

Report

on

IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT BASED LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMME

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ABBREVIATIONS

AKRSP – Aga Khan Rural Support Programme

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

DPR – Detailed Project Report

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

IDI – In Depth Interview

JKPL – J K Paper Limited

KII – Key Informant Interview

PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal

VDC – Village Development Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This assessment was undertaken to understand the outcomes of the watershed and livelihood interventions implemented by AKRSP in partnership with Sparsh Social Foundation across selected villages. The study adopted a qualitative approach comprising Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Village Development Committee (VDC) consultations, beneficiary interviews, case studies, and interactions with project staff. The assessment explored community perceptions regarding changes in water availability, agriculture, livelihoods, institutional development, and overall wellbeing.

The findings suggest that the programme has contributed positively towards strengthening natural resource management and improving livelihood opportunities for participating households. Community members consistently highlighted the benefits of interventions such as land levelling, gabion structures, water conservation works, and agricultural support activities. Several beneficiaries reported that farming, which was previously limited largely to the monsoon season, has become more productive due to improved soil and water management. Increased cultivation of crops such as paddy, maize, vegetables, chickpea, and fodder crops was observed across several intervention villages. Beneficiaries also described reductions in soil erosion, improved water retention, and enhanced confidence in agriculture as a viable livelihood source.

The study further found that Village Development Committees and water user groups played a significant role in strengthening community participation and ownership. Through regular meetings and collective decision making processes, these institutions enabled villagers to identify priorities, discuss local challenges, and participate actively in implementation activities. Community members appreciated the transparent and participatory approach adopted by the programme, which helped build trust and encourage broader engagement over time. Comparisons with control villages revealed noticeable differences in institutional participation, agricultural opportunities, and livelihood diversification. While intervention villages demonstrated greater awareness of watershed practices and reported improved farming outcomes, control villages continued to face challenges related to limited irrigation facilities, dependence on rainfall, and seasonal wage labour. Nevertheless, water scarcity remains a concern across both intervention and control areas.

Overall, the assessment indicates that the programme has established a strong foundation for improving community resilience and livelihood security. The experiences shared by beneficiaries and village institutions demonstrate that watershed development, when combined with livelihood support and community mobilization, can contribute meaningfully to sustainable rural development. Continued investment in water conservation, climate resilient agriculture,

livelihood diversification, and institutional strengthening will be important for sustaining and expanding the gains achieved thus far.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Water has always been the lifeline of agrarian communities, yet for millions of smallholder farmers across India's semi arid regions, access to reliable water remains one of the most persistent and debilitating challenges. The tribal communities of Songadh and Uchhal Blocks in Tapi District, Gujarat, are no exception. Predominantly dependent on rain fed agriculture, these communities have long grappled with erratic rainfall, seasonal water scarcity, degraded land, limited irrigation, and the precarious livelihoods that come with them. For many households, a failed monsoon is not a statistic: it is a season without income, a year without security.

Recognising the deep and interconnected nature of these challenges, Sparsh Social Foundation (SSF), in partnership with the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India) [AKRSP(I)], implemented a Watershed Development Based Livelihood Programme during FY 2024–25 across selected villages of these two blocks. The programme was holistic in its design: it did not treat water in isolation, but understood that sustainable water management is inseparable from soil health, agricultural productivity, livestock livelihoods, and the strength of local institutions. Accordingly, the programme wove together a range of interventions: construction of check dams, farm ponds, bori bandhs, and solar mini lift irrigation systems; soil and water conservation measures like farm bunding, gully plugs, and gabions; support for livestock based livelihoods through goat rearing units and Pashu Sakhis; and the formation and strengthening of Village Development Committees (VDCs) and User Groups.

The programme was supported by J K Paper Ltd. (JKPL) as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitment to community development and environmental sustainability. To assess whether the programme has delivered meaningful and lasting change, JKPL commissioned an independent impact assessment, which was conducted by STAR Foundation.

1.2 Study Objectives

The purpose of this impact assessment is to go beyond reporting outputs: to genuinely understand whether and how the programme has changed lives. It seeks to measure and validate the social, economic, environmental, and institutional impact of the watershed programme on beneficiary households and communities, and to generate credible, evidence based insights for accountability, learning, and future programme design.

Specifically, the study aims to:

- Assess improvements in agricultural productivity, cropping intensity, and farm incomes among beneficiary households.
- Examine the livelihood impact of livestock and allied activities, with particular attention to the most vulnerable households.
- Assess the effectiveness and sustainability of soil and water conservation measures.
- Evaluate the performance and functionality of community institutions, particularly VDCs and User Groups.

- Analyse outcomes related to gender inclusion and climate resilience.
- Document best practices, challenges, and lessons that can inform future programme design and scale up.

1.3 Study Area

The study was conducted across six villages, four intervention villages and two control villages, spread across Songadh and Uchhal Blocks of Tapi District, Gujarat.

Table 1: Study Area- District, Blocks, Villages

State	Gujarat
District	Tapi
Blocks	Songadh Uchhal
Intervention Villages	Anandpur Junibavli Gaysawar Vadda
Control Villages	Rampur Kothar Nindvada

1.4 Target Group

- Village Development Committee (VDC)
- Beneficiaries/ User Groups
- Implementing Staff

1.5 Sample Size and Sampling Approach

Given the qualitative nature of this assessment, the sampling approach was designed to capture depth of experience and diversity of perspectives rather than statistical representativeness.

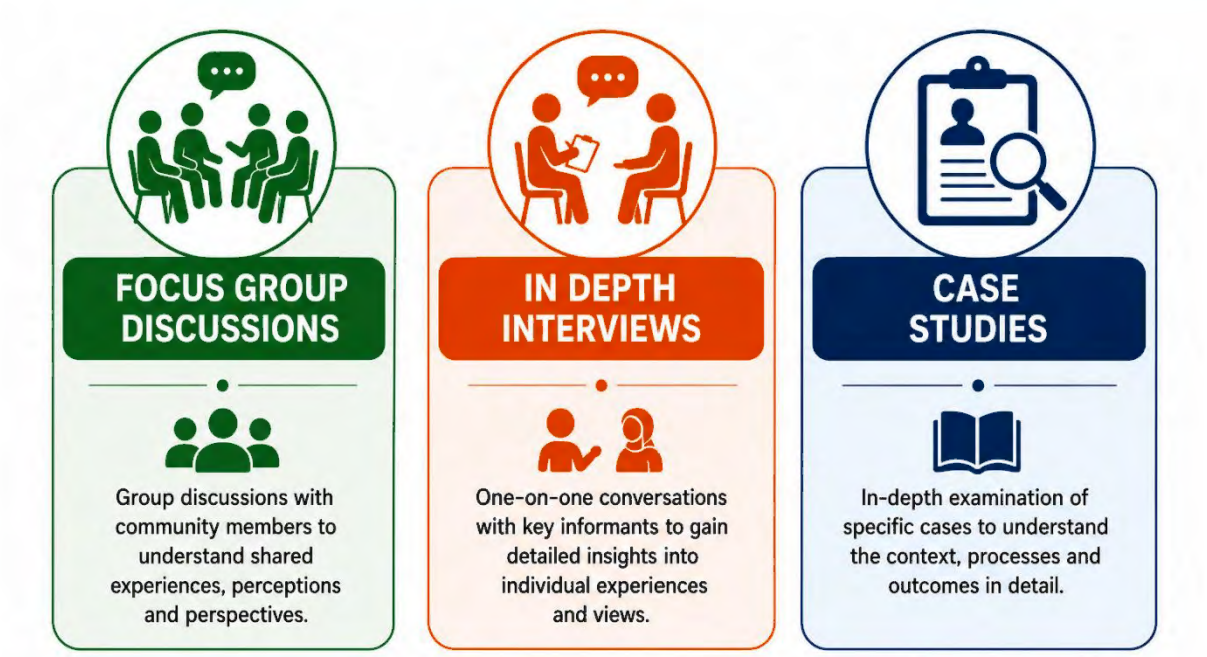
A purposive, stratified sampling approach was followed. Beneficiary lists were obtained from the JKPL team, and respondents were selected ensuring gender balance and representation across all key activity categories. Villages were selected based on programme performance, including both high performing and relatively lower performing villages, to capture a realistic range of outcomes.

Table 2: Sample Size

Target Group	Research Technique	Intervention	Control
Village Development Committees	Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	**3**	**2**
User Groups	Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	**3**	**-**
Beneficiaries	Case Studies	**4**	**-**
Beneficiaries	Key Informant Interview- In Depth Interview (IDI)	**4**	**-**
Implementing staff	In Depth Interview (IDI)	**2**	**-**

1.6 Data Collection Methods

The study adopted a qualitative research approach:



Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were the primary data collection tool, used to explore community level perceptions of programme relevance, participation, changes in water and agricultural conditions, and the functioning of community institutions. Separate FGDs were conducted with VDC members and User Groups to capture both governance and beneficiary perspectives.

In Depth Interviews were conducted with individual beneficiaries and implementing staff to gather more personal, detailed accounts of change. These helped illuminate specific livelihood pathways and the ground level realities of programme implementation.

Case Studies were developed as in depth beneficiary stories, capturing individual journeys of change and the concrete, human scale impact of the programme on specific families and their circumstances.

All data collection tools were designed in consultation with the JKPL team and translated into the local language (Gujarati) to ensure clarity and authenticity in interaction. The predominant language in the study area is Gamit; therefore, all interviews were conducted in Gamit to ensure effective communication and accurate responses from respondents.

Team Deployment: One Moderator and one Note taker were deployed for the data collection. STAR Foundation's Senior Field Manager- West Zone planned field mobilization, engaged in FGDs with respondents, and ensured high quality data within the ethical protocols.

Data collection took place from 19th May to 22nd May 2026.

1.7 Training of Field Teams

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, the team underwent a comprehensive training conducted by STAR Foundation's Senior Field Manager on 18th May 2026 Songadh. The training focused on familiarizing the field teams with the study objectives, research tools, sampling procedures, interview techniques, and field protocols. Special emphasis was placed on ensuring that the team clearly understood the intent of each questionnaire section and were able to interact with respondents in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner. Mock interviews were also conducted to

strengthen the team's preparedness for data collection.

1.8 Ethical Considerations and Data Quality Assurance

Ethical principles were adhered to throughout the study process to ensure the dignity, privacy, and voluntary participation of all respondents. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to each interaction, and consent was also sought before any audio recording. Participants were clearly informed of the study's purpose, their right to refuse participation, and their right to withdraw at any point without consequence. The confidentiality of individual responses was maintained throughout, and no personally identifiable information was included in the analysis or reporting. Field teams were briefed on these principles and were expected to conduct all interactions with sensitivity, respect, and without any form of pressure or coercion.

To maintain high standards of data quality, a two tier quality assurance mechanism was implemented by STAR Foundation. Field level monitoring was carried out by the Field Manager through regular supervision, spot checks, and verification of completed interviews, while the research team provided continuous remote oversight to review data consistency, completeness, and adherence to study protocols across all study villages.

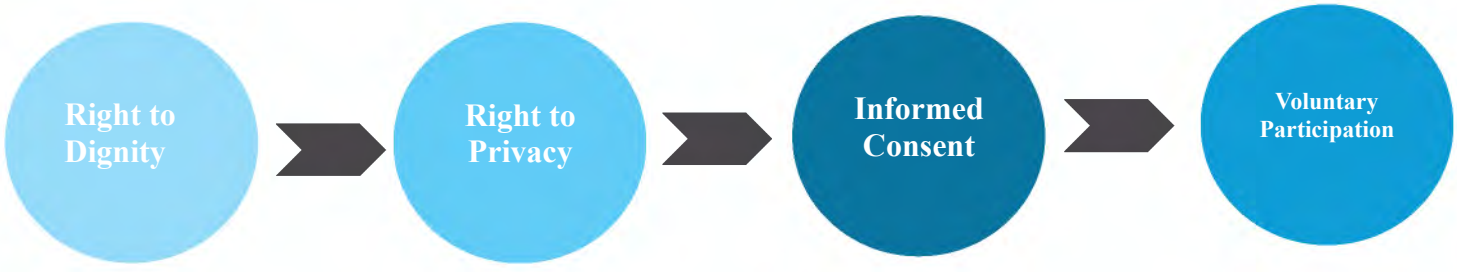
1.9 Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected through FGDs, IDIs, case studies, and KIIs was analysed thematically, in alignment with the study's objectives and evaluation framework. Field notes and recordings were reviewed and coded against key thematic areas, including water availability, agricultural change, livelihood improvement, institutional functioning, gender inclusion, and sustainability. Patterns, consistencies, and divergences across intervention and control communities were identified and analysed to generate the findings presented in subsequent chapters.

1.10 About the Report

The report consists of the following chapters:

- **Chapter 2- Key Findings:** Thematic analysis across all major areas of programme intervention.
- **Chapter 3- Comparison Between Intervention and Control Groups:** Comparative analysis between intervention and control groups.
- **Chapter 4- Case Studies:** In depth beneficiary stories illustrating pathways of change.
- **Chapter 5- Conclusion and Recommendations:** Overall assessment of programme relevance, effectiveness, impact, and actionable guidance for programme strengthening and scale up.



2 KEY FINDINGS

This chapter presents community perspectives and field level experiences emerging from interactions with VDCs, user groups, project staff, and beneficiary households across project villages. The findings are drawn from FGDs and IDIs conducted with community members associated with watershed development and livelihood initiatives implemented.

2.1 Formation and Functioning of Village Development Committees

Across villages, the formation of Village Development Committees emerged as one of the foundational processes through which the project established community ownership and participation. VDCs were created to identify local priorities, facilitate planning discussions, mobilize villagers, and support implementation of watershed related activities.

Community members explained that the initial phase required extensive engagement and repeated meetings before villagers developed confidence in the process. In many villages, members initially struggled to understand the concept of collective planning and were uncertain about whether the interventions would genuinely benefit them.

> *"Earlier, we had to go door-to-door and explain everything. People did not understand what the group was or why meetings were being held. Slowly, after one or two works were completed, people started coming on their own."*
>
> — VDC Member

Project staff highlighted that exposure visits, PRA exercises, and regular village meetings played an important role in building trust and participation.

2.2 Beneficiary Selection and Community Prioritization

The study found that beneficiary selection processes were largely routed through VDC discussions and community consultations. Priority was generally given to households with limited landholdings, poor irrigation access, and lower economic capacity. Community members stated that local level understanding of household vulnerability helped identify families genuinely requiring support.

> *"We knew which families were genuinely struggling because we all live in the same village. The idea was to first support those who could not do the work on their own."*
>
> — VDC Member

However, the process also faced occasional tensions around expectations and inclusion. Households with relatively more resources at times contested prioritization decisions, underscoring the importance of transparent communication and participatory safeguards.

2.3 Water Scarcity and the Importance of Watershed Interventions

Water scarcity emerged as one of the most critical issues across the intervention villages. Community members consistently described irregular rainfall, declining groundwater availability, and limited irrigation access as major constraints affecting agriculture and livelihoods.

Watershed interventions included land levelling, soil bunding, gabion structures, farm ponds, lift irrigation systems, and water harvesting structures. These measures helped improve water retention and reduced soil erosion across participating villages.

Despite these gains, villagers emphasized that water insecurity persists in several hilly areas, calling for continued investment in groundwater recharge and sustained maintenance of existing structures.

Figure 1: Primary and Community Level Benefits of Interventions

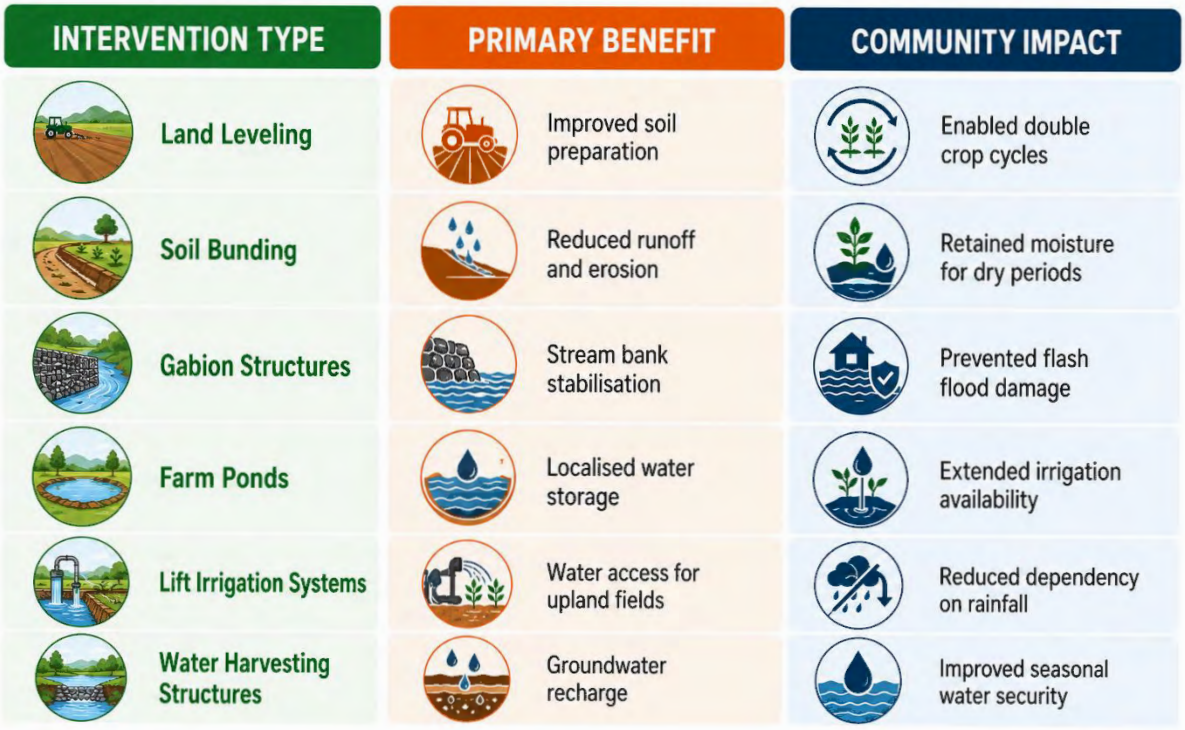


Figure 2: Awareness of Interventions among Beneficiaries

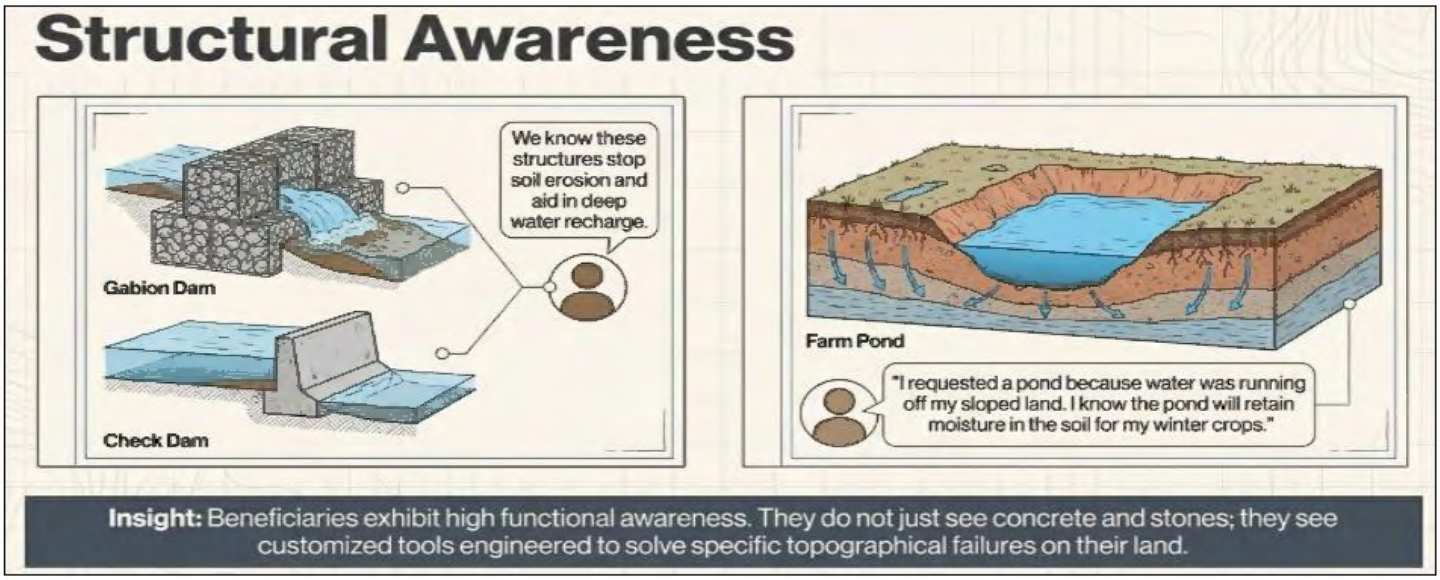


Figure 3: Financial Savings for Farmers through Interventions

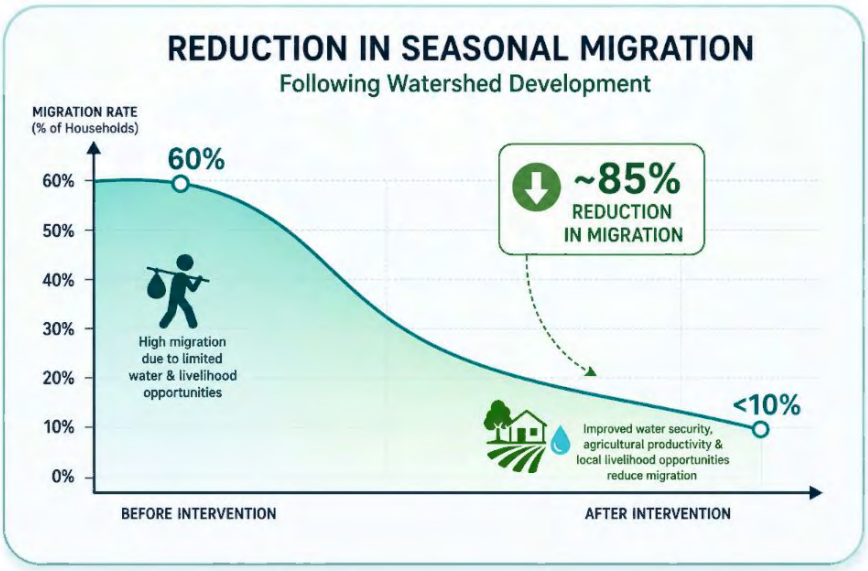


2.4 Changes in Agriculture and Livelihoods

Many farmers reported meaningful improvements in agricultural productivity and household income following support for land levelling and irrigation related works. Prior to the interventions, cultivation was highly uncertain and often insufficient even for household consumption.

PARAMETER	BEFORE INTERVENTION	AFTER INTERVENTION
WATER AVAILABILITY	Extreme scarcity, women spent 30-60 mins fetching water	Year round access, water available for 2-3 crop cycles, even in summer
AGRICULTURAL YIELD	Low yield (4-5 quintals of rice), fallow land	Yield doubled and tripled
HOUSING IMPROVEMENTS	Temporary/Kachha houses	Permanent/Pukka houses
FOOD SECURITY	Had to purchase rice and grains from market	Households grow their own rice and vegetables, self sufficient. Improved nutrition
HOUSEHOLD INCOME	Low, unstable (upto Rs 10,1000 annual)	20% to 100% income increase
ASSET ACQUISITION	No assets, only one asset per household	Individual smartphones, motorcycles, trucks

Figure 4: Reported Reduction in Seasonal Migration as a Result of Livelihood Interventions



**Reported values are based on approximate estimates provided by respondents during discussions*

Following the interventions, several households reported taking two crops instead of one and diversifying into maize, vegetables, groundnut, and pulses. Critically, agricultural improvements also helped reduce seasonal out migration, creating better livelihood opportunities within the village.

Table 3: Before and After: Livelihood Outcomes at Household Level

Indicator	Before Intervention	After Intervention
Cropping Cycles	Single crop (rainy season only)	Two crops per year
Crop Diversity	Predominantly one staple crop	Maize, vegetables, groundnut, pulses
Household Income	Insufficient for household expenses	Visible income from surplus production
Seasonal Migration	High, for labour work	Reduced due to local livelihood options
Food Security	Uncertain, often inadequate	Improved and more consistent

Figure 5: Asset Creation as a Result of Interventions

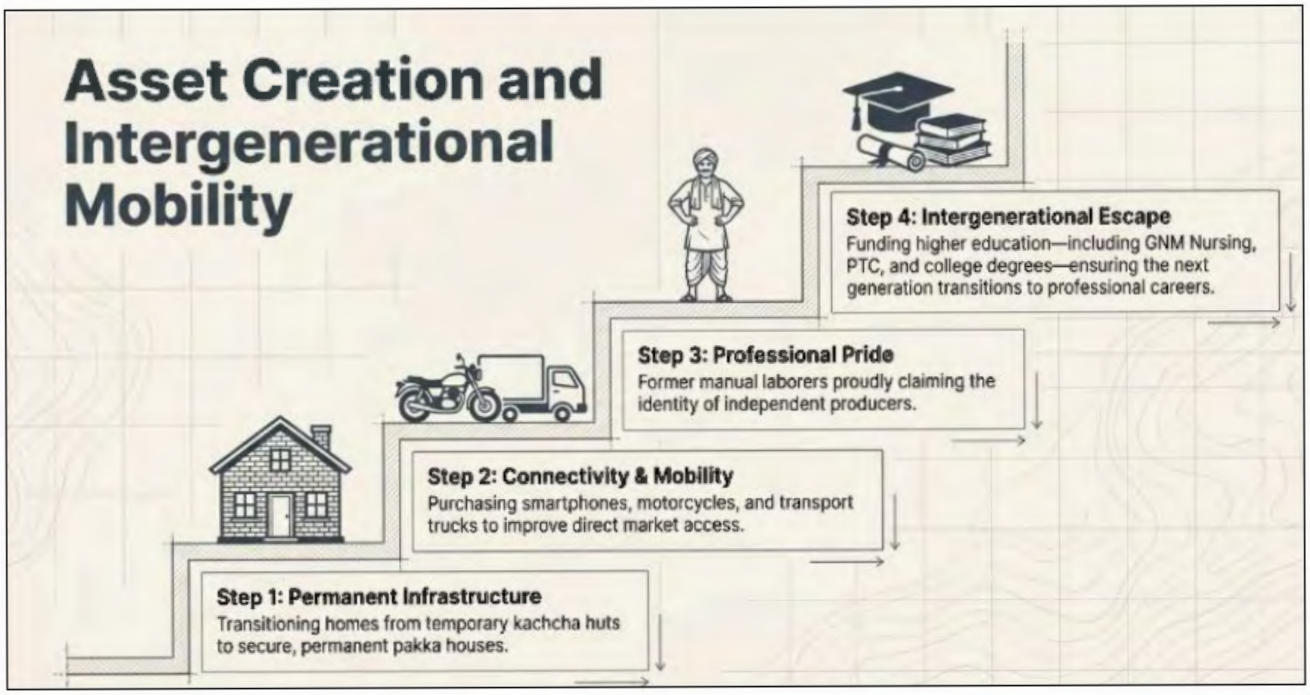
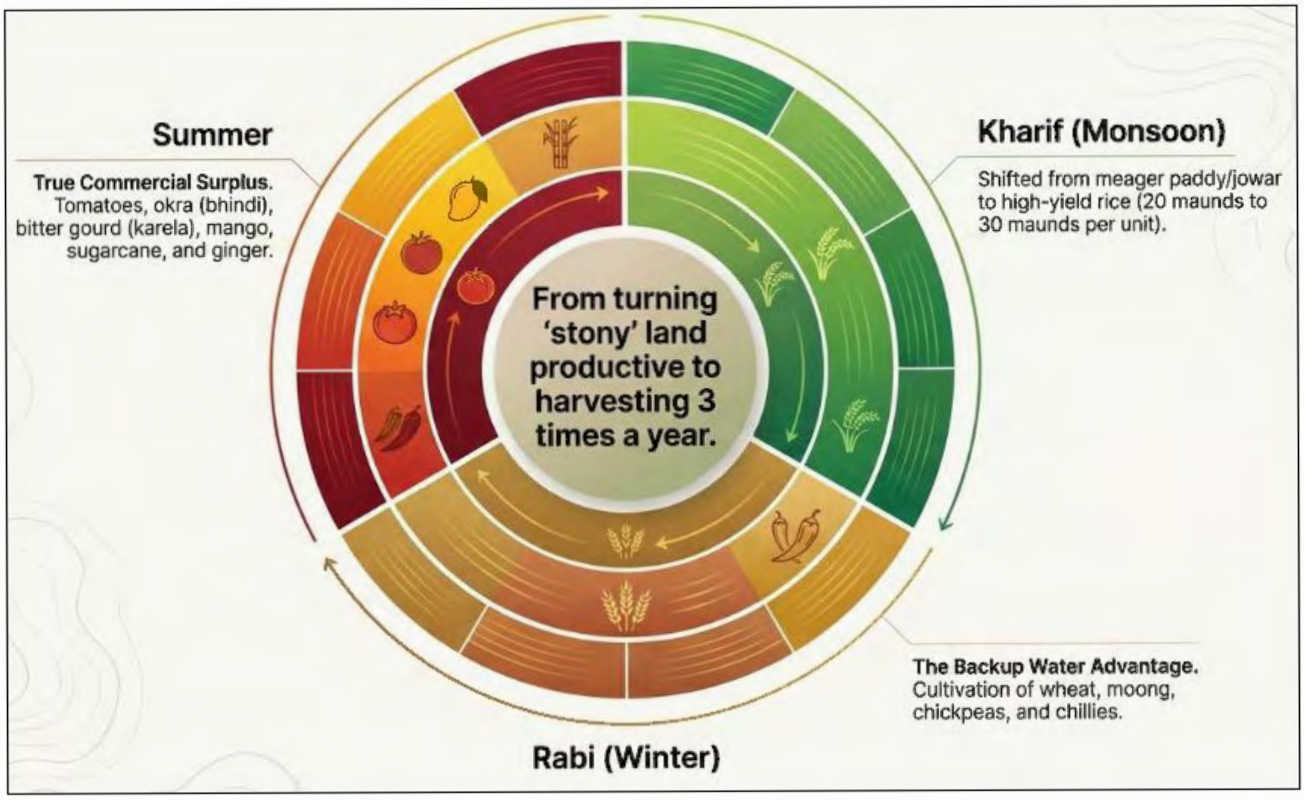
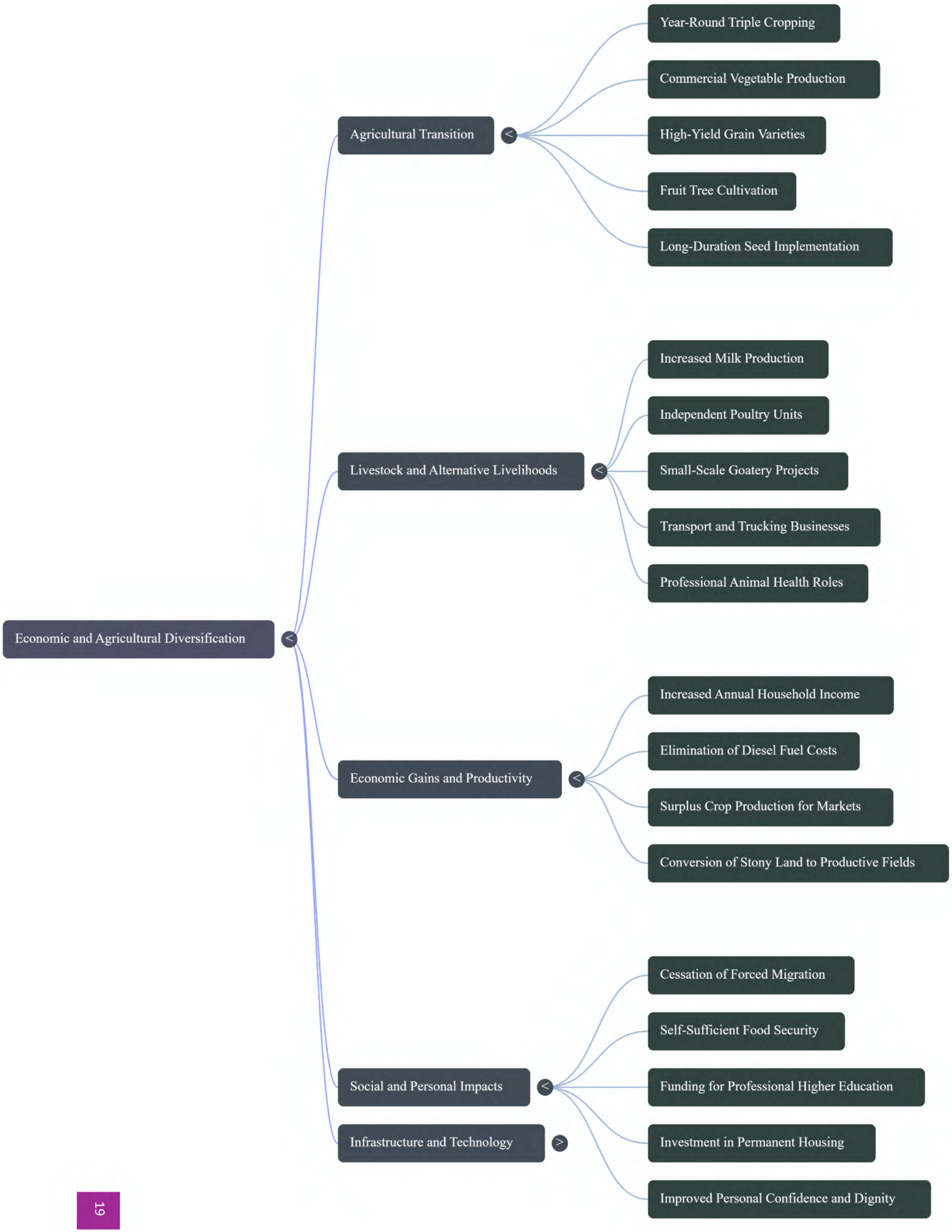
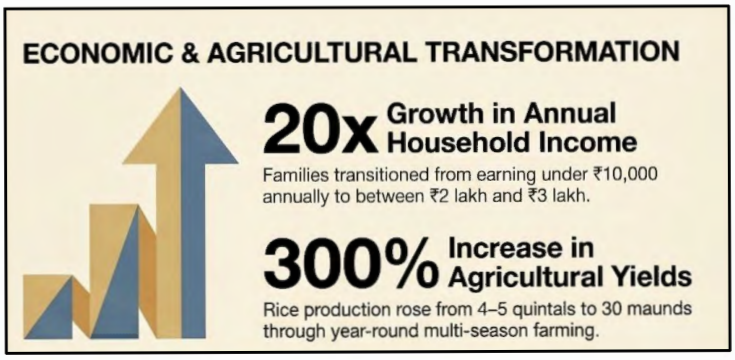
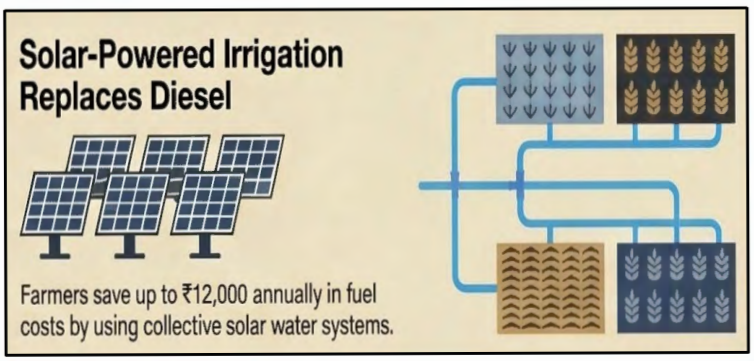


Figure 6: The Three Season Crop Wheel




Economic and Agricultural Diversification
Agricultural Transition
Year-Round Triple Cropping
Commercial Vegetable Production
High-Yield Grain Varieties
Fruit Tree Cultivation
Long-Duration Seed Implementation
Livestock and Alternative Livelihoods
Increased Milk Production
Independent Poultry Units
Small-Scale Goatery Projects
Transport and Trucking Businesses
Professional Animal Health Roles
Economic Gains and Productivity
Increased Annual Household Income
Elimination of Diesel Fuel Costs
Surplus Crop Production for Markets
Conversion of Stony Land to Productive Fields
Social and Personal Impacts
Cessation of Forced Migration
Self-Sufficient Food Security
Funding for Professional Higher Education
Investment in Permanent Housing
Improved Personal Confidence and Dignity
Infrastructure and Technology





2.5 Participation of Women

Women's participation in VDC meetings and community mobilization activities grew gradually over time. Initially, community members reported hesitation among women due to limited prior exposure and uncertainty regarding the project's scope and benefits.

Repeated meetings, group discussions, and tangible results helped improve confidence and participation. The findings suggest that community ownership deepened progressively as villagers became more directly involved in planning, implementation, and monitoring activities.

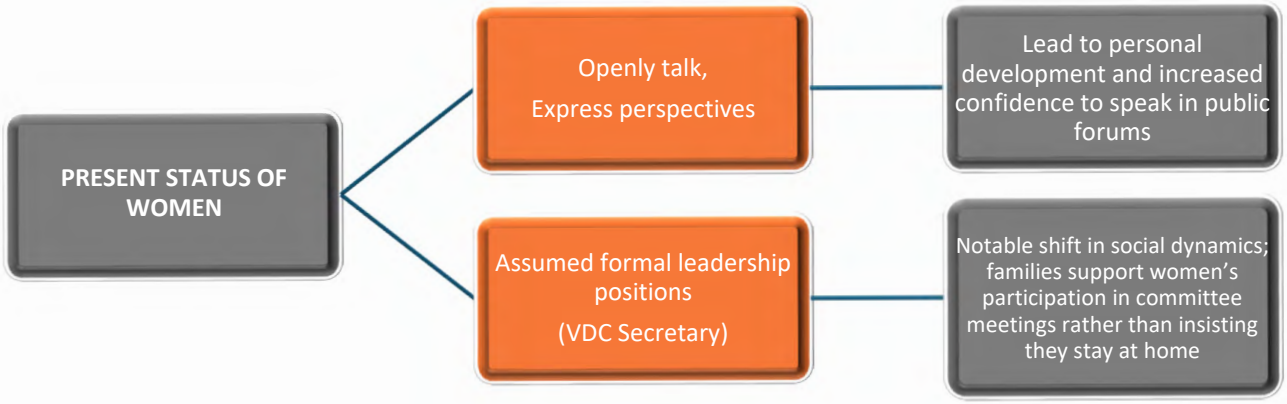


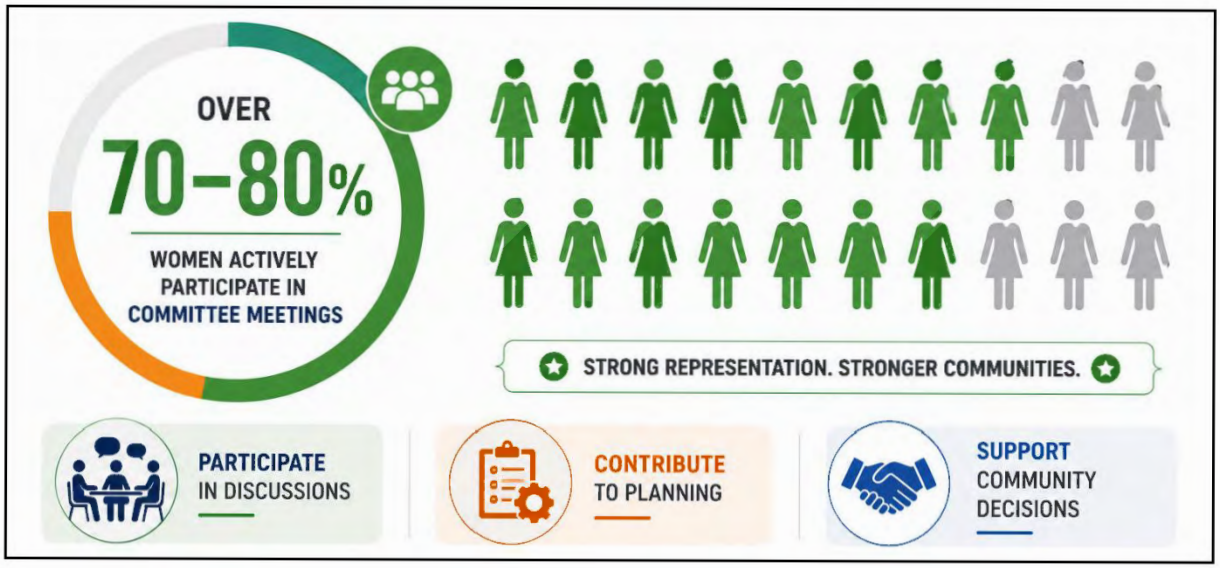
Table 4: Evolution Of Participation of Women

Indicator	Before Intervention	After Intervention
Mobility outside village	Mostly limited to household chores and nearby water/fuel collection	Regular visits to farms, markets, SHG meetings, and community events
Participation in village meetings	Rarely attended Gram Sabha or community discussions	Actively attends and contributes to village meetings and watershed discussions
Involvement in livelihood activities	Primarily unpaid household and farm support work	Engaged in income-generating activities such as goat rearing, vegetable cultivation, poultry, or farm management
Role in farming decisions	Decisions largely taken by male family members	Joint participation in crop planning, irrigation, and input purchases
Membership in groups	Limited involvement in organized groups	Increased participation in SHGs, producer groups, and community institutions
Access to markets	Dependent on male family members for market interactions	Independently participates in selling produce and purchasing inputs
Financial decision-making	Limited say in household expenditure	Greater involvement in savings, investments, and household budgeting
Confidence in public interactions	Hesitant to speak in public forums	More confident in interacting with officials, extension workers, and community leaders

Access to training and awareness programmes	Low participation due to time and mobility constraints	Regular attendance in capacity-building and livelihood training programmes
Leadership roles	Few women held community responsibilities	Women increasingly taking leadership roles in SHGs, watershed committees, and village groups

Figure 7: Reported Participation of Women in Committee Meetings and Decision Making

**Reported values are based on approximate estimates provided by respondents during discussions*




Role and Status of Women
Decision Making & Leadership
Collective community consensus
Mixed Committee Representation
Gaysawar VDC: 11 men, 5 women
Junibavali VDC: 5 men, 4 women
Active voice and equal perspectives
Formal Specialized Roles
VDC Secretary
Pashu Sakhi (Animal Health Worker)
Personal & Social Advancement
Personal development (Apna Vikas)
Increased public speaking confidence
Shift to family-supported participation
Economic Empowerment
Priority Livelihood Targeting
Widows
Divorced women
Income Diversification
Goatery
Poultry
Dairy farming
Sustainable independent earning
Quality of Life & Wellbeing
Reduced Physical Burden
Eliminated 30-60 minute water trips
Ended 5:00 AM water fetching tasks
Priority for project assistance

The Upward Spiral of Women's Empowerment

Formal Leadership Stage 4

Transitioning into specialized, recognized **community roles** such as **VDC Secretary** and **Pashu Sakhi** (Animal Health Worker).

Social Voice Stage 3

Families actively support VDC participation. **Women** report **increased personal development** and **equal footing** in **expressing perspectives**.

Stage 2 Economic Independence

Prioritized **livelihood** interventions (goatery/ poultry) provide **sustainable, independent earning sources**, especially for widows.

Stage 1 Reduced Physical Burden

Infrastructure eliminates the grueling 5:00 AM, 30–60 minute water retrieval trips, reclaiming **hours of daily time**.

2.6 Participation and Status of Landless Households

Current Status of the Landless

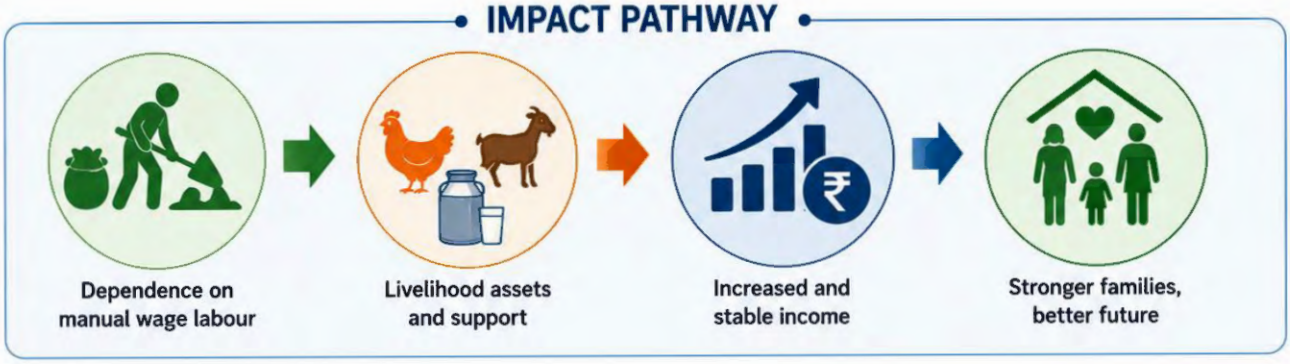
Because landless individuals cannot benefit from soil and water conservation on their own property, they are the primary focus of the livelihood component of the program.

- **Alternative Income Streams:** They are supported through poultry, goatery, and dairy activities. For example, landless farmers have specifically been provided with poultry units to ensure they have a source of income.
- **Livestock Provision:** In some cases, landless women from the Kotwalia community have been provided with livestock to ensure they have an independent means of livelihood.
- **Economic Stability:** These interventions aim to move landless families away from a total reliance on unpredictable manual wage labor toward more structured and sustainable earnings.

PROCESS CHANGE/IMPACT FOR LANDLESS HOUSEHOLDS



Figure 8: Impact Pathway for the Landless




Livelihood and Integration of Landless People
Identification and Priority Selection
Targeting Vulnerable Tribal Groups
Focus on Widows and Low Income Households
Door-to-Door Socio-Economic Verification
Explicit Priority in Livelihood Schemes
Decision-Making and Representation
Participation in Village Development Committees
Involvement in Annual Action Plan Discussions
Representation for Every Hamlet
Voice in Selecting Non-Land Interventions
Specific Livelihood Interventions
Poultry Unit Provisions
Goatery and Dairy Activities
Livestock for Independent Earnings
Targeted Support for Landless Women
Positive Impacts and Current Status
Creation of Independent Income Streams
Shift to Structured Sustainable Earnings
Reduced Reliance on Manual Wage Labor
Integration into Community Frameworks
Improved Economic Stability

Figure 9: Reported Satisfaction of Beneficiaries



**Reported values are based on approximate estimates provided by respondents during discussions*

Reclaiming Previously Unproductive Land for Agriculture

- Farmers reported that land once considered stony and unsuitable for cultivation is now being used for productive agriculture and commercial cropping.
- Beneficiaries highlighted that previously fallow or underutilized land has been brought under cultivation, increasing the area available for farming and crop production.
- They noted that reliable water availability has enabled cultivation beyond the monsoon season, allowing formerly unproductive land to support two to three crop cycles annually.
- Several farmers stated that reclaimed land is now being used for high value crops such as tomatoes, okra, ginger, and mangoes, generating significantly higher returns than traditional farming.
- Beneficiaries described a visible transformation from uneven, erosion prone plots to organized and productive agricultural fields capable of supporting year round livelihoods.
- Farmers reported that land which earlier produced little or no output is now contributing to household income, food security, and surplus production.

2.6 Perspectives of Implementing Staff

Implementing staff emphasized that the watershed programme was designed through a participatory planning process rooted in detailed village level assessments, DPRs, and community consultations.

According to project personnel, water scarcity, land degradation, soil erosion, and limited livelihood opportunities emerged as the most pressing concerns across the project villages. The interventions were therefore designed to address both natural resource management and livelihood enhancement simultaneously. Staff highlighted that VDCs were established as key institutional mechanisms to ensure community participation, transparency in beneficiary selection, and local ownership of interventions. Considerable effort was invested in mobilizing communities, conducting village meetings, and building trust before implementation activities commenced.

> *"Initially, people were hesitant and wanted to know whether the programme would really benefit them. Once one or two activities were completed and visible results emerged, trust increased and people started approaching us themselves."*
>
> —Implementing Staff

Project staff further noted that community acceptance evolved gradually over time. In the initial stages, many villagers were uncertain about the programme objectives and skeptical about the benefits. However, visible results from activities such as land levelling, gabion structures, well repairs, and agricultural support helped build confidence among communities. Staff members observed that the participatory approach enabled communities to identify their own priorities and encouraged greater accountability in maintaining assets created under the programme. They also acknowledged that challenges such as local politics, meeting beneficiary expectations, difficult terrain, and persistent water scarcity in certain locations required continuous engagement and adaptive implementation strategies. Despite these challenges, staff expressed satisfaction that the programme had strengthened local institutions and improved community awareness regarding sustainable water and land management practices.

> *"The biggest achievement was not only the structures we created, but the fact that villagers started discussing their development needs collectively and taking ownership of the process."*
>
> —Implementing Staff

2.7 Key Challenges

While the interventions created visible improvements, communities and project staff also highlighted several implementation challenges. These included local political influences on beneficiary selection, disagreements within households and across village factions, uneven water availability in hilly terrain, and longer term sustainability concerns related to groundwater recharge.

Project staff also noted that building trust within villages required considerable time and repeated engagement before communities were willing to actively participate in planning and decision making.

Despite these constraints, most participants acknowledged that the interventions had contributed positively towards improving agricultural opportunities, strengthening village level institutions, and enhancing awareness regarding water conservation.

3 COMPARISON BETWEEN INTERVENTION AND CONTROL GROUPS

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of intervention and control villages, drawing on FGDs with VDC interactions and beneficiary interviews conducted during the study. The comparison examines differences in water access, agricultural productivity, livelihood opportunities, institutional participation, and community perceptions between villages covered under watershed and livelihood interventions and those without similar support.

3.1 Community Institutions and Participation

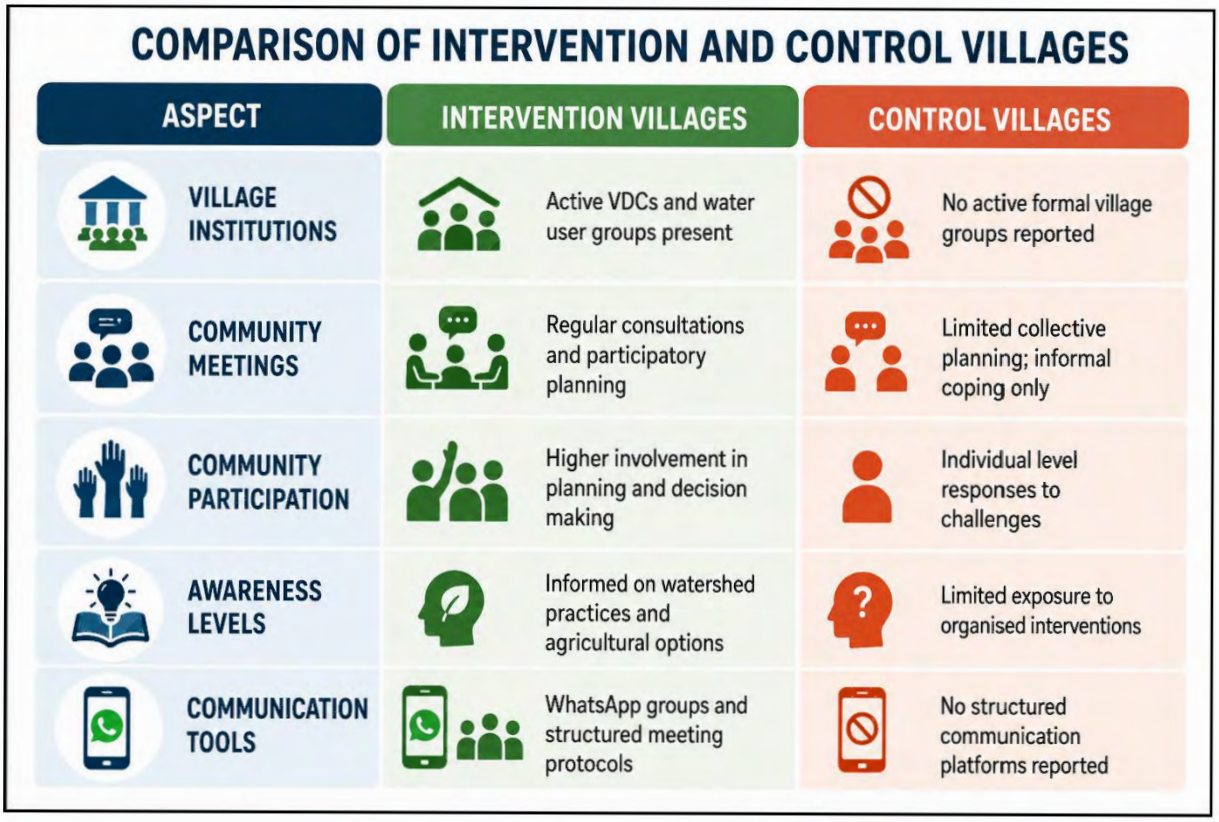
A significant distinction between intervention and control villages was the presence of active village level institutions such as Village Development Committees and water user groups. In intervention villages, communities reported regular meetings, collective discussions on village priorities, and meaningful participation in planning and implementation processes.

Project teams initially conducted repeated meetings and awareness sessions before villagers developed confidence in the process. Communities in Junibavli and Gaysawar described how VDCs evolved into effective platforms for discussing land levelling, water conservation structures, beneficiary selection, and agricultural support, a development that fundamentally shifted how decisions were made at the village level. VDC members also highlighted that WhatsApp groups and regular check in meetings significantly improved communication and sustained participation within communities over time.

In contrast, participants from control villages reported the near complete absence of structured village institutions and very limited exposure to collective planning processes. No formal village development committee or water group existed in their villages, leaving development planning fragmented and largely informal.

> *"We know that in some villages there are committees and groups working on water and farming, but in our village there is no such group."*
>
> **— Participant, Control Village FGD**

Figure 10: Comparison of Intervention *vs* Control Villages



3.2 Water Availability and Agricultural Outcomes

Water scarcity emerged as a critical constraint across both intervention and control villages. However, intervention villages reported relatively stronger outcomes due to watershed activities including gabion structures, land levelling, soil bunding, and water harvesting interventions. These works improved soil moisture retention, reduced surface runoff, and extended irrigation availability across cropping seasons.

Beneficiary farmers explained that prior to the project, agriculture was almost entirely dependent on monsoon rainfall, and many households were forced to migrate during dry periods. Following the watershed interventions, households reported meaningful improvements in farming conditions, crop diversity, and household income. Intervention villages also reported significant crop diversification into maize, onion, chickpea, vegetables, and fodder crops alongside increased paddy cultivation.

Control villages, by contrast, continued to report heavy dependence on rainfall, inadequate irrigation infrastructure, and limited cropping intensity. Most respondents cultivated only one major monsoon crop, predominantly paddy, followed by periods of wage labour or out migration.

> *"We only grow rice during the rainy season. After that, there is very little work."*
>
> **— Respondent, Control Village**



Table 5: Agricultural Outcomes- Intervention *vs* Control

Indicator	Intervention Villages	Control Villages
Cropping Cycles	Two or more crops per year	Single monsoon crop (mainly paddy)
Crop Diversity	Maize, onion, chickpea, vegetables, fodder crops	Primarily paddy; very limited diversification
Irrigation Access	Improved through gabions, lift irrigation, ponds	Dependent on rainfall; no structured facilities
Soil Health	Improved through bunding and land levelling	Ongoing erosion and runoff challenges
Annual Farm Income	Increased to approx. ₹1-2 lakh post intervention	Remained at ₹20,000-30,000 or below
Post Harvest Period	Reduced migration due to local livelihood options	Wage labour and migration for survival

DIVERSIFICATION OF CROPS (INTERVENTION)

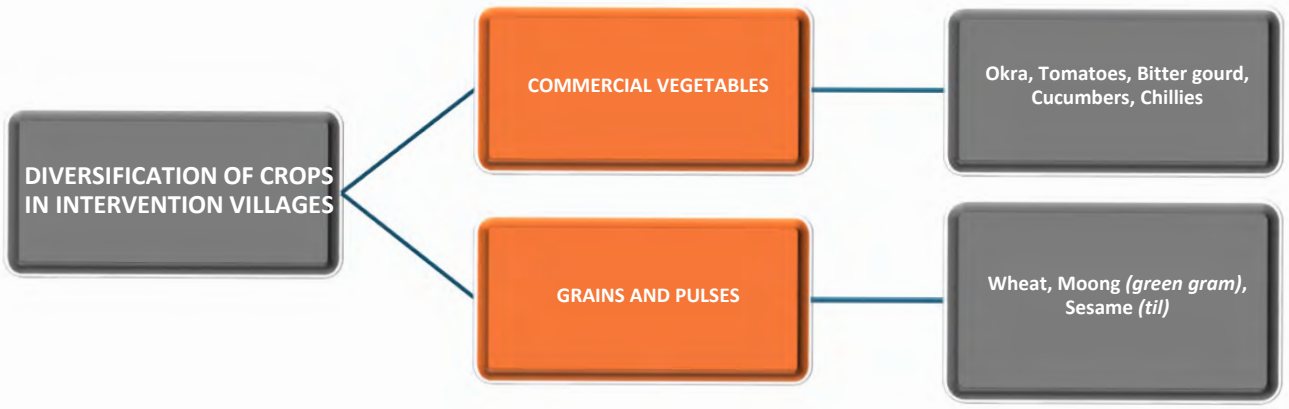


Table 6: Livelihoods and Household Well Being-Intervention *vs* Control

Dimension	Intervention Villages	Control Villages
Household Income	Visible improvement; farming surplus reported	Insufficient; heavy reliance on wage labour
Food Security	Improved and more consistent year round	Uncertain; often inadequate during lean seasons
Seasonal Migration	Reduced due to local livelihood opportunities	High; migration essential for survival
Livestock & Assets	Goat rearing and livestock support improving incomes	Limited asset base; no structured support
Children's Education	Improvements noted with increased household income	Constrained by financial pressure on families
Housing Conditions	Some households report improvements	Largely unchanged; no additional income for investment
Farmer Confidence	Shift towards farming as a primary livelihood	Low confidence in agriculture as reliable income



4 CASE STUDIES

4.1 Case Study I

Block: Songadh
Intervention: Gabion Stricture

2.5 acres	₹20–30K	₹2 lakh	6 members
Farm size	Income before	Income after	Household size

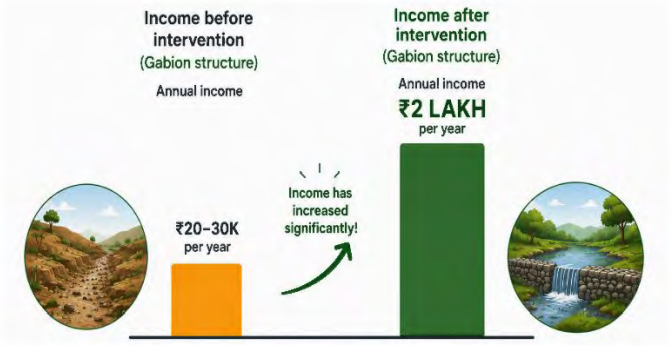
Profile

Beneficiary is a farmer in Anandpur village, Songadh Block. He is 50 years old and lives with five other members : his son, daughter, son-in-law, and other family members, all sharing a single roof. Of the family's seven acres jointly held across three brothers, his share is two and a half acres. Farming is the household's primary occupation, though several members also supplement income through daily agricultural labour.

Life Before Intervention

Before the gabion structure was built, agriculture was at the mercy of the monsoon. The farm was flanked on both sides by open channels, and every heavy rainfall would send water rushing through the middle of his fields, carrying topsoil, seeds, and any hope of a productive harvest along with it. Year after year, erosion stripped the land of its fertility. Crops either drowned or washed away.

The household income in those years hovered between ₹20,000 and ₹30,000 annually, a number that, spread across six people, left almost nothing after food and the most basic necessities. Four people in the family regularly went out for daily wage labour, walking to work for ₹200 a day on whatever fields would have them. The house itself reflected their circumstances, a mud structure with a leaking roof, where even rains that should have been a blessing brought flooding and anxiety.



Intervention

The construction of a gabion structure on his land fundamentally changed the relationship between his farm and the water that flows through it. The structure prevented soil erosion, stabilised the land on both the sides, and helped retain moisture in the soil for longer periods after the rains. What had been a liability, water, was converted into a resource.

The results were quick. He now grows maize, onions, and fodder across two harvesting cycles each year, one in the monsoon season and one post monsoon. His fodder crop alone was valued at ₹60,000-₹70,000 in the first year and has since grown to ₹80,000-₹90,000. Maize brings in another ₹40,000, and onions contribute roughly ₹50,000. The household's total gross income from farming has risen to approximately ₹2,00,000 per year, a six to eight fold increase from earlier years. After accounting for input costs of around ₹50,000, the net income to the family is meaningful and stable in a way it never was before.

The family also now keeps two buffaloes, from which they draw five to six litres of milk per milking at ₹30-35 per litre, contributing an additional ₹1,20,000

annually. This diversification into dairy has added both income and food security to the household.

4.2 Case Study II

Block: Uchhal
Intervention: Goat Rearing Unit

51 years	₹2,000/mo	₹11,000/mo	4 goats → 9
Age	Labour income before	Income after (combined)	Goat herd growth

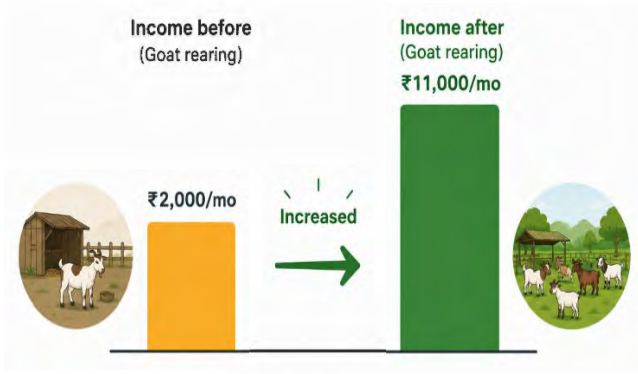
Profile

Beneficiary is 51 years old and competed 10th grade, one of the more formally educated members of his village community. His household comprises himself, his wife, and two daughters, one of whom is currently pursuing her 12th grade in science. His two sons are employed in a company and live elsewhere. He is the primary earner for the family unit at home.

Life Before Intervention

Beneficiary does not own agricultural land in his own name, the land his family cultivates is registered on his mother's name, and it only produces a rain fed rice crop during the monsoon, yielding roughly fifty quintals of rice that is kept entirely for household consumption. For cash income, he has spent the past fifteen years working as a night security guard at a local farm, earning ₹8,000 per month.

Before being selected for the livestock livelihood programme, his supplementary income came from daily wage labour in the village, and work was not guaranteed. In a productive month, he could find ten to twelve days of work at ₹200 per day, amounting to no more than ₹2,000. Running the four member household with ₹8,000-₹10,000 a month, with a daughter in senior secondary school and no farming income to speak of, left the family chronically short.



Intervention

Through the watershed programme's livestock livelihood component, he was identified as a vulnerable household and supported with a goat rearing unit. He was provided four goats on a loan linked basis, a two year repayment arrangement with a monthly deduction of ₹2,500, amounting to a total repayment of ₹24,000 over two years.

Since receiving the goats, the herd has grown from four to nine, a natural increase that demonstrates both the health of the animals and his care in managing them. He takes the goats to graze in nearby forest areas daily. The milk from the goats is not sold commercially but used to supplement nutrition for his children at home. The income from the goat unit, net of loan repayment, currently adds roughly ₹3,000-₹4,000 per month to the household.

Once the two year loan is fully repaid, which is now less than a year away, the net monthly income from the goats will rise to approximately ₹5,000-₹6,000. His combined income will then comfortably cross ₹13,000-₹14,000 per month, a meaningful improvement from the roughly ₹10,000 he was managing before.

4.3 Case Study III

Block: Songadh
Intervention: Land Levelling

39 years	₹5–6K/mo	Doubled	20 gunthas
Age	Income before	Farm income after	Land levelled

Profile

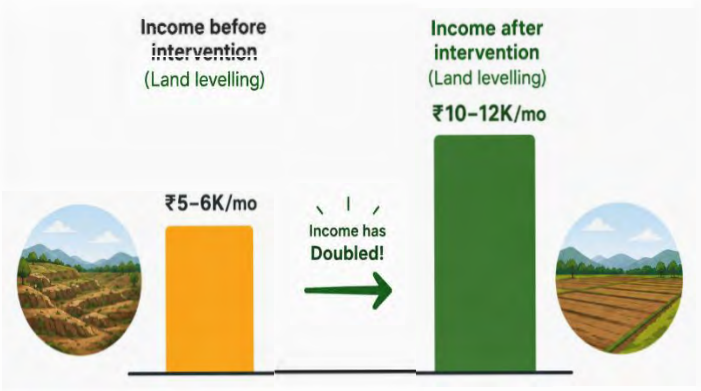
Beneficiary is 39 years old, and completed 12th grade and is the sole breadwinner for a family that includes his mother, a disabled brother (injured in an accident), his wife, and two children. It is a household that has known hardship not as an occasional visitor but as a constant companion.

Life Before Intervention

His entry into working life was through catering, a trade he learned under someone else, earning whatever was given at the end of a long day. His monthly income was ₹5,000–₹6,000. In a household with a disabled member, two growing children, and a mother to support, this was never going to be enough.

His family owned some land, but it was far from productive. Heavy rainfall brought severe soil erosion, mounds had formed across the field, making it impossible to work large sections of it. Without proper land levelling, without access to quality seeds, and without reliable water, the land was more burden than asset. His grew grass on whatever patches he could manage. There was zero income from the land in any meaningful sense. Private loans, taken by his late father, added to the family's burden, a past he inherited without fully knowing its details.

Transport was another hardship. His children went to school in Songadh, and dropping them off before returning for work meant time and cost the family could barely afford. The house was mud, and remains mud today, though construction of a new structure has recently begun next door.



Intervention

Beneficiary received support through two primary pathways: improved seeds and land levelling. The land levelling, covering approximately 20 gunthas, transformed the usable area of his farm. Where mounds and uneven ground had made cultivation difficult, he now has a levelled field that retains moisture, allows for uniform planting, and is far more responsive to inputs.

The improved seeds, particularly for paddy and chickpeas, produced results that surprised even him. For the first time, he had income generated from his own land rather than from working for someone else. He now grows paddy (a portion kept for home consumption and a portion sold), chickpeas, maize cultivated as fodder, and has planted five mango trees on part of the holding. The gross income from crop sales has approximately doubled, from a range of ₹10,000-₹20,000 in previous years to roughly ₹35,000-₹40,000 in net realisable value this season. He no longer needs to borrow to meet household expenses.

He left the catering work after getting into farming more seriously, a decision that reflects a significant shift in confidence and economic possibility. He now has a motorcycle, a regular source of farm produce, and plans to extend the boundary wall around his holding to consolidate his land.

4.4 Case Study IV

Block: Ucchal
Intervention: Bori Bandh

Daily labour Primary income before	Own farming Primary income now	₹1 lakh+ Estimated annual income	Nil Current loan burden

Profile

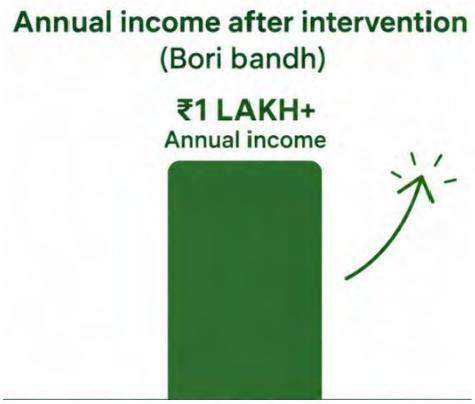
Beneficiary is a farmer from an intervention village in Uchhal Block. His story is characteristic of a group of beneficiaries whose challenge was not the absence of land but the absence of the right conditions to make that land productive. He is the primary earner in a household that includes his wife and children. Before the programme, farming was something he did alongside daily wage labour, because neither alone was sufficient.

Life Before Intervention

His land was not without potential; it was simply unmanageable. Uneven terrain, with pronounced mounds and low lying patches, meant that rainfall either ran off or pooled unevenly. Soil erosion was a recurring problem, and without reliable irrigation or moisture retention, he could not confidently plan a second crop or invest in higher value cultivation. His income from farming was low, in the range of ₹20,000-₹30,000 per year. He supplemented this with daily agricultural wage work, going out for labour most months and earning roughly ₹200 per day. There were no loans from formal banks, but the financial pressure was constant.

Intervention

The programme supported him through a combination of structural and agronomic interventions. A bori bandh and associated water conservation work was established on his land, which improved the retention of rainwater in the soil and reduced runoff significantly. Land levelling was also carried out, creating a more uniform planting surface and enabling him to bring previously underused sections of the field into active cultivation.



The impact was direct and measurable. His field now supports two cropping cycles: a monsoon crop and a second post-monsoon crop, which was not possible before. He has diversified into maize, chickpeas, and fodder grass, generating income across different months of the year. The gross annual farm income has risen substantially to over ₹1,00,000, and his dependence on daily wage labour has dropped considerably. He still goes out for labour occasionally, but it is no longer the financial backbone of the household.

There is a visible change in how he talks about farming. The tone is not that of someone managing scarcity but of someone making plans. He speaks of what he will plant next season, what he is considering expanding, and how the additional water retention has made his land respond better to the inputs he puts in. His household has not taken a new loan. And for the first time, the farm is generating enough surplus to build a small financial reserve.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

- The qualitative assessment conducted across intervention and control villages indicates that the watershed and livelihood interventions have contributed positively towards strengthening agriculture based livelihoods, improving community participation, and enhancing awareness regarding water conservation and natural resource management.

- In intervention villages, beneficiaries reported visible improvements in agricultural productivity following activities such as land levelling, gabion structures, soil bunding, and water conservation works. Many households explained that prior to the interventions, farming was highly uncertain and limited largely to monsoon cultivation. The interventions enabled several families to diversify crops, improve soil retention, and reduce dependence on seasonal wage labour.

- Community members also highlighted that the formation of VDCs and water user groups helped create spaces for collective planning, discussion, and village level decision making. The participatory approach adopted during implementation helped strengthen trust and ownership among communities over time.

- At the same time, the findings also suggest that major structural challenges continue to persist. Water scarcity remains a critical issue in several remote and hilly villages, particularly during summer months. Limited irrigation access, groundwater depletion, market related challenges, and dependence on rainfall continue to affect agricultural sustainability. Seasonal migration for labour also remains common among economically vulnerable households.

- The comparison with control villages further demonstrated that intervention villages had relatively stronger institutional participation, better awareness regarding watershed practices, and improved livelihood opportunities. In contrast, control villages continued to report limited access to organized village institutions, lower agricultural productivity, and greater dependence on wage labour.

- Overall, the interventions have laid an important foundation for improving livelihood resilience and promoting community based resource management. However, sustained support, continued community engagement, and long term investment in water conservation and livelihood strengthening remain essential for ensuring durable impact.

Recommendations

Based on the findings emerging from FGDs, VDC discussions, beneficiary interviews, and stakeholder consultations, the following recommendations are proposed for strengthening future interventions:

1.Water Infrastructure and Management

- **Expansion of Distribution Systems:** To reach distant fields, there is a strong recommendation for installing irrigation pipelines and a specific request to build a pipeline to bring water from nearby dams.
- **Water Storage and Recharge:** Implementing water storage structures is recommended to solve water pressure issues caused by long pipelines and to allow more community members to benefit. Additionally, further work on water recharge is needed to ensure borewells and ponds do not dry up during the off season.
- **Large Scale Irrigation:** Residents suggested a larger project to lift water from the Tapi River to benefit multiple villages simultaneously.

2. Agricultural Enhancements

- **Input Accessibility:** Farmers recommend improving the availability and quantity of Urea fertilizer, which is currently difficult to obtain.
- **Protective Infrastructure:** Building bunds around leveled fields is necessary to prevent remaining soil erosion. For high value crops, there is a need for tent infrastructure to grow creeper vegetables like bitter gourd.

3. Capacity Building and Training

- **Intensive Technical Training:** Villagers and staff alike emphasize the need for professional training on agricultural techniques, such as where and how to plant various crops to maximize results.
- **Livelihood Diversification:** Training should focus on growing "creeper vegetables" using mandwa systems and learning how to cultivate multiple crops per year (Rabi and Summer seasons).
- **Governance and Communication:** There is a recommendation to improve farmers' knowledge of governance and to develop communication skills within the community.

4.Institutional and Social Recommendations

- **Government Linkages and Convergence:** Future designs should prioritize convergence with government schemes, such as using MGNREGA for the desilting and maintenance of check dams and training VDCs to access the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP)
- **Holistic Development Model:** Implementing staff suggest moving toward a "holistic rural development" model that includes better market linkages to ensure farmers receive the best rates for their commercial crops.

The experiences shared by communities demonstrate that participatory watershed development can create meaningful improvements in rural livelihoods when combined with strong community engagement and locally relevant planning. The positive changes reported by beneficiaries also underline the importance of sustained institutional support, technical guidance, and community ownership for ensuring long term sustainability of development outcomes.

ANNEXURE: PHOTOGRAPHS


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Bavli, Gujarat, India
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Bavli, Gujarat, India
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Bavli, Gujarat, India
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Gaisavar, Gujarat, India
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DETAILED ANALYSIS REPORT ON

ASSESSMENT OF BYST PROJECT PERFORMANCE IN RAYAGADA DISTRICT

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Executive Summary

This impact assessment was undertaken to independently evaluate the outcomes and effectiveness of the Entrepreneurship Development Programme implemented by **BharatiyaYuva Shakti Trust (BYST)** in partnership with **Sparsh Social Foundation** across the selected project areas. The primary objective of the assessment was to determine the extent to which BYST's interventions contributed to enterprise establishment, business sustainability, financial growth, employment generation, and the overall socio-economic development of beneficiary entrepreneurs.

The assessment adopted a mixed-method approach comprising structured beneficiary interviews, interactions with BYST project personnel and mentors, physical verification of enterprises. Information was collected from sampled entrepreneurs to understand the nature of support received, including entrepreneurship awareness, training, mentoring, business counselling, documentation support, loan facilitation, market linkage assistance, and post-establishment handholding.

The study assessed changes in enterprise performance, investment levels, business turnover, profitability, employment generation, household income, asset creation, financial inclusion, business sustainability, and improvements in the overall socio-economic status of beneficiary families. In addition, the assessment examined the effectiveness of BYST's mentoring ecosystem, the extent of institutional support received by entrepreneurs, and the challenges encountered during enterprise establishment and business growth.

The findings presented in this report are based on evidence gathered through field verification, beneficiary interactions, documentary review, and observations made during the assessment. Wherever differences were observed between programme records and beneficiary responses, such differences have been objectively documented based on the evidence available during the course of the study.

Introduction

In rural and tribal areas of India, where opportunities for formal employment are limited and agriculture remains highly dependent on seasonal conditions, small businesses in the trading, service, manufacturing, and allied sectors provide a sustainable source of income and livelihood for local communities.

Financial support, when combined with entrepreneurship development services, plays a crucial role in enabling micro-enterprises to establish and expand their operations. Access to adequate capital allows entrepreneurs to purchase machinery, acquire inventory, improve infrastructure, adopt new technologies, strengthen working capital, and improve the quality of products and services. At the same time, business mentoring, project planning, capacity building, financial counselling, market linkage, and post-establishment guidance help entrepreneurs manage risks, improve operational efficiency, comply with statutory requirements, and respond to changing

market conditions.

In tribal-dominated districts, where most enterprises are engaged in small-scale trading, retail businesses, repair services, transport, food processing, tailoring, mobile servicing, electrical works, hospitality, handicrafts, livestock-based activities, and other service-oriented occupations, even modest financial and technical support can significantly enhance business sustainability. Improved access to finance and professional guidance enables entrepreneurs to increase sales, diversify products and services, improve profitability, generate additional employment, and build resilience against economic uncertainties.

Study Objectives

Recognising these challenges and opportunities, BharatiyaYuva Shakti Trust (BYST), in partnership with Sparsh Social Foundation, has implemented an Entrepreneurship Development Programme aimed at promoting sustainable self-employment through entrepreneurship awareness, business mentoring, enterprise development support, loan facilitation, capacity building, and continuous handholding. Rather than focusing solely on financial assistance, the programme seeks to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem by helping aspiring entrepreneurs develop viable businesses and improve their long-term economic prospects.

This impact assessment has been undertaken to independently evaluate the extent to which the programme has contributed to enterprise establishment, business sustainability, financial growth, employment generation, and the socio-economic development of beneficiary entrepreneurs. The assessment also examines the effectiveness of mentoring, business guidance, institutional support, and loan facilitation, while recognizing that business success is influenced by multiple factors, including the entrepreneur's own efforts, market conditions, family support, access to finance, and the broader economic environment.

Study Area

The study was conducted in **Rayagada District, Odisha**, a predominantly tribal district characterized by dispersed rural settlements, limited industrial development, and a high dependence on agriculture, petty trade, and small service-based enterprises for livelihoods. The district is home to a significant tribal population, where entrepreneurship has emerged as an important pathway for income generation, self-employment, and socio-economic development.

The impact assessment covered four intervention areas where the Entrepreneurship Development Programme was implemented by Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust (BYST) in partnership with Sparsh Social Foundation. These intervention areas were selected to represent different categories of enterprises and varying socio-economic conditions within the project area.

The selected intervention areas comprise entrepreneurs engaged in diverse economic activities, including retail trading, grocery shops, tailoring, food processing, electrical and mechanical repair services, mobile servicing, transportation, hospitality, handicrafts, and other micro and small service enterprises. These enterprises constitute an important source of employment and livelihood in the district and contribute to strengthening the local rural economy.

The study sought to assess the effectiveness of BYST's entrepreneurship development interventions in promoting sustainable enterprise development, enhancing business performance, facilitating access to institutional support, generating employment, and improving the financial and socio-economic status of beneficiary entrepreneurs.

Sample Size and Sampling Approach

The impact assessment was undertaken using a **purposive stratified sampling approach**, designed to capture a broad range of entrepreneurial experiences and business outcomes rather than achieve statistical representation of the entire beneficiary population. The sampling strategy ensured that the assessment reflected the diversity of enterprises supported under the programme and enabled a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of BYST's interventions.

The beneficiary database provided by **Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust (BYST)** formed the sampling frame for the study. From the total population of **541 beneficiary entrepreneurs**, a representative sample of **80 entrepreneurs** (approximately **14.79%** of the total beneficiaries) was selected for detailed field verification.

The sample was selected to ensure adequate representation across the following parameters:

- Different **loan amount categories** (small, medium and relatively higher loan values);
- Various **business sectors**, including trading, service, manufacturing and allied activities;
- Different **geographical areas** covered under the project in Rayagada District;
- Enterprises at different **stages of business performance**, including well-performing, moderately performing and relatively under-performing units;
- Entrepreneurs with varying years of business experience and stages of enterprise development.

The findings presented in this report are based on field verification of the selected sample and provide indicative evidence regarding the overall outcomes of the programme. The observations should be interpreted as representative of the sampled entrepreneurs and are intended to support programme learning, performance assessment, and future strategic planning, rather than serve as a statistical estimate for the entire beneficiary population.

Based on the data available, we analysed the responses from **80 entrepreneurs** to assess whether **BYST's intended intervention (loan facilitation, mentoring, meetings, post-loan support and entrepreneurship development)** was actually implemented and perceived by the beneficiaries.

Key findings

Evidence shows that the project was able to cater to the needs of communities in general by creating an enabling environment for entrepreneurship, a market place and youth focused programme. The youths were found to be now engaged in micro- enterprises which has helped not only the targeted beneficiaries but also motivated other youths in the community leading to the foundation getting requested to support them in starting an enterprise. This simply reflects effective approach of the intervention.

Survey reflects that the entrepreneurship intervention is diverse in terms of type of enterprises promoted by the foundation. The diversity gave an ample opportunity to the foundation to further their understanding about what worked and what didn't in the project context. In addition, the support provided also influenced participants' ability to understand entrepreneurship, given their continued engagement and managing the total revenue from sale (source: telephonic interview with young entrepreneurs).

Findings suggest that those who are into the enterprise, reported to be in their respective business for an average period of 5 months or more, giving an indication that the engagement and motivation by the project team had a lasting effect on the youth entrepreneurs. In addition, the engagement from the implementation side helped the youth in getting motivated and keep an interest in investing time and energy in the enterprises (Source: telephonic interview with young entrepreneur).

The study found that average total turnover for the period reported was Rs. 3,16,700/- (SD: 4,21,641.04). This reflects that the intervention could be able to make these young micro-entrepreneurs into full-fledged business owners managing huge sum of rupee in their business operations.

The average monthly turnover of an entrepreneur was Rs. 91,723.48 (SD: 115983). This reflects on an average; each entrepreneur was able to achieve a net revenue from sale of more than Rs. 3000 per day. However, the standard deviation reflects that the total turnover data has higher degree of variance, meaning there were enterprises which made high revenue from sales and at the same time there were entrepreneurs who made smaller revenue from sales with reference to average sales reported by the young entrepreneurs.

Most of the respondents were found to be into grocery store business (Kirana store) with an average of Rs. 1,65,667/- (SD:145563.88) as revenue from sale. The second most preferred enterprise found as running fancy store. Those involved in the fancy store business has an average turnover of Rs. 6,97,500/- (SD:432726). Both the grocery and fancy store operation found to be running through the year under the assessment period.

The findings suggest that BYST's work was directed towards reducing poverty and bringing economic opportunity for youth by directly contributing to SDG 8 and SDG 1 directly and partly to SDG 10.

Given the engagement between BYST and young entrepreneurs, as a continued approach, the foundation shall think of continuing support these young entrepreneurs through their entrepreneurship journey with additional handholding support with a clear exit plan. The

prolonged handholding support will ensure that these enterprises are resilient to shocks and can absorb shocks on their own. In conclusion, JK Paper CSR initiative to support these entrepreneurs showed a positive effect on the youth in terms of not only getting self-employment but also managing business operations in volume.