

FINDING THE WILL AND THE WAY



KAMLESH (Uttar Pradesh)

Kamlesh truly embodies the motto of 'when there's a will, there's a way.'

The eldest of seven siblings, her childhood in the city of Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh was difficult. Her father was a daily wage worker and resources were scarce. Kamlesh was married at the age of 18 and moved to Pinangwan town in Nuh district of Haryana with her in-laws. Within seven years, Kamlesh became a mother to three daughters and two sons. In the year 2011, after her husband passed away, she was asked to leave the house and live separately. She was not allowed to take her two sons along with her.

With no financial recourse, Kamlesh began looking for work. She found a position as a teaching assistant in one of Pinangwan's Madrasas (educational institutes). She rented a room for herself and her daughters, making ends meet with her meagre earnings.

Life then threw another shock at her. Her sister Sima, married into the same family, was deserted by her husband. She too was thrown out with just her three daughters and came to live with Kamlesh. It was more than a struggle to support all eight of them with Kamlesh's sole income.

Her meeting with Naseer, the Block Cluster Coordinator from the Haryana State Rural Livelihood Mission in 2018 was the turning point. She was encouraged to join a Self-Help Group and began receiving a lot of support from her fellow members.

"If we work hard, our progress is inevitable," she says. Indeed, within a year and a half, Kamlesh's dedication had shown results and she was made

a Community Resource Person. She now has an average monthly income of ₹15,000 and has bought a small plot where she plans to build a house. From a social perspective, she has made a name for herself and receives a lot of respect from others for her work; despite the initial trouble she faced at the behest of her in-laws. She has also motivated Sima to join her on this journey and become financially self-sufficient.

Having learned tough life lessons, her confidence has grown. *"I am more comfortable now financially,"* Kamlesh says. *"All my three girls are studying. I want to make them financially independent. They should not have to beg for their living."*

Kamlesh is now using all of her experience as a Biz Sakhi (Business Supporter), a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiative building resilience and facilitating the restoration of livelihoods among rural micro-entrepreneurs to combat Covid-19. Since women like Kamlesh already have deep connections and trust built up in their villages, the programme works through Haryana State Rural Livelihood Mission(HSLRM) and them.

For Kamlesh, she feels this is an opportunity to further her life goal - supporting other women like her to find their path to progress.

