For decades, academic reports and media publications have talked about the plight of women across the world who travel miles every day to fetch water for their families, or the young girls who are forced to drop out of their schools due to lack of a nearby water source. The scenario was no different in the village of Modwa, in Rajasthan’s Udaipur district until 2016. But a solar operated water system has ended this age old scenario and improved quality of life.

Situated near the majestic Aravalli mountain range of Rajasthan, the Modwa village houses 233 families. The village is divided in eight smaller hamlets. Even though almost each of these hamlets has had its own source of water in the vicinity, the water quality and availability is poor.

Kadfala, one of the hamlets of the village, houses twenty-five families of Gamiti tribe. To address their water-requirements, there was a well in the vicinity. The well was situated about 200 m away from the locality. The community has always preferred to use the water from the well for their personal as well as cattle’s consumption. As a result, the women of the family, who were solely responsible for fetching water, had to make multiple rounds till the well. Wardibai, one of the eldest women of KADFALA, estimates that during the summer days she would have to make as many as ten rounds to the well.

She continues, “The walk itself wasn’t very long at all, but what was painful was the task of fetching water from the well.” She goes ahead to explain me that the well did not have a proper pulley system attached to it. The women would have to climb down the well using the stairway-like structure which was originally a series of rocks protruding out from the surface of the well’s
walls. Not only were these steps slippery, but also did not provide a large enough surface to be able to walk safely and comfortably.

I was shocked when Bhuribai, another middle-aged woman from the locality, narrated how a few years ago she had slipped and fallen in the well. Fortunately, she could swim and thus, she was able to reach out to rocks and creepers on the well’s wall. But others were not that lucky. There had even been a case of a child drowning a few years ago.

Another such story was reported from the Modwa main village which is a heterogeneous community of 33 households. Here, unlike Kadfala, the only source of water for this hamlet was a hand-pump located about 400 m from the locality on the side of a main road which connects the hamlet to the other hamlets, nearby villages and to Udaipur district. This meant that the women would have to make several trips to this spot to suffice all the needs of the family. Moreover, with no other source of water in the hamlet both men and women had no choice but to use this place for bathing purposes as well. The lack of privacy, especially for the women, was a big problem. Along with this, the hand pump was also the reason for a few major and minor accidents of the locals, especially the children, due to clashes with the motor bikes and carriage vehicles passing on the road.

To help address some of these grievances, there have been some attempts by the administration, like the installation of hand-pump near the main road in the Modwa hamlet village, but this did not make a big difference. With the passage of time, the villagers felt there was a dire need to address the problem of drinking water in the village. With that in mind, WOTR in 2016 decided to install a solar-operated drinking water system in both these hamlets. The financial help for this initiative was provided by Concern India Foundation, while each household in both these hamlets also donated Rs. 1,000 and four-days of labour work as their voluntary contribution. At the time of installation, it was also agreed that the community would pay the maintenance expenses in future.

This newly installed system
consists of a solar-operated fully-automatic motor pump which draws water from a nearby well and thus, keeps the overhead tank filled all the time. Alongside the tank, several taps have been installed which can be easily accessed by the community to fill their buckets and bottles. Also, a specific place has been allotted near the tank for cattle to drink water.

The impact of this novel initiative was evident to me in my very first interaction with a group of women from Kadfala. Not only does the initiative significantly reduces the drudgery of women in both the hamlets by simply reducing the walking distance, but also makes the water-source more accessible to men and children. In fact, now the children and men themselves fetch water. Also, the allocation of a separate spot for the cattle to drink water maintains cleanliness and hygiene. But more importantly, the initiative has helped secure and safeguard the lives of locals of the Kadfala hamlet which otherwise were under fear of drowning in the well or that of a snake-bite.