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BASA – AN INITIATIVE TOWARDS COMMUNITY TOURISM

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While promoting sensitive construction practices using local materials, BASA illustrates sustainable tourism in a village of Khirsu, a hill station in Pauri Garhwal district of the state of Uttarakhand, India.

What is the project about?

“BASA” in Garhwali language is an expression to invite guests to your house for a night halt. This initiative focuses on the local needs, economy and architecture in a way that the locals develop a sense of ownership and add value to it.

The place is made to be run by the local Self-Help Group, Unnati.

BASA consists of a cottage with 4 rooms, a community kitchen, a tourism centre and a packaging and a selling unit of local produce and handicrafts. The cottage is adorned with wooden carvings done by local craftsman which adds to the aesthetics. A rainwater harvesting tank with a capacity of 27000 litres of water is also provided with the intent of spreading awareness amongst the villagers to save water in the water-scarce region.

Located in the snow-peaked mountains and within forests, the tourists can experience the landscape as well as the village life and local food. BASA is designed to give holistic and authentic Garhwali living experience to the tourists.

Women empowerment is an integral part of the initiative since they are considered the driving engine of the Garhwal region. Along with handling the stay, they will also be engaged in production and packaging all the local village produce and crafts which will be sold to the tourists. An existing government block is converted into selling and a packaging facility for the local produce. These are sold with the Khirsu logo to create a brand and identity of Khirsu.

For the exhibition centre of the building, multiple workshops were conducted with the locals to identify and document the cultural landscape of Khirsu and villages around. The intent was to capture and give importance to the local traditions and heritage getting lost with people migrating from rural areas. The exhibition documents demographic information of Khirsu, about BASA, a map of Khirsu, the traditional house form and household activities, local festivals, biodiversity and folk narratives, a guide for local bird spotting, everyday objects used by women signifying their role in the village, the local produce map with information on the various crops grown, places to visit around Khirsu, local dishes and maps of two nearby treks.

What is the impact?

Basa's institutional model incorporates participatory models to encourage a long-lasting sense of ownership and livelihood generation within the locals not just for the building but their resources. Some of these are listed below:

01. Activating a group of local leaders: The project was approached by identifying and activating a group of local leaders who could spread the spirit of value in local practices, promoted through the tourism centre. In Khirsu village, the women were found to be the hard workers in every house. They laboured in the hills to acquire essentials, cooked, cleaned, and also sewed to earn money for resources. The women's self-help group was thus accosted in the early stages of the project, for collaboration. A group of ten women formed a self-help group, Unnati, to manage the tourism centre as local leaders. Hence the tariffs generated through BASA were transferred directly to this SHG making them the primary financial beneficiaries.

02. Encouraging individuals in households: In Khirsu and its neighbouring villages, a number of households were found to be working on small scale production of haldi (turmeric), mushroom, mandva, burange (rhododendron) juice, other seasonal crops and multiple other forests produces. Basa provided a platform to encourage these households to continue their engagement with agriculture and horticulture activities.

03. Local tour guides: Alongside locals were encouraged and oriented to become local guides of their culture to tourists. Villagers were trained as guides for nearby treks, bird spotting, village agriculture practices and nearby historical destinations. These activities would initiate a gradual seepage of local value and pride within the community.

04. Promoting homestays as a livelihood: BASA cottage establishes an example for locals. As a model of homestay, it has inspired locals to open up their spare house spaces as homestays. Such initiatives done and managed by locals have helped revitalise the local economy and allow authentic tourism which can help preserve the natural and cultural landscape of Khirsu.

05. Building through participation: The building was constructed through a 'hands-on' construction workshop, Handmade, organised in parts for local masons, people and twenty other participants with a background in architecture and its allied professional fields. The workshop module was introduced to revive value in local construction materials and encourage adoption of earthquake-resilient building techniques for the construction of self-build homes by locals. The synergy generated while working hands-on would instigate a knowledge transfer across professionals, masons and locals, all participating in the workshop.

Project Funded by

DTDO (District Tourism Development Officer), Pauri Tourism Office

Stakeholders Involved

The District Magistrate of Pauri District, Uttarakhand

The State Minister, Uttarakhand

The Block Development Officer, Khirsu

Minister of State (Independent Charge) Cooperation, Higher Education, Milk Development and Protocol

Unnati, Self Help Group, Khirsu

About Compartment S4:

Compartment S4 is a collaborative of eight architects, graduated from Centre of Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT) University.

Our firm was conceived as a multi-disciplinary practice in May 2017 with the intent to provide sophisticated design solutions from user-driven perspectives in both the formal and informal sectors of rural and urban India.

As a design collective, we cover a plethora of initiatives ranging from private and government projects to publications, furniture design, construction workshops and even curating design discussions.

Links to read more:

A [compilation](#) of exhibition panels displayed on the upper level of BASA.

[Handmade Workshop](#)