

FARMERS' DIALOGUE

INDIA

Shailendra Mahato and his wife Sushila live in the northeast of India, in an industrial region. The farmers are among the poorest of India, they have no irrigation and are not able to cultivate rice outside the monsoon season, mid-June to mid-October.

After his studies, Shailendra wanted to find a job in a business. It meant leaving his village. This raised the question: 'Why leave my village to make a living? I am farmer; I should be able to earn my living from my land and help others too' To do this it would be necessary to solve the problem of the irrigation.



He decided to create reservoirs. The plan he had in mind was, for financial reasons, spread over five years. But he was invited to a meeting of industrialists in his region, organized by Initiatives of Change. This accelerated his project! He was invited to present it. An engineer from a big industrial group offered then to put an excavator at his disposal, free of charge. In three months, 50 ponds were dug around the village. This made irrigation possible and raised ground water levels, resulting in improved production of vegetables, wheat, potatoes and rice, and fish farming.

For Shailendra, this success is the fruit of an experience that he had through meeting Initiatives of Change where he was challenged to apologise to his wife and to a political opponent in his village, allowing them to fulfill their long-held desire to bring development to their village.



His new attitude also resulted in his wife, Sushila, working with the women and the children. She was also affected by what she had learnt during a Dialogue between farmers in Tanzania in 2005: when she got home she helped the women develop a number of projects, involving poultry, culture of mushrooms, a course in sewing etc.

Two years later, when she was invited to a Farmers' Dialogue in France, the women in the group asked her what she would take back home. She answered: 'I could take sweets but once they are eaten they are finished. I could take clothes, but they wear out. I shall take the spirit and methods that enable you to stand on your own!'

Shailendra and Sushila Mahato An Indian farmer and his wife



Farmers' Dialogue is a programme of
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