

5 Comprehensive environmental management through holistic development

Watershed Organization Trust (WOTR) a NGO founded in 1993 believes that land degradation and water scarcity are the most intense and commonly felt needs of a village community that can bring different groups of people together to begin their development process. Community restoration of the natural environment makes sustainability happen. Community-led efforts help combat and adapt to climate change and mitigate the impacts.

Summary:

Objective: Empowering communities to take charge of their own development through collective action for sustainable natural resource management.

Location & Area: Wankute village located at the foothills of the Sahyadri ranges in Ahmednagar ; 1486 ha.

Project Area information: Estimated population is approximately 1,377 with about 70% population living below poverty line. Agriculture, livestock rearing and labor are the main occupations.

Problem: Fuel wood, fodder and water scarcity, lack of management of catchment, land degradation, & inequitable resource distribution.

Best Practice: Village Development Committee (VDC) involving every section of community including 49-51% women representation was formed. WOTR helped the community to first form a vision for their village. Issues were identified and various groups were formed to address issues. Inter-linkages were created with relevant government departments, financial institutes, SHGs, village institutes and academic institutes to provide all-round support to the activities. Wealth ranking was done to obtain contribution in equitable manner and share benefits with the poorest.

Organizations Involved: Misereor, Community Action for Poverty Alleviation, Swiss agency for Development and Cooperation, forest department, International Livestock Research Institute, Agricultural Department and Minor Irrigation Department funded the led initiative by WOTR along with Jai Malhar Village Watershed Committee, District Animal Husbandry, agriculture and forestry department, Mahatma Phule Agricultural University, District Central Co-operative Bank.

Activities: VDC conducts various activities with community participation including,

- Promote the mechanisms to negotiate improved fodder access in public (wastelands) and private grazing areas.
- Participatory Net Planning to study each plot of land and design its treatment together with the land owner/farmers.
- Plantation, construction of drinking water wells, farm bunds, continuous contours, horti-pasture, nala bunds, check dams etc. was done through 'shramdan' or volunteer labour. Organic farming, micro farming, Kitchen gardens and soak pits, drip irrigation, water budgeting.
- Work is in progress for agro-met stations which will help farmers plan their agricultural activities.

Connection to the UNCCD theme

- Capacity-building and awareness-raising.
- DLDD and SLM monitoring and assessment/research.
- Policy, legislative, institutional framework.
- Funding/resource mobilization.
- Participation, collaboration and networking.

- Training, exposure visits to the neighbouring villages, farmer to farmer extension, experience sharing workshops and gatherings are conducted.
- Linking up with DRDA for complimentary programmes.

Approaches that led to success:

- Wasundhara approach is a local initiative which helped local community members to take up the activities. Participatory approach of the project

ensured the community's continuous support.

- Addressing the issue of equitable distribution of benefits and involving community to distribute benefits to the poorest of the poor.
- Village envisioning helped villagers to see their future and design their own path for development.

Lessons learnt:

- For management of natural resources the whole village must come together and manage it together. All communities must be given their equitable space and representation to voice their demands.
- Communities can create and manage funds transparently when capacitated for the same.
- A systematic ridge to valley approach and detailed Participatory Net Planning is important as peoples' participation is a must for success for watershed projects. Village envisioning creates a sense of accountability, responsibility and ownership.

Benefits of the practice		
Environmental	Economic	Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wasteland reduced from 300 ha pre-watershed to 55 ha post-watershed. ● As a result of women's initiative, the village now has 160 solar lamps, 15 smokeless chulhas and 32 hot water chulhas, reducing use of bio-mass for fuel. ● 110,000 saplings planted on wastelands and mountains helped increasing ground water level. ● Convergence approach adopted for fodder management is being spread to other WOTR project areas in its Climate Change Adaptation Project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increases land use area from 600 ha to 800 ha for Khariff crops, from 30 ha to 400 ha for Rabbi and from 0 ha to 10 ha for summer crops. ● Increase in per acre production of rice from 10-12 bags to 20 bags (1 bag=100 kgs). ● Round the year fodder availability even with excess that is sold out to generate extra income. ● Reduction of wasteland helped in increased productivity, growth through innovative, sustainable practices and knowledge. ● Increased revenue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wasundhara approach led to incentives for the VDC, women self help groups and PRIs. This demonstrated a positive discrimination in the favour of the disadvantaged. ● Kitchen gardens and soak pits are being promoted to address the strategic needs of women. ● Villagers constructed individual latrines, anganwadi (child care centre), high school, roads, public health care centre. ● Women empowerment through training educational programs, personality development, personal care advisories.

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