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Women Create Alternate Food Security in Zaheerabad Region in South India.

What: Women from very poor untouchable families worked together with support from Deccan Development Society to create food security for their families and other poor in their village communities. Village grain banks were set up to provide food in lean season when people face hunger.

Why: The starting point was the formation of village Sanghas (groups) that wanted to be self-reliant. Based on their experiences for more than 10 years the women agreed to work towards increasing food production in their own fallow land and setting up village grain banks, which would be accessible to all the poor in the village. The DDS helped to think through issues and raised resources for the plan.

WHO: The women belong to extremely poor dalit families. 1765 women started the programme and more than 800 hundred joined them later. They were the most vulnerable families to hunger.

Where: The women are spread over thirty villages in the Deccan region of Andhra Pradesh state in India. While the women planned the project with great care and their own men supported it, they faced severe opposition from local elite politicians. A vicious campaign was launched against the DDS, which was supporting them and funds restricted by government. In-spite of this women showed Great Spirit and we were able to continue our work with support from other donors. At present the women have their own resources.

When: The programme started in 1994, for a five-year period. It continues now with their own funds and some support from international donors.

How: The women used participatory methods to plan their work. (PRA) Regular group meetings, reviews and discussions led to improvements in the programme. Wealth Rankings were carried out to identify genuine beneficiaries to access the grain banks. The process was extremely innovative because it was carried out in the village center publicly. This reduced a number of potential conflicts. Village women groups made decisions collectively.

Impacts-Results: The result of the programme is that grain banks have been set up in 32 villages and are controlled by women. The poorest families have access to this. The organization of food production and distribution has fundamentally challenged the government public distribution system where food is stored in national granaries while millions of poor go hungry. As a sequel the women have also set up their own marketing systems.

At a time when the process of Globalization is making the poor poorer, the women in Zaheerabad have shown how local production and local markets can help women to take control of their own lives and improve their own resources.

Prepared by Dr V. Rukmini Rao on behalf of women in Deccan Development Society.