



DIALOGUE SERIES

WATER AND LIVELIHOOD SECURITY

The Foundation to Make India Atmanirbhar

Dialogue # 3 Dec 22, 2020

Sheroes - Women in water and livelihood security

Summary Report

Background

The Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) and Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS) initiated a dialogue series titled “Water and Livelihood Security: The Foundation to Make India Atmanirbhar.”

The series features interactive discussions involving practitioners, representatives from government, civil society, academia and communities to ideate, discuss and share experiences on improving and enhancing water and livelihood security. It highlights unique initiatives and experiences for us to learn, adapt and adopt.

Discussions in the first dialogue centered around the need to build an atmosphere of constructive dialogue amongst all stakeholders to increase awareness, foster collaboration and create a nationwide water literacy campaign engaging universities and educational institutions. The message emanating from the discussions was that Atmanirbharta needs to begin from India’s villages and self-sufficiency in villages is possible through land, soil and forest conservation. The summary of the first dialogue is attached.

The second dialogue highlighted the efforts of practitioners across different ecological regions shared their experiences of addressing water scarcity through community engagement. There was a call to advance the geo-cultural region approach to water conservation which integrates the human and natural dimensions and allows us to engage communities to adopt suitable water and agriculture practices.

The third dialogue in the series was organized on December 22, 2020 on the theme of Sheroes - Women in water and livelihood security. It saw the participation from Meera Devi and Geeta Devi, Jal Sahelis from Bundelkhand, Sanjay Singh, Secretary, Parmarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan; Dr. Gayatri Parihar, Director, Vasudha Vikas Sansthan; Dipak Mortale, Jal Nayak, Nanded; Pooja Bhati, Manager, Tarun Bharat Sangh; Dr. Indira Khurana, Vice Chairperson, Tarun Bharat Sangh; and Vivek P Adhia, India Country Director, Institute for Sustainable Communities. Ms. Rahibai Soma Popere, Padma Shri Award Winner, Seed Mother of India sent a recorded message sharing her experience.

The Session was moderated by Romit Sen, Associate Director, ISC.



Practitioners shared experiences of how women across different states of India have:

Taken up the challenge to address water scarcity in their villages, including selling the few livestock animals they had for water conservation structures;

Galvanized community action for ensuring food security;

Worked for diversifying livelihood options in their village;

Created natural assets so that the menfolk no longer had to migrate due to distress

Boosted nutrition of expecting mothers during these difficult COVID 19 pandemic times; and,

Bridged urban-rural divide by contributions to support marginalized banjara women.

Examples were shared from Ahmednagar and Nanded districts of Maharashtra; Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh, Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh and Karauli and Alwar districts of Rajasthan.

Jal sahelis of Bundelkhand

Jal Sahelis of Bundelkhand have worked for asset creation in addition to saving natural resources. On one hand they are engaged in securing the rights of the people and on the other they are overseeing the delivery/ implementation of government schemes in their villages. The concept of jal sahelis, and their empowerment is supported by Parmarth.

The story of Jal Sahelis is an inspiring one and full of struggles. They had to fight social inequities in their families and society, face hardships in moving out of their household in a patriarchal society and work towards convincing women in their villages to come out to address the problem of water in their villages. They worked shoulder to shoulder for restoring the water bodies and ensuring drinking water facility in their village.

Empowered with information through training and realizing the power of collective will, the Jal Sahelis have formed self-help groups and are engaged in generating income for their households through community nutrition gardens and production of compost. The nutrition garden is an effective model to ensure nutrition security in the villages. The Jal Sahelis are producing a people's manifesto on water to mainstream the aspirations of the communities in the upcoming panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh.



Tribal women from Dhar

Scarcity of water, poor livelihoods in rural areas forcing people to migrate to towns and cities is a normal scene in the tribal dominated Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh. In order to change the landscape women came ahead and took upon them the mantle to repair water harvesting structures in the villages. They mapped out the dug wells that were the major source of water and worked for its restoration. The women were supported and empowered by VASUDHA.

Encouraged by the success of the water harvesting, the women engaged in planning for food and livelihood security. In addition to planting conventional crops like wheat they convinced farmers to plant maize and millets. This was meant to provide nutrition to the people. The shortage of seeds was a major problem that emerged in the villages and the women addressed the problem by setting up a seed bank and grain bank. Both these initiatives helped address the problem of food shortage and ensure a regular supply of seeds for the farmers.

The women organized themselves into SHGs and then as a federation and are reaping the benefits of economic empowerment. The federation in addition to supporting the food, nutrition and seed needs is also providing credit to fellow villagers at lower interest rates. What began as an effort to save water has gradually transformed itself as a federation promoting economic wellbeing for the womenfolk of the region. They no longer need support and are now self-sustaining.



Supporting nutrition for expecting mothers in Rajasthan

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people in the villages, especially those returning from the cities faced shortage of food. This included pregnant women who were more vulnerable and needed special attention to ensure the well-being of themselves and their child.

Tarun Bharat Sangh initiated a Happy Mothers Campaign to provide food for the pregnant women. There is a general trend in our villages where girl child does household chores. Given their nutrition needs are never fulfilled, these girls when they grow and bear a child faces health problems that lead to poor development of the child.

As part of the campaign, 1,000 women have been provided with nutrition kits. Awareness creation activities focused on nutrition security for the girl child and sensitizing families to given attention to the diet of the children especially the girl child.



Meeting immediate water needs and creating water assets, Maharashtra

Bhillo Nayak Tanda Village in Nanded district of Maharashtra mainly comprised of migrant labours, a vast majority of them migrate to cities for 4-5 months of the year. This region faces severe water security. At times there is only one functional borewell to meet the water needs of the entire village of more than 200 people. This results in women walking 3 kms across hilly terrain to fetch water. With contribution from people (mainly women living in cities), a set of tankers were brought to provide water for the people and a series of concrete tanks were constructed to provide water for the livestock.

Led by Dipak Mortale and his team with support from funds from individual people, a set of 21 ponds and 100 contour trenches were constructed by blasting the rock. The decision to sell the livestock which was critical to meet the shortfall of 2 lakh rupees required for blasting was taken by women. This was a painful but the most critical decision in order to ensure water security in their village. These 21 tanks constructed in series allows for gravity flow of water.

The ponds have resulted in harvesting 25 crore litres of water ensuring the well-being for the people. People decided to plan for agriculture in their village but were conscious not to waste water by over irrigating their fields. The prosperity led to a reduction in migration from the village. Women now are able to get water in their household through borewells and are reaping the benefits of their decision to make their village water secure.



Adopting traditional farming practices and using indigenous seeds for safeguarding health, Maharashtra

Rahibai Soma Popere known as the Seed Mother of India, began preserving native seeds when she observed her grandchild becoming ill after consuming vegetables that had high spray of chemical pesticides. She was convinced that traditional practices of farming is key to maintaining the health of people and the environment. Savings on input expenditure and health problems add to the economic benefits. Soils are not harmed.

Hailing from Kombhalne village of Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, Rahibai has the distinction of conserving and multiplying 48 indigenous varieties 17 different crops including paddy, hyacinth bean, millets, pulses, and oilseeds. Rahibai also spearheaded the formation of Kalsubai Parisar Biyanee Savardhan Samiti in Ahmednagar district to works towards the conservation and propagation of traditional varieties of crops.



After successfully implementing all that she learnt, Rahibai now trains farmers on seed selection, techniques to improve soil fertility and pest management among others. She supplies farmers with seedlings of native crops, encouraging them to switch to native varieties. Rahibai has been awarded the Padma Shri for her efforts.

All the examples demonstrated the strong will power of women, their commitment and determination and the willing of society to help reduce the burden of women. The examples brought out the fact how water security underpins food security and economic and environmental well-being of our villages. The key role of committed organizations who spared no effort in supporting the communities to make a villages water and food secure was evident.

ISC and TBS will host several sessions as part of the dialogue series over the next three months, covering a range of topics. A paper will be developed at the end of the series highlighting curated solutions as part of a roadmap to ensure water and livelihood security. We look forward to your suggestions and participation.

For further information, contact:

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