



## Gram Sakhis and Women's Forums Disseminating and Promoting Helpline Numbers to Deal with Violence, Block Kishangarh, Ajmer

Saraswati a Gram Sakhi of Roopnagarh, has been designated by the Roopnagarh Police Station as a Suraksha Sakhi (Protection Buddy). This is under an initiative by the Rajasthan Police to form Suraksha Sakhi Groups (Protection Buddy Groups) in every police station across the state to support the safety and security of girls and women.

On her new role, Saraswati says, "I gained knowledge on laws and redressal mechanisms. My confidence grew and I was motivated to raise awareness of the people in my village."

Indeed, Saraswati has been doing just that. Her efforts are paying off. The village community is now aware of the helplines they can access in times of need, of distress including 1090, 1098, 100, and 181. Saraswati adds, "As a Suraksha Sakhi, I also collaborate with the police to impart training on self-defence to school-going girls."

Saraswati is part of a wide network of Gram Sakhis or Village Buddy – who are local village women motivated to become a social change agent in their area. Gram Sakhis, cover 33 villages falling within 10-gram panchayats in Kishangarh block, Ajmer district. They work closely with frontline workers, paralegal volunteers at the village level and collaborate with other networks such as Women's Forums and Survivor Support Groups for raising awareness on Violence Against Women (VAW).

Despite the existence of laws and implementation authorities to protect women against crimes, women continue to face violence. The primary reason is the lack of knowledge on redressal mechanisms available to them. They simply do not know where and how to report incidents of violence. Eight Gram Sakhis, each responsible for one Gram Pan



Photo 1. Saraswati raising awareness of helplines at worksite under Rural Employment Guarantee Act, village Roopnagarh



chayat along with 93 members of Women’s Forums have taken up this challenge head-on. Their objective is to educate and inform women about VAW including the redressal mechanisms in place.

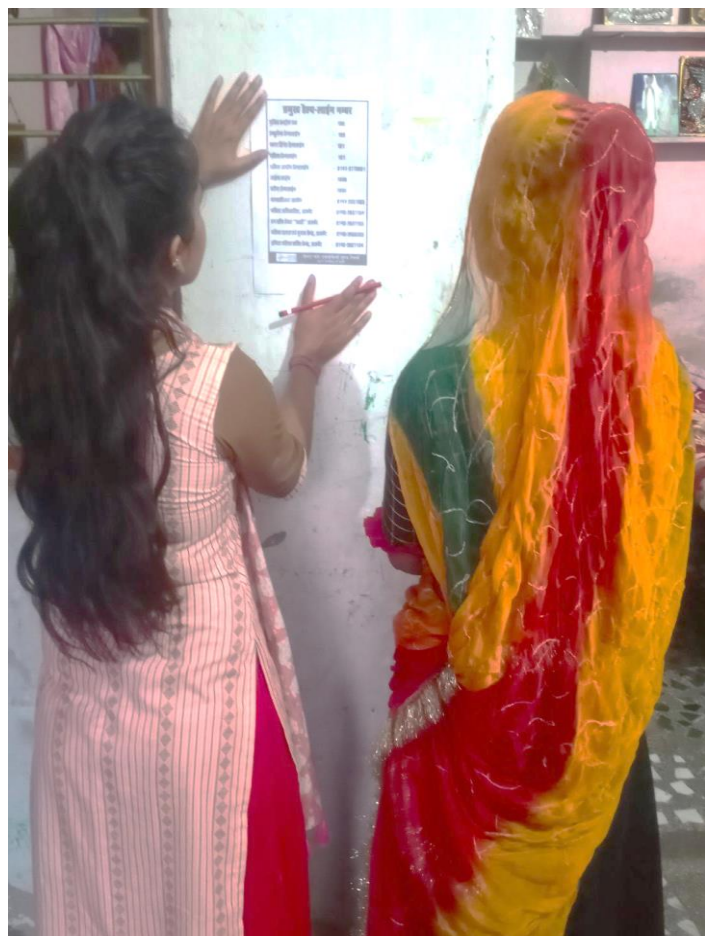
The effect of the work of Gram Sakhis is becoming increasingly evident. They have been able to share their own increased understanding and knowledge on how to address VAW with the village community. This covers both the legal and social aspects of VAW. Further, those who have faced violence have been empowered to speak out, to call out perpetrators, to hold them accountable

"We have launched an intensified door-to-door awareness campaign on the helpline for VAW. This serves as a crucial resource for women who may be facing violence or abuse. Our objective is to spread the word about this valuable tool that can empower women and provide them the required support for their safety and security," says Sakina, Member, Women's Forum, village Chundari, Patan Gram Panchayat.

Sakina herself is a survivor of violence. Along with members of the group, Sakina is determined to reach each of the 153 households in Chundari. The group has already covered 70 per cent of the households.

All this is shaping sensibilities on the ground. A deeper understanding and awareness of not only the issue but how to protect oneself –is taking root. "We were not aware of any mechanisms to complain or reach out to when we needed or were in trouble. Even though the helpline numbers had been shared with us verbally, we would forget. But now these have been pasted in our houses. We see them and find it easy to remember. We can access this and also help others when they face violence. This has been very helpful to us indeed" says Lai Rao, SC women, Roopangarh Gram Panchayat

The government has stepped in to offer support both at the level of governance as well as provision of legal services. The establishment of the District Legal Services Authority, One Stop Sakhi Center, Women's Safety Center, and the



*Photo 2 Member of Women Forum putting helpline in a house, village Mundlao*

State Women's Commission –all point to the intent and engagement at the governmental level.

However, these can only be effective if the women are made aware of these facilities and have access to mechanisms. On the ground, this effort has gained momentum. At the village level, a group of women and adolescent girls began to discuss these issues in order to create a narrative around VAW and its prevention.

This group has taken up the responsibility to educate every woman in the village about the legal framework and helplines established by the government. They are putting in enormous effort, going diligently door-to-door. Outside each house, posters giving crucial information on all available services including helplines are pasted.

Their outreach is wide, their dedication commendable. The group is driven by the desire to empower women to seek help for themselves as well as others who are facing violence. Their hope is that all this would help create a safer and more informed community.

Indeed, theirs has been an inspired effort. It speaks of their commitment towards creating a safer environment for all.

**The door-to-door campaign began a month ago. The campaign began with priority households with survivors of violence, school going girls, single women, elderly women and Dalit women.**

**3210 households in 10 Gram Panchayats namely Sursura, Roopangarh, Harmara, Khaotli, Barna, Kadha Bandersindri, Nalu, Salemabad and Patan –have been covered till date.**

The women's group is being supported by the Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR). CFAR is implementing the project 'Building a Coordinated Response to prevent and reduce Gender based Violence (GBV) in Kishangarh block, district Ajmer, Rajasthan supported by India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) and Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF) .



*Photo 3 Madhu, gram sakhi putting helplines in a house, village Nalu*