

## Tribal Upliftment in Rajasthan: The *Sankalp* Team *Jagrat Mahila Sangthan (JMS)* and Firoz Khan Fellowship

**Sankalp** (literally meaning solemn vow, determination) was started over four decades ago by three idealistic young men who wanted to serve the poor. They chose this tribal belt in the southeastern part of Rajasthan as their area of work. Their passion was education, the result of which are two educational centers for tribal children that have brought enlightenment (and employment) to a large number of tribal families. Then, around 20 years ago, a women's collective, the **Jagrat Mahila Sangthan** was created in order to seek the larger social and economic empowerment of these marginalized communities. IFA started supporting JMS in 2012. They were working in a few dozen villages. By 2021 their work has expanded to 75 villages in the Shahbad and Kishanganj blocks of Baran district covering families mostly from the Sahariya tribe. The team consists of two male and about a dozen female activists who are joined by a team of 10 to 12 women in each of the villages they are working in.

The most powerful impact of this work is the awakening and empowerment of these communities in exercising their rights and in availing of the government entitlement schemes. The women of JMS are all from within the community. Once they earn the trust of the community they are able to mobilize the women. They have fought against corruption to ensure proper delivery of benefits to the intended recipients. They have also joined other groups in the state to get policies that help the poor.

### Main activities

**MNREGA** (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act): Enabling workers to demand work under this law. Also ensuring that they get the necessary job cards and that the wages for work done are received in a timely manner.

**Pension Schemes**: Obtaining pension for the elderly, disabled and widows under various schemes.

**Indira Awas Yojna**: Under this scheme the poor are given funds to make homes for themselves. The money is released in steps after completion of various stages of construction to ensure that the funds are actually used for building the home. Unfortunately, the money is typically not released unless the corrupt officials are bribed. JMS intervenes to get the money to the families without bribes.

**Food Rations**: Ensuring the correct amount of subsidized grains are given to the people at the correct time intervals.

**Women's education and empowerment**: Workshops are conducted for women to deal with domestic violence, hygiene, disadvantages of child marriages etc.

**Freedom to Bonded Laborers**: Freeing and rehabilitating people from lifelong bonded labor status based on loan sharking and fraudulent accounting of loans taken by their forefathers. This has been a major achievement of JMS over the years.

### 2021-22 Update

Just like 2020, work has been hampered by the restraints imposed by the pandemic. The group has had to prioritize their work with primary focus on Covid relief. In addition there were severe floods this year that damaged a lot of cropland. MNGREA, work as is well known, has been the savior of rural India. Continuing with their efforts of last year, they focused heavily on ensuring enough work and PDS rations.



### MNREGA Work



*JMS lead women handing a letter demanding NREGA work, to the Panchayat Development Officer*



*Villagers displaying job cards entitling them to NREGA work*

*3007 MNREGA workers in 20 villages were able to get their stalled wages  
4464 workers in 120 villages were assisted in applying for work  
552 families in 113 villages got new job cards made*

## **Pensions, homes and other relief**

IFA Fellow Firoz Khan works closely with JMS. He travels extensively, meeting people and gathering information about their woes. He then publishes those reports thus putting pressure on the authorities to act. He also communicates directly with the concerned officials. This combined with the organizing of JMS makes a huge impact on getting relief/remedy.



This year, water shortage has been particularly severe while at the same time, there have been spells of severe, untimely rain with instant rivers ravaging cropland turning it in to beds of stone.

***JMS got 10 new tube wells installed in the area***



***Villages in Madhopura (Kishanganj) demonstrate against lack of rations***



***JMS distributed dry rations to those suffering from the severe floods***

***604 women in 67 villages received old age pensions  
54 women in 27 villages received widow pensions worth 10,000 rupees each  
5 pregnant women in one village received financial help  
337 families from 10 villages were helped to finalize their submission for building homes (Indira Awas Yojna)***

***In the coming year, they plan to add another 25 villages to their work area while dropping some that have become more or less self-sufficient. IFA members Jyoti, Rajesh, Surekha and Prithvi have visited them multiple times and have been very impressed by how this work is empowering these extremely marginalized communities. We hope to continue supporting this important work and help them expand.***

***--IFA Liaison Jyoti and Rajesh Sahai***