

## Case study — UBFDB

The small workshop in the back yard of Ram Kumar's hovel is filled with an assortment of cane articles. Hailing from Selaqui, a small village located 19 kilometres from Dehradun, Ram Kumar's family is involved in fabricating bamboo crafts, such as fans, different types of baskets, bags, purses, etc., an occupation that has been handed down several generations. "I sell my products from home, and from a stall at the annual fair. I also supply my products to shops in Dehradun," explains Ram Kumar.

Together with his family, he is able to earn over Rs10,000 per month from the sale of these items. Though their craft has been in existence over several generations, the artisans do not think too highly of their products. Perceived as something to be sold mainly in the local markets, the product quality was rather crude. Improving the quality was considered unnecessary – "The cost would increase and nobody would buy," was the common refrain. Consequently, these craftsmen were reduced to eking out their meagre livelihoods through unorganised local marketing of substandard quality products.



However, the winds of change swept in around 2003, with the establishment of the **Uttarakhand Bamboo and Fibre Development Board (UBFDB)** in Dehradun, to sustain, utilise, manage, and develop the existing resource base of bamboo and natural fibre in the state, besides promoting bamboo and fibre based livelihood options.

Starting with the basic assumption that the economic backwardness of a region is characterised by the co-existence of unutilised or under-utilised manpower on the one hand, and unexploited natural resources on the other, **UBFDB** has made efforts to devise a system where both these factors are utilised to their fullest potential, thereby transforming common folk like Ram Kumar into entrepreneurs.

Consequently, the concept of Ajivika Vatikas (livelihood gardens) emerged, with the main guiding force being the bamboo. Established in five locations in Uttarakhand, these livelihood gardens highlight livelihood options, and demonstrate best practices in nursery raising and plantation as an integrated unit.

In collaboration with the Uttarakhand Forest Department, **UBFDB** has focused on nursery development through the distribution of a million bamboo seedlings, besides bringing an area of over 1,328 hectares under bamboo plantation.



**UBFDB** has also organised a series of product development workshops with the craft community, which has resulted in a wide repertoire of handicraft and furniture items made out of natural fibres and bamboo, such as bags, purses, footwear, baskets, chairs, cots, etc. Fibres that had limited potential earlier, are being developed into fine clothes. Natural fibres such as stinging nettle and industrial hemp have been brought into the mainstream, and are being further developed as an alternative livelihood option for the rural communities of Uttarakhand.

The artisans are taken to fairs and trade festivals throughout India on regular basis for exposure visits. Their new product lines are marketed at these events, thereby providing them the entrepreneurial fillip.

The Trust has supported **UBFDB** since 2004, under its **Himmothan Pariyojana** initiative. The project has the following key objectives:

- Research, demonstrate and disseminate bamboo and fibre based technologies
- Guide the policy and resources of various state and national level agencies working in bamboo and fibre in Uttarakhand
- Create livelihood options amongst rural poor through cultivation of bamboo and fibre, as a reliable and profitable income-generating alternative
- Undertake action research on material exploration, market, design etc.

This support has enhanced the potential of strong bamboo and fibre-based enterprises in providing hope to the rural poor in Uttarakhand, besides augmenting the state's capabilities to service the needs of the regional markets.