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Pages 8 2.00

Write by me 

Hill Kids take survival tips against disasters



Nitin Jugran Bahuguna

Deepika belongs to a village called Lwani Gwad in Chamoli district. As President of the Bal Sangathan (Children's Organization) in her village, she was selected along with 23 other adolescents from different villages in the district to participate in a 14-day training programme on Disaster mitigation and

rescue.

"The training was very useful as I learned many important things such as how to tie different kinds of knots, how to pitch up tents, their uses and also how to fold them properly," says the animated girl on her recent return from the training programme.

Along with the other youth, Deepika also learned about mountaineering which, she explains, is called Jumaring and how to descend from mountains known as Rappelling.

Another important part of the training was how to quickly and efficiently despatch injured or sick people to the hospital during emergencies. "We were taught that if a person becomes unconscious,



we should never give them water immediately. Instead, we should first lay them on their left side and ensure they are taken to the hospital as soon as possible."

Similarly, Anju of Banjbagad village, also President of her Bal Sangathan, talks of the importance of learning about different kinds of knots, their uses and how and when to ap-

ply them. "We learned how participation and team work can help our community stay safe in times of disaster," she discloses. "We practised mountaineering and river crossing and gained knowledge about the equipment used in these activities."

Through this disaster risk reduction and rescue training, the youth got an



opportunity to understand how to keep themselves and their communities safe during both man-made and natural calamities. They went back to their villages and began to impart their new knowledge to other children and women. "I shared all the things I learned with other members of my Bal Sangathan as well as with my parents and community,"

Anju says.

This unique training programme, a much needed initiative given the recent calamities in Uttarakhand, was spearheaded by the Mountain Children's Foundation (MCF), a Dehradun-based NGO, in collaboration with Azim Premji Foundation and Nanda Devi Adventure and Outdoor Education Institute (NDI), located

in Nanda Nagar, Chamoli where the training was held. Aditi Kaur, President of MCF, tells me that while disasters rage around us in the mountains, the only way we can respond immediately is if the youth is prepared. "The first 24 hours are critical and sometimes it is impossible for the rescue teams to reach the disaster zone," she points out.

Inhabitants of disaster-prone areas can save their lives if they are trained in disaster reduction and rescue techniques, adds Dr Sunil Kainthola, Founder of NDI. To press home his point, he gives the example of a family that was swept away by river waters in the 2013 Kedar-

nath catastrophe due to lack of information about self-protection during a natural disaster.

The objective of the training programme, I learn, is to ensure that at least one member from each family in the hill areas is trained in disaster mitigation and search and rescue manoeuvres so that there is no loss of life during calamities.

Disaster preparedness builds resilience by empowering individuals and communities to cope with and recover from adverse events. The youth who took part in this survival course are leading the way towards achieving this goal and that sounds all right by me.

nitinjug2002@yahoo.com