

Women Water Champions

A compendium of
41 women stewards
from the grassroots



SIWI



WATER
GOVERNANCE
FACILITY



Published by:

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Development and Content Editor: Ms Vinni Munjal
Copy Edit and Design: Roots Advertising



UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility (WGF)'s under the GoAL Waters programme, with support from Sweden, provided funding and technical expertise to UNDP India in this WWC initiative.

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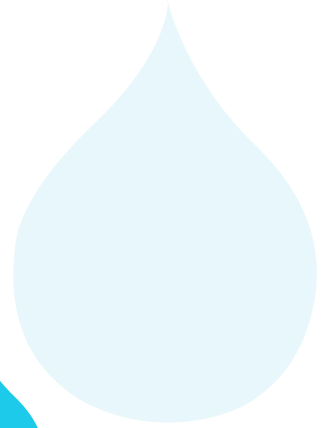
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are thankful to all the contributors who generously shared the inspiring stories of the women doing extraordinary work to address the water challenges in their regions. We would like to acknowledge and appreciate the following partner organizations without whom the Women Water Champions initiative would not have been possible.



AGA KHAN RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME (INDIA)
A PROGRAMME OF THE AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK





TATA STEEL FOUNDATION



Message



Water is an indispensable resource for all domestic and economic activities. The availability and access to adequate water resources and sanitation facilities is crucial for maintaining a minimum quality of life and has been appreciably declared a basic human right. But, with the advent of climate change, both quantity and quality of available water resources are being negatively impacted.

The adverse effect of reduced water quality and availability has a prominent gender component as there is a great connect between women and water. Just like unpaid domestic chores and care work, ensuring drinking water in a household is considered primarily the responsibility of women and girls across communities and countries. Up to 200 million (wo)man hours are spent on these activities on a daily basis (UNICEF, 2016). This undue burden has kept them from engaging themselves in gaining educational capacity and fully participating in other paid economic opportunities. They are the first to be affected when there is a water crisis. Their relationship reflects the cultural, social and gender differences that exist in the use, access and management of water. The intersection between marginalization in communities and gender exacerbates the issues related to access to water and sanitation and further impacts socio-economic status of the individual.

In 2015, countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Though its Goal 5 deals with “Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls”, the gender issues cut across all 17 SDGs and is reflected in 45 targets and 54 indicators for the SDGs.

The National Water Mission, Ministry of Jal Shakti, is patent in its recognition of the role of gender in issues related to water and its governance. We recognize, in our campaigns—be it in the **‘Sahi-Fasal’**; to nudge farmers towards opting for less water intensive crops and adopting efficient water use or in the **‘Catch the Rain’**; for promotion of rainwater harvesting, artificial recharge and prudent use of water – the undeniable role played by women. We have through our many e-talk platforms such as the monthly “Water Talks”, “Water-Tech Talks” and the weekly “Dialogues with DMs” given opportunities for many women water warriors to showcase their efforts to conserve water. We hope to further expand our vision through gender sensitive lenses when it comes to upgrading the scope of water governance through policy for a more sustainable and equitable water-secure future.

We congratulate all the selected Women Water Champions and hope that this will encourage many more to help realize our cherished goal to achieve “universal respect for water”.

G. Asok Kumar

Additional Secretary and Mission Director,
National Water Mission,
Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India

Message



Gender equality and water lie at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While water is one of the most basic human needs, gender equality is a basic human right and is central to our progress across all the goals.

Women as homemakers and professionals have a close connection with water. Whether it is for domestic consumption or for commercial purposes, they have been responsible for collecting water for centuries, even walking miles every day carrying vessels on their heads. Fortunately, times have changed. It is uplifting to see how piped water supply is now being provided through the Jal Jeevan Mission of the Government of India and other local solutions that are driven by civil society organizations and the private sector.

It is crucial to first understand the relationship between women and water. We need to acknowledge the existing inequalities, identify the barriers, and ascertain participation opportunities. Only then can we design women-inclusive programmes and policies that will benefit water, ecosystems and people.

There are many examples of women being powerful catalysts for change, including the inspiring stories of the Women Water Champions in this compendium. These 41 women have challenged water crises at the grassroot level with grit, courage and determination. Yet, despite their valuable experiences and perspectives, women are often missing from water management policies and decision-making processes.

Water has assumed even greater significance now in the pandemic and post-pandemic scenario. It is essential in these times that we all work together to promote integrated water management practices that have people, especially women, at the centre.

UNDP, in partnership with Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) through the GoAL-Waters project and the National Water Mission, Government of India, is working to promote women's leadership in water governance and management. There are several women water stewards in India, and we shall endeavour to continue providing suitable platforms that will help to amplify their voices and encourage more women to follow in their footsteps.

I express my compliments to many of the unsung women champions who have dedicated their time, effort and passion to address water accessibility and inequality. We hope to enhance the participation of more women as decision-makers and encourage more path-breaking efforts towards improved water governance.

Shoko Noda
Resident Representative
UNDP India

Message



Including women in water management can enhance efficiency, ingenuity, integrity and sustainability; and yet, women are visibly missing from community leadership and decision-making forums. Without the voices and perspectives of women from the community, we lack critical insights from knowledgeable water stewards and representatives of half the population. These insights and overall representation are crucial for effective water governance.

Women often have a complementary understanding of the diverse needs for water sources and the benefits that sustainable water resources management can bring to their communities. This is, in large part, due to their growing roles in agricultural production and their responsibilities in ensuring food and nutritional security for their family as well as in their roles as community members and leaders representing Water Users Groups. These experiences also position women well to provide innovative solutions for resilient water management, particularly in the face of climate change.

The benefits of a gender-inclusive approach have been well observed in India with women-led councils prioritizing water projects at a much higher rate (62 percent higher) than those led by men. Including women's perspectives in community governance is likely to lead to better prioritization of water issues and more dedicated resources to ensure sustainable management. Despite these merits, women face several barriers to their inclusion in critical discourse. One of the biggest barriers is their perceived, yet unwarranted, lack of credibility.

Building women's validity as knowledgeable water managers is a priority in SIWI's work and is why we, as UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility, are proud to support UNDP India's launch of the Women Water Champions compendium as part of GoAL-WaterS activities. Projects such as Women Water Champions build credibility by highlighting examples of women

as water leaders and knowledgeable stakeholders, depicting women as more than mere end users or victims of water insecurity.

This compendium highlights the achievements of 41 astounding community water managers who have broken through gendered barriers to bring sustainability to water resources management in their communities. Often faced with staggering water challenges, these women addressed them head on with ingenuity and determination. Not only have they secured their livelihoods and protected their communities through environmentally sound practices, they have often also helped to further empower other women and bolster economic opportunities for many.

This compendium helps us all to better recognize the diverse but valuable contributions women everywhere can and do make to water resources management. Through these examples we challenge the bias that leadership is primarily a male quality. We hope this compendium inspires the reader to look to their own community and surroundings and recognize the incredible (and often-hidden) women driving change everyday. We trust that putting forward more examples of women as knowledgeable and reliable water managers will build credibility and help women everywhere be more visible as leaders in their communities. We invite other organizations to do the same and help us raise the profile of women everywhere, everyday. And more than anything, we hope that by raising the voices and experiences of these 41 incredible women, they will inspire many more to follow in their footsteps.

Birgitta Liss Lymer

Director, UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility

PREFACE



Water is intrinsically linked to our life, livelihood and economy and is at the core of development across sectors. Water resources and the range of services they provide are inextricably linked to poverty reduction, food security, health, equality, gender empowerment, environmental sustainability and overall human development.

Women are disproportionately impacted both by water scarcity and the lack of safe drinking water, increasing the vulnerability associated with persistent poverty. Water policies are often based on generalized perspectives that lack gender perspectives and local knowledge¹. Failure to integrate gender considerations into water resources management, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, urban water supply, energy and industry, will ensure that gender inequities persist, preventing the adoption of solutions that equally benefit women and men. Gender is an important axis of social differentiation that shapes differential access and rights over this critical resource. At the same time, gender intersects with other axes of social differentiation such as caste, class, ethnicity, age, etc.

Water is truly at the core of sustainable development. It is inextricably linked to climate change, agriculture, food security, health, equality, gender and other critical areas of sustainable development.

Water is a key aspect of human development, that is a pre-requisite to achieving a minimum standard of health and education; and enabling the ability to undertake productive activities. Without adequate, safe and affordable water and sanitation, millions of people are unable to lead healthy lives and lack the ability to build secure livelihoods. While children

are denied the opportunity for a safe and healthy childhood, women are denied their self-respect and dignity without availability/access to water for daily life. Least to say the marginalized and the vulnerable are immensely impacted due to water scarcity and accessibility to clean water. Water access and consumption vary greatly and significant inequalities persist within and between countries; between rich and poor; and between urban and rural areas. This reflection of existing inequalities also harbours an opportunity for reducing them and build healthier, more just and peaceful societies. Reducing the inequalities by way of improving and extending the access to basic services among the poorest and most marginalized, constitutes one way to redistribute resources in our societies – a systemic way to combat inequalities.

The human rights-based approach is being promoted by many development agencies and non-governmental organizations for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Gender-centric planning and implementation of policies, programmes and schemes is important to promote a people-centric approach to sustainable water conservation and management. Though most water sector policies, programmes and schemes emphasize community involvement in planning and implementation of actions in water conservation, management and community engagement, yet a clear strategy on how to ensure participation and equality in access, control and use of water resources is largely missing.

UNDP India, National Water Mission, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India and SIWI wishing to underscore the critical role of women in water conservation and management and in an effort to promote women's leadership in water governance,

¹ WWAP (World Water Assessment Programme). 2012. The United Nations World Water Development Report 4: Managing Water under Uncertainty and Risk. Paris, UNESCO.

introduced the initiative 'Women Water Champions (WWCs)' with like-minded organizations. Through the WWC initiative, technically and financially supported by UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility (WGF) under its GoAL Waters programme, 41 women contributing at grassroots-level are being recognized for their committed effort in the water sector. This is intended to not only document some of the exemplary work undertaken but also enhance women's visibility and participation in the water sector at all levels. It is intended that suitable platforms will be made available for these WWCs to amplify their voices, for instance, UNDP's -Water Community of Practice, Ministry of Jal Shakti's -Water Talks and SIWI- World Water Week, leading to enhancing awareness among different stakeholders, promoting women's leadership, and thereby influencing policy at the national level. A wider dissemination of the WWC compendium will also influence peer-to-peer learning and bring more recognition to women's participation in the water sector. This is just one of the first steps in collaborating towards achieving gender equality in the water sector.

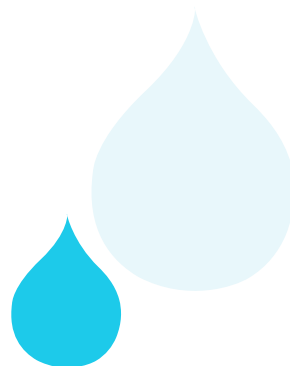
A detailed and thorough process was followed to identify the Water Champions working at the grassroots who are improving access to and efficiency in water availability and use. The organizations working with women on water at the local levels across the country were mapped and reached out to send nominations of women known to them who are doing exemplary work to solve water issues of their village/region based on a set eligibility criterion. The nomination process encompassed a detailed nomination form, testimonials, videos/photos, and interviews to validate their work. More than 60 nominations were received, and were reviewed based on the defined selection criteria by UNDP and SIWI.

This Compendium of the Women Water Champions from the grassroots documents the journey of 41 women who challenged the water crisis and steadily addressed the issues with grit, courage and determination. These women are from different regions and different socio-economic and educational background. Many are independent dynamic young women while others have risen from the ranks of homemakers and bystanders to active contributor/leaders. The journey has been arduous yet commendable. Supporting them have been the organizations that provided these women the vision and the route to forge ahead and create lasting impact.

Additional information was also sought from partner organizations to ensure that the information on the WWCs is encompassing and aptly describes their engagement, and thereby 41 champions identified and recognized.

Though there are many women water stewards in the country, this is the first attempt at documenting and recognizing some of them. Going forward we hope we can recognize many more path-breaking efforts towards improved water governance.

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS



| | |
|----------------|---|
| BBF | Broad Bed Furrow |
| CARD | Centre for Advanced Research and Development |
| FES | Foundation for Ecological Security |
| GDS | Grameen Development Services |
| GP | Gram Panchayat |
| IWMI | International Water Management Institute |
| MGNREGS | Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| NIWCYD | National Institute of Women, Child and Youth Development |
| NPM | No Pesticide Management |
| PAD | Peoples Action for Development |
| PANI | People's Action for National Integration |
| PPM | Parts Per Million |
| PRI | Panchayati Raj Institution |
| RWHS | Rainwater Harvesting Structure |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| SHG | Self-Help Group |
| SIWI | Stockholm International Water Institute |
| SRI | System of Rice Intensification |
| VWSC | Village Water Sanitation Committee |
| WWC | Women Water Champion |
| WWUG | Women Water User Group |



Catch the Rain

Where it falls, When it falls
National Water Mission



National Water Mission's campaign "Catch The Rain" with the tagline "Catch the rain, where it falls, when it falls" is aimed at nudging the states and stakeholders to create appropriate Rain Water Harvesting Structures (RWHS) suited to the climatic conditions and sub-soil strata before monsoon.

As part of this campaign, drives to make check dams, water harvesting pits and, rooftop RWHS; removal of encroachments and de-silting of tanks to increase their storage capacity; removal of obstructions in the channels which bring water to them from the catchment areas; and repairs to step-wells and using defunct bore-wells and unused wells to put water back to aquifers are to be taken up with the active participation of people.

To facilitate these activities, states have been requested to open 'rain centres' in each district in Collectorates/Municipalities or Gram Panchayat (GP) offices. During this period, each rain centre will have a dedicated mobile phone number and will be manned by an engineer or a person well trained in RWHS. The centre will act as a technical guidance

focal point for all in the district on how to catch the rain, as it falls, where it falls.

Efforts will be made to ensure all buildings in the district have rooftop RWHS and that maximum quantity of rain water falling in any compound is impounded within the compound itself. The basic aim should be that no or only limited water will flow out of the compound. This will help to improve soil moisture and raise the groundwater level. In urban areas, it will control water from gushing onto roads, damaging them and prevent urban flooding.

As part of the "Catch the Rain" initiative, all water bodies in the districts are to be enumerated (checked with revenue records) and encroachments removed.

All District Collectors, heads of institutions that own large tracts of land such as Indian institutes of management and technology, the Railways, Airport Authority, public sector units and Central Armed Police Force, etc., have been requested to take steps to "Catch the Rain".



Akali Tudu

“Water is a precious natural resource; we cannot imagine life without water. We depend on it for everything from drinking to household chores to crop production. Rainfall is the only source of water so it must be stored. We can survive without food, but not without water.”



TATA STEEL FOUNDATION

Age

32

Education

7th Grade

Occupation

Farming

Location

**Surgi Village, East
Singbhum District,
Jharkhand**

Area of Intervention

**Water Conservation,
Governance and
Management**

Skills and Training

**Community Awareness
and Mobilization,
Water Harvesting and
Management Techniques**

CHALLENGE

Depletion of groundwater led to water scarcity, loss of rabi crop production and severe shortage of drinking water in wells and tube wells

INITIATIVE(S)

Mobilized the community to dig around 70 ponds in the block and thereby initiated a pond-based livelihood programme for farmers to cater to employment needs

IMPACT

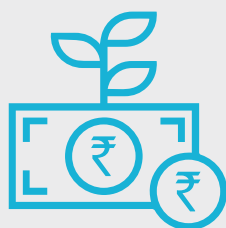
Her efforts resulted in the restoration of groundwater level and strengthened village water security. Implementation of integrated pond-based farming led to an increase in farmers' income and a reduction in migration amongst daily wage workers

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Gurabanda Block



The pond-based livelihood programme has generated and increased the income of farmers.



Akali Tudu hails from a remote village in the Gurabanda block, East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. Villagers were facing acute water shortage for agricultural activities, animals and other household chores since 2010-11. She recognized the imminent need for creating rainwater harvesting infrastructure. She formed a Self-Help Group (SHG) in the year 2012 and registered an organization named 'Jumid Tirla Gawnta Trust' in the year 2014



to collect funds for water and agricultural work. Her Trust partnered with Tata Steel Foundation to construct ponds and drinking water facilities.

Akali faced several challenges along the way including hindrances posed by extremist elements in the area. But due to her persistent efforts and courage, she has been able to create 71 ponds and 7 drinking water facilities in neighbouring

schools. The pond-based livelihood programme has generated and increased the income of farmers, while also putting a check on migration. The improved groundwater levels resulting from rainwater harvesting also contribute to Rabi crop cultivation. Drinking water facilities ensure safe water for both the villagers and the cattle. Presently, **Akali** is working with 350 farmers.

She wants to create more ponds in her area and wishes to create awareness on preservation, conservation and judicious use of water. She wants to inculcate amongst the farmers a scientific approach to farming with a focus on climate-resilient farming. **Akali** aims to enable the construction of wells and other water harvesting structures in every farm field of her village.



Aruna Das

“River is life for the Assamese Hindu culture. We start the festival with river water. Due to floods and erosion, the community faces a lot of struggle. But now people are aware of the value of every single water drop in the river.”



Supported by



Age

40

Education

10th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

Village Amtola Joinpur,
District Lakhimpur, Assam

Area of Intervention

Water quality
improvement and
management

Skills and Training

Capacity building,
community mobilization
and leadership

CHALLENGE

Flooding in the village due to overflowing of
accumulated rainwater in the dam

INITIATIVE(S)

Formed Women Water User Groups (WWUGs)
for water management and leadership

IMPACT

Solved the issue of the embankment to
protect the community from floods

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Amtola Joinpur



The embankment project is now protecting the community from floods and villages are safely using water.



Aruna Das is a social worker from a Dalit Assamese family and a resident of Amtola Joinpur village – a flood-prone area, near the embankment of the Ranganadi River. During the summer, an upstream dam operated by the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO) on Ranganadi usually fills up with rainwater. To stop overflow, NEEPCO releases the water which then floods the downstream villages. Floodwater damages roads,



embankments and bridges. **Aruna Das** raised her voice and pushed for the successful completion of an embankment on the river.

Aruna leads the WWUG of Amtola Joinpur village which works on water issues such as safe drinking water, dam-induced floods and water scarcity in the winter. She facilitated a rally with the support of the WWUGs. Under her leadership,

the groups made every effort to solve water-related issues in the village. The embankment project is now protecting the community from floods and villages are safely using water. **Aruna** emerged as a woman leader in this remote village of Assam. She was selected as Secretary collectively for 10-18 SHGs that form a Village Organization. She was trained in water conservation and governance, leadership and communication skills by People's Action for Development (PAD) with the support of Oxfam India.

She continues to contribute to water-related issues and wants to strengthen her knowledge and capacities on water governance.



Asha Komati

“Water is life for all mankind on earth. I want to make my village free from the drinking water crisis in the coming years. I wish that everyone in the village should make judicious use of water for our future generations.”

Age

44

Education

10th Grade

Occupation

Homemaker

Location

Shivani Khurd Village,
Kalamb Taluka, Yavatmal
District, Maharashtra

Area of Intervention

Water quality
improvement and
management, water
sanitation and hygiene

Skills and Training

Water budgeting, water
security, community
awareness and
mobilization, advocacy at
the Panchayat level

CHALLENGE

Acute water scarcity, lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities

INITIATIVE(S)

Created awareness about water and sanitation issues, mobilized four villages to develop soak pits, advocacy at the GP level to do regular water quality testing, build toilets and well recharge structures

IMPACT

GP passed a resolution to purchase one field testing kit; development of soak pits and improvement of water and sanitation facilities to help minimize water-related risks in the village.

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Shivani Khurd



People from her village and nearby hamlets together developed 148 soak pits.



Asha's village had acute water scarcity; people had to bring water from their fields for drinking and household purposes. Lack of sanitation and cleanliness near the water sources was another important issue affecting the health and hygiene of people. When WaterAid, along with its local non-governmental organization (NGO) partner, the National Institute of Women, Child and Youth Development (NIWCYD) started its intervention in the village, **Asha** came



forward to lead the work. She, along with few other women, was trained on water budgeting and water quality testing.

Asha led the group and started organizing meetings of the village women on the issue of safe and clean drinking water, sanitation as well as to explain water quality testing and how to do it. She also organized rallies and bhajans to create awareness. While working to create awareness in the initial

period, **Asha** faced resistance from the villagers, especially the elderly, who raised doubts about her efforts which they said would bear no fruits. Despite these hurdles, **Asha** continued her work. She convinced the GP to purchase one field water testing kit and pass a resolution to do regular water quality testing and make the report public so that everyone in the village would know the quality of the water. **Asha**, with support from village women, ensured that soak pits were built at the household level. People from her village and nearby hamlets together developed 148 soak pits. Her efforts also resulted in the construction of 25 individual household toilets and well recharge structures.

Asha wants to make her village free from future water crises. She wants to construct a stop dam in the village which would increase the water level of the water sources. She also wants to install one reverse osmosis plant so that the villagers get clean and pure drinking water throughout the year.



Babita Liloriya

“People believe that money is the most important thing in life. I believe it is water. No money will be enough to bring back water if a day comes when there’ll be none left. It is the only thing that will flourish if invested in. No water saved will ever go waste, and no water wasted will ever return to us. If one understands this simple equation, life will be simpler.”

Age

37

Education

12th Grade

Occupation

Self-employed

Location

Nayapura Village, Bagli
Tehsil, Dewas District,
Madhya Pradesh

Area of Intervention

Water quality
improvement and
management

Skills and Training

Water quality testing,
water budgeting,
community awareness
and mobilization, water
conservation, basic
concepts of retrofitting of
hand pumps

CHALLENGE

Poor water quality, lack of hygiene,
dysfunctional operation and maintenance of
water sources

INITIATIVE(S)

Led water quality testing in her village and also
trained and motivated women of her SHG

IMPACT

Awareness increased concerning clean drinking
water and farmers adopted strip cropping

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Community



As a result, the community made kitchen gardens and farmers opted for strip cropping.



Poor management of drinking water sources in Babita's village in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, was making the water unsafe for drinking. She was part of an SHG and had undergone training at a capacity building workshop on changing mind-sets and behaviour concerning water quality and hygiene in the vicinity of drinking water sources of the community. **Babita** always believed in the power of collective action, therefore, after attending training on water quality and



assessment on a locally available water quality testing kit, under the Women + Water Alliance Programme in her village, she led the process of water quality testing and further trained women in her village. She also motivated her women's group to develop kitchen gardens in the vicinity of a water outlet point in the house.

WaterAid and the Centre for Advanced Research and Development (CARD), together with members of the Village

Water Sanitation Committee (VWSC) , prepared a social map of the village's water sources. Training was provided to some members of VWSC on water quality. Awareness increased in her village concerning clean drinking water; as a result, the community made kitchen gardens and farmers opted for strip cropping. **Babita** promotes the importance of saving water from contamination by ensuring regular water quality tests.

Keeping water sources clean and increasing the number of water conservation structures in her village so that the water could be collected before it goes waste is **Babita's** next aim. She also wants to make platforms along with soak pits around all the hand pumps in her village.



Bhurki Bai

“Water is life – it is everything! Water is the essence of our lives, without it our life is nothing! Our morning begins with water and a farmer’s life entirely relies on water. We will be bereft of agriculture if there is no water for us, and if there is no water, there will not be any food for us and animals. We all have to work together and find a solution to save water.”



Age

49

Education

No formal education

Occupation

Farmer and social worker

Location

**Alsigarh Village, Girwa
Tehsil, Udaipur District,
Rajasthan**

Area of Intervention

**Water conservation,
governance and
management**

Skills and Training

**Community awareness
and mobilization,
advocacy at GP level,
trained in floriculture and
water-saving techniques**

CHALLENGE

Water scarcity, frequent droughts and lack of access to clean drinking

INITIATIVE(S)

Mobilization of other women to join the SHG, led the construction of two anicuts, contribution in the installation of hand pumps as well as watershed, afforestation and livelihood activities in her village

IMPACT

Drinking water availability at the doorstep and abundant water to grow additional crops

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Alsigarh Village



Bhurki Bai's efforts are reflected in the long-term benefits her community will receive with regard to the availability of water both for humans and cattle and more cultivation through irrigation.



Bhurki Bai hails from a poor peasant family of Kaatiyawala Fala in Alsigarh Village where water scarcity is perhaps the most crucial issue – the entire region is arid with uneven distribution of rainfall and frequent droughts. Only about 50-60 percent of villages have access to clean drinking water. **Bhurki Bai** has emerged as a strong leader championing for the cause of overall development in her village by becoming a member of an SHG being run by Seva Mandir. She motivated other women to join the SHG.

Bhurki Bai took the initiative in the construction of two anicuts in the hamlets of Kadafala and Vadafala in her village. She has contributed to the installation of 20 hand pumps to solve the drinking

water problem. She had been a part of the watershed, afforestation and livelihood activities in her village. She is also a trained health attendant and works as an independent health worker dealing with maternal healthcare needs in the area. Apart from this, she has also contributed to other social development matters of the village such as creating community awareness on issues like alcoholism, domestic violence prevention and the need for education in her village.

She was also awarded the Ummedmal Lodha Environment Award 2020 for her contribution to the preservation and development of natural resources in her village. **Bhurki Bai's** efforts are reflected in the long-term benefits her community will receive with regard to the availability of water both for humans and cattle and more cultivation through irrigation. This has resulted in economic gains, reduction in physical drudgery of women and improved ecology in her area.

Seeing her hard work and leadership, **Bhurki Bai** was elected as the Ward Panch by the village community. She would like to continue to work on this mission and inspire other tribal women to stand up against all odds and create a way for themselves and others.



Chandrika Kisan

“Water is the main source of sustenance. From waking up in the morning to night, every moment, we need water. My farm work is unworkable without it. For cattle, it is the most vital resource. We truly cannot survive without it.”



Age

31

Education

10th Grade

Occupation

Farmer, Naib Sarpanch, Vice President of Vana Sarankhyan Samiti and tube well mechanic

Location

Gopalpali Village, Barkote Block, Deogarh District, Odisha

Area of Intervention

Water access and supply, water conservation, governance and management

Skills and Training

Tube well repair work, community awareness and mobilization, training of trainers on water, sanitation and hygiene and various water treatments

CHALLENGE

No access to safe drinking water, defunct tube well, public water supply not fully functional

INITIATIVE(S)

Awareness work on water sanitation and hygiene in the village and school, facilitated the formation of village water user committee for regular monitoring and operation & maintenance of water sources, tube well repair work, water quality testing, initiative on the construction of various water conservation structures

IMPACT

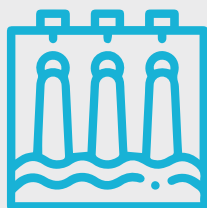
Women's participation and leadership in village-level meetings, regularization of water quality testing, construction of nine new ponds and three check dams, functional tube wells and piped water supply system

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Gopalpali



She ensured that water conservation initiatives were undertaken and completed nine new ponds and three check dams.



Chandrika Kisan belongs to a tribal community and has worked as a wage labourer previously. She was selected by the Odisha Livelihoods Mission to facilitate the SHG as a community resource person. She was later elected as Naib Sarpanch in the GP election and took on multiple responsibilities for the development of her village. There was no access to safe drinking water, so people used stream water for drinking and domestic purposes. As a front line woman, **Chandrika Kisan** joined as cadre in JEETA, a local NGO, to create awareness



in the community on water sanitation and hygiene. After participating in various training programmes, she realized the importance of water conservation and sustainability of water sources. She formed a water user committee with the help of JEETA and began monitoring the committee by regularizing monthly meeting. She also took the initiative on water conservation and planning for new ponds.

Under her leadership, the village tube wells were repaired and water quality

tests regularized. She also ensured that water conservation initiatives were undertaken and completed nine new ponds and three check dam. **Chandrika** motivated women to participate and women leaders came up in her village. They became aware of water sanitation as well as other social security schemes of the government.

Chandrika wishes to advance her mechanical skills to continue repairing tube wells and make this an alternative source of livelihoods for herself.



Gayatri Sharma

“Water, a common and valuable resource for all, demands conservation and tactful management. I feel youth pick up the nuances of technology easily and this can be used for sustainable water governance.”



FOUNDATION FOR ECOLOGICAL SECURITY

Age

23

Education

Masters in Sociology (final year student)

Occupation

Community resource person at Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)

Location

Bavdi Village, Jahazpur City, Bhilwara District, Rajasthan

Area of Intervention

Water conservation, governance and management

Skills and Training

Community awareness and mobilization, water budgeting, groundwater monitoring, crop water budgeting, water conservation practices, water governance

CHALLENGE

Water scarce region, women walk miles to fetch water from long distances

INITIATIVE(S)

Launched a community programme on water literacy. Using several technologies, she shares the analyses and inferences with the communities for adopting efficient water conservation practices

IMPACT

Young water warriors joined her campaign to save water. The construction of numerous water harvesting structures resulted in the recharge of the groundwater table

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Block



Her efforts resulted in the construction of water harvesting structures across the block and the block is dotted with green pastures and biodiversity.



Gayatri Sharma, a sociology student from a water-scarce region in Jahazpur, launched a community programme on water literacy where she demystified the science of water. Women in her village were compelled to walk miles to fetch water from nearby villages. To relieve them from their drudgery, **Gayatri** launched a simple water literacy programme on the conservation of water right from the household level to the community level, which helped bring awareness among the children, students,



community members and people of adjoining villages as well.

Gayatri has been associated with the women of her GP and the adjoining ones, helping them understand the significance of conserving every drop of water. Using several technologies such as well water depth monitoring and construction of water harvesting structures, she shares the analyses and inferences with the communities, motivating them to adopt efficient water conservation practices.

Her efforts resulted in the construction of water harvesting structures across the block and, within just a couple of years of the intervention, the block is dotted with green pastures and biodiversity.

Currently, she is completing her post-graduation and aspires to engage in community development with an aim to promote reforms in favour of natural resource management and sustainability.



Geeta Devi

“Our water initiatives will not remain in our village only, we will create awareness on water conservation and water literacy in other villages as well. I am so happy to acknowledge that our work has been fruitful in ensuring the availability of water in our village.”



Age

41

Education

8th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

Manpur Village, Jhansi District, Uttar Pradesh

Area of Intervention

Water access and supply, water conservation, governance and management

Skills and Training

Advocacy and leadership, community awareness and mobilization, trained in legal literacy and, water use planning and management

CHALLENGE

Water crisis during summers, lack of maintenance of the village pond, migration of people to cities and towns in search of work

INITIATIVE(S)

Mobilized GP funds to repair the pond, motivated the community to donate labour (shramdaan) and volunteer for repairwork, advocacy for new pipelines and tap connections at the district level

IMPACT

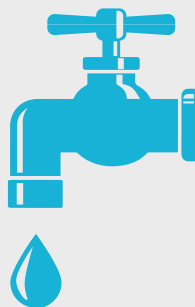
Drinking water supply for all village communities, ample water for irrigation, reduced migration in the village

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Manpur



Geeta Devi made several advocacy efforts and submitted applications to block and district level officials to build new pipelines and taps ensuring the availability of safe drinking water to the community.



Geeta Devi hails from a water-scarce village in the Bundelkhand region. There was only one pond in her village and it went dry due to low rainfall. Other water sources were three hand pumps, out of which one was defunct and the two others were accessible across a national highway which caused multiple accidents of women crossing the highway. Also, piped water supply was only available to a few dominant households in the village.

Parmarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan formed the Pani Panchayat Committee in this village. **Geeta Devi** was selected as the Jal Saheli by the Pani Panchayat Committee members. She decided to mobilize the community and women in her efforts to conserve water. She fought against feudal



norms in her village that dictated that upper caste men would control access to water. She took on the role of Jal Saheli to help address the water challenges of her village. She motivated the Pani Panchayat Committee members and other villagers to come forward to repair the pond. Due to her consistent efforts, the head of village Panchayat finally provided funds for the pucca repair of the pond. Apart from this, **Geeta Devi** made several advocacy efforts and submitted applications to block and district level

officials to build new pipelines and taps ensuring the availability of safe drinking water to the community. Today, a regular water supply for all communities in her village is a reality.

She wants to make her village Manpur drought-resilient even in case of no or scanty rainfall. She is planning to work on groundwater conservation to realize this vision. She also aims to create awareness on water conservation and water-saving practices in other villages as well.

Notes:1. Geeta was featured in the book *Women for Water: stories of women connected to earth and water* published by Hindustan Unilever Limited.

2. Link to the video "No one should live without water" highlighting Geeta's efforts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZGWuaP6Qnl&t=2s>



Gokula Bagade

“A woman can understand the value of water more than a man as her daily life and day-to-day activities depend on water. So, I believe mobilizing women farmers is more important than mobilizing men farmers.”



Age

36

Education

10th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

**Kakarkheda Village,
Amravati District,
Maharashtra**

Area of Intervention

Water-use efficiency

Skills and Training

**Water-saving techniques
to grow soybean, training
of fellow farmers,
leadership skills**

CHALLENGE

Dry belt and acute water scarcity in the area due to which rabi crops cultivation is quite challenging

INITIATIVE(S)

Educating fellow farmers, especially women farmers to adopt the Broad Bed Furrow (BBF) method for soybean and harvest water for the rabi crop

IMPACT

Established a custom hiring centre to provide BBF attachment to the tractor mound seed drill on a hiring basis. Due to Gokula's efforts, in 90 percent area covering around 200 hectares of her village, soybean is sowed using the BBF method

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Kakarkheda and nearby villages



She mobilized the women farmers and trained them on improved water-saving techniques.



Gokula is a progressive farmer from Kakarkheda, a village that usually suffered crop failure due to a lack of sustainable sources of irrigation. In the past few years, she faced rain uncertainty, lack of moisture retention in her field and prolonged dry spell. She was cultivating soybean crop during kharif season using the traditional method, which resulted in low productivity and economic instability. Most farmers in the area depend entirely on the monsoon and rainwater



availability in water harvesting structures. To overcome crop failure, they use the water available in their sources to sustain the crop in a dry spell but it remains insufficient for the rabi crop.

Gokula participated in training provided by ITC Limited and National Rural Livelihoods Mission. She became the president of her SHG and began adopting new techniques over the traditional practice of flat sowing. **Gokula** and fellow

SHG members showed their willingness to adopt the BFF method of sowing the soybean crop, which is a proven technology of water conservation and management for sustainable cultivation of soybean. She mobilized the women farmers and trained them on improved water-saving techniques. The BFF method of sowing allowed them to store water in furrows at the time of rainfall so that the moisture retained in the soil can be utilized in the dry spell to yield rabi crops also.

Gokula was inspired by the results she achieved and decided to replicate them in all the nearby villages with the hope of further extending them to the whole of Amravati.



Imrati Devi

“Water is life for us. I am happy that today we are having water at our doorstep and we don’t have to walk miles to fetch water.”



Age

40

Education

8th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

Moto Village, Lalitpur
District, Uttar Pradesh

Area of Intervention

Water access and supply

Skills and Training

Community awareness
and mobilization,
trained in leadership,
legal literacy, water user
master plan and ground-
and surface-water
management

CHALLENGE

Severe drinking water crisis, village
women walked miles to fetch water

INITIATIVE(S)

Rejuvenation of a dry, dysfunctional well
in the locality, motivated other women to
join her efforts

IMPACT

Local availability of potable water

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village and community



She discusses the water issues in Pani Panchayat meetings regularly and members have committed themselves to protect and manage water bodies within the village.



Imrati Devi is a Dalit woman and an inhabitant of Moto Village of Bundelkhand region in Uttar Pradesh. Her village was facing a severe drinking water crisis and women in her village trudged 4-5 kilometres every day to fetch water to source drinking water throughout their lives. The only well in her village belonged to the upper caste community that debarred people from other communities from using it. Parmarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan intervened in the village and formed the Pani Panchayat to help the villagers come forward and resolve the water crisis in their village. The Pani



Panchayat unanimously nominated Imrati as the Jal Saheli. **Imrati** had faced water scarcity for several years and was keen to do something about it so that the women of her village would not have to walk miles for water.

Imrati Devi identified a dry, dysfunctional area to dig a well in her locality to make

water convenient and within everyone's reach in the village. Initially, she faced struggle in achieving her goal as nobody was willing to support her but her persistent endeavour bore results when water came out of the dug well. The determination of **Imrati** made this feat possible. The villagers are now able to fetch potable water from within their locality.

She discusses the water issues in Pani Panchayat meetings regularly and members have committed themselves to protect and manage water bodies within the village and are also sensitizing the community to come forward to conserve water.

Notes:1. Imrati was featured in the book *Women for Water: stories of women connected to earth and water* published by Hindustan Unilever Limited.

2. Link to the article on Imrati Devi Published by Better India, 2019
<https://www.thebetterindia.com/185184/bundelkhand-village-army-of-women-water-conservation-inspiring-india/>

3. Link to the BBC documentary featuring Imrati Devi
https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2157959511178064&id=100008921080739



Jugoda Das

“The river is one of the main sources of human life. We can’t ignore its significance; however, the misuse of Ranga river is creating a negative impact on us. Many children in our area are prone to diseases after consuming the polluted water of the river. The government must ensure that the river is kept free from pollution and help us improve our wellbeing.”



Supported by



Age

36

Education

10th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

Pachim Telahi GP, Telahi Block, Lakhimpur District, Assam

Area of Intervention

Water quality improvement and management

Skills and Training

Community awareness and mobilization and leadership

CHALLENGE

Flood-prone area, groundwater quality concerns and river pollution

INITIATIVE(S)

Advocacy on floods and river pollution issues with the government, community awareness and capacity building of women in water governance

IMPACT

Local women became active in dealing with water-related issues and found a voice in water governance

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village



A major impact of her work was that local women became active in dealing with water-related issues through their participation in WWUGs.



Lakhimpur district is highly flood-prone not only due to seasonal inundation in the monsoons but also due to the release of water from the dam built by NEEPCO on the Ranga River. Until recently, water was released from the dam without much warning to the locals. This resulted in severe flooding issues in the past which caused damage to life and property, erosion, hygiene, health and nutrition issues, etc. Moreover, the available groundwater contains an excess amount of iron. In 2019, NEEPCO released water containing silt and other contaminants



such as oil from the dam machinery. As a result, river water became unsafe for consumption by humans as well as for livestock and it even led to the death of a great number of fish in the river. It took more than six months for all contamination to be washed away.

This motivated **Jugoda** to work with other local civil society organizations and arrange for testing of contaminated water samples and dead fishes to take stock of the problem they were facing. She followed this up with constant

advocacy efforts with the government to resolve the release of dam water and contaminates into the river. A major impact of her work was that local women became active in dealing with water-related issues through their participation in WWUGs. This way the women found a voice in water governance at the local level.

Jugoda's primary aspirations are based on creating sustainable and robust livelihoods for women. She wants to take forward her work with the village organization, and motivate the women to become self-sufficient so that they become leaders in dealing with water-related issues. She also plans to work with the youth by building their capacities in advocating for their rights.



K. Selvi

“Water bodies are important assets of our society. We need to revive them, to save them for our future generations. We must educate children about the importance of water bodies and methods of water conservation. Being a woman, I feel proud that I have done my role in conserving water for my fellow villagers.”



Age

33

Education

8th Grade

Occupation

**Agriculture wage labour
and livestock rearing**

Location

**Kallupatti Town, Madurai
District, Tamil Nadu**

Area of Intervention

**Water conservation,
governance and
management, water access
and supply**

Skills and Training

**Advocacy for water rights,
community mobilization,
water conservation through
renovation of tanks and
ponds, establishment of
farm ponds, micro-irrigation
techniques, leadership
training and green farming**

CHALLENGE

Low and unpredictable rainfall, drought, deterioration of village water bodies, groundwater exploitation, encroachment of water feeder channels which led to water stress and migration of people

INITIATIVE(S)

Mobilized the local communities through a series of discussions to form an association and SHGs. Raised her voice and got the feeder channel encroachment removed and initiated its renovation by the community. Headed women-led water conservation works such as renovation of tanks

IMPACT

Inspired the entire village to come forward to form an association and nine SHGs. Convinced other farmers to release the water to provide perennial water-access to over 200 families. Her village has become a model village of the block. All the farmers have become members of the association, group and farmer's producer organization

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Vaippar Basin



Now, K. Selvi's village is better known for women-led conservation and development because of her efforts.



Farmers of S. Narikudi village in the town of Kallupatti faced the disadvantage of farming in one of the driest basins of Tamil Nadu. Kallupatti is highly susceptible to drought and receives rainfalls for less than 50 days in a year. Due to uncertainty in agriculture, water stress and poor returns, farmers have migrated to nearby cities for survival. **K. Selvi** as a farmer faced multiple issues such as variation in the distribution of rainfall, poor condition of water bodies, over-drafting of groundwater and deforestation. Also, the feeder channel



which supplies water was encroached upon by villagers on both sides. These hardships compelled her to become involved in water conservation and management.

K. Selvi got the feeder channel encroachment removed and mobilized the local communities by mobilizing 100 farmers to renovate the feeder channel. She also took active steps to renovate the tank in the village, regenerate the

ecosystem and promote silt application for building a green environment. The water conservation work inspired the entire village and villagers came forward to form an association as well as nine farmer SHGs whose 128 members are saving and accessing credit.

The farmers' federation functioning in the block made her an executive committee member, which resulted in her working with about 2,000 farmers as of 2007. In 2014, she was given the responsibility of a treasurer when the federation was working with about 3,000 farmers. Today her village is a model village for the entire T. Kallupatti block. All the farmers have become members of the association, SHGs and farmer's producer organization. S. Narikudi village is better known for women-led conservation and development. She wishes to promote women's participation and leadership in water conservation and development.

Note: K.Selvi was featured in the book *Women for Water: Stories of women connected to earth and water* published by Hindustan Unilever Foundation of Hindustan Unilever Limited.



Kaminibai Rajguru

“A lot of my crucial time goes in fetching water. Women of all ages share this harsh reality. If we have water in our village, we will finally get time for ourselves.”



Age

50

Education

7th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

Ubalkhed Village,
Buldhana District,
Maharashtra

Area of Intervention

Water conservation,
governance and
management

Skills and Training

Community awareness
and mobilization,
trained in watershed
management techniques

CHALLENGE

Water scarcity, lack of community-led water conservation efforts

INITIATIVE(S)

Awareness of the importance of water conservation and watershed management

IMPACT

Mobilized men and women in the building of watershed structures with voluntary labour and monetary support

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Ubalkhed



Around 100 to 125 villagers teamed up to supplement Kaminibai's efforts and provided monetary support.



Ubalkhed is a drought-prone village and its residents are no strangers to water scarcity issues. In 2019, in an effort to free itself from the shackles of drought, the village nominated itself to participate in Paani Foundation's Satyamev Jayate Water Cup, a village-level competition for the best work in water and soil conservation. Realizing the importance of this competition for her village, **Kaminibai** came forward and became the leader that everyone looked up to when it came to spearheading work around water



and soil conservation activities. She first volunteered to participate in a residential training programme organized by Paani Foundation. After the training, she decided to take on the mantle to convince fellow villagers to join the work.

In Ubalkhed, several residents are forced to work as daily-wage labourers on others' farms or pushed to migrate to cities in search of work. Therefore, there was a severe lack of manpower, resources as well as will when it came to putting in the

work to make the village water-abundant. To address this, **Kaminibai** went door to door, motivating the women and explaining to them why this work could change their futures for good. Gradually, women in the village joined in by offering voluntary labour. Inspired and motivated by their wives' enthusiasm and leadership roles, their husbands also joined them in building watershed structures. Around 100 to 125 villagers teamed up to supplement **Kaminibai's** efforts and provided monetary support. The village successfully built the watershed structures across an area of 43,178 cubic metres.

Kaminibai was instrumental in encouraging women to come out of their homes and participate. She is continuing her water conservation efforts via her participation with her SHG.



Kanchan Jadhav

“Water is like gold in terms of value, so everyone should value it and use it as required and keep it secure for tomorrow.”



Age

38

Education

10th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

Jadhavwadi Village, Pune
District, Maharashtra

Area of Intervention

Water-use efficiency

Skills and Training

Innovation in water-saving in sugarcane planting, soil conservation techniques and training of fellow farmers

CHALLENGE

Flood irrigation creating huge losses of water and hampering the soil health and productivity of the sugarcane crop

INITIATIVE(S)

Implemented the innovative idea of the pre-germinated seedling plantation, drip irrigation, training fellow farmers and sugarcane waste mulching

IMPACT

Around 45-50 percent of water saving in sugarcane, sugarcane productivity increased by 30 percent. About 80 percent of farmers adopted pre-germinated nursery plantation successfully not only in her village but also in the adjoining villages

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Jadhavwadi and nearby villages



As a woman, she had to face many problems; her family as well as society questioned her leadership but she managed to change people's mind-set.



Kanchan Jadhav is a farmer who has been growing sugarcane for many years, using flood irrigation methods. These traditional methods caused huge water losses and hampered the health and productivity of sugarcane crops. Facing problems of low productivity and water scarcity, she decided to adopt water-efficient practices.

Kanchan, motivated by ITC Mission Sunehra Kal, collaborated with ITC Limited to form a water SHG in her village. She experimented with pre-germinated nursery plantation in her field and started to train her fellow SHG members on water



management and conservation, crop water management techniques and the use of drip. She tried another model for conserving soil moisture and soil health, i.e., trash mulching in sugarcane. As a woman, she had to face many problems; her family as well as society questioned her leadership but, with the help of ITC and her SHG, she managed to change people's mind-set.

Kanchan aims to ensure that this innovative technology can be replicated in all of Junnar block for a better tomorrow.



Kunti Gupta

“We have always worshipped our natural resources and water is a treasure that needs to be preserved for our future generations. Water is a basic human right yet some communities still struggle with access to safe drinking water. I feel honoured to be a water change agent and consider my work as a blessing bestowed onto me.”



Age

46

Education

Post graduate

Occupation

**Social development worker
at Sehgal Foundation**

Location

**Nuh District, Haryana and
Muzzafarpur District, Bihar**

Area of Intervention

**Water quality improvement
and management, waste
water treatment and
management**

Skills and Training

**Community awareness and
mobilization, trainer for
making soak pits, installation
of filters and adoption of
water-saving irrigation
technologies, trained on
behaviour change, leadership
and water conservation
methods.**

CHALLENGE

Poor water quality and lack of community awareness

INITIATIVE(S)

Community capacity building on water management and water testing, facilitated the installation of over 110 filters and five soak pits, worked on water-saving irrigation technologies, introduced low-cost household water treatment technology

IMPACT

Irrigation water-use efficiency, wastewater management, creation of alternative livelihoods, adoption of household water treatment technology led to a reduction in medical expenses incurred due to waterborne diseases

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village and Panchayat



She has been instrumental in managing corporate social responsibility projects on water management and agricultural development in Bihar.



Kunti has over 13 years of experience in grassroots development. She started working on life skills education in the Nuh district of Haryana and later moved to water management and training communities on thematic areas of water. She has played an active role in sensitizing communities on access to clean drinking water and wastewater disposal through the promotion of soak pits. Nuh was a water-scarce region and water salinity was an issue. Lack of awareness about water-borne diseases was a major challenge that **Kunti** had to handle.



Kunti has evolved in her role from a field coordinator to a project coordinator and has extensive experience in working with communities across Haryana and Bihar. She has been instrumental in managing corporate social responsibility projects on water management and agricultural development in Bihar. In the course of her work, she has facilitated the installation of over 110 filters and five soak pits in five villages in Muzzafarpur district. On the agriculture front, she has worked to propagate water-saving irrigation technologies such as solar pumps and farm mechanization by promoting zero tillage machines and potato planters among

farmers. Kunti has been working with women on the promotion of goat farming and creating goatpreneurs to generate alternative livelihoods. She introduced communities to the Jalkalp water filter which is a low-cost, household-level water treatment technology developed by the Sehgal Foundation. Families now use filtered water for drinking and cooking, instead of the hand pump water which they used earlier.

Kunti aims to create a cluster-based ownership model for drinking water technologies, which will provide access to technology even to the poorest of poor households. She believes women and water have a deep connection; they are the primary users of water, and it is important to build their capacities. She encourages more and more women to come forward for managing water resources.



Laichi Bai Uike

“If there is no water, there is no life. That is why we conserve water wherever and in whichever way we can. When we make boribunds, it is not only for us but also for cattle and wild animals from the forest who drink that water.”

Age

46

Education

1st Grade

Occupation

Farmer, daily wage labourer, non-timber forest products collector

Location

Umarwada Village, Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh

Area of Intervention

Water conservation, governance and management

Skills and Training

Community awareness and mobilization, capacity building training on water commons and water conservation

CHALLENGE

Water scarce region, women walk miles to fetch water from long distances, low motivation in the community due to irregular Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) payments by the Panchayat

INITIATIVE(S)

Motivated and mobilized community (including women) to construct boribunds near the streams across the village every year, brought transparency in MGNREGS payments

IMPACT

Access to water for the household and cattle needs even during the dry season, women were empowered to manage their common resources and take part in the decision-making process, Panchayat functionaries were pushed towards accountability and transparency

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Six Panchayats



Due to her persistent efforts, boribunds are being built across the village every year. People now have access to water for their household needs and cattle.



Laichi Bai and her husband used to travel to Jabalpur as farm labourers since farming didn't seem like a viable option in their village due to acute water scarcity and a lack of rainwater harvesting systems. Moreover, people who undertook water conservation efforts such as the construction of boribunds on streams were not receiving the stipulated compensation from the Panchayat under MGNREGS due to informal payments being made. This deterred the community from undertaking water conservation



efforts in their common lands and they ultimately lost the motivation to manage their common water resources.

Observing the low motivation within the community, **Laichi Bai** decided to lead by example and undertook the creation of boribunds on the stream near her farmland to harvest the water. She also managed to get her due wage from the Panchayat for undertaking this work. However, with corruption in payments

being a persistent issue, many people did not receive their payments even after repeated interactions with the local administration. **Laichi Bai** was motivated to bring about a change in this system and she ran for the position of one of the Panchs in the village. She was elected with the support of the community and, during her tenure, she worked diligently to ensure transparency in the dealings of the Panchayat. She also mobilized women to come forward for this initiative as water scarcity affected them the most. Due to her persistent efforts, boribunds are being built across the village every year. People now have access to water for their household needs and cattle, especially during the water crisis months of summer.

Laichi Bai has inspired many women who are now on their way to managing other Commons such as forests in addition to Water Commons. The women are also thinking of taking the initiative of undertaking community fisheries in their community pond for better management of their Water Commons.



Lalitha

“Water is one of the main natural resources used by us for hygiene and health. It is a connecting link to not just our existence but also our well-being. If water quality or quantity goes wrong, the very balance of life is disturbed.”

Age

40

Education

5th Grade

Occupation

Community mobilizer at
Keystone Foundation

Location

Anekatty Village, Sigur,
Nilgiri District, Tamil Nadu

Area of Intervention

Water access and supply

Skills and Training

Community mobilization,
water quality testing
and monitoring, water
resources surveying,
participatory rural
appraisals and natural
resource use with the
rights-based approach

CHALLENGE

Water scarcity due to poor water supply
infrastructure and maintenance, weak village
institutions and lack of community unity

INITIATIVE(S)

Community awareness and mobilization to form
water user groups and empowering them leading to
effective action towards water accessibility

IMPACT

Strengthening the village institution through seven
water user groups in seven villages. This led to
the cascading effect of leadership-building in the
villages. As a result, water scarcity was arrested and
the idea of community water management was well-
acknowledged by the people

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Panchayat



She used her skill base to scale up the intervention and lead the talk towards forming the water user group.



Lalitha, known in the area as Lalithakka, is an indigenous woman from Anekatty village. Drinking water scarcity in her village and the cumbersome chore of fetching water from long distances undertaken by women motivated her to espouse work on water leading to her association with the Keystone Foundation. Subsequently, she received training in water testing, water monitoring and water resource surveys.

In this journey, she understood that it was not an easy step forward. Unifying all concerned line agencies to work



was tedious. That is when the need to strengthen the village institution and the creation of a water user group idea was pitched. Another challenge she faced was to bring awareness amongst people about the water quality of the area. She conducted water quality testing in her village but initially found it difficult to share water quality test results with the community as only a few people were attending the update meetings. But, gradually, with an increase in water-

related health issues, linkages with the community were fostered in the village that ensured the importance of regular monitoring of water quality. This resulted in the setting up of a system of sharing of the data on a monthly basis with the community.

Lalitha played a major role in coordinating the work and mobilizing the community. She used her skill base to scale up the intervention and lead the talk towards forming the water user group. With the water user group in place, physical or infrastructure activities were looked after and local youth was trained on plumbing. The health and hygiene component revolving around water was also introduced. Water user groups also incorporated a monetary contribution from the villagers to help in the maintenance.

In the time to come, **Lalitha** aims to further strengthen the water user group and link its work with a rights-based approach. Through these institutions, she desires to take up water conservation activities such as spring rejuvenation through appropriate infrastructure in prioritized villages.

Note: The two published articles on Lalitha are available at the following links:
<https://keystone-foundation.org/an-advansi-women-at-the-forefront-of-forest-rights-act/>
<http://keystone-foundation.org/teams/m-lalitha/>



Leela Bai Pawar

“I have a dream to get clean drinking water at my house so that I can save my time from the daily drudgery of bringing water and instead put that time in agriculture and other activities. Clean water will save money spent on medical facilities and help my family with financial support and help me become an independent woman.”

Age

44

Education

No formal education

Occupation

Daily wage labourer

Location

Memdi Village, Indore
District, Madhya Pradesh

Area of Intervention

Water access and supply

Skills and Training

Water conservation
and budgeting, water
security plan, advocacy
for water rights,
community awareness
and mobilization

CHALLENGE

Lack of water availability due to technical faults
in well boring done by the government, women
fetching water from far distances

INITIATIVE(S)

Approached the government to repair defunct
boring well, regular monitoring of bore well,
community mobilization, motivating youth
to undergo training on routine operation and
maintenance

IMPACT

Advocacy efforts led the government to repair
and improve the bore well supply structures

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Community and village



She continues to motivate local village youths to undergo training on routine operation and maintenance of water sources to have resources availability within the village.



The boring well near **Leela Bai's** home stopped functioning; therefore women had to travel a distance of a minimum of 3 kilometre to carry water back to their homes to meet their daily needs. The women could not understand the problem due to a lack of knowledge on the subject. Then, during one of the meetings of WaterAid and Samarthan - Centre for Development Support Team, Leela Bai realized the importance of source sustainability, regular operation and maintenance and water quality.

She urged 10 more women from neighbouring houses to join her in



gaining emancipation from the drudgery of water scarcity. As the Chairman of the Jal Samiti, she took the initiative to hold meaningful discussions related to water with department representatives, maintaining cleanliness around the water sources, the formation of the VWSC and also community contribution towards water tax, and generating awareness on water quality and water conservation. She had to face challenges on the grounds of gender for acting a progressive role in achieving sustained availability of clean water. However, she continued striving and, along with Panchayat members, approached the government for repairing the defunct boring well.

She continues to motivate local village youths to undergo training on routine operation and maintenance of water sources to have resources availability within the village. **Leela Bai** believes that it is important that women participate in the planning and managing of water sources.



Lilabai Sonvane

“Water is an important natural resource that should be conserved and used sustainably. Water availability continues to be the biggest problem in the region, with droughts recurring every other year. If there is no water for us, no water for the birds or the animals, how will we go on living?”



Age

60

Education

7th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

**Godri Village, Jalna
District, Maharashtra**

Area of Intervention

**Water conservation,
governance and
management**

Skills and Training

**Community awareness
and mobilization,
leadership skills, water
budgeting and water
governance**

CHALLENGE

Drought-prone area, low agricultural productivity, declining groundwater levels, poor governance

INITIATIVE(S)

Promoting aquifer literacy, motivating and mobilizing people to work together for sustainable management of their aquifer

IMPACT

Community water stewardship in 14 villages that share a common aquifer, water and aquifer literacy in villages

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Panchayat



Her passion and dedication have helped to promote water and aquifer literacy in her village as well as other villages of the Godri cluster.



The Godri cluster of villages experiences a cycle of drought every three years. Agricultural productivity was low and the cluster was highly dependent on groundwater but lack of awareness resulted in unequal access to groundwater and its severe depletion in the cluster and nearby villages. **Lilabai** took over the mantle of leadership and played a strong nudging role in the promotion of the Water Stewardship Initiative of the Watershed Organisation Trust. **Lilabai**, with the support of



Jal Sevaks and Jal Sevikas, is guiding villages to manage their water resources effectively. The initiative has brought together the residents of 14 villages that share a common aquifer.

Lilabai became an active member of the Aquifer Management Committee, head of SHG federation of her village, a Village Water Management Team member and an important member of her village GP. Her passion and dedication have helped to promote water and aquifer literacy

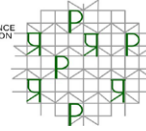
in her village and other villagers of the Godri cluster and has motivated villages to set up institutional measures. **Lilabai**, as a member of the GP, talked about the possibility of digging a well for women who travelled long distances to fetch drinking water. Her plan was implemented by the GP, and the water problem in the village was finally addressed to an extent because of her efforts.

Lilabai emphasizes the importance of SHGs as a platform to educate women about water management and aquifers, so they can eventually feel empowered to participate and speak up on public platforms.



Lilabati Mahata

“Water is the source of our life. As we drink water for living, it is also the chief component for crops in the land which fundamentally is the source of the rural economy. Managing water and conservation of water is the key to a better tomorrow. If women can manage water, then it is surely the process to unlock success.”



Age

30

Education

12th Grade

Occupation

Social mobilizer at PRADAN

Location

Dhobakuria Village, Jhargram District, West Bengal

Area of Intervention

Water conservation, governance and management

Skills and Training

Community mobilization, planning and management of natural resources, advocacy for water rights, watershed area demarcation, map preparation, water budgeting, MGNREGS supervisor training, improved agriculture practices' training and book keeping training of SHGs

CHALLENGE

Water stressed dry zone with complete dependency on rainwater for irrigation, lack of water conservation resulting in frequent crop failure

INITIATIVE(S)

Community awareness and mobilization of women for soil and moisture conservation and regeneration of natural resources by making them self-dependent, facilitated the process of collaboration between SHGs and GP

IMPACT

1,250 households in around 85 villages adopted water use efficiency in agriculture, more than 3,500 members of women's SHGs gained confidence in the knowledge of various natural resources management and crop practices

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Community, village and Panchayat



She succeeded in adopting efficient water use in agriculture involving more than 1,250 households in around 85 villages.



Lilabati Mahata worked as a labourer in agricultural fields in the water-scarce region of her village where the major need was conservation of natural resources, especially soil and moisture. However, due to lack of water conservation and irrigation management, the rainwater was flowing from upland to downstream to the river resulting in water stress zone and frequent crop failure.

Lilabati formed a SHG and started cultivation on leased land by taking a loan from the SHG. She gradually



started spreading awareness among the members of SHGs and the whole community to bring rigorous engagement on issues such as soil and moisture conservation and regeneration of natural resources, resource mapping, patch demarcation and problem identification. Current and aspired land use assessment for appropriate activity planning such as treatment of forest upland and water harvesting structure creation were some aspects she brought

forward to promote the community's role in making themselves self-dependent. The fundamental change that happened was a paradigm shift in the perspectives around holistic development among members of the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI), SHG as well as the community. Through her engagement with the community, she succeeded in adopting efficient water use in agriculture involving more than 1,250 households in around 85 villages. The initiative also helped in enhancing practices of agriculture along with better production and upliftment of economic conditions. With this journey, more than 3,500 members of women's SHGs acquired knowledge of various natural resources management and crop practices.

Lilabati aspires to establish women's identities as farmers in society through natural resource management.

Note: Lilabati was featured in the book *Women for Water: stories of women connected to earth and water* published by Hindustan Unilever Limited.



Madhuben Raval

“Life is not possible without water. There has always been sufficient water to fulfil the needs of all living beings but not the greed of human beings. To ensure that everyone gets water and uses it judiciously, my village has established an equitable canal water distribution system, taken to water harvesting and reduced water use in agriculture through collective community efforts.”



Age

63

Education

11th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

Lolasan Village, Himmatnagar Taluka, Sabarkantha District, Gujarat

Area of Intervention

Water-use efficiency

Skills and Training

Community awareness and mobilization, trained in participatory irrigation management, irrigation water requirement, water harvesting and conservation, production and use of organic inputs such as vermicomposting, integrated nutrient management and integrated pest management in agriculture

CHALLENGE

Erratic supply of water for drinking and irrigation purposes

INITIATIVE(S)

Filed a petition with the canal authorities to gain access to canal water for a longer period, formed an organic input producer group and motivated farmers to adopt sustainable agriculture practices

IMPACT

Increased access and availability of canal water to farmers, helped the community in adopting organic inputs in agriculture, reduced irrigation water application employing improved soil moisture and change in a package of practices

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Lolasan



She is undertaking new initiatives with confidence and participating in various forums on agriculture and women at the district level.



Madhuben Raval is an inhabitant of Village Lolasan where she has lived with water scarcity throughout her life. She stood in queues for hours to source drinking water when she was a child, borrowed money for a bore well that never yielded water and could only cultivate one acre of her total landholding. The canal in her village provided four months of erratic supply. Unpredictable water availability in the post-monsoon season decreased the agriculture production while poor fertility and less humus in sandy loam soils of



the area increased the cost of inputs and cultivation. The imbalanced agriculture situation forced the farmers to leave their farms and migrate to nearby towns or cities in search of other livelihood options.

This motivated **Madhuben** to work with other women and arrest this issue. She mobilized women farmers to petition the canal authorities to get longer access to canal water. Her continuous efforts resulted in the rehabilitation of the canal

network and ensured water supply in her village for eight months in an agriculture year. After going through training on sustainable agriculture practices, she helped farmers to transition to home-made organic inputs in agriculture. Vermin-wash from cow dung and bio-pesticide from cow urine and other non-edible herbs are now easily available within the village; all of which successfully demonstrates a positive change in yield, input reduction in the cost as well as a decrease in irrigation water needs. She also motivated a group of enterprising women to start a vermicomposting business. It helped farmers cut down the water required while adding to their earnings.

She uplifted the reputation of women within the community as a social leader. Today, she is undertaking new initiatives with confidence and participating in various forums on agriculture and women at the district level.

Note: Madhuben was featured in the book *Women for Water: stories of women connected to earth and water* published by Hindustan Unilever Limited.



Meenakshi Bhor

“For people like us who have always been tanker-dependent, water is synonym with happiness and satisfaction. We are working hard towards fulfilling our dream of daily water availability.”

Age

35

Education

12th Grade

Occupation

Village Sarpanch and farmer

Location

Kansewadi Village,
Ahmadnagar District,
Maharashtra

Area of Intervention

Water conservation,
governance and
management

Skills and Training

Community awareness and
mobilization, trained in
watershed management
techniques

CHALLENGE

Drought-stricken village facing water scarcity

INITIATIVE(S)

Community awareness and mobilization to build watershed structures to harvest rainwater

IMPACT

Community participation in water conservation works, availability of water in the village

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Kansewadi



The watershed initiatives led by Meenakshi and several other young women helped the village to harvest rainwater.



Meenakshi lives in a village afflicted with acute water scarcity and drought. Every year post December-January, the entire village accustoms itself to tankers for its daily needs. To tackle the issue of water shortage, the village community decided to participate in Paani Foundation's Water Cup competition. Women in the village initially faced immense resistance from men. To overcome the voices of opposition, **Meenakshi** started motivating and mobilizing women to start the watershed management work as part of the competition. She inspired women of all ages to happily work alongside her and inspired them to join the movement.



To build the watershed structures, it was important to mark out the locations and make key measurements for every structure as per technical guidelines and specifications. However, the village had run out of chalk or white powder to mark the structures. **Meenakshi** came up with a creative, home-grown and cost-effective solution to address this problem. Along with two other women, she used the ash from stoves at home to mark out the boundaries for every structure. She also worked relentlessly to ensure that every structure was accurately marked.

Gradually, inspired by the dedication and quality of work performed by the women of their village, men also offered their support and came forward to work together for the competition. The village emerged as a top 15 contender in the competition and also won the second prize at the taluka level. The watershed initiatives led by **Meenakshi** and several other young women helped the village to harvest rainwater.

Years ago, **Meenakshi** had dreamt that she would make her village similar to Hiware Bazaar, which is a model village, renowned across the state and country. She hoped to meet the village sarpanch and watershed veteran, Shri Popatrao Pawar, who had led this revolutionary change in Hiware Bazaar. In 2019, Shri Pawar himself visited her village as a member of the jury for the Water Cup and applauded her leadership and work.

Since the beginning of the competition, **Meenakshi** was determined to change the face of her village. She continues her active participation in the work by being a part of local decision making in the village and empowering women to be change makers.

Note: Link to the video featuring her work: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPsD7OmRnmY&ab_channel=PaaniFoundation



Naktu Devi

“For me, water is a precious commodity. I have witnessed severe droughts and famine. I have understood the struggle women do by travelling 3-4 kilometre daily just to fetch a few pots of water. Water is costlier than ghee to me. I can bear the loss of butter but a loss of water is unbearable. It is like heart pain to me.”



Age

40

Education

Can only read

Occupation

Farmer

Location

**Bhojo ki Bap Village, Bap
Tehsil, Jodhpur District,
Rajasthan**

Area of Intervention

**Water conservation,
governance and
management**

Skills and Training

**Community awareness and
mobilization for rainwater
harvesting, construction
of earthen dykes and
renovation of ponds**

CHALLENGE

Drought and water scarcity led to stress in agriculture and migration of village youth in search of work

INITIATIVE(S)

Construction of rainwater harvesting structures, providing exposure to women and motivated them to join the SHG

IMPACT

Rainwater storage brought water and food security, women joined together in collective action which made them more confident, self-reliant and participants in the decision-making process

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Bhojo ki Bap



The model she demonstrated is a sustainable drought mitigation approach for not just providing water and food to a family but an overall socio-economic development with a secure rural livelihood.



Naktu belongs to a poor scheduled tribal community living in the remote drought-prone area, afflicted by acute water shortage and lacking means of livelihoods. She became a member of the women's SHG in the village and motivated women and the community to do work on preserving rainwater to ensure water and food security in the village.

She was involved in the implementation and monitoring of water management activities and solely constructed Khadin



(earthen dyke) in her farmland to do rain-fed farming. She observed that the land productivity of her farmland had improved. She took ownership of rainwater harvesting tanks and the renovation of ponds in the village. She initially faced discrimination but, after continuous efforts, her community started believing in her work. She motivated women from the poorest of poor families to join the SHG, and helped them to learn basic financing as well.

Naktu is still the voice of women in her area. She is a benchmark for women of the underprivileged community to come forward to take control of their lives. The model she demonstrated is a sustainable drought mitigation approach for not just providing water and food to a family but an overall socio-economic development with a secure rural livelihood. She continues to participate in village meetings and links women with existing water and livelihood related schemes.



Neetaben Patel

“Water is the most invaluable gift of nature to us. It is life. Its availability and access is an important indicator of one’s quality of life. Life on earth thrives because of water. It is what gives the earth its beauty.”



AGA KHAN RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME (INDIA)
A PROGRAMME OF THE AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK



Hindustan Unilever Limited
Hindustan Unilever Foundation
An wholly owned subsidiary of Hindustan Unilever Ltd.

Age

42

Education

Post graduate

Occupation

Community development expert

Location

Dang District, Gujarat

Area of Intervention

Water conservation, governance and management

Skills and Training

Expertise in rural livelihoods, community mobilization, community-based institutions, rural governance, gender, trained in participatory rural appraisal, promotion and strengthening of community-based institutions, soil and water conservation, water budgeting, sustainable agricultural practices

CHALLENGE

Unavailability of water for domestic consumption and irrigation, severe impact on health and livelihoods, distress migration

INITIATIVE(S)

Facilitating water conservation efforts, strengthening community-based institutions for water conservation and efficient water management, mobilization of women to raise water issues with the Panchayats, advocacy with PRIs and other stakeholders

IMPACT

Water sufficient villages, women's leadership and active participation in water committees, women gained technical expertise on soil and water conservation & management, livelihood enhancement

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village, Panchayat, block and district



Her efforts have turned many water-stressed villages into water-sufficient villages. There is a visible impact on both ground- and surface-water availability.



Neetaben hails from a remote tribal village in the Navsari district of Gujarat. She faced many hardships to access water throughout her life which motivated her to start working on gender and water-related issues. She later joined the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme where she worked as a development organizer in the tribal hinterlands of Dang, Narmada and Bharuch districts. She realized that the unavailability of water for domestic consumption and irrigation has a severe impact on the health and livelihood of people. She noted that barriers in accessing water for irrigation affected crop production and, eventually, food security and livelihoods, forcing people into distress migration.



Her work has mostly been around facilitating water conservation efforts to improve livelihood opportunities for local communities and strengthening community-based institutions for water conservation and management. She took the lead in nurturing leadership skills of women, demanding better infrastructure for water accessibility and advocating with PRIs and other stakeholders. She facilitated collaboration between the community, PRIs and concerned government agencies.

All these efforts have turned many water-stressed villages into water-sufficient

villages. There is a visible impact on both ground- and surface-water availability. As a result, many farmers have now started growing rabi crops and also engaging in animal husbandry in the region. The drudgery of women and girls has reduced, women are now active members of water committees and, above all, have gained considerable technical expertise on soil and water conservation and management. The direct-indirect impact of livelihood enhancement has also helped in addressing many gender issues and ensuring better life quality for women and girls.

Neetaben now plans to work on sensitizing communities on judicious use of water. She plans to emphasize these emerging issues over time.

Note: Neetaben was featured in the book *Women for Water: stories of women connected to earth and water* published by Hindustan Unilever Limited.



Neetu Singh

“Water is priceless. Most of the water in the world is used for agricultural purposes. We all should take some important steps to save water in agricultural work. Five years ago, people in my village did not understand the importance of saving water but today they are aware and are adopting water-saving agriculture practices.”



Age

24

Education

Graduate

Occupation

**Field coordinator at
People's Action for
National Integration
(PANI)**

Location

**Siddharth Nagar and
Balrampur District of
Uttar Pradesh**

Area of Intervention

Water use efficiency

Skills and Training

**Community awareness
and mobilization,
leadership, trained on
sustainable farming
techniques, water
budgeting & accounting
and water conservation
methods**

CHALLENGE

Extremely poor condition of village water bodies, declining groundwater level during summers, water-intensive agricultural practices by farmers

INITIATIVE(S)

Piloted System Rice of Intensification (SRI) technique on her farm, regular measurement of groundwater levels, mobilization of women farmers, mentoring women professionals in other Panchayats

IMPACT

Convinced the farmers to adopt sustainable farming practices, water saving in agriculture

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village and Block



She led a team to reach out to 2,250 women farmers with a focus on water-saving farming and yield enhancement while doubling farming income in agriculture.



Neetu hails from Basawanpur Village which is a flood-prone region in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Since her childhood she has witnessed the poor condition of ponds, drying wells, declining groundwater levels during summers in her village. She noticed that farmers in her village were using water-intensive agriculture techniques and overexploiting groundwater resources. She decided to join PANI as a community resource person. She was opposed and questioned for breaking gender barriers when she joined the organization and realized her identity as a farmer.



Neetu received extensive training on farming and water-use practices. She piloted SRI on her farm which increased the yield and reduced the amount of water and fertilizers needed. Eventually, she was able to convince other farmers to adopt similar practices. She also gathered the community's support to measure the groundwater table to create awareness about groundwater depletion. She started mentoring women professionals in other Panchayats.

At present, she is working as a field coordinator at PANI and has 10 community resource persons working under her who are reaching out to 2,250 women farmers with a focus on water-saving farming and yield enhancement while doubling farming income in agriculture. She aspires to start her own organization and empower women so that they come out of their homes and realize their true identity.

Note: Neetu was featured in the book *Women for Water: stories of women connected to earth and water* published by Hindustan Unilever Limited.



Pareshamma

“Every creature on mother Earth needs water every day. We need water for household requirements and growing crops. Nowadays, many farmers depend upon groundwater for their crops and dig bore wells, thereby exploiting the resource. This way, water has become scarce, with insufficient water even for our household requirements. It is, therefore, our responsibility to conserve every drop.”

Age

30

Education

Training at the Industrial Training Institute

Occupation

Community resource person at FES

Location

Thamballapalle Village, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh

Area of Intervention

Water conservation, governance and management

Skills and Training

Community awareness and mobilization, crop water budgeting, water game, sustainable agricultural practices, millet cultivation and consumption, soil and water conservation measures

CHALLENGE

Decline in groundwater levels due to growing water-intensive crops in a water-scarce region

INITIATIVE(S)

Promoted the cultivation of millets, advocated benefits of eating millets, helped incentivize farmers by giving them seeds free of cost

IMPACT

About 50 farmer families started growing millets. Around 200 families made millets a part of their diet

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Thamballapalle



She was able to motivate farmers to shift to millet cropping. Today, about 50 farmer families are growing millets in the Thamballapalle region.



Pareshamma is a Dalit woman who works as a community resource person in the drought-prone district of Chittoor. Tomato and paddy are the main crops grown in this region. The continuous cultivation of these water-intensive crops severely affected the groundwater table in the village. **Pareshamma** had attended several training programmes on millet cultivation, crop water budgeting, sustainable agriculture practices and groundwater games. She was introduced to less water-intensive



millet cultivation and decided to promote it in the village. Initially, she found it challenging to convince farmers to make the shift from paddy to millet cultivation as millets promises less money than paddy.

She started promoting the benefits of eating millets and dissuaded people from consuming paddy which was treated with chemicals and pesticides. She facilitated meetings and discussions, bringing up the issue of the disappearance of millets

from the diet over the past 40 years and trying to impress upon the farmers that millets required less water than paddy or tomatoes. She and her team started incentivizing farmers by giving them seeds free of cost. As a result, she was able to motivate farmers to shift to millet cropping. Today, about 50 farmer families are growing millets in the Thamballapalle region. Around 200 families out of 700 have made millets a part of their diet.

Pareshamma's drive to promote water and food security amongst her village community is still on. She wants to boost the production and consumption of millets in other villages as well, starting with her native village. She believes that, to resolve water issues in her region, there should be a ban on drilling new bore wells and there is a need to undertake soil and water conservation works.



Radha Meena

“Availability of water will make the life of women easier and is a key to fulfilling their dreams. Women devote four to six hours daily in just walking and fetching water from far distances for their family and then spend the rest of their time in cooking food, agricultural activities, etc. Women who continue to live in a place suffering from water scarcity will never be able to think for themselves and their dreams.”

Age

32

Education

10th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

Mahukala Village, Budhni
Tehsil, Sehore District,
Madhya Pradesh

Area of Intervention

Water access and supply

Skills and Training

Advocacy for water rights,
community awareness
and mobilization, water
quality testing, water
budgeting

CHALLENGE

Lack of piped water supply and water scarcity
in the village

INITIATIVE(S)

Mobilization of women to form a water user
committee, development of a village water security
plan with the support of the community, actively
engaged with the district officials for distribution
and operation and maintenance of piped water
supply system

IMPACT

Fully functional piped water supply in the village,
establishment of a strong women-led water user
committee

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village, Panchayat and district



Radha Meena herself took the lead in mobilizing other women to form a strong water user committee, which eventually led to a fully functional pipe water supply scheme with minimum defects in the village.



Radha Meena belongs to Mahukala, a village devoid of piped water and access to safe drinking water for the community. Women of the village used to spend four to six hours a day to arrange drinking water for their families. To solve the problem of water scarcity, Mardanpur Nal Jal Scheme was introduced in the village; however, there was no mechanism for operation and maintenance to implement the scheme. Men in the village did not seem to be interested in solving the issue and most households showed no support.



Radha Meena herself took the lead in mobilizing other women to form a strong water user committee, which eventually led to a fully functional piped water supply scheme with minimum defects in the village.

Radha Meena took the initiative to form a drinking water subcommittee and also develop a water security plan with the support of the community. She actively sought an estimation of tap connections required, mobilized households while

explaining to them the economy of piped water, water tariff fixing and tax collection. She took responsibility for distribution and grievance redressal related to piped water and its operation and maintenance. The committee, through the Panchayat, voiced its opinion to the government department to include the village in the piped water supply scheme. In coordination with Jal Nigam officials, it worked with contractors and solved the problem of water pressure in all the six identified taps.

Radha Meena wants to ensure a sufficient amount of water in each household of neighbouring villages so that every woman can spend her time to realize her dream instead of spending it on the arrangement of water for her family.



Ramandeep Kaur

“To me, water is needed in every phase of life. I see water as the provider of life itself. I realized its importance in the past few years. And now I cannot be an armchair critic any longer sitting and watching the misuse of water. I hold water sacred and recognize the role of water in everything that I do.”



Age

26

Education

Post graduate

Occupation

Social worker

Location

Palia Kalan, Lakhimpur
Kheri District, Uttar
Pradesh

Area of Intervention

Water quality
improvement and
management

Skills and Training

Capacity building and
community mobilization,
trained on integrated
water resources
management and village-
level water planning

CHALLENGE

Lack of access to safe drinking water, river
pollution and groundwater contamination

INITIATIVE(S)

Instrumental in setting up a women's group for
water management and leadership, community
capacity building on water management

IMPACT

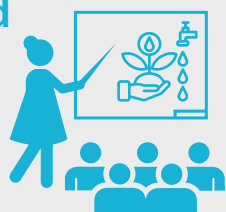
Women's participation and leadership in water
governance, community participation in water
management and planning

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Block



She pursued the issue by sensitizing and educating not just the women but also the rest of the local community on water-related issues.



Ramandeep Kaur is a social science post-graduate from Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh. Her journey on water governance began when she joined Grameen Development Services (GDS), a local NGO, working on the trans-boundary rivers of South Asia project. She was instrumental in setting up a women's group for water management which she led. Through the Village Water Management Committee, she helped extract knowledge on water-related issues and impact of the private sector on local water bodies. Following this, the women's group collaborated and worked



with the private sector and government officials on the water contamination issue. She also led the group in implementing the citizen science approach for advocating water governance.

Ramandeep faced and overcame various roadblocks to solve the problem of polluted water in her village. Initially, the women would not step out of their homes to participate in water committees due to various reasons such as illiteracy, cultural and social norms and lack of confidence. She took up the mantle of organizing these women through

constant engagement with them in their homes. She pursued the issue by sensitizing and educating not just the women but also the rest of the local community on water-related issues. Today, the local women have a voice in decision-making and are using water quality data for advocacy on local water issues. Many women in the village have taken up leadership on water issues by themselves. Community members have started making integrated plans on water management.

In the future, **Ramandeep** plans to set up linkages with various government schemes on water and create transformational leadership in the community. She also plans to engage with the local private sector on water-related issues and support the community in its demands for rights over water.



Renuka Kotambkar

“Water is necessary not only for the present generation but also for the coming generations. We must educate people on this issue so that every drop of water is used properly. There is a need to save every single drop of water for the betterment of mankind. To achieve this, not only the government but all other stakeholders should work jointly.”



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Gap Inc.



Age

45

Education

Graduation

Occupation

Sarpanch

Location

Kotamba Village, Wardha
District, Maharashtra

Area of Intervention

Water conservation,
governance and
management, water
access and supply, water
sanitation and hygiene

Skills and Training

Leadership &
coordination skills, water
quality testing and water
budgeting

CHALLENGE

Depleting groundwater levels and lack of water conservation efforts resulted in irregular drinking water supply and lack of toilets led to open defecation

INITIATIVE(S)

Coordination work for construction of a dam near the village, construction of toilets and rainwater harvesting structures in government buildings of the village, preparation of soak pits near every hand pump

IMPACT

Water conservation in the village, increase in the water storage capacity of the dam, 100 percent toilets construction stopped open defecation, provision of tap connections for extremely poor families and sufficient availability of water for all the households

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Kotamba



Because of her continuous work, GP Kotamba received many awards at the district and taluka level. Due to her efforts, her village now has ample water for all households.



The asymmetrical piped water supply scheme in **Renuka's** village compelled all villagers to depend on the hand pump for drinking water. Only 30 percent of families had toilets, forcing the other disadvantaged people to defecate in the open. During the summer season, the water level in the hand pumps and wells was depleted making it difficult for villagers to get drinking water regularly. **Renuka** has been the Sarpanch of GP Kotamba for the last 10 years. She took the initiative of implementing



schemes of central and state governments so that the villagers would get clean and safe drinking water. She initiated the preparation of a soak pit near every hand pump in the village; as result water percolation increased the water level near the hand pumps. She also led coordination with the government department officials for repairing a dam near the village. Rainwater harvesting structures were constructed in all four government buildings of the village. Apart from that, she initiated river

deepening and cleaning, wastewater management, plantation and stream straightening activities. Because of her continuous work, GP Kotamba received many awards at the district and taluka level. Due to her efforts, her village now has ample water for all households. She aims to continue her efforts in making her village completely self-reliant.



Sagni Bai Dhurwe

“Water is everything to us. Because of this water, we can grow vegetables in our kitchen garden without buying them from the market. When we get water in our house, we don’t have to put efforts to collect water, we can finish our household work on time and have time for other things, like attending meetings and taking care of our children.”

Age**48****Education****No formal education****Occupation****Farmer, daily wage labourer, non-timber forest products collector****Location****Gubri Village, Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh****Area of Intervention****Water access and supply****Skills and Training****Community awareness and mobilization, advocacy & leadership, capacity building training on Water Commons and water conservation****CHALLENGE**

Water scarcity led to tedious efforts by women to collect drinking water from a distant well every day

INITIATIVE(S)

Undertook the leadership on jan sunwai (people's hearing) to demand for implementation of the Nal Jal Yojana in her village, advocated for other issues on water such as the repair of a transformer for pumping water, undertook cleaning of a common well and fitting of a motor for drinking water supply

IMPACT

Nal Jal Yojna programme was implemented in the village which provided door-to-door availability of drinking water, motivated other women to play an active role in water management

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Gubri



She motivated villagers to use water judiciously to grow vegetables in their kitchen garden during the winter and summer months and fulfil the nutritional needs of their families.



Sagni Bai is a farmer from Gubri village, where water scarcity for drinking and other domestic purposes was a big challenge. Women in her village, vexed by the daily chore of climbing uphill to fetch water, decided to raise their voices on the issue. Discussions were initiated in the 'Mahila Sabha' under the leadership of **Sagni Bai**. She mobilized other women to demand for the implementation of the Nal Jal Yojana in their village.

She started advocating for these issues repeatedly on various platforms and, finally, the programme was implemented



in the village, providing door-to-door availability of drinking water for all. Further, funds collected by the SHG federation were used to install a solar-powered pump and to lay down the pipelines which provided door-to-door water for the village community.

With increased awareness, the women in the village, under the leadership of **Sagni Bai**, decided to start playing an active role in the management of their Water Commons. Judicious use of water enabled them to grow vegetables in their kitchen garden during the winter and

summer months and fulfil the nutritional needs of their families without depending extensively upon the market. **Sagni Bai** continues to advocate for other issues related to water faced in her village and to motivate women to start playing an active role in the management of their Water Commons.



Sarswati Barik

“Water is valuable to life, without it human beings cannot live. It is vital for me to save every drop of it and to use it judiciously.”



Age

24

Education

Graduate

Occupation

Community mobilizer

Location

**Pachapada, Nalgunda,
Bhadrak District, Odisha**

Area of Intervention

**Water conservation,
governance and
management**

Skills and Training

**Community awareness
and mobilization,
trained in water,
sanitation and hygiene,
rainwater harvesting and
wastewater management**

CHALLENGE

High dependency on groundwater, wastage of water and wastewater stagnation near hand pumps

INITIATIVE(S)

Community awareness on water conservation and sanitation, formed Women's Water Forum in the Gram Panchayat

IMPACT

Influenced people to adopt water conservation and management measures, women's leadership in water management

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Gram Panchayat



She is facilitating the forum and fight for the water rights of people and sensitizing them about water conservation.



Sarswati's house is situated in a saline zone near the Bay of Bengal. Here, the hand pump is the major source of drinking water and freshwater aquifers are available at a 1,000 feet below the ground level. People are mostly dependent on the community hand pump or stand post for fresh drinking water. This situation motivated **Sarswati** to join Pragati Jubak Sangha, a local NGO, and work on water conservation and management.

Sarswati started her work at the community level and organized women's



SHGs to promote their socio-economic empowerment, including on issues of water sanitation and hygiene. She conducted weekly and monthly SHG meetings where she led discussions on water safety, conservation and management on a regular basis along with other socio-economic issues. She even organized a special house-to-house campaign for sensitizing people on the importance and proper management of water.

She created community awareness and mobilization to bring about change in

the behaviour of the village community. She also formed the Women's Water Forum in the GP with the representation of women leaders from different villages. She is facilitating the forum and fight for the water rights of people and sensitizing them about water conservation. The forum also looks at the operation and maintenance of community water sources such as hand pumps, ponds, etc., administers disinfection of water sources regularly, supervises the construction of rainwater harvesting structure and use of wastewater for agriculture and vegetable cultivation.

Sarswati was part of various watershed, afforestation and livelihood activities. She facilitated the construction of two water harvesting structures in the village. Her continuous efforts influenced people to adopt water conservation and management measures in their locality.



Sarjubai Meena

“Water is like milk – holy, pure and extremely valuable. Just like I treat milk as holy by serving it to God and my family and sell it for a livelihood, similarly, I value water by serving it to all and not taking it for granted. Also, exploitation of water (by miners and bore well diggers) has to stop as it is snatching away someone’s basic needs.”

Age

55

Education

No formal education

Occupation

Farmer

Location

Amritya Village,
Mandalgarh, Bhilwara
District, Rajasthan

Area of Intervention

Water conservation,
governance and
management

Skills and Training

Community mobilization,
water budgeting,
groundwater monitoring,
crop water budgeting
and water conservation
practices

CHALLENGE

Acute paucity of water resources, drastic drop in the level of the groundwater table due to illegal digging of bore wells

INITIATIVE(S)

Campaigned for the involvement of women and better water governance, mobilized community-driven initiatives such as water conservation planning and building recharge structures

IMPACT

Active participation and decision making by women on shared resources and ensured water availability throughout the year

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Mandalgarh and Kotri Blocks



Sarjubai's efforts had a significant impact on groundwater governance in her rural community leading to Jal Swavalamban.



Sarjubai, on realizing about the adverse impact of illegal extraction of groundwater through bore wells, banned them with support from her community members. She also resisted water mining and suggested more sustainable water harvesting structures. **Sarjubai** has been instrumental in shifting her rural community's approach to natural resource management to ensure sustainable, equitable access for all. She has consistently demonstrated innovativeness in her approach by



campaigning for better water governance with the involvement of women in this governance.

With time, **Sarjubai's** mobilization efforts against gendered norms transformed the village whereby the women, together with the men, attended village meetings and put their suggestions forward

without any hesitation. Their involvement and contribution were greatly valued. **Sarjubai's** efforts had a significant impact on groundwater governance in her rural community leading to Jal Swavalamban (self-sufficiency) using local water resources without bringing water from outside the village.

Sarjubai is also a member of a federation of village institutions working on conservation and management of Commons. She is actively engaged in taking her vision of "Save Nature, Save Commons, Save Water, Save Life, Save Time and Treasure Women" forward across the other blocks of the district.

Note: An article published in 2013 in *The Times of India* recognizing Sarju Bai as "woman with the turban" can be accessed at the following given link: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/TOI-Social-Impact-Awards-An-evening-to-honour-Indias-changemakers/articleshow/18215565.cms>



Sartama Devi

“Water is not in any way less than life for me and my animals. A consistent water supply in my village has allowed us to feed our animals properly. It has given a better life for my village and myself.”

Age

55

Education

No formal education

Occupation

Farmer

Location

**Patara Village, Uttarkashi
District, Uttarakhand**

Area of Intervention

**Water conservation,
governance and
management**

Skills and Training

**Community mobilization,
ferro cement water tank
making, leadership skills,
water conservation
awareness and
sensitization, field
training on leadership,
volunteerism, water
budgeting and water
conservation techniques**

CHALLENGE

Shortage of drinking water for domestic animals generally during the time of grazing due to which drudgery of women increased

INITIATIVE(S)

Revived four traditional water storage structures and constructed two new structures. Mobilized the village community to act collectively. Made the first ferro cement tank to conserve rainwater

IMPACT

Easy access to water for animals reduced women's drudgery, motivated them to do volunteer labour for the first ferro cement tank structure

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Panchayat, near-by Panchayats via visibility in newspapers/awards



Under the leadership of Sartama, members of Him Patara Gram Sangathan collectively decided to revive all the chal-khals present around the village with community shramdaan.



For **Sartama** farming and livestock rearing has been a major source of income but she faced the critical issue of drinking water availability most of her farming life because of continuous water availability shortages in her village Patara.

Reliance Foundation started its development work in her village in November 2018. It took up series of campaigns and capacity building programme such as *Jal Shakti Abhiyan*, *Swachhta Hi Sewa*, wall paintings, field training on leadership, volunteerism, water budgeting and water conservation techniques to make the community



aware about water conservation, revival of existing water infrastructures and to sensitize and involve the youth, adults and women in village development activities. **Sartama** came forward to join hands with Reliance Foundation to address the daunting water challenges of her village.

Today, **Sartama** heads the Him Patara Gram Sangathan, a federated body of 10 SHGs with 94 members, promoted by the National Rural Livelihoods Mission. Under the leadership of **Sartama**, members of Him Patara Gram Sangathan collectively decided to revive all the *chal-*

khals present around the village with community *shramdaan*. *Chal-khal* is an age-old practice in Uttarakhand, used for water storage from natural sources such as rain. The *chal-khal* method provides drinking water to domestic animals and also seepage maintains the moisture content in the soil. The community also decided to make new structures wherever accessible to their animals to drink water near their sheds. With collective effort of women of the Sangathan, they were able to revive four traditional water storage structures and construct two new structures having 60,00,000 litres of water harvesting capacity; seepage from these structures would maintain the moisture content of approximately 7 hectares of agriculture land, positively impacting the local ecosystem. These structures provided drinking water facility to about 275 domestic animals. This intervention also reduced women's drudgery.

This work inspired eight other villages of Dunda block and they have also become part of this water campaign. **Sartama** asserts this process of water conservation should be included in the community as a custom every year through collective efforts.



Shantilata Majhi

“Water has helped the community come together. Earlier we used to face a lot of issues in terms of access to clean drinking water, now we have water 24*7 at our doorstep. Plantation and soil conservation work undertaken in the catchment area has allowed us to access water for livelihood purposes also. We now grow vegetables in winter and also grow a second crop every year.”



Age

28

Education

10th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

Tukuguda Village,
Kalahandi District,
Odisha

Area of Intervention

Water conservation,
governance and
management

Skills and Training

Watershed
development, soil &
water conservation,
water quality testing
and spring shed
management

CHALLENGE

Reduction in vegetation cover and high runoff, severe water shortages for drinking and livelihood-related activities

INITIATIVE(S)

Spring shed discharge reading monthly, formed a watershed subcommittee in the village, over 1,000 staggered contour trenches were dug in the catchment area of the springs, 9,000 social forestry trees were planted

IMPACT

Functional village level watershed subcommittee which conducts monthly water readings in the village. Active village watershed cadre for the maintenance of infrastructure and plantations. Motivated other women and GPs to take an interest in watershed activities

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Panchayat



She has successfully led the watershed committee of Tukuguda village to raise a nursery and plant 9,000 saplings in the village.



Shantilata, a tribal woman of Tukuguda village, became the secretary for the Village Development Committee after her village started facing severe water shortages for drinking and livelihood. Initially, the community practised traditional shifting cultivation to meet food security needs. However, over the years, the villagers observed that the discharge from the springs has reduced.

She actively took responsibility for monitoring and recording the monthly



water readings from different water sources in her village. Under her leadership, over 1,000 staggered contour trenches were dug in the catchment area for water supply in the village. She has successfully led the watershed committee of Tukuguda village to raise a nursery and plant 9,000 saplings in the village. Horticulture plantations such as mango and cashew and intercropping were promoted. Seeing her exemplary work, Village Development Committees from nearby villages in the GP started following

her model efficiently. Even other women in neighbouring villages started to take an interest in watershed activities and think about increasing the water supply in their villages.

Shantilata has shown great commitment to ensuring proper community monitoring of the watershed area. She has and continues to mobilize people and convince them to work for their water security. She is a natural leader and has a good relationship with the people.

Shantilata wishes to ensure an increased water supply for irrigation so that people can cultivate more crops and improve their livelihoods.



Sobha Devi

“Water is more than just a resource. We can stay hungry for long but not without water. Even a plant requires water to grow as a tree. This diverse ecosystem revolves around the water – all the birds, plants, seeds, crops depend on water for their survival. Water is life and life requires water for its existence.”



Age

33

Education

5th Grade

Occupation

Community mobilizer

Location

Bahadur Bigha Village, Churi GP, Gaya District, Bihar

Area of Intervention

Water conservation, governance and management, water quality improvement and management

Skills and Training

Community awareness and mobilization, identification of water quality related issues, nutritional awareness, operation and maintenance of water supply systems

CHALLENGE

Groundwater sources and piped water supply is highly contaminated with fluoride

INITIATIVE(S)

Created awareness on water quality, mobilized community members around restoring abandoned dug wells and construction of a rainwater harvesting unit and also to adopt two community-based de-fluoridation units

IMPACT

Awareness of the community resulted in actions to create alternative sources of safe drinking water

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Block, Panchayat and district



She created community awareness on the importance of safe drinking water and the use of an alternative water source for drinking and cooking.



Sobha Devi belongs to the Mahadalit community of Bahadur Bigha village of Bihar. In her village, fluoride contamination in the groundwater has been observed at an average of 8 parts per million (ppm) whereas 1 ppm is considered to be the standard for drinking purposes. Lack of awareness among the community remains the main challenge and this led the community to access available water through the nearby public hand pump and piped water supply which has high fluoride contamination. This motivated



Sobha Devi to take action on behalf of the deprived community affected by unsafe water. She started working as a motivator under the 'Har Ghar Nal Ka Jal' scheme.

With support from WaterAid India and the local NGO, Pragati Gramin Vikas Samiti, **Sobha Devi** created an enabling support environment. Focusing on community participation, resource mobilization and education communication, she created community awareness on the importance of safe drinking water and the use of an

alternative water source for drinking and cooking. She also mobilized community members to restore abandoned dug wells that provide fluoride-free water to 26 households in the village. **Sobha** has been instrumental in mobilizing people to construct a rainwater harvesting unit and organize community members to undertake the proper operation and maintenance of two community-based de-fluoridation units. She has even motivated people to contribute monthly for its hassle-free operation and maintenance. She developed the first kitchen garden in the village while realizing the importance of food and nutrition to curb the impact of fluoride on the human body. **Sobha Devi** targeted Integrated Child Development Services centres in the community and spread awareness among the women and adolescent girls in the community.

She has a dream that each household in Churamana Nagar is aware of safe water so that proper decisions on improved health practices for their children can be taken. She believes that for realizing this dream, along with access to safe sources, behaviour change through awareness generation should get prioritized.



Sugan Dawar

“We live in a water-scarce region. Water is a life-source for us, the scarcity of which throws us into grave crises. I have struggled my entire life to get just enough water to be able to work and live. If enough water is available in our village, our families can live together and see each other every day. Otherwise, we would have to migrate to faraway towns away from home. Water enables us to grow food for our home all year-round, without it we would not have a healthy diet either.”



Samaj
Pragati
Sahayog



Hindustan Unilever Limited
Hindustan Unilever Foundation
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Age

35

Education

No formal education

Occupation

Farmer

Location

**Sitapuri Village, Bagli Tehsil,
Dewas District, Madhya
Pradesh**

Area of Intervention

Water use efficiency

Skills and Training

**Community awareness and
mobilization, trained in
water-saving agricultural
practices, No Pesticide
Management (NPM)
farming techniques,
watershed development
activities**

CHALLENGE

Dryland region, water-stress led to seasonal migration

INITIATIVE(S)

Adopted NPM techniques and other water-saving agriculture practices on her farm, community mobilization around water conservation and sustainable agriculture

IMPACT

Inspired a lot of farmers to shift to NPM techniques and sustainable agriculture, water-saving and prevented seasonal migration

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village



Her work influenced members of her SHG and community who gradually started making a shift to NPM farming techniques.



Sugan hails from the Nimar Valley, a dryland region dependent solely on rainfed agriculture. **Sugan's** family seasonally migrated to Malwa Plateau to seek out a living and ensure food security for all at home. Many in her village, who had access to irrigation sources, would grow water-intensive crops thereby creating even more scarcity in an already water-stressed region.

Sugan joined the Samaj Pragati Sahayog's Watershed Development Programme in 2002 where she was introduced to



different water conservation techniques. Gradually, she gained more knowledge on different water-saving, non-chemical based agricultural practices such as dry sowing, seed treatment and other seed germination practices. **Sugan** began NPM farming on her farm which is a low-cost, low-risk and less water-intensive technique. She cut down on chemical fertilizers gradually and stopped using pesticides on her crops. She began mixed

cropping and grew a variety of crops that required less water. Her participation and savings in the SHG helped her secure a loan for a bore well that helped her irrigate her field in the rabi season. Her crop choices and her NPM farming techniques helped her save a lot of water. The rabi crop helped the family earn a living without having to migrate. It not only sustained her family of six but also generated nutrition security because of the absence of chemical substances. Her work influenced members of her SHG and community who gradually started making a shift to NPM farming techniques.

Sugan became a board member of Ram Rahim Pragati Producer Company Limited, an all-woman farmers' producer company, promoting NPM agriculture. She wishes to continue her work in the community and her village, spreading awareness on water and agriculture and empowering her fellow SHG members in doing the same.

Note: Sugan was featured in the book *Women for Water: stories of women connected to earth and water* published by Hindustan Unilever Limited.



Sunita Patil

“Water is at the core of my life in my village. Prior to starting this watershed management work, I had not even seen a Panchayat office. Today, I am a proud community leader because I worked for water. Without water, there is no life.”



Age

37

Education

Graduate

Occupation

Farmer

Location

**Wawad Village, Nandurbar
District, Maharashtra**

Area of Intervention

**Water conservation,
governance and
management**

Skills and Training

**Community awareness and
mobilization, leadership,
trained on watershed
management, labour
budget**

CHALLENGE

Water-stressed village, dependency on tankers, lack of community unity and political factionalism

INITIATIVE(S)

Community mobilization, built rainwater harvesting structures on her land, construction of earthen bunds and tree plantation

IMPACT

Women joined hands to work for water conservation and rising groundwater level in the village

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village



Sunita is continuing her water conservation and management efforts via her continued participation in Paani Foundation's Samruddha Gaon Spardha.



Sunita lives in Wawad, a water-stressed village, where dependency on tankers has been a major problem for many years. She was a watershed management trainee with Paani Foundation, who was determined to solve her village's water crisis. Under her leadership, many challenges such as political factionalism, substance addiction among the village youth and their lack of willingness to participate in the village, had to be faced. Yet, as a lone ranger, **Sunita** tirelessly



worked towards water conservation despite lack of support.

She built structures on her land to harvest rainwater and contribute to the welfare of the village. She also built earthen bunds and planted trees. She continued updating the Paani Foundation Android app meticulously, with data and photographs of work carried out in her village. Seeing **Sunita's** relentless efforts, members from her Anganwadi group

as well as some other women, joined her and bolstered her confidence and work. They decided to work together and contribute to mitigating the depleting groundwater level in the village. In the summer of 2020, due to the efforts of **Sunita**, her husband, and a few supporters, the village did not have to buy water from outside. They managed to conserve water in the village itself.

Prior to 2018, **Sunita** says that she had “not even seen a Panchayat office, nor was aware of what a Panchayat Samiti does”. Today, she sees herself as a community leader and is not afraid of being the first one to carry out any work around water and environment issues – even if she has to work as a lone ranger for the major part of the journey.

Sunita is continuing her water conservation and management efforts via her continued participation in Paani Foundation's Samruddha Gaon Spardha. She is currently leading efforts to measure the well water levels in her village.



Ujjwala Ghadge

“Water is the life of a farmer and a key to success in farming but, at the same time, water is very valuable so everyone should use it very effectively and should save a single drop of water as its tomorrow’s wealth.”



Age

36

Education

10th Grade

Occupation

Farmer

Location

**Pimpri Pendhar Village,
Junnar City, Pune District,
Maharashtra**

Area of Intervention

Water-use efficiency

Skills and Training

**Water-saving onion
cultivation, community
awareness and training
of SHG members
and farmers**

CHALLENGE

Water scarcity, uneven rainfall with prolonged dry spells and low productivity of onions

INITIATIVE(S)

Adopted raised bed with drip method of onion cultivation and irrigation scheduling, brought awareness among villagers about raised bed technology, trained SHG members and fellow farmers

IMPACT

Saved a million litres of water, facilitated high onion yield and brought water security into different aspects of agriculture

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Pimpri Pendhar and nearby villages



Ujjwala's efforts brought a change in the approach of the villagers and now around 500 acres of onion is being planted on raised beds, saving a million litres of water.



Ujjwala, lives in Village Pimpri Pendhar, a dry area of Junnar block with uneven rainfall and prolonged dry spells and water scarcity. Onion is the major cash crop of the region; however, growing onion effectively was a major issue for **Ujjwala**. She faced problems with her onion cultivation due to lack of water and uncertain rainfall; her crop failed many times. She and her husband wanted to break the water insecurity cycle and update traditional ways of cultivation, i.e., the flood irrigation method of irrigation and flatbed method of planting.



To overcome these challenges, **Ujjwala** attended the ITC Mission Sunehra Kal training programme and decided to adopt the raised bed with drip onion cultivation in her field. She analysed the results and observed that the method saved 40 percent of water and got 16 tonne of onion per acre. She started mobilizing her SHG members and farmers to create awareness among all the villagers by exposing them to the technology. **Ujjwala's** efforts brought a change in the approach of the villagers and now around 500 acres of onion is

being planted on raised beds, saving a million litres of water. Her village is today known as high onion yield village.

Ujjwala aspires to bring innovation with the help of the SHG army to bring about a change in the mind-set of all the onion farmers of the block by training other SHG members.



Urmila Devi

“Fetching water is a woman’s responsibility in the family no matter how far and how many rounds it takes. Women, in my village, face a lot of problems in fetching water – they have to wait for their turn, sometimes people fight for it too, even throw bucket in frustration. So, it is very important to improve the water system here.”



Age

40

Education

No formal education

Occupation

Cook in a government school

Location

Ajaypur Village, Bhadohi Tehsil, Sant Ravidas Nagar District, Uttar Pradesh

Area of Intervention

Waste water treatment and management

Skills and Training

Community awareness and mobilization, trained on leadership development, WASH education, water testing, action planning and hands-on construction of toilets, rainwater harvesting system, and various water treatments

CHALLENGE

Poor water quality of the hand pump and stagnation of waste water due to lack of drainage

INITIATIVE(S)

Community awareness and mobilization around water quality improvement and water point restoration, support in planning, development and implementation of technologies and water projects in the communities

IMPACT

Access to safe and portable drinking water

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Ajaypur



She developed a plan for water point restoration and convinced the community members to contribute to this initiative to rejuvenate the hand pump water point for safe and potable drinking water.



Urmila Devi belongs to a very poor family and lives in Ajaypur village with her family. Her family as well as 10 other families in the village depend on a single hand pump on her premises for drinking water. The region lies in the floodplain of Ganga River. Water safety and management are ignored by the district administration.

Urmila Devi and fellow villagers participated in a rigorous training programme conducted by Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group which included leadership development, WASH



education, water testing, action planning and hands-on construction of toilets, rainwater harvesting system, and various water treatments. She led the women's team to provide support in the planning, development and implementation of technologies and water projects in their communities. As a result of the training, **Urmila** and other women learnt the importance of keeping the drinking water source safe from any contaminants. She developed a plan for water point restoration and convinced the community members to contribute to this initiative to rejuvenate the hand pump water point

for safe and potable drinking water. With the technical support from Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group, restoration of the water point was done with the construction of a platform around the water point, silt chamber and a soak pit for wastewater management constructed 10 metres away from the water point to avoid any contamination.

She looks forward to encouraging more people on water source safety and security.



Valli

“Water is a gift of God and life revolves around it. Water is one thing that connects us with nature because it is a need of both humans and wildlife. Better the water resource availability, better will be our life. We depend on rains for our agriculture and it is the water that decides our livelihood choices too.”

Age

40

Education

5th Grade

Occupation

Farming

Location

Thadasalatty Village, Erode District, Tamil Nadu

Area of Intervention

Water conservation, governance and management

Skills and Training

Community awareness and mobilization for the construction of water storage and recharge structures, water quality and quantity monitoring, data collection especially on the agro-ecology aspects

CHALLENGE

Stress in rainfed agriculture due to changing rain patterns and erratic rainfall which led to water shortages and soil erosion

INITIATIVE(S)

Mobilized the community to work on the rejuvenation of the existing springs and bunds in their farmlands to conserve soil moisture. She got together youth, women and men to create water harvesting and recharge structures

IMPACT

Women lead the initiative, community ownership to bring in the change they need for themselves, increase in water storage and availability period especially during the water stressed times of summer

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Village Thadasalatty



Her work brought a shift in women's leadership and accelerated the work on water storage, rejuvenation of springs, construction of bunds and percolation ponds by the community.



Valli is a 40-year-old tribal woman possessing rich traditional knowledge of farming and wilderness as she has spent her entire life amidst the forest, in the Nilgiris during her childhood and Sathyamangalam after her marriage. Thadasalatty village, home to the Irula community, depends on rainfed agriculture for its livelihood. The cropping calendar relied on the monsoon pattern for years sustained by the inbuilt traditional knowledge of the Irula community. But lately, the community has seen a difference in rain patterns and cropping calendar leading to stress on agriculture. The agriculture imbalance occurred due to water shortage and washing off of topsoil during erratic rains, further causing loss of soil moisture, and eventually breaking down the traditional rainfed agriculture.



When things started falling out of place, **Valli** decided to act. As an avid farmer, she had worked on aspects of water conservation and soil moisture conservation in agriculture lands. She leveraged her interest and knowledge in water conservation to mobilize and engage local community members to hold discussions on water conservation in the area. Uniting everybody to engage in a single cause was the challenge she had to face. She conducted village meetings and constant dialogues and mobilized the community in undertaking water conservation works.

She is designated as a Barefoot Ecologist after receiving intensive training in data

collection on the agro-ecology aspects from Keystone Foundation. Her work brought a shift in women's leadership and accelerated the work on water storage, rejuvenation of springs, construction of bunds and percolation ponds by the community.

She wants to set up a community-led system to manage the quality of the rejuvenated ponds with regular cleaning and maintenance. She aims to create numerous kitchen gardens in the area around the ponds and in the farms to secure food and nutrition alongside water conservation.

Note: An article on Valli is published in *Nilgiri Natural History Magazine* on page number 11 and is available at the following given link: https://nnhs.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/NNHS_Newsletter_8.1_Jun19.pdf



Vasantha

“Water is a lifeline to me. It is an important agent of change both in agriculture and health. It is very important to keep its quality good and maintain a healthy life.”

Age

33

Education

11th Grade

Occupation

Reporter for community media at Keystone Foundation

Location

Sigur, Nilgiri District, Tamil Nadu

Area of Intervention

Water quality improvement and management, water sanitation and hygiene

Skills and Training

Water quality testing and monitoring, communication and awareness about water quality, health and hygiene, water quality testing and water monitoring, community media as reporter

CHALLENGE

Poor water quality and emerging health issues amongst adults and children due to its consumption

INITIATIVE(S)

Water quality testing and monitoring and community awareness on water hygiene. Volunteer reporter for community media and mobilized other women to spread awareness and collect news for the community media

IMPACT

Regular water testing has kept people aware of their water quality, brought awareness about water hygiene, a simple solution of boiling water before drinking was adopted for the prevention of skin-allergy problems

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Panchayat



Vasantha engaged with the community to disseminate awareness on water quality related issues and she has evolved into a confident community leader and continues to strengthen her skills and capacities.



Vasantha is an indigenous woman from Anekatty village in the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu. The poor water quality in certain villages of her region led to health issues such as skin allergies and children falling ill during the monsoons which became a major concern. There was speculation in the village that poor water quality was causing health issues but no official data to confirm it.

Owing to the water problems in her region, she joined Keystone Foundation as a volunteer reporter for community media, '*Nilgiri Seemai Suddhi*'. She linked the emerging health issues and

undertook regular water quality testing and monitoring in her region. She struggled at first to unite people and take forward this work with community participation. Eventually, she got everyone onboard especially the village elders and leaders of the area. She received training in water quality testing and monitoring and harnessed her skills to test water quality using basic water parameters and e-coli tests in 15 villages of the Sigur area.

Regular water resource testing has kept people aware of water quality. Also, interlinking water quality and health has yielded awareness about water hygiene. Besides being a news reporter, **Vasantha** has further engaged with the community to disseminate awareness on water quality related issues. Over time, she has evolved into a confident community leader and continues to strengthen her skills and capacities.

She wants the water testing activity to scale up in other areas and execute more programmes on water as part of community media. She aims to build an empowered community and wishes to enhance the value of water to more than a consumable good.

Disclaimer


The Compendium features the Women Water Champions, referred and nominated by organizations working in the water sector and has been supported by testimonials. Due to COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, case studies could not be validated on the ground, and hence are based on secondary information received from the organizations. This report sets forth information based on the completeness and accuracy of the facts stated. The comments in the report are not intended, nor should they be interpreted to be legal advice or opinion.





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