



Meet Yashveer Rana, a budding entrepreneur of an ecotourism venture in Uttarkashi

Yashveer Rana lives in Thandi village, 47 km away from district headquarter in Uttarkashi. Yashveer, who is a high school graduate, started a mobile repairing centre in the village soon after. In a village with vulnerable geographical location and limited livelihood opportunities, Rana was successful in setting up enterprise based on the demands of the local population. Recently he also started a SBI customer service centre for a cluster of 7-8 villages in the area that helped him get extra income for his family.

An enthusiastic young man, who was looking for opportunities to enhance his family income and sharpen his entrepreneurship skills, undertook trainings on 'Enterprise Development- Start Your Own Business' (SYB, ILO) and 'Ecotourism Development and Hospitality' organised by Development Alternatives (DA) along with Dehradun based organisation called Been There, Doon That (BTDT).

DA in collaboration with National Mission of Himalayan Studies, under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India under a project on Livelihood through Ecotourism, aims to develop Ecotourism clusters and strengthen the capacity of the community through skill development. The project focuses on eco and responsible tourism interventions in villages that have been untouched by conventional tourism so far. The clusters in Mandi, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand, where this project is currently being implemented, are both near tourist spots but have not been benefited socially or economically by the activity.

The local community was earlier unfamiliar with the concept of eco and responsible tourism. The fundamental component of an Ecotourism initiative is to develop pride within the community for nature, culture, traditional cuisine and local skills. Through this project we are creating awareness on eco-tourism

and related livelihood opportunities, through capacity building and training programs on requisite skills, and linkages to other stakeholders.

The training helped Yashveer in discovering new ideas to develop tourism in his village and enhanced his skills and knowledge. On the first day of the training itself, he offered his home as a homestay to the trainer, Rohit Bhutoria, an ILO certified trainer appointed by DA to conduct the training on SYB. Yashveer and his family welcomed him warmly and offered homemade Garhwali food. The meal included local red rice (*laal chawal*) and squash (*kaddu*), *kaafuli-saag*, *jhangore ki kheer* and *mandua* (*finger millet*) *roti*. Bhutoria stayed for four days and appreciated the Garhwali hospitality. Yashveer is now managing the Kamad-Thandi Ecotourism page on Facebook and has been inspired by the BTDI training to lead this initiative and set up a homestay in his house. He also dreams of starting a café on the terrace of his home as the eco-tourist influx into the region grows. He is also an inspiration for many others in the village to start ecotourism centric enterprises.