultural and construction technologies which will aid in environmental protection and community development.
5. Empower women and eradicate gender inequality, namely through micro-credit and self-help groups.
6. Extend our services to the vulnerable section of elderly, and promote independence amongst this section.
7. Develop areas of mutual cooperation amongst Government agencies and NGOs.
8. Improve the community health standard, mainly through preventative measures.
9. Encouragement of a young rural workforce focused on and with and understanding of integrated rural development, promoted through non-formal education.

3. Management and Administration

3.1. Structure

RUCHI has authorized an Executive Director for day to day administration. Over and above this the management of RUCHI rests with a Governing Body comprised of seven members, each of whom is elected for a term of two years. RUCHI employs 23 full-time staff.

RUCHI firmly believes in team work and 'people power'. It fosters a team environment and has a base of experienced, hardworking and dedicated staff members who combine their skills, knowledge and experience to achieve the goals outlined above. Now more than ever before, RUCHI has long- and short-term volunteers participating in the programme, injecting fresh ideas and knowledge into the strong long-term employee base.

3.2. Finance and Accounts

In the past financial year RUCHI received Rs. 75,70,483/- of which 89% was from foreign funding agencies. RUCHI's expenditure totaled Rs. 75,87,364/-9 of which 86% was made against foreign contribution. The details are outlined in Annexure 1, the audited statement of accounts. As well as bilateral support, RUCHI receives income from the following sources –

1. Membership fees and annual subscriptions.
2. Consultation fees.
3. Infrastructure usage charges.
4. Agricultural activities.

At present, RUCHI is receiving funds from the following international funding bodies -

1. OXFAM/Water For Survival, New Zealand
2. MISEREOR, Germany
3. HelpAge International, UK
4. DFID



RUCHI's Indian sources of funding include –

1. Ministry of Science, Technology & Environment, GOI
2. Council for People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), Ministry of Rural Development, GOI
3. Ministry of Environment & Forests, GOI

4. 2006-2007 Projects

4.1. 'Improved Community Health through Natural Resource Management'

At a glance –

- 30 villages, Dharampur Block, District Solan, Himachal Pradesh
- Sponsored by Oxfam/Water for Survival (New Zealand)
- A five-year project initiated in April 2003.

- Project objectives –

1. To improve community health through education and primary health care.
2. To provide clean drinking water through household rainwater tanks and community spring protection.
3. To improve sanitation in each village by encouraging the construction of latrines, soak pits, compost bins and kitchen gardens.
4. To improve the environment and health status through encouraging indigenous soil and water conservation practices.

Villagers in the RUCHI project area work closely with the land every day and rely heavily on its natural resources for agricultural practices and domestic needs. Community health is therefore strongly connected to environmental health.

Since the commencement of the project a number of initiatives have been introduced to encourage environmentally responsible behaviour. RUCHI has chosen practical applications designed to reduce the environmental impact of humans (though the prevention of contamination) that require community participation either in the construction process or through an ongoing interaction with the environment.

RUCHI has sought to create a sense of ownership amongst the beneficiaries through requiring a contribution to construction and has tried to increase responsibility and empowerment in the community as whole through the introduction of CHMs and SHGs.

Although construction has been an extensive part of the work that RUCHI has performed over the past four years; a means to achieving three of the project's four objectives and a major factor in increasing beneficiaries' income RUCHI has been careful not to position themselves as providers but as teachers/source of knowledge. They are technical experts in the field of development and as such it is their aim to pass on the knowledge and skills that



will enable villagers in the project area to successfully manage their communities and the surrounding environment.

RUCHI finds the progress with the project in general very satisfying. As is evident from the amount that has been achieved this year, progress towards achieving the specified objectives is proceeding at an unprecedented rate, and the rewards of the hard work of fundraisers, RUCHI ground staff and villagers themselves are already being reaped. The past year has seen this project progressing with speed towards achieving its objectives. The physical targets achieved are shown in table below.

S. N.	Particulars/Activity per annum	Proposed targets (4th year)	Completed during the period
1.	<i>Water Harvesting Structures:</i>		
	a. Ferro-cement water storage Tank	10	10
	b. Plastic Sheets	5 families	-
	c. Development & Protection of Springs	10	10
	d. Irrigation tanks (50,000 litre)	3	10
	e. Percolation tanks	10	10
	f. Storage tanks (25,000 litre)	3	3
	g. Cattle troughs	10	10
	h. Gully plugging	200 cubic meters	200 cubic meters
	i. Check dam	1	1
2.	<i>Environment and Sanitation:</i>		
	a. 10,000 fruits plants to 500 families	10,000	10000
	b. Sanitary latrines	30	30
	c. Compost Pits	10	10
	d. Soak pits	20	20
	e. Training/exposure of 200 farmers on Natural Resource Management/SHG	200	200
3.	Community Health		
	a. Development of health education material/AV aids	Video on 5 diseases	(editing to be done)
	b. Medicines for first aid care and emergencies	Medicines and kits	Ongoing
	c. 3-day training to CHMs	2	2
	d. CHMs and 3 educators' meetings	36	36
	e. PAC meetings	4	4
	f. Kitchen gardens	50	50





RUCHI believes that active participation is the key to empowering individuals, building a strong community spirit and sense of ownership and ultimately ensuring the sustainability for the project. RUCHI also recognises that, in a society where females have traditionally been grossly marginalised, positive change must start with breaking down social injustices and elevating the status of women.

RUCHI staff are feeling very satisfied with the project in general. As is evident from the amount that has been achieved this year, progress towards achieving the specified objectives is proceeding at an unprecedented rate, and the rewards of the hard work of fundraisers, RUCHI ground staff and villagers themselves are already being reaped.

4.2. ‘Sustainable Water Harvest for Food Security and Poverty Alleviation’

At a glance –

- Jadla Panchayat, Solan District, Himachal Pradesh
- Supported by MISEREOR, Germany.
- Initiated in November, 2005.

- Project aim –

to improve the quality of life of the rural target group through the protection, conservation, regeneration and rational use of natural resources.

The project is designed to empower villagers and give them a sense of ownership for their community’s development through:

- Teaching them technical, managerial and decision-making skills,
- Motivating them to participate in activities,
- Improving their knowledge of natural resource management system.

From the outset RUCHI recognised that enlisting the help of key individuals within the villages was a means to empowering the community and gaining their trust.

Through the provision of basic facilities RUCHI seeks to tackle health and economic issues whilst instilling confidence in their practices and inspiring participation which, according to RUCHI, is paramount to the success of the project.

It is not RUCHI’s aim to establish themselves as long-term financial providers and this point has been stressed to the beneficiaries throughout the duration of the project. The



infrastructure and other projects provide tangible benefits for the villages and are therefore a means for RUCHI to:

1. Establish themselves as socio-technological experts in the field of development,
2. Gain local confidence,
3. Facilitate positive change for improved standard of living and give guidance where necessary,
4. Encourage environmentally sustainable practices.

Details of physical targets achieved:

S.N.	Particulars/Activity	Proposed targets (1 st year)	Completed during the period
A	SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION		
<i>A</i>	Irrigation Tank (48000 Lit. capacity)	2	2
<i>B</i>	Spring Development With Cattle trough	2	2
<i>C</i>	Demonstration of thread technique for tomato	15 farmers	2 farmers + demo at RUCHI
<i>D</i>	Community Garbage Collection Bins	5	5
<i>E</i>	Channel for Water Collection	200 Mt.	200 Mt.
<i>F</i>	Organic composting	10	1
<i>G</i>	Percolation Tank	5	1
<i>H</i>	Bench Terracing	200 rm.	0
<i>J</i>	Gully Plugging	150 Cum.	0
<i>K</i>	Stone Bunding	200 Cum.	0
<i>L</i>	Silt Trap Tanks	5	0
<i>M</i>	Trenching	200 Cum.	.200 cum
<i>N</i>	F C Tank 2500 Lit	8	8
<i>O</i>	F C Tank 10000 Lit	2	1
<i>P</i>	Fuel, Fodder Plants	5000	5000
<i>Q</i>	Fruit Plantation	2000	2000
<i>R</i>	Grass Roots	20000	20000
B	CAPACITY BUILDING		
<i>A</i>	3 Day Exposure tour	70 Farmers	50
<i>B</i>	Orientation for users groups (2 times a year)	20x2	20x2
<i>C</i>	Staff Development through on site orientation and out station exposures	2	2



4.3. Soil & Water Conservation in Thod Muth Catchment in Rajgarh area of Himachal Pradesh as a Model Watershed

At a glance –

- 2 villages, Rajgarh Block, District Sirmour, Himachal Pradesh
- Sponsored by Department of Science & Technology, Ministry of Science, Technology & Environment, GOI
- A three-year project initiated in August 2006.

- Project objectives –

1. To improve on the environment and ecology of the area leading to a better quality of life for the rural people.
2. To regenerate, conserve and protect natural resources and promote their rational use.

The project envisages harvesting of rain water from all possible sources – roof tops and surface - to recharge ground water, increase soil moisture and store surface water for household and irrigational needs. As a science & technology component we are also developing water channels, put up silt traps and water filters at strategic places and allow the water to pass through them before that is finally stored.



Second highlight of the project is Bamboo plantation, which is considered as the most effective soil binder and the best means of bad land reclamation, to stabilise soil and minimise erosions in a much better way than other vegetative means.



The major achievement of the project within this short span is the recharging of a natural spring immediately under the earthen percolation tank in Thod Kolan hamlet (Beria) so much so that this water is used through channels to irrigate about 5 hectare of land. The Kolan village farm pond developed during this period led to

development of 3 bighas of wasteland into cultivable land. The people have also started developing land and growing vegetables on land close to the developed check dam due to assured irrigation. The exact quantity of increased production and their impact on the environment will be realistically known in the next three years



Physical targets achieved:

S.N.	Activities	Target	Achieved
1	Earthen Dam	1	1
2	Check Dam	1	1
3	Farm Pond	2	1
4	Ferro-cement Tank	5	4
5	Gully Plugging	100cum	100cum
6	Trenching	150cum	170cum
7	Channel	200rmt	100rmt
8	Silt Trap chamber	2	2
9	Percolation Tank	1	1
10	Fuel, fodder plantation	300	300

4.4. Sustainable Development through Promotion of Floriculture in Hilly Areas

At a glance –

- 5 villages, Rajgarh Block, District Sirmour, Himachal Pradesh
- Sponsored by DFID through GIF
- A 18 month project initiated on 7th March 2006.

- Project objectives –

1. Promotion and extension of floriculture techniques to farmers
2. To introduce low cost Green House Floriculture Technologies as the basis to involving the small growers in modern commercial floriculture product



The project was initiated with a view to introduce diversified activities for the farmers and increase their income level. This is also going to help check outward migration of farmers. This area has better irrigational facilities and floriculture is quite suitable to the area. Since

the project area lies in North-West slope of the Churdhar range it does not face sun for long hours and hence there is moisture in the land which is much required for the off seasonal flower crops. Some of the flowers like Chrysanthemum, Marigold, Aster, Gladiolus and Carnation were grown under controlled conditions. A green house and a mist chamber were developed to raise nursery of seeds and cuttings. Roughly 20,000 flower saplings and bulbs were distributed to 30 farmers to promote floriculture in the area.



4.5. Improve the state of the environment by inculcating sound environmental values in school children

At a glance –

- primary level school children of Dharampur Block, Solan District, Himachal Pradesh.
- Sponsored by Ministry of Environment & Forests through Indian Environment Society.
- One year project initiated in March 2007.

- Project objectives –

1. To sensitize school children about environmental issues.
2. To propagate the concept of environmental education among teachers.
3. To mobilize youngsters by instilling in them a spirit of scientific enquiry into environmental problem.
3. To motivate school children to undertake activities that would influence elders to emulate their good work

Though 7 activities were planned to be taken up under the project, however, due to financial constraints all of them were not approved by the MOEF. Therefore, within the sanctioned budget we took up following activities:

1. Sensitization of RUCHI staff.
2. Awareness creation
3. Formation of Nature Clubs in schools.
4. Preparation and Distribution of Educational Material.

4.6. The 'Sponsor A Grandparent Programme' (SAGP)

At a glance –

- 128 60+ year olds.
- 50 villages (ten Panchayats), Dharampur Block, Solan District, Himachal Pradesh.
- Sponsored by HelpAge International.
- First initiated in 1992, this project continues to the present day.

- Project objectives –

1. To foster a sense of independence and self-confidence among the elderly.
2. To educate elderly people on issues relating to their health and well-being.

As well as allowing dissemination of information on RUCHI's behalf, the monthly meetings provide a forum for elderly members of the community to voice their own problems and concerns. Many elderly are bed-ridden or immobile and thus cannot make it to the meetings – RUCHI staff visit the houses of these scheme members, ensuring they have all they need and are as comfortable and happy as possible.



Once every month, on 1st and 2nd RUCHI staff visit each of the 128 elderly at a point very close to their homes, taking with them food, clothes and a small amount of money. This gives the elderly a great deal more independence, empowering them as they no longer feel so indebted to or reliant on their nearest relatives. Indirectly it also reduces the strain on poorer families who are struggling to support older relatives. The SAGP thus fosters better community and family relations.



If a scheme-member needs a specific item (a bed sheet, for example, or a gas cooker), he or she can apply to a committee consisting of five scheme-member elected elderly and one RUCHI representative. This committee meets before the distribution each month, considering each request, and where it is granted the item in question is delivered along with the normal aid package. Such special aid packages are distributed every 3-months.

In order to foster a sense of community amongst the elderly of the area, allow them to meet new people and introduce entertainment into what can be fairly mundane lives, RUCHI organises six-monthly social outings.

4.7. Rotary-Sponsored Projects

As a part of their centennial celebrations Rotary Wellington (Distt. 9940, New Zealand), with the support of Rotary International and host club Rotary Kasauli, had initiated a Water Project in Bandh village. The ground breaking ceremony for the project was done by Mr. Graeme Waters, The High Commissioner of New Zealand, New Delhi.



The RUCHI campus has also benefited from this development, which provides clean water for RUCHI staff as well as for villagers. The project involves not only a check dam and associated gully plugging, but also the development of two natural springs, the installation of one filter chamber and three cattle troughs, and one percolation tank. The project has been a great success as it has recharged the seasonal springs and is making available drinking water to the people round the year.





Rotary District 9940 (New Zealand) also donated to RUCHI a full container of clothes, hospital beds and other materials for the benefit of communities it is working with.

5. Membership and Promotion of Other Organisations

RUCHI and RUCHI staff members are members of various other voluntary organisations. As well as establishing a network and a forum for discussion of ideas and circulation of new information and technologies, RUCHI works to promote the vision of these projects through its own projects.

5.1 Reseau International d'ONG la Desertification (RIOD) - India

At a glance -

- RIOD-India established 1995.

- Programme mission statement – To promote and enhance the participation of civil society in the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) at all levels, especially NAPs.

- Programme objectives -

1. To initiate the efforts related to awareness generation in the country to minimize the effects of drought and desertification
2. To promote South-South and South-North cooperation among people, NGOs, national and international institutions for learning and sharing the experiences.
3. To lobby/advocate for the needs and priorities of dry land farmers, particularly dry land farm women.
4. To encourage/facilitate communication, exchange of information, training for all the stakeholders in the country.
5. To initiate appropriate technologies/committees, monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in the country; and to mobilize technology and financial resources for implementation of the convention.

Mr. Dharmvir Singh, RUCHI's Director, had continued in his role as contact person (Vice President, RIOD Northern India) for RIOD in Himachal Pradesh.

RUCHI continues to promote RIOD's objectives through its general community work. The organization is of the strong belief that the future could see Himachal Pradesh becoming



increasingly water-scarce, and that without proper water management, the threat of desertification here is great.

5.2 All India Federation of Women in Agriculture (AIFWA)

At a glance –

- AIFWA establishment initiated in 2002.
- Federation mission statement – To initiate activities, projects and programmes such as relevant policy actions, advocacy, network, livelihood action, information dissemination, training and grass-root level action to achieve the vision (*Institutionalize, organize and empower Indian women in agriculture - politically, socially and economically*).

- Federation objectives –

1. To create awareness in rural women in general and farm women in particular about their role, responsibilities and rights.
2. To organize farm women into self-help groups and promote economical activities for their employment and income generation.
3. Building technical capacity in farm women to improve their effectiveness and efficiency in farming and reducing their drudgery (material labor).
4. To organize farm women cooperatives for the accessibility of farm inputs to them and to promote marketing of the products.
5. To bring about policy issues for the government and for NGOs and to develop advocacy programmes
6. To educate, motivate and encourage farm women in their active participation in the activities of the Federation and in other developmental programmes.
7. To promote a participatory mode of working and decision making in the Federation and their families.
8. To promote culture, moral and spiritual values in the members and undertake community service in the interest of the public
9. To promote national and international linkages and relationships with various government and NGOs to support the activities of the Federation.

Ms. Neelam Anand, a RUCHI staff member, has continued in her role as one of four team members of the AIFWA Coordination Committee. In the Solan District of Himachal Pradesh alone, this year has seen the addition of 1500 members to AIFWA. About 150 of those (from an estimated 40 villages) have been facilitated through RUCHI's work in the Dharampur Block. Members are organized into SHGs, and a RUCHI staff member visits each of these once a month. This year the major RUCHI/AIFWA project has been the distribution of 5000 fruit tree saplings to SHG groups in about 30 villages. RUCHI has also advanced the aims of AIFWA through the dissemination of information about new seeds and agricultural technologies, plant diseases, crop marketing, water supply and composting.



5.3 Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIIVS):

RUCHI was accepted by CCIIVS as a full member in October 2006. CCIIVS is predominantly occupied with international voluntary service. Membership of CCIIVS brings an organisation into a worldwide network which is itself linked to other regional and international structures including those of the United Nations system. This enables an organisation to:

- develop relations and joint activities with new foreign partners,
- develop new bilateral or multilateral exchanges,
- exchange ideas with international agencies,
- receive information and practical advice on international organisation's programmes

6. 2006 -2007 Additional Staff

6.1. TOTEM Volunteers

The TOTEM International Volunteer Programme allows foreigners with an interest in RUCHI and sustainable development work to come and visit the organization on either a short- or long-term basis. As well as generating additional income for RUCHI (useful in its bid to become more independent of agency funding), the scheme allows exchange of ideas and perspectives, not only between RUCHI staff and programme participants, but also between participants and the local population.

This year RUCHI has hosted volunteers through two different organizations. 20 volunteers visited RUCHI. Two of these volunteers were Rotarians and had visited RUCHI last year also! 18 volunteers have participated in the programme through Oxfam/Water for Survival – 13 of who were New Zealanders, two British, one German, one Canadian and one American.



6.2. Student Placements

Students from Indian Universities are invited to work on a voluntary basis as part of their placement programme. They are required to study areas related to the development sector in general, and the organisation's activities in particular. While the students gain practical experience, RUCHI benefits from their newly acquired ideas and skills.



This year RUCHI has hosted three students. They have come from far and wide – two came from Xavier Institute of Social Science in Ranchi and one from the G.B. Pant Social Science Institute in Allahabad.

7. Media and Documentation

RUCHI's publications in the form of handouts has a wide coverage and is appreciated at every quarter. This year RUCHI produced two video films – one on health issues and the second one on natural resources management. The second one is used as a training material for the education of farmers.



