Diya works in five villages across three gram panchayats (local governance units in villages) in Chitrakoot district. These villages are located in the periphery of the main city, approx. between 7-18 kms and are resided mainly by Dalit communities. The villages are not well connected with the main town area and services like electricity and water in home taps are rare.

The area of Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh rooted in patriarchy and feudalism, is also one of most marginalised and difficult areas for developmental work, lest on gender rights. In fact very few organisations work in the area towards women’s empowerment, rights and justice. Diya Welfare Society (Diya) amidst this a welcome step for many women, especially Dalit women.

Diya Welfare is known to be working for Women. Today the villagers know the entire groups of women who get associated with them. This recognition was easy, especially in an area, where gender and caste discrimination and violence is high and socially just. When talking about rights was a complete no-no, Diya Welfare started building associations with the women through celebrations and festivals. Getting to know Mamta, the founder, the women started trusting her and sharing their stories. Today more than 100 women across all the five villages are with Diya. Their villages know them. They are part of village committees, they attend panchayats meetings.

Working on women’s rights is in itself challenging. As soon as women start asking questions and stop accepting everything around them, they become house or family breakers. Their life and dignity becomes vulnerable. Diya has started to build a community support network, which will include all women from
these five villages, supporter men and boys, and young girls, with panchayats leaders should be formed. Interaction with men and boys in the community on understanding domestic violence and building advocates to support women leaders too has been initiated. Diya over the years, through the support of these women have built their understanding on gender and patriarchy, violence against women, laws and how to provide feminist counselling to women violence survivors. A group of five women leaders from these villages have formed a core collective of feminist leaders, to develop a district wide a peer support network for women and girls, supporting them to lead a life free of fear, discrimination and experiences of violence. The core group conducts and attends the monthly meetings with village women, represent the women and children concerns of their villages at block level meetings with government representatives and participate in capacity building trainings on diverse issues. They are also keenly developing support groups of women in each village, equipping them with information and skills of counselling and case work.

Diya Welfare Society founded in 2011, by a women’s rights advocate Mamta Soni. Born in lower caste Hindu community, Mamta was forced out of schools and married at the age of 14 years. After being subjected to years of emotional and psychological abuse, she had her calling, when her dear friend and neighbour was burnt alive for dowry. She started her journey with women’s rights organisation like Vanangana and government educational programme Mahila Samakhya, and worked across the state of Uttar Pradesh, establishing herself a strong advocate on women’s rights in Bundelkhand region.

SAWF-IN also supports Diya Welfare Society in Chitrakoot, Bundelkhand, to develop Dalit women’s leadership towards eliminating violence against women in their villages. It works in 5 villages where it strengthens women’s leadership, and provides legal help and counseling to vulnerable, harassed women.

For more information on the programme contact sawfindia@gmail.com Also follow us online: www.sawfindia.org