



Laleeta Atoliya
(Batch II; 2015 – 17)

- ✚ Laleeta always has a point to prove, it seems. The best part of it is that she always does it ever so silently! In doing so, she also pays tribute to her dotting parents who went against all odds to get all their four daughters educated. She proudly says: “My father and mother always thought differently from our fellow villagers. Not letting the girls to study or to work was a norm in my village but we could break such barriers with our parents’ support.” She hails from Kervasa village in Jaora tehsil of Ratlam district.
- ✚ For Laleeta (26), what better way to justify the faith her parents always reposed in her than to win the best employee’s award not once but twice (December 2018; August 2019) in a short career span and that too, at perhaps the most prestigious Indian NGOs of all; the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (India), better known as simply the AKRSP(I). Laleeta achieved this feat while working as Development Organizer (D.O.) at the organization’s Niwali cluster in Barwani district of Madhya Pradesh.
- ✚ Her tenure at the AKRSP(I) lasted for 2.5 years. Since January 2020, she works as the block coordinator with the Dept. of Women & Child Development, Govt. of India. She is posted at the Bajna block headquarters in Ratlam district (MP).
- ✚ All her practical learning in Development has occurred while working with the AKRSP(I). It was the first time ever she was literally spending all her time with the tribal communities in Barwani, especially with their women. These women have largely been instrumental in what Laleeta has been able to achieve as a successful development professional. Three such events still remain close to her heart:

➤ **First:** For the first time in the history of Niwali cluster, Laleeta and her colleague Shilpa (yet another SRM Diploma holder) could convince not less than 1000 tribal women who are members of the SHGs and Federations (that development professionals like Laleeta has helped mobilize and organize) to come together to celebrate the International Women's day on March 08, 2019. Every year, the organization used to allot a budget of Rs. 70 to 80 thousand to cover the costs of such events. In 2019, however, Laleeta and her team could manage to cut down this amount by more than 50 percent; courtesy the contribution from the participating women! This event remained the talk of the organization for many days.



➤ **Second:** When Laleeta began her work with the tribal women in Niwali, a few of the potential women's federations were just beginning to emerge. They had just completed the registration process and other formalities. It was a moment when if not given a proper guidance or not shown the right direction, they might flounder. The onus, therefore, was on Laleeta and her team to do adequate hand holding before they are carried forward. The fact that they could deliver at such a crucial juncture is a proof of not only the close rapport they had been able to cultivate with these women but also the latter's response as well.



➤ **Third:** It is almost normal for the rural women across the country to be oblivious to how and when the Gram-Sabhas are convened in their own villages, let alone participate in them! There is hardly any encouragement either from their own families or other community members to do so. Laleeta was instrumental in arranging a series of training sessions

wherein these women were given properly and adequately oriented to the importance, the structure and the functioning of gram-Sabhas in rural India and how important it was for everyone to exercise this constitutional right. Such awareness programs resulted in these tribal women gradually shunning their inertia to not only attend the Gram-Sabhas but also to put forward their problems and thoughts on resolving them in writing! This proved to be quite a big deal for Laleeta and her team.

✚ After obtaining a bachelor's degree in commerce with specialization in computer applications, Laleeta had set her mind on doing a course that would help her start any business venture in Agriculture, a long-drawn dream of hers. When she heard of a course, offering a post graduate

diploma that had something to do with rural development and agriculture and that it existed in the vicinity, she opted for it gladly. This is how she found herself becoming part of Batch II of the course in rural management at the SRM/NLRI.

✚ She feels two of the best years of her life so far occurred at the SRM. She got to learn about the discipline of rural development and management in a very systematic manner. The faculty was very good, both at the professional and personal level. She learnt a lot about the subject and life, too. Besides, she found a group of fellow travelers who got bonded together into life long friends by the time she completed the course.

✚ Another event she would never forget occurred during their second semester when the students were expected to join various organizations to undergo practical training in the field as part of the Management Training Segment (MTS-I). The entire batch was roped in by Reliance Foundation, by far one of the biggest CSR ventures in India, as interns. All of them, including Laleeta, were rigorously put through the paces first by the RF team at their Navi Mumbai headquarters and then sent to the RF's field offices in different parts of India in smaller teams. For her second round of internship (MTS-II) at the end of the third semester, Laleeta spent six weeks working with one Ahmedabad based not-for-profit company, Development Quest Foundation. She still feels that the foundations of her learning in rural management were laid at these two internship segments. They taught her almost everything that a would-be rural development professional or rural manager would want to equip herself with before stepping out into the sector.

✚ The major positives she has taken away from the course are three: a widened knowledge base, a set of relevant skills and some correct professional attitudes. At the same time, Laleeta sees certain areas where the SRM / the course can improve and this, according to her, comes down to significantly increasing field work and field exposure.

✚ Laleeta's success story would not be complete without mentioning where she sees herself five years down the line. She would like to become a social / agricultural entrepreneur and also be a source of inspiration for all those girls whose still want to chase dreams in face of all the adversities the society tries pin on them.

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