PEOPLE’S INSTITUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
Acknowledgement

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This book was conceived to document the processes and learning inherent to various initiatives of ACF in promoting and strengthening peoples institutions. ACF would like to thank Nabarun Sen Gupta, Dr. Braja Sundar Misra and Dr. Bharti Gaur, facilitators of the process of ‘Case Write Shop’ for making this book possible. Their critical inputs and support during the writing process encouraged authors to put out their best in narrating experiences.

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All our ACF team members deserve a special mention for turning authors with this publication, and for bringing in their experiences and learning together to make this book possible. Most importantly, we would like to thank all our community members who have been an integral part of every effort.

Ambuja Cement Foundation
www.ambujacementfoundation.org
Corporate Foundations are created for several reasons. Ambuja Cement Foundation is the CSR arm of Ambuja Cements Ltd and came into existence to enable direct engagement with our host communities and empowering them to experience a better quality of life and prosperity.

For 22 years, ACF has consistently worked in partnership with community members. It has evolved unique processes across 12 states which are participatory in nature and bring people together for inclusive development of all. Our work ranges from Water Resource Management to creating livelihoods through skill development. The process includes a belief in merging local wisdom with innovative practices, new technologies, and a scientific approach, for social transformations. Much of it is possible with a strong community-based people’s institution. When groups come together to make informed decisions, the impact, effectiveness and the sustainability of any project is ensured.

Our focus at ACF, across projects, has been to facilitate the creation, strengthening and empowerment of people’s institutions. This publication highlights our efforts in this direction, and the ways in which people’s institutions are creating social change at the community level in agriculture, water-resource management and health sectors.

At ACF we believe that our stories are best told by the people who lead them. Our field implementation staffs who toil relentlessly to bring these processes to fruition are the best authors for these cases stories. To build their skills in creating narratives and write better, each team-member featured in this publication has participated in writing workshops. These stories therefore reflect not only their field experiences and learnings, but their growth as writers and reporters as well.

Corporate Foundations are currently being referred to as the emerging development paradigm in India. With a law in place for corporates to engage in development work, there is an increased need to share good practices and case studies as knowledge for this sector. This book is another attempt to make that knowledge available.

Pearl Tiwari
Director, Ambuja Cement Foundation
“We approach ACF for help mainly in making new proposals, capacity building for a new project or for an advice when faced with a critical issue”, mentions the President of the Women’s Federation at Kodinar. This statement may seem ordinary to many, but ACF takes an inordinate pride in it. Here is a local institution establishing an independent identity for themselves. It is but one among several people’s institutions promoted by ACF. Their endeavour for self-management with ownership for decision making carries a sense of delight for ACF. The community is in the driving seat while ACF supports as needed.

‘Energise, Involve and Enable Communities to Realise their Potential’ is our mission at ACF. It guides development initiatives and strategies adopted for implementation of programs. Active participation of local community is a prerequisite for each intervention promoted at ACF.

ACF’s vision is to work for the holistic development of both the region and its people. Strong local institutions are integral to this process. ACF considers them as vehicle for social change and social action. Through capacity building of communities, ACF has seen the emergence of formal and informal local institutions. These vary both in nature and the magnitude of its impact with the underlying belief that it should benefit and be accessible to all. Evolution of these institutions has been a stimulating process, both for the local community as well as ACF.

Enabling a local institution to work towards a felt need; capturing a potential opportunity; or organising people for social action - each of these involved unique process and challenges.

In retrospect, the first phase witnessed initial ambiguity amongst locals about the relevance of an institution. The role played by ACF was crucial in working closely with a small section of locals who perceived it to be an opportunity while investing in others to become part of the process. It was also contingent to the aspect of work and intensity of the felt need at the community level.

Then followed a phase detailing the road map and facilitation for clarity of roles expected to be played by various stakeholders. The structure of the institution was shaped in this phase. Reinforcing responsibility of each stakeholder in making the institution work was ensured by key ACF functionaries involved. One factor that remained common throughout the phase was the dynamics during decision making, evident at the local level at every step. In some cases, it turned out to be a long-drawn process. However, in most cases it contributed in advancing capacities of locals to handle issues both at micro as well as the macro level. It further contributed in developing preparedness to handle responsibility. Today, there is a prevailing sense of satisfaction among the farmers in being part of the process. As Manubhai Mansingbhai Mori puts it with great pride, “Farmers got their own institution and that has increased their self-confidence.”

In case of most local institutions promoted by ACF, the current phase is a stabilising phase. They are now clearer about their goals and the way forward. The process of development however is varied and complex. Institutional development is a dynamic process involving complex interactions (Skoog 2007). The roles change with the pace of development process and calls for
complete ownership of the members. It makes the institution struggle through turbulences, sometimes in the form of wasted interest or irregularities of nature. The same is an experience of most institutions which are part of this book who struggled at different times to continue to hold members together. The ACF team’s role also changed from facilitation to providing support to these wide-ranging institutions as they grew.

The journey of these institutions has certainly been full of challenges but has led to some visible positive change. Farmers have grown stronger having come together. Direct linkages with the market have opened avenues. Recognition for production of high quality, certified crop has enhanced self-esteem of the farmers. Assured and surplus income has improved family life.

Another critical contribution made by these local institutions is in the area of improved access for all. And interestingly it deals with diverse aspects of life of rural communities. Participatory irrigation contributed in incorporating a substantial section of population out of the reach of irrigation in drought-prone areas of Rajasthan. Safe drinking water became possibility only with local initiative in Andhra Pradesh. Anti-tobacco campaign in Vidarbha, Maharashtra, contributed in improving awareness level by providing information on its ill-effects, and waste become wealth with SHG intervention in Chhattisgarh. Issues such as minimum wage, abolition of child labour, and equal wages that were never considered before have become priority for a local-level institution today.

Importantly, these initiatives have also attempted to bridge the gender gap in programme participation although in a very small way. A Farmer-Producer company in Maharashtra has about 27 women members, SHG members taking responsibility for RO became critical mass for the community and members of SHGs in Chhattisgarh were empowered with the financial contribution to their community.

There are several such encouraging changes. These and many more examples are alive and in budding stages all around us. They assure local ownership and sustainability of any initiative taken up by the community. They further assure that these efforts are headed towards making a difference to the economically and socially underprivileged by opening the doors for participation and information. We are beginning to witness the change and that inspires us by strengthening our belief in the capacities of the locals we work with!

The road could have its set of challenges but as Ray Davis puts it, ‘A challenge only becomes an obstacle when you bow to it’. It is with this spirit we hope these local institutions drive their work.
Developing institutions which are run and managed by their own members is accepted as an important function for those committed to making development people-centric and sustainable. Ambuja Cements Foundation (ACF) has been doing this since a long time. It has, from the very beginning, involved the community in charting their own future. This book is a compilation of the processes adopted by the ACF team. The interventions captured in the book put forth the argument that though the process may look difficult in the beginning, it actually pays in the long run. Such process requires perseverance and a well-defined strategy. The interventions thus depict the following three basic things that one needs to keep in mind to create a viable and active people’s institution:

1. People will not hesitate to come together if they are motivated and made to foresee the benefits of togetherness
2. If given the direction and the needed support, people can manage the work of the institution without much difficulty
3. As they learn and mature, people will make an all-out effort to expand the scope of the institution.

Let us elaborate.

Once motivated people do not hesitate.

The shape that any institution takes will depend on what is done to motivate its members. There have been efforts made by many development agencies to help build people’s institutions. Ironically, these efforts were made as part of a project and continued only till the projects were being implemented. The scope was limited and so were the efforts. ACF’s interventions were different. Though in some of the interventions, the initial assumptions were limited as regards the role that the institution could play, for example in the intervention of supplying agricultural waste as Alternative Fuel Resources (AFR) to the captive power plants, the efforts that were made were much more structured and focused.

None of the interventions had any limit as regards the scope. ACF made efforts to build these people’s institutions. It made efforts to motivate the members to see what they would gain out of the process and carried out the process for a longer period. The results are visible. In all the cases, the farmers realized the benefits of coming together and gradually came forward on their own to join the initiative.

People can manage their institutions.

The assumption is often the reverse in many similar initiatives – stemming from the mistaken idea that since rural people are not highly educated they cannot manage their institutions with any amount of skill, and hence will require external agencies to come and manage their affairs. ACF work has proved this mindset wrong. ACF chose to render support for a longer period rather than actually manage the institutions. It provided support whenever required and demanded, but refrained from doing anything out of turn. Take, for instance, the Free Tobacco Campaign. The Village Development Committee of the village took up the issue with the Gram Panchayat and went to the police station along with representatives of the Gram Panchayat,
thus proving that it was the people’s institution which called the shots and not ACF. Similarly, in the case of the drinking water projects in the seven villages, ACF’s role had been to provide the first thrust only. The process continues to be now managed by the people’s institution and not by ACF. Time to time, ACF has played the critical role of extending support. But never has this support come with sanctions or attachments that would intimidate the institution and its office bearers.

_Begin with one idea and allow people to understand its potential._

Do not bring in too many ideas and confuse people. When agencies start their dialogue with the community, they should be prudent not to show them too many dreams. Let the people experience the transformation of some dreams into reality and dream big. This was one of the mantras of ACF’s success.

None of the institutions began with a grand idea. They all started small – understanding their own capabilities and limitations. But as they tasted success they expanded. The expansion was on two fronts. The institutions expanded in terms of members and in their activities. The Gadchandur Farmers’ Producer Company (GFPCL) had done some trading with the ginners even before it was actually formed. They earned a better price. This prompted others to also join. The ADC at Kanakiya village in Ambujanagar, Gujarat, prompted other villages also to expand their operation and later the Somnath Farmers’ Producer Company (SFPCL) was formed. However, at the basic level, the activity that they started with continues to be the prime mover. The institutions continue to carry out this activity while engaging in other activities to supplement the primary one. The process of building the institutions and helping them become strong has been successful because of multiple reasons. Some of these reasons can be categorized as philosophical and some operational. Let us elaborate.

### Philosophical level

This refers to the ideology that the facilitating agency wishes to follow. This ideology has made the agency do something and refrain from doing something. The ideology/philosophy that was central to ACF’s process of institution building consisted of:

1. **People are central to the initiative and not their institutions.** ACF went ahead with its initiative to motivate people to join the institution and take advantage of the work. However, once it had succeeded in creating interest among the people to be part of this process, ACF led the people to chart out the process that gave expression to what they wanted to do. It did play a mentorship role, but did not go overboard to make things happen. All decisions that helped the process to become sustainable were taken by the people.

2. **Freebies are of no use.** ACF firmly believes that contribution should come from the people. It also believes that people must pay for the services that they want their institutions to provide to them. For example, the drinking water intervention illustrates this philosophy. ACF had promised to provide the cost of the RO plant. However the cost of the premises to house the plant, getting the water point drilled and all other incidental costs came from the villagers. The RO plants have been running since the last seven years and people have been paying for the water. The institutions manage the operations and take care of the expenses to run them. ACF has made paying for services the habit of the community.

3. ** Outsiders must refrain from deciding.** Many a time the big brother attitude clouds the approach that agencies take. ‘Only I know and only I will therefore decide what people need to do and how’ – is a self-defeating
approach. It does not help. ACF chose not to go that ways. It was never in a hurry to establish its credentials as so many others involved in development do. It went at the pace of the people and gave the members the right to decide. The Bhatinda Farmers’ Producer Company members decided on the site for the shop. The decision was theirs. The members decided what was best for them. Similarly, the selection of the Volunteers to run the ADC was not done under pressure from a powerful lobby, but was an honest decision to allow the farmers to decide who from among them must be trained to pass on agriculture related information. The farmers knew that their interest would be best served in the long run if they made the right selection then. Again, in the case of WUAs in Rajasthan, how the contribution should come – cash or kind, how much should each farmer member’s share be, etc. were left to the WUAs and not prescribed by ACF.

Many of these philosophical scripts that ACF followed and practiced were not new. They were known for long. However, many involved in creating people’s institutions knowingly break these rules – sometimes in a hurry, sometimes in order to prove something, and sometimes due to pressure. But ACF did not fall prey to deviations and helped build institutions strong enough to stand on their own feet.

Let us now look at some of the operational dimensions.

**Operational Level**

1. **Making people see the pros and cons of any action:** Development agencies commit mistakes in their hurry to establish credentials. The ACF team steered clear of this rush mentality. It allowed people to realize for themselves what was good and what was not. This helped people to see what decisions were good for them and what were not. Wherever needed the ACF team played the role of explaining to the people the pros and cons of their decisions. They never suggested solutions.

2. **Ownership comes when even small decisions are taken by people:** We have the example of the selection of the name of the Producer Company in Chandrapur. Farmers’ suggestions were sought. The same principle was followed in the case of buying the seeds for the farmers in Bhatinda. The ACF team could have ordered the seeds directly from the traders and ensured availability. It chose not to tread this path. It took the farmers along and asked them to see for themselves which seeds they would like to purchase. These details help in developing a feeling of ownership.

3. **External agencies must facilitate the process for the institutions to tread the unknown path:** The fear of the unknown path is often the reason that stops people from going ahead. This happened in case of the plastic waste collection by women SHG members. Though they were told to come and collect the garbage, they had apprehensions. The ACF team accompanied them to the houses. Similarly, when it came to the collection of share capital, the farmers were initially reluctant to put in the amount. ACF decided to go slow on the matter and finally the farmers were convinced.

4. **Showing the institution members ‘good and workable’ examples works:** At all interventions across locations, the team used the standard operating procedure of getting people to see in order to believe. Members had no idea of how they could and also why they should have their own company. The word ‘company’ was an alien word for them. The ACF team took farmers and their representatives to exposure visits. This helped them in clarifying their doubts about the venture.
5. **Invest in people and their institutions**: This is what will make efforts sustainable. This operational principle has guided ACF to invest its time and resources. ACF could have used other mechanisms to take knowledge to the people. For example, in the Ambujanagar case ACF chose to invest its resources on developing cadre from among the farmers. Similarly, it went for training the community members as facilitators to carry out training in case of the WUAs. Even in case of SHGs in Balodabazar involved in supplying plastics to ACL plant, ACF decided to invest in building the capacity of members in the finer aspects of institution governance. All these have paid rich dividends.

These operational principles have been the very cornerstones to the success of the efforts made by ACF on the institutional front. One important thing for development agencies is to understand the indicators that would pronounce if the efforts have given results. In simple words, these are indicators which we must look for while we carry out our efforts. These indicators will help us realize the health of the institutions that are being promoted. Let us look at some of the indicators pronouncing health status of people's institutions.

**When institutions grow without external impetus:** Here one of the indicators can be increase in the number of members. This has happened in all the interventions. The AFR in Chhattisgarh started with one SHG and now there are two. The AFR supply in Rajasthan started with two farmers' groups and now there is an institution of all the entire farmers' groups. The ADC in Ambujanagar started with one and now there are 50 of them. This is true for all the cases. The memberships increased when people saw the benefits of being a member.

**When institutions expand organically:** This refers to the function which gets added to the existing institutions. Some of these functions with which it starts, shows growth in volume and also in reach. Expansion also becomes a part of the system. For example, the farmers in Bhatinda realized that burning of crop residues was harming the soil and now it has become their agenda to motivate others against doing this. The AFR trading that the Balaji Farmers' Producer members did expanded to other businesses. For example, they are now involved in bulk purchase of seeds and farm inputs and are also contemplating having seed farms to meet their own needs. It is the same with the VDC and its efforts in Maharashtra. Mangibu is not the only village that is Tobacco-free, many others have joined in. They have taken lessons of how to do and what to do from Mangibu. ACF efforts had been to initiate the process - the villagers have taken the same ahead.

**When institutions run without much of external support:** Support is needed when institutions are taking shape. It takes time and resources to take institutions from one level to the next. However, thereafter the members manage to run their own institutions. The women of Bhatapara may be illiterate, but they now have mastered the art of managing the supply of plastics to ACL. They have understood the procedures and are able to explain the same with ease. In case of the Nadikudi Reverse Osmosis plants, all the aspects of running the plants - from looking at the volumes of water sold, provisioning the amounts for repairs to maintenance and salaries - are done with skill and dexterity. Many of these RO plants are managed by women's federations.

**When institutions create surplus from their businesses:** Surplus creation is an indicator of growth and independence. Surplus helps institutions create a buffer against unforeseen situations. It also creates impetus to expand the operation / activity. This has happened in all the interventions.

**When institutions find out new and innovative methods to generate surplus:** This indicator establishes the maturity of any institution. That
a surplus is generated through trading is well known. But a few institutions have evolved their own methods to generate working capital.

The AFR trade in Rajasthan is possibly the best one. Asking farmers to pay Rs 10 per tonne of AFR supplied as service fees is an innovative method. It generated cash reserves for doing the business linkage. Asking the ginners to pay Rs 10 per quintal of cotton bought from BCI farmers helped the Producer Company generate a cash surplus of Rs 245000. In the second example asking another business to pay, calls for high level of skills and negotiating capacities. These two methods can be understood as indicative of the maturity levels of farmers’ collectives. The cases depicted in the book provide glimpses of the efforts made by the ACF team.

It provides important learnings on what one must do. The outcomes depict the changes in the situation that have taken place as a result of the actions so done. In most cases, the outcomes also gel well with the goals of ACF.

For example, the Bhatinda farmers voluntarily stopped the burning of agricultural residues in their farms, thus participating in the agenda of environment conservation. That people have joined hands with ACF in support of the larger agenda itself depicts the larger goal that ACF has achieved through its intervention. This would not have happened if ACF had dealt with individuals on a one to one basis. ACF dealt with a community institution to make this happen. Institutions are therefore the DNA for sustainable development.
Our Own Institution
The Story of a Farmer-Managed Producer Company
Introduction

The farmers of the villages of Bathinda district in Punjab had been facing issues such as lack of technical knowledge on scientific agricultural practices. This had been affecting the crop yield and returns from farming. At the same time, farmers were quite dependent on ardhtia (commission agents) for all kinds of transactions related to procuring seeds or fertilisers and selling their produce. The farmers had no one to help them and the vagaries of both nature as well as the intermediaries were giving them a tough time. ACF had been active in the area and had promoted Farmers’ Learning Groups (LGs) under one of its projects called the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI). Seeing the grim situation, ACF wanted to take its initiative beyond BCI with the farmers of these villages.

Context

The livelihood of the rural folks of Bathinda district is predominantly agricultural. With an average land holding of around 2 hectares, the land is used for growing paddy and cotton during the kharif season and wheat during the rabi season. While the farmers wished to increase their income, they were severely handicapped by a lack of technical knowledge. The dealers owning the agro-centres...
and dealing in fertilisers and pesticides would frequently misguide the farmers for their own business gains. Consequently, farmers would end up applying much more fertilisers and pesticides than were necessary or proper. An assessment carried out by the ACF team in 2011 revealed that farmers spent an average of Rs. 4,255 per acre on such applications. Thus, they incurred a huge amount of expense while growing crops.

There were other issues such as seed procurement and sale of harvests as well. The investments being high, farmers depended on the middlemen, locally known as Ardhtia, for agricultural finance. Over 90% of the farmers borrowed what they required for agriculture from these Ardhtias, paying interest at the rate of 18 to 24% per annum. These Ardhtias were also the buyers of the produce and they offered not just lower prices but also charged a 2.5% commission for making a sale. Dealers also engaged in rampant hoarding of seeds. They would then sell them to farmers at a premium price a few days before the start of the sowing season. Government supply of subsidised seeds was also well short of the actual demand and reached only those who had the right connections.

Adding to their woes, the farmers exhibited an individualistic attitude. They simply refused to come together. When ACF started its work in 2010, in Bathinda, it realised that there was an unhealthy competition among the farmers which deterred them from discussing their practices and problems with each other. They competed recklessly with each other. If one bought a tractor, another was sure to bring in a bigger one even though he may not require it. Farmers’ institutions were non-existent.

When ACF started its agro-based livelihood programme through its BCI project in 25 villages including the productivity enhancement project, funded by NABARD in 12 villages; and the organic farming project in 10 villages - these issues came up strongly.

ACF realised that the success of the projects would depend much on farmers coming together and learning by sharing their problems and solutions. However, it was difficult for ACF to drive home this concept of coming together.

**Intervention**

As ACF initiated its BCI intervention with farmers, it realised that the agro-based livelihood project would be able to address the problems of farmers only when they took charge of their current situation. Organising the farmers into collectives would be a good strategy to help farmers come out from the clutches of the middlemen as well as of those who provided them wrong technical inputs. The strategy to organise the farmers was thus placed at the centre of the agro-based intervention. This involved some distinct phases, which are described below.

**The groundwork: ACF began the Better Cotton Initiative project in 2010-11. The project necessitated ACF to organise farmers into small groups called learning groups (LGs). The work started in five villages with 700 cotton farmers. ACF’s initial efforts to organise farmers into these learners’ collectives was quite difficult. ACF decided to discuss with the farmers themselves to find out suitable representatives from among them. The process led to a selection of volunteers through awareness camps.

These volunteers were named Extension Volunteers and their support was taken to organise the learners’ groups. The criteria decided while forming the first level of collective was that these groups should have members who shared among themselves field boundaries; and were well acquainted with each other.

When ACF started its agro-based livelihood programme through its BCI project in 25 villages including the productivity enhancement project, funded by NABARD in 12 villages; and the organic farming project in 10 villages - these issues came up strongly.
really interested in learning and thereafter these farmers were specifically spoken to. ACF began building trust with this group and conducted trainings, meetings, farmers’ field visits, with support from Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) and other line departments. The farmers were happy with these efforts and they soon became the ambassadors of the process, motivating other farmers to participate in the project.

After a year of groundwork, 40 such learners’ groups were established in six villages. Around the same time, ACF also conducted an assessment of the capacities of the farmers of all the learners’ groups. The verification by the BCI team showed that 24 LGs had qualified on the six principles of Better Cotton standards. Their cotton was purchased directly by the BCI ginners and they fetched a slightly better market price. The news soon spread like wildfire and after that there was no looking back. Within the next three years, ACF was able to organise 5135 farmers into 150 LGs and all of them today have been verified as Better Cotton Producers.

Each year has seen more farmers joining these collectives, and more LGs qualifying under BCI. As the groups developed faith in ACF, they started seeking support for other crops as well. The members demanded technical knowledge on wheat and paddy. Co-incidentally, NABARD’s support on productivity enhancement on three lead crops, i.e., wheat, paddy and cotton, came through. The support proposed reduction in cultivation cost.

ACF realised that reduction in cost would only be possible through a formal institution; and ACF decided to initiate the formation of a farmer-producer organisation. With farmers adopting good practices in cotton, ACF was sure that they would adopt good and sustainable practices in wheat and paddy cultivation as well. However, cost reduction could only happen if they came together under one institution and procured seeds and other inputs as a group.

**Buying together:** ACF realized that it must develop the process, so that farmers could buy collectively, based on an informed choice as a group. It initiated the formation of Farmers’ Business Groups (FBGs) with interested farmers from the LGs (from around four to five LGs in a village). Each village had one such FBG. ACF provided inputs on the crops as well as the management of inputs.

Each FBG also maintained some monthly savings and in a few months, had their own bank accounts. These groups also selected members from among themselves to manage the financial affairs. The ACF team facilitated the discussion on the need to purchase agricultural inputs. The groups knew that it would be of great help to them. However, not all of them were forthcoming. In a meeting one FBG decided to start the collective purchase of sorghum seed. In order to take the process ahead, ACF took three members from the FBG to the market and surveyed the price of sorghum seeds at different dealers.

After the market survey, the members came back to discuss the rates and quality of sorghum seeds in their respective FBGs. Four of the groups together decided to purchase 1810 kg of sorghum seeds. They invested Rs. 92,310 to purchase the seeds and sold the same among the members at a price that fetched the group a profit of Rs. 16,290. Before they went in for the purchase, the groups had asked each member to make an advance payment, equivalent to the amount he wanted to purchase. The members’ requirement was aggregated and the payment to the dealer done through a bank transaction.

This first activity gave the group credibility among the seed dealers. The FBGs could, on the basis of their reputation, obtain supplies of other inputs directly in the village from the dealers. Later, inputs worth Rs. 5,41,610 were credited to the FBGs by the traders. The members purchased these inputs and the FBG could return the amount well within the stipulated time. It led to a profit
of Rs. 68,890 during kharif season in 2013 for the FBGs. When these experiences were shared with the other FBGs, they were all inspired and plunged into collective purchase of inputs.

However, these processes were not quite a cakewalk for the FBGs. As they started collective purchasing of agricultural inputs, they faced the stiffest competition from the commission agents. Commission agents were quick to understand that unity among the farmers was the reason for their success. They knew that if they could break this unity, the FBGs would collapse in no time. So, the commission agents started selling at a lower price to some farmers. Inevitably, some farmers fell prey to this mischief and started arguing within the group in favour of the commission agents who were offering a lower price for inputs.

The ACF team suggested that they should all go as a group and procure what they needed from the commission agents. This was a great strategy and when the farmers' collective went with this offer, the commission agent refused to honour the supply. The members, who had earlier been persuaded in favour of the agents realised the motives of the agents and decided not to engage with them further. They realised the strength of unity.

All the 12 FBGs have done this business well ever since they ventured into it. However, being groups that are informal in nature, they had some limitations. They were not eligible to take licenses and deal in the sales of pesticides, fertilizers and seeds. They also faced the occasional liquidity crunch to raise enough capital to buy goods required by their members. They also faced difficulties in coordinating as all of them did not have the same management capacity. The time was ripe for the second metamorphosis.

Building the concept of Farmer Producer Company (FPC): The difficulties experienced by the FBGs to collectively purchase inputs were discussed at the farmers' meetings in all villages. Here, ACF also shared how a Farmers’ Producer organisation could be a solution to this problem. As an FPC could do business on a larger scale it would be able to work through FBGs and service all the farmers’ requirements of inputs. Apart from being a trading organisation, it would also support farmers in upgrading their knowledge.

The FPC could also set up its seed production units in villages and produce good quality seeds of wheat and paddy and supply them at a much reasonable price to its member farmers. With licenses, it would be able to deal with companies and become dealers for seeds, pesticides and fertilisers. The margin between the price at which it bought from the manufacturers and the price at which retailers sold could make up the profit needed for running the cost of the institution. It would also be able to supply inputs at a further reduced price to its members.

The process of registering the FPC: The process was cumbersome as there were numerous paperwork and legalities to be attended to. One member from each FBG was nominated by it to become a subscriber of the company. ACF hired the services of a Chartered Accountant (CA) to complete the documentation for registering an FPC. It included applications for PAN, DIN and consent letters. A board of directors (BoD) for the FPC were selected in a meeting, wherein the board also proposed a few names for the FPC. Finally, one name was agreed upon by all – Bathinda Farmers’ Producer Company Limited (BFPCL).

The FPC also had to submit an address for itself. It took almost two months to decide on the address as meetings of all the FBGs had to be conducted. The address was an important consideration as it gave identity to the FPC. Then a member of the BoD suggested his shop address (in Village Behman Diwana) be used as the address for the office of the FPC. The paper work was submitted to the Company Registrar's office and on 21st March, 2014, the FPC got the necessary
certification paving the way for the first Farmers’ Producer Company in the entire district.

The legal processes following registration: The first mandatory meeting to elect an ACF team member as the CEO to guide the FPC for the processes ahead had to take place. The CEO was expected to function under the leadership of the Chairperson and the Board. The board meeting also requested ACF to provide some support by way of revolving funds to initiate business and become financially independent. ACF pledged support with Rs. 1,81,000, and also provided a consultant to help the FPC develop its business plan. The capacity building cost of the FPC also received support from ACF.

Initiating the Business: The FPC’s first business transaction started during the Rabi season of 2014. It procured seeds of oats and lentils and followed all processes correctly to ensure transparency in operation. Quotations were obtained from different dealers on the seed supplies and rates, along with the terms and conditions. Each quotation was discussed at length among the board members before finalising the agency to place the orders. The FPC selected a location to store the seeds it procured and hired a member as the store in-charge. Even this selection was done through a wide consultation among all its members. This first business venture was a great success. All the seeds were sold and members got them at a relatively lower price.

Fighting new challenges: Attempts to break farmers’ unity continues even today. A dealer, seeing the success of the FPC, opened a shop in front of the FPC-managed store. He started selling the seeds at the same price while offering some farmers a slightly better deal. Unnerved by his action, the FPC discussed the issue in its meeting and there was a thunderous response from all the members present.

They all declared in unison that they would not be tempted even if it meant a loss of a few rupees. The FPC members have become wise to such tactics by traders. They know that their interests are well protected by their own institution and that their FPC has only their interests as its goal.
Outcome

The work done with the farmers of Bathinda was by no means easy. However, determination brought about positive changes and hopes of a better tomorrow. Some of these changes are as follows.

**Discussion, dialogues and debate have removed the trust deficit:** Farmers who had neither trusted each other nor had shared their knowledge earlier have now started doing so. This trust has developed after they became members of the FPC and the LGs. It manifests when they share their own learnings within the group and advise others to follow suit. The meetings and the LG discussions are enriched with ideas the farmers now discuss, and debate among themselves. They are not hesitant to take advice from others either.

**Farmers are assured of quality seeds and that too at a much reduced price:** The Bathinda Farmers’ Producer Company (BFPC) today has a turnover of Rs. 1.174 million. It generated a surplus for itself to the tune of Rs. 72,370 in 2014-15. Farmers too could buy seeds at a lower price, enabling the organisation and its members to save Rs 88,000 during the year. These seeds are purchased directly from the seed producers who supply the FPC branded seeds at dealer’s price. The FPC scans the available brands in the market before making the purchases. The FPC members negotiate hard with suppliers for a better price. These supplies include seeds of wheat, oats, lentils; bio-fertilisers; as well as chemical compounds like gypsum and sulphur.

**More farmers now wish to join the group:** Initially there were 10 BFPC members. Today there are ten farmers’ clubs representing ten villages with a total of 212 members. They are all shareholders of BFPC. Many others are showing interest to be part of this venture.

**Increased access to right package of practices:** Farmers have improved their access to the right Package of Practices. Regular trainings conducted by ACF; the mutual sharing and learning platform provided through LG’s; and regular meetings of farmers have improved their access to right information. They are no longer guided by the business interest of suppliers but by their own informed understanding of farming, procurement and marketing of produce.

**Sustainable agriculture is a new found agenda among the farmers:** The farmers are gradually giving up the practice of burning crop residues. This practice today finds no acceptance among the 2722 farmers from among 5135 farmers hailing from 25 villages. These 2722 farmers have realised the ill effects of burning crop residues. Addressing this practice among the farmers is now high on the agenda of all the LGs.

**Achieving Recognition:** The work done by BFPC prompted state-run institutions like NABARD,
the Punjab Agriculture Department, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), and the Punjab National Bank Farmers’ Training Center (PNBFTC) to offer their support. NABARD provided its first financial support to ten farmers’ business groups in the form of a grant-in-aid of Rs. 5,000. Apart from this, NABARD also approached the FPC with financial support to expand its business operations. Recognitions from other organisations too are lining up because the FPC works with dexterity and transparency.

Learnings

The process of running an organisation has given the team some very specific understanding on building, developing and sustaining a member-centric institution. A democratic way of functioning and a recognition of its role as an institution that works for its members have been the core guiding principles of the FPC. This has been possible due to the hard work of the team, its adherence to its vision, and in their following of ethical and fair processes to achieve its end. These are:

If institutional processes are transparent, the institution succeeds: Institutional processes have to be transparent. All its functions, decisions and processes such as record keeping and financial transactions, must be done with the objective of building trust among the members. The members must not feel sidelined or ignored. They should be party to all the decisions and should be informed about the processes by the office bearers. This trust, once developed, will take the institution a long way.

Members, and not the facilitators, should be taking decisions: Decision making is critical and much depends on the processes adopted by the facilitating agency. It may sometimes take long to come to a decision but this must never be the excuse for the decision to be taken by only a few
members. Membership-based institutions must realise that it is the members – and not the office bearers or facilitators -who have to take decisions on the direction the institution needs to move ahead.

**Processes should ensure that members remain committed to their institution:** Attachments could be emotional to begin with, but as the group becomes a business unit, members should be committed to create an institution that serves the practical needs of all its members. No one should ever feel neglected or be kept out of the process.

**Consistent Investment in building capacities of members:** Building capacities through need-based capacity building programmes is essential; and should not be ignored by the organisation. It is important that the members of the group come to common understanding on various issues. This will help them to make decisions for the institution in an informed way. Investment by the facilitating agency as such is bound to be long drawn as building an institution requires a long term commitment of investments.

**Conclusion**

There has been a significant change in the outlook of the farmers in this region, today. There was a time when they would not trust their neighbours. Today they have undergone a distinct metamorphosis. Farmers trust each other; they work together and plan to take greater leaps forward, together. All this has happened as a result of ACF’s investment in human capital and in the development of transparent systems and processes.

The beginning has been positive and with things shaping up according to plan, the future looks both exciting as well as challenging.
Shaping the Dreams of Farmers in Tribal Areas
Introduction

More than half of India’s population depends on agriculture as their source of livelihood. India occupies the second position in the world in terms of agricultural production. However, these figures mean little to the farmers in the tribal area of Chandrapur district of Maharashtra. For them practising agriculture had been a struggle. ACF had been working on a project to strengthen the agro-based livelihoods of tribal farmers in the villages in Chandrapur district since 2001. In 2010 it started a project called the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) to improve cotton production methods. This intervention was designed to bridge the gap between technology and the farming community, and aimed at empowering farmers. Over a period of several years, the intervention has also looked at the various issues that tribal farmers have long been grappling with.

Today, these farmers have a company of their own called the Gadchandur Farmer Producer Company Limited (GFPCL). It is a registered institution that addresses the problems faced by its members and provides them with the support they require so as to make a decent living.

Context

Chandrapur district has had to contend with issues such as uneven rainfall, poor infrastructure, little irrigation facilities and traditional farming methods. Though the land holdings were good, i.e. 70 % of farmers had land holdings of about 2 ha (which is above the state average), and the area was blessed with relatively better rainfall of 1092 mm (though slightly erratic), the farmers were not able to reap any profits. The presence of black soil led farmers to go for growing cotton during the kharif season. Besides cotton, farmers
also grew soybean, red gram and black gram in the kharif season, while growing wheat and gram during the rabi season.

The farmers were a hardworking lot but they had low literacy levels. Money lenders and commodity traders who provided the capital necessary for investments charged very high rates of interest. A system called ‘dedi’, which involved paying additional 50% of what is borrowed. This made farming a loss-making enterprise for most farmers. The literacy handicap of the farmers kept them away from scientific knowledge and access to improved technology. They depended on the advice of the traders on fertiliser application as well as pest and disease management. They were sold inputs of inferior quality at a very high price.

This had been the practice for many years. Every farmer was alone in every respect. Each farmer bought these supplies on his own and traded harvests on his own as well. Farmers did not have any formal or informal institution that represented their interests, and as such, they had to do all negotiations individually. When it came to selling the produce, the traders offered them a price which was much lower than the rate at which one would otherwise trade.

Additionally, the traders had many malpractices up their sleeves. They would resort to inaccurate weighing of produce and would impose many other non-transparent malpractices like commission\(^2\), arhat\(^3\), dharmada\(^4\) and mamul\(^5\) on farmers. The farmers had reached the stage of utter helplessness. Many had chosen to migrate out to the urban centres for sustenance.

**Intervention**

ACF began its development activities under the agro-based livelihood generation programme, in Gadchandur area of Chandrapur district, in 2001. ACF began with an intensive assessment of the various issues facing farmers and based on the results, it decided to work with the cotton growers in the region. The objective was to establish an end-to-end linkage (with supply chain actors) to make growing cotton a lucrative proposition for most farmers. Thus ACF joined hands with BCI in 2010 and started implementing the project with 304 cotton growers in five villages of the Ambuja Cement Works.

**Capacity Building:** As part of BCI activities, ACF had been organising farmers in smaller units of learning groups (LG). These groups conduct meetings at regular intervals, share their learnings with each other, and deliver farm support activities. ACF also facilitates trainings on better cotton production and discuss ways and means to minimize the harmful impact of crop protection practices during these meetings. Social practices like decent work conditions and ethical trading practices are also discussed. As a result, farmers have embraced the principles and practices of better cotton production. Much of this work is carried out by a cadre of trained village level Extension Volunteers (EVs).

ACF has developed many capacity building methods and materials that best correspond with the needs of the farmers in LG trainings. ACF has also been conducting farm demonstrations on plots on farmers’ fields to drive home methods around good agricultural practices. Methods like audio-visual shows, street plays and farmers Field School (FFS) among others have been employed to help farmers understand various practices around cotton farming.

ACF has also discussed social issues like child labour in these farmers’ groups as part of BCI values. A lot of these capacity building efforts were done in partnership with expert institutions. Support of government departments was also roped in whenever needed.

Before the BCI project started, the farmers were indiscriminately using chemical fertilizers and pesticides. They would procure these materials from the agro centres and would rely on the advice and guidance of this group who chiefly
had their own business interest at heart. It was therefore, difficult for ACF – a newcomer – to ask farmers to give up something that they had been doing for so many years. Besides, the farmers had apprehensions about ACL itself. A considerable number of farmers had sold off their land on which the ACL plant operated. Some feared that ACL wanted to take away the remaining land as well. It took a long time to do away with this trust deficit.

While the first year was spent in building up trust in ACF and its methods, in the following year, the BCI project joined hands with the ginners to buy cotton directly from the farmers. It was difficult to ask the farmers to stop the practice of sprinkling water on the cotton before trading. They had been doing this for years and the middlemen and local traders had simply ignored this practice. These middlemen would still benefit by showing less weight and by deducting many kinds of charges. The farmers accepted the price offered by the traders as they had no clue about what they could actually have earned.

The BCI project wanted to change this practice. As the first step, ACF conducted training of farmers on aspects of cotton farming and distribution. The project established a linkage with the ginner Nagarwala Cotton Processor, at Wani, to buy cotton from the farmers at a fair price, without deducting any commission or other charges. The BCI project could also impress upon the ginners to make immediate cash payments.

The mechanism worked with farmers from the villages of Hardona and Mangi. They had followed directions and refrained from sprinkling water on the cotton before selling their produce. During the cotton season of 2011 a total of 6800 quintals of cotton were procured by the ginner. The farmers received a marked up price, which was about Rs 180 per quintal more than what other farmers had received. This experience was enough to attract many more farmers in the following year to join the BCI supply chain.

The environment was generally upbeat and the ACF team did not miss out on taking advantage of the opportunity. Many meetings were conducted in villages – several of them at night. As discussions proceeded, the farmers realised that they could come together as a collective and gain from not just selling their produce, but also procuring the inputs collectively. The kharif season of 2012 was the first one in this direction. The farmers of village Hardona (Khu.) came together and booked 100 packets of BT cotton from a local dealer. The process gave them a margin of Rs. 70 per packet. The ACF team took this message to other villages to inspire others to also follow suit.

**Origins of the Farmer Producer Company:**

The two positive experiences - one in procuring seeds and the other in selling through the BCI supply chain - led more farmers to join the BCI initiative. Around this time, discussions were on within ACF regarding the setting up of a farmers’ producer organisation. Internal capacity building was done with the team involved in this task. Input sessions by experts, and exposure visits to other successful farmer-producer organisations were held for the key staff. These were followed up with meetings between field facilitators and some key farmers from some villages. As a result of these efforts, the team was able to convince farmers on the possibilities that such an institution could open up for them. On the one hand, such an institution would retain the unique elements of cooperative business while on the other it could also operate within a regulatory framework similar to that of a company.

**Sensitization and mobilization:**

In 2013, the discussions gained momentum at almost all village level meetings in the 14 operating villages. The ACF team felt that most of the farmers were sceptical as they could not see how they could be part of a business organisation. Efforts were made on a wider scale. The ACF team discussed the idea not just with the farmers, but also with local SHGs and youth groups.
After two months of intensive meetings and discussions, the farmers were convinced that they could set up a farmers' producer company (FPC). The team thought the time was ripe to broach the idea of share capital and in one of the farmers' meetings, the idea was discussed. But the farmers failed to understand the relation between the company and the share fees. The amount of share fee of Rs 500 was also on the higher side. For many it was too steep an amount. Their response was not very enthusiastic.

**Learning from their peers:** The first attempt to obtain the share capital from the farmers did not yield any result. On the contrary the idea boomeranged. After analysing the fallout, the team concluded that the farmers could not conceptualise the role that the FPC could play for them. Hence the team decided that they should continue facilitating the collective procurement of agri-input and output. These efforts went on for about three months and it motivated two farmers from Dhanoli village, Mr. Jangabhau Soyam and Mr. Linga Vetti, come forward and contribute Rs. 500 each. A few other farmers also expressed their willingness. However, this response was not adequate for ACF to go ahead. The team decided that the farmers had to see for themselves how similar initiatives had succeeded elsewhere. An exposure visit was planned to Devnadi Valley Agricultural Producers’ Company Limited, Sinner Nasik, which had received support from NABARD to start an AGRI-MALL. After this exposure visit, the farmers were quite excited and came forward with their share contributions. There was no looking back then, and the process towards registration formalities was initiated.

**Structure of the FPC:** It was important for the team to discuss the structure of the proposed farmers' producer organisation. During the discussions, it was jointly decided that in each of the villages there would be a village level body (VLB). The LGs would be members of these VLBs and thereafter the VLBs would nominate one from among them to be on the FPC Board. Eventually, 13 VLBs nominated 13 members to the Board. The process of forming the VLB was done in all the villages and each LG had one member in the VLB. The federated structure gave strength to the representatives and also charged the representative to remain accountable to their respective VLBs.

Once the nominal board was finalised, the time was ripe to work out details about the formation and registration processes, the governance, the legal requirements and the opening of a temporary bank account. The BoD passed a resolution and opened a bank account with the proposed name of Swavalambi Utpadak Gat. The meeting also decided the name of the President, Secretary and the Treasurer who would jointly operate the account till the registration process was completed. The group had by then collected Rs. 20,000 as share fees from the members. The discussions on the processes also happened in the villages under the leadership of the nominated members from the village (VLB member) and this was done to share the processes and continue obtaining the share capital. By mid-2013, 125 members had contributed their initial share of Rs. 500 each. The corpus amount thus collected was Rs. 62,500. However, this was still not enough to take the process of registration ahead.

**Focus on generating the primary corpus:** Since one of the beneficiaries of the FPC would be the businesses in the area, the Board decided to approach the ginners to contribute towards building the corpus base. After negotiations with the ginners, an amount of Rs 10 per quintal was
decided as the support that the ginners would extend towards building the corpus. During the season the villages together sold 24,500 quintals of cotton to the ginners and thereby received a support of Rs. 2,45,000 from the ginners towards the corpus. As the corpus amount grew, more members began joining in. By the end of the season, 210 farmers had subscribed to the share fees. The time was ripe to start the processes for registration.

**Formation and Registration of FPC:** In August 2013, ACF organised a meeting with all selected BoDs and VLBs. A detailed presentation on the formalities involved in registering a FPC was made. This was followed by a discussion on the documents required for the registration. In this meeting, doubts regarding the registration process were also clarified. The registration process required a lot more paper work from the farmers’ side. The paper work required is attached as annexure.

**The legal process:** Initiating the legal process was the most challenging phase so far. With only one member of the group having a Permanent Account Number (PAN), others had to apply afresh. It took four months to get all the necessary papers in order. However, the papers could be obtained only for 10 members and not for all the 13 BoDs. The BoD however decided to go ahead with the registration process with these 10 members.

The services of a Chartered Accountant (CA) from Nagpur were obtained. The CA was given the power of attorney and he was authorised to take actions on the behalf of the farmers’ group. A power of attorney letter duly stamped and executed by the director with the Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) had to be submitted to the Registrar of Companies (ROC). Thereafter the BoD and the team sat together to decide on the names. As per the legal requirements, five names of the farmers’ producer group had to be suggested to the ROC. The ROC finally gave its approval to the “Gadchandur Farmer Producer Company Limited (GFPCL)”.

The team then drafted the By-Laws (Memorandum of Association (MoA) and Articles of Association (AoA)) of the Farmers’
Company. After finalizing the MoAs and AoAs, a declaration from the BoD was drafted, stating their name, age, address and specific agricultural or animal husbandry occupation. The finalized MoA, AoA, Declaration, Affidavit and Consent Letter documents were provided along with the registration costs of MoA and AoA. This was paid online and within a few days, the ROC, after reviewing the documents provided the Certificate of Incorporation to the CA. Thus, the first Farmers’ Producer Company was listed on 20th March, 2014 and there were grand celebrations in all the villages.

Post-Registration Governance Processes: After registration of the GFPCL, the first board meeting was conducted on April 12, 2014. It is mandatory to conduct the first Board meeting within 30 days of registration. During the meeting, it was formally decided to open an account with Bank of India. They also appointed Mr. Jangabha Soyam as the Chairperson of GFPCL; Mr. Ganpat Chapale as the Vice Chairman; and Mr. Pritam Kore as the CEO during the meeting. Members were also explained the terms in the final MoA and AoA; they carried out the process of share distribution; and discussed current business activities. Subsequently, the company held its first Annual General Meeting (AGM) on May 31, 2014, wherein all the 380 members were present. They discussed and approved the business plan as proposed and also finalised plans to file relevant applications for PAN, TIN and licences to conduct trading activities in agricultural inputs and outputs.

Business Plan and Implementation: The company had a corpus of Rs. 4,35,000, which included the farmers’ share of Rs 1,90,000 (380@500 per member) and Rs. 2,54,000 which came as contribution from the ginners. The amount was used to place order for agri-inputs like BT cotton seed and seeds of soybean, wheat and gram. The company also placed orders for chemicals and pesticides. By December 31, 2014 the company had achieved a turnover of Rs. 16,35,075, with 736 shareholders. Now the company plans to establish an Agri-Mall at Gadchandur town and is also planning to start a primary seed processing unit. To establish the Agri-Mall, GFPCL will receive support from the Maharashtra Agriculture Competitiveness Project (MACP), BCI and ACF. Decisions have been taken in this regard at each of these organisations. The company is currently awaiting the letter and support from the relevant authorities. GFPCL has also linked itself with the Maharashtra State Seeds Corporation Limited through the Department of Agriculture to undertake a seed production programme. There are many such plans on the anvil and time will tell how the company grows and operates for the benefit of its members. A sufficiently strong foundation has been laid.

Outcomes

Work done with farmers, both at the technological and the institutional fronts have provided some interesting results. Some of them are here to stay. These are:

Farmers are now freed from the unholy nexus of moneylenders and traders: Devidas Sunga Velladi, a tribal farmer of Kargaon village, owns 1.6 ha of agricultural land. For as many as 16 years, he used to borrow capital from a moneylender and sell the produce through him. At the end of the season, the margins would not be enough to make ends meet for his family. But now his situation has changed. He receives advice on what practices he should adopt and there has been an increase in his produce. He now gets the best margins from the sales. A transparent pricing method and direct linkages with ginners have helped him earn about 36% more than what he used to earn earlier. Farmers like Ganpat Chapale (Mangi), Mahadev Chavale (Kukudsath), Bhimarav Sidam (Kargaon) and Indrajit Korvate (Bhendvi) have also reported similar increase in earnings. They have now decided to go with their institution and not with any middleman or moneylender, freeing them from this unholy nexus.
Farmers have now developed a business sense in all their actions: Time has changed the way the farmers do their transactions. Earlier, they would mostly be on their own, negotiating prices for their inputs and outputs all by themselves. Today, they discuss these issues in their Learning Groups, at the village level bodies and at the BoD meetings of FPC. These platforms have helped them to learn from each other’s practices and experiences. They do collective purchase of agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilisers and pesticides) and sell their farm produce collectively. They now have better bargaining powers, as well as profits.

Most farmers are now beaming with confidence: Mr. Jangabhau Soyam of Dhanoli village – a primary-educated farmer – never dreamt that he could become the Chairperson of GFPCL. Until a few years ago, he had been on his farm toiling hard to grow crops and make ends meet. He was only known among some farmers in his village. Today, as a BoD, he is known beyond his village. He goes around and discusses farming practices with other farmers. He negotiates with suppliers and traders on behalf of the company. He is invited to various meetings and forums to share the experiences of GFPCL. Today, he is a confident farmer, who has come a long way.

Farmers’ institution is a well known entity in the area: GFPCL is the first producer company registered in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, and doing its business well. Government departments of the district and of the region have taken note of the farmers’ company. The company officials are now called in for meetings and workshops not just in the district but across the state as well. This new found recognition is a testimony to the work that the company has done in a short span of two years.

Learnings

The process of mobilizing farmers to set up a strong FPC has had its limitations, successes and numerous learnings. Some of these are:

Learning through real-life examples is an effective method to establish any community based organisation: When the ACF team had initially discussed the idea of having a company of farmers, many felt it was a ‘Shekchallis’ (unachievable) dream. They did not believe in it and showed no response to ACF’s efforts. ACF organized an exposure visit for a few select farmers to Devnadi Valley Agricultural Producers’ Company Limited, Sinner at Nasik.
After seeing the AGRI-MALL and the businesses that this FPC was doing, they started to realise that such an initiative could be started by them too. They also interacted with BoD members and asked several questions to clarify their doubts. And, they came back with a dream.

Farmers join in when collectives assure them of better returns: The farmers of Hardona (Khu.) are today wedded to the idea of collectivism. There are 139 farmers from this village who are members of FPC. This village has had a history of not having any institution such as an SHG or a Farmers’ Club - prior to the FPC. Bringing the villagers together under the BCI project was a challenging experience. However, things changed when they collectively procured the first batch of inputs and realised the margins they received when doing things together.

Do not compromise your efforts in the initial phase. Even if it takes a long time, continue with your efforts: There were instances when the farmers had pulled back after initiating the process. When the ACF team had wanted the farmers to contribute Rs. 500 as membership fee for the FPC, many farmers were silent or non-committal. The ACF team continued to discuss, and though it took time, they contributed. It is important that the practitioners give enough time to the farming community so that they are clear about the objective behind what is being proposed. One must clarify as many doubts as possible at every stage of the process.

Transparency is a must on all governance and financial matters: Generally there is a trust deficit among most of us and farmers are no exception. They have seen how institutions meant for them have broken their faith. The ACF team was clear from the very beginning that all processes had to be transparent; discussions had to involve everyone; and everyone should come to the same understanding before moving on to the next step. No decisions should ever be taken keeping any of the members in the dark. All financial matters and governance matters should be discussed threadbare. These processes, if meticulously followed, will surely develop trust and ownership among the members. The ACF team’s commitment in this regard has resulted in zero conflicts in the FPC in the last two years.

Conclusion

The GFPCL, the first of its kind in operation in Chandrapur, has been a boon to its members. The farmers free from the unholy nexus of the middlemen and traders. They now have money in the house and are contemplating reinvesting the same in agriculture. The foundation for a larger revolution has been laid. It’s the start of a revolution that can spiral growth – a growth that will be managed by the farmers themselves.

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<th>Crop</th>
<th>Harvesting season 2012</th>
<th>Harvesting season 2013</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cotton</td>
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Optimizing Agro-Waste for Self-Sufficiency
Introduction

A common practice among farmers in the villages of Jaitaran Block in Rajasthan, is to burn crop residues with no economic value, and those not consumed by their cattle. They would resort to this method as it saved time, labour and hence, costs. However, biomass can serve as an effective alternative to fossil fuels. Thus, when the Ambuja Cements (ACL) unit at Rabriyawas initiated a demand for procuring biomass as an alternate fuel to replace the use of other fossil-based fuel; Ambuja Cement Foundation (ACF) found an opportunity to help farmers opt for a better practice.

Earlier, ACL used to procure biomass from private vendors. But when supplies from private vendors became irregular and failed to meet the actual demand; ACF facilitated the creation of a farmers’ organization to obtain biomass. This narrative describes how the organization began with only the idea of supplying biomass but later evolved into a strong farmers’ institution, whose voice represented local interests, and sought to create wealth for the farmers.

Context

As global demand for energy continues to rise, industries have to confront hefty energy bills. They have also to comply with the pollution control norms. ACL had been using large quantities of coal to run its kiln and its captive power plant. The requirement of coal was staggering – around 5.40 lakh tonnes per year in its Rabriyawas unit.

In order to match national and global standards and also driven by its own commitment towards the environment, ACL wanted to shift partially to some alternate fuel resources. This was a tough challenge as alternate fuel resources like biomass and plastic had to be obtained from vendors who had never dealt in such supplies earlier.

The company wanted to reduce the consumption of coal up to 10% and use Alternate Fuel Resources (AFR) instead. The use of AFR would help reduce carbon dioxide emission by almost 50%. Farmers in the villages of Jaitaran grow crops such as bajra, green gram, and sesame during the kharif season; and wheat, mustard and cumin during the rabi season. The crops are used for domestic consumption but the excess produce is also sold in the market to fetch cash surplus for domestic needs.

However, the crop residues of most crops would be burned in the farms to save labour cost and labour time. Since many of these crop residues
could be used as alternate fuel, it was a win-win situation both for the Company as well as the farming community. ACF saw this as an opportunity to initiate a pilot project to supply AFR to ACL. They roped in the farmers’ collective to aggregate the supplies.

**Intervention**

ACL had started procuring biomass from a vendor to comply with its AFR strategy during 2010. The vendor used to purchase the biomass from the villages, but was not very regular with his supplies. He was also unable to match ACL’s targets. When ACF learnt of this issue, it realized that the problem could be solved if the farmers directly supplied the biomass to the plant.

Around this time, ACF had organized a few farmers’ clubs in the villages with the support of NABARD. The ACF team decided to vet the idea of a farmers’ institution taking up the role of supplier of biomass at these farmers’ clubs. However, these discussions brought two contrary aspects to the fore. On one hand, the farmers showed an interest in the biomass-supplying project; but on the other, they pointed out that the burning of the crop residue on the field contributed to soil fertility by adding to the potash content. They were disinclined to let go of this process that they believed it benefitted the soil and crop productivity. ACF carried out a research and realized that the farmers’ beliefs were misplaced. The burning of the crop residue did not add anything to the soil – on the contrary, it damaged the soil. This was communicated to the farmers through club meetings. The farmers understood the argument and finally agreed to become vendors themselves.

They agreed to join in the survey to understand the areas under different crops and the possible amount of biomass that these crops generated. The survey helped ACF to assess the potential amount of biomass that the farmers’ club could supply to the cement plant. ACF had to consider another factor as well. A part of the crop residue was used as cattle feed by the farming households. It was then jointly agreed by the farmers and ACF, that the crop residues used as cattle feed would not be included in the supply of biomass. The survey conducted by ACF gathered information on the cropping patterns, area under different crops, methods adopted to thresh out grains from the crops and the ultimate use of the crop residue by the farming household. The survey results revealed some local uses of biomass. One of them was its use as a fuel substitute in brick industries in the area. The survey identified biomass from crops like mustard, taramira, cumin, green gram, heena and sesame as not being used except for burning in the fields.

The survey thereafter could estimate the total amount of such biomass that could be collected based on the distance from the ACL plant. This was important as it helped the team to assess the distance that had to be covered so as to maintain the supply requirement of the ACL unit. The assessment revealed that within a distance of thirty km from the plant, the farmers could aggregate around 22800 tonnes of biomass. If the requirement increased, then transporting biomass from a radius of 50 km would help supply 38300 tonnes. Another important consideration of the study was to ascertain the calorific value (CV) of the biomass. Samples were sent to the ACL laboratory to ascertain this. The test results provided the understanding that certain crops had better CV. Mustard and taramira gave between 3000 to 3100 kcal whereas cumin gave 2900-3000 kcal. ACF discussed these results with the farmers’ club, thus enabling them to take the decision to start the supplies.

ACL required the opening of a Vendor Code and adherence to certain safety and business practices. ACF organized 50 farmers’ clubs in 45 villages, and initiated a dialogue with them. After understanding the process and the formalities, two farmers’ clubs submitted the necessary documents on behalf of the 50 farmers’ clubs.
towards the supply of biomass. Within a month of this proposal, ACL opened the Vendor Code, thus paving the way for the supply to start.

However, ACL's conditions for supply of biomass proved tough for the farmers to adhere to. The norms prescribed included specifications like size of the biomass, moisture content and the ash percentage in the biomass. Those adhering to these would be paid at the rate of Rs 1950 per ton. Once these norms had been accepted by the supplier, ACL would release the purchase order from its store department and the prescribed quantity would thereafter be supplied. The vendor was given the first purchase order within weeks of opening the vendor code.

In addition to supplying the biomass, the supplier would also have to do a lot of paperwork. The process included filling up the challan with the vendor code; providing the vehicle number; weighing the vehicle both with and without the bio-mass; checking the quality parameters and then depositing these papers. All the papers needed signatures of various persons at the
gate, the weighbridge, the store, the yard and other specific locations right up to the storage department. However, payments would be made only after the laboratory provided its analysis of the CV. The sample collected from the supplies would be tested for quality to ascertain the price that the farmers would eventually get. It generally took between 20 to 25 working days for the payment to be credited into the account of the farmers’ club. The farmers receive their share based on the quantity supplied. Therefore, the club deducted Rs 10 as its fee per ton to for its role in facilitating the process.

The first year was a learning phase for the farmers’ clubs. The two farmers’ clubs, namely Shri Ram Kissan and Dev Kisaan did a business of Rs. 13,88,474 and Rs. 4,81,436 respectively. The two clubs earned Rs. 13,885 and Rs. 4,814 as fees. Together they supplied 926 MT of biomass during April and June of 2012. The first phase was a challenge for both the ACF team as well as the farmers’ clubs. The club representatives received threats from the existing local vendors who wanted to capture the business.

There were safety issues as well. The farmers and tractor drivers would not adhere to the prescribed safety standards such as wearing safety shoes, helmets and reflective jackets. There were days when many farmers would come up together to supply biomass, waiting for hours to get the tractors unloaded. Then, there were days when the supply would exceed the demand and without proper storage facilities, ACL would unilaterally stop procurement making the tractors queue up for supplies the next day. There were also delays in getting the amount credited within the stipulated timeframe. Again, not all farmers adhered to the prescribed size and quality parameters of the biomass. As only two farmers’ club got the vendor code registered, others too wanted to get similar codes. The company realized that it would only complicate the matter and hence declined to open more codes. This helped the initiative, but caused some heartburn.

The problem related to the quality of biomass had to be resolved first. ACF roped in the support of the AFR committee of ACL to educate the farmers on the quality parameters. This exercise clarified doubts and helped the farmers’ club representatives see the logic and ensure that parameters would be honoured.

The second most important aspect on which ACF focused its attention was to find out a solution to the rivalry and tension emerging between the farmers’ clubs. Every farmers’ club wanted its own vendor code. Understanding the growing interest amongst farmers, ACF floated the idea of forming an apex body of all the farmers’ clubs. This apex body would have all farmers as members and all of them would be able to sell their biomass as per specifications, but with the consent of the apex body. ACF realized that such an institution would help resolve conflicts and tone down the negative competition amongst the farmers’ clubs.

ACF facilitated a meeting of the 50 farmers’ clubs in which participants from each club put up a proposal for registration of a Farmers’ Producer Company (FPC). All the delegates of the farmers’ clubs agreed to this proposal and they elected ten members from amongst them as the board of directors (BoDs). These ten representatives thereafter elected one from among them to be the chairperson of the producer company. Shri Chain Singh Jodha was given the leadership role of this body. They then began working towards the registration of the producer company. It was a long drawn process. The company was finally registered on 15th June, 2012. It had 1000 members with an authorized share capital of Rs one million. The board members received capacity building inputs on managing the company. They were also taken to interact with a similar institution of farmers at Banswara to learn about how it was being governed. The governance of the company, named Balaji Farmers’ Producer Company, is today quite streamlined.
It conducts its board meeting once every three months and maintains all the necessary documents related to its business turnover and for auditing. Among all the activities that the FPC engages in, the supply of AFR is one of the most important. It is the most contentious one as well. The difficulty lies on multiple fronts. The first is the fixing of the price of the biomass. The farmers have been demanding a better deal, but the rationale of price fixation that is agreed to, also being quite logical and scientific (based on CV), does not allow ACL to go along with the farmers’ demands. Today, the board member is also a part of the price determining committee.

This has helped in streamlining the process. Recently, with a reduction in global coal prices, the price of biomass too had to fall. However, farmers have continued to supply the biomass as it still makes business sense to do so.

The other issues like lag time in getting their payments or waiting time of the tractors at the gate are slowly being resolved. These issues will be streamlined in time with the development of new systems. Today, there is a separate stand for biomass-loaded tractors thus resolving the issue of tractors piling up and clogging the gate. All the tractors carry with them gate passes, which allow them to unload on a first come-first-serve basis.

ACF has taken the support of ACL to carry out a series of training programmes on safety with the members of the FPC. The delay in checking the biomass quality has been addressed by increasing the number of lab staff and appointing an FPC member to monitor the process. Payments are now released within ten days of delivery with farmers receiving their payments through account payee cheques in their bank accounts. The FPC also charges a small token fee to facilitate
the transaction. As the system evolved, it helped in improving many aspects and led to an increase in supplies. In 2013, the FPC supplied 10,582.54 tonnes, which increased to 14,135.89 tonnes in 2014. The Balaji Farmers' Producer Company got involved in procuring hybrid seeds of good quality. The farmers have been demanding such services. Therefore, the company procured seeds of green gram, mustard and cluster beans. It also obtained a retailer license for the supply of agri-inputs (seeds, fertilizers, pesticides) from the Department of Agriculture.

In 2013, the company did a business of Rs. 1,83,250 and made a saving of Rs. 9,162. The following year the input business went up to Rs. 6,22,295, bringing in a profit of Rs. 31,114. Running the company requires resources and the company has been able to take care of this quite effectively. The total expenditure during 2013-14 was Rs. 1,91,380. These included expenses on administration, payment of legal fees (audit fees), rent for office and rent for maintaining storage of seeds among other overheads.

These expenses have been managed from the profits generated from the business. Today the company has enough of corpus to purchase seeds for its members well in advance. The corpus is likely to grow with more farmers using the FPC vendor code to supply the biomass. The facilitation charges are an important source of funds for the FPC. It has used its resources effectively to serve the interest of its farmer members.

**Outcome**

The initiation of an activity to give extra cash to farmers by asking them to supply biomass to the cement plant, which began as a pilot project of ACF, has today evolved into an organization of farmers which not only supplies biomass but also serves the requirements of various other agricultural inputs. The formation of this collective and its role in serving long term needs of farmers have yielded outcomes as follows:

**For many farmers what was once waste is now another source of income:** Before the intervention farmers found no use of the agri-residues. They would simply burn them. The demand of this agri-residue has provided on average Rs. 5,783 to 1955 farmers from 45 villages. This extra income has benefited the farmers. Discussions with them in their group meetings have revealed that the additional income has also been invested wisely. Farmers have pooled back the income into agriculture by purchasing better quality seeds, fertilizers and livestock. Some have invested in their children's education.

Estimates reveal that supply of biomass to ACL would bring in an income of Rs10,000/- per tractor load of five tonnes to the farmer. The farmer also incurs an expense of Rs 5,300 in getting the biomass sized, loaded and transported to ACL leaving them with net income of Rs.4,700 per tractor load. This amount is paid to different service providers like threshing machine owners, labourers and transporters.

**Even labourers now have additional income:** The intervention has also benefited agricultural labourers. Many of them would migrate to the cities during the non-agricultural months in search of an income. Today, they have an additional source of income. These labourers find employment in cutting, sizing and loading the biomass even in the non-agricultural season. A simple calculation shows that whenever a farmer supplies a tractor full of biomass, which is equivalent to five tonnes, he pays Rs 1,500 towards loading and another Rs 200 towards unloading charges thus enabling a labourer to earn up to Rs.1, 700.

**Farmers and labourers are today better equipped in safety than earlier:** Every farmer and labourer involved with the supplies of biomass is provided training on safety by ACL. The training has had its impact on both the farmers and labourers. They wear helmets whenever they are on two wheelers; use safety masks, gloves; and sometimes aprons.
when they spray pesticides. Records obtained from the local police stations have shown reduction in accidental deaths on highways. Safety standards are now being followed by farmers both in and around the ACL plant.

Farmers have their own organization now: The farmers’ producer organization belongs to all the members. The farmers’ organization not only negotiates the rate of biomass supplies with ACL, it also procures inputs from dealers at a much lower rate and makes the same available to the farmers at their doorsteps. The cost of agricultural inputs for farmers has thus come down. The quality is assured and the supply is also certain. The producer company has eliminated the middlemen from the AFR business as well. The farmers now deal through their company with ACL. The payment of the biomass is certain and comes in time to the farmers.

The producer company is today a self-reliant business entity: The Balaji Farmers’ Producer Company has an operating surplus and a sizable corpus to expand its operation. The corpus has been built through the fees charged for the biomass supplies. Thus, it is the farmers’ contribution. The corpus has also grown because of the profits from the sales of seeds that it purchased from the dealers. The business entity of farmers is cash rich; is able to take care of its expenses; and has been able to establish itself as a thriving enterprise.

Learnings

The farmers’ collective has travelled a long way. As the journey unfolded, the team had a variety of experiences. These experiences have yielded lessons that could be followed while initiating similar processes elsewhere in future. Some of these learnings are:

One should have rules which are defined well and also known to all its members: The farmers’ body made its rules before it started the biomass supplies. These rules were clearly defined and explained to the farmers as well, thus removing confusions that could have potentially arose later.

Do not ever compromise with set standards: The farmers’ organization developed a system of reward and punishment when it came to differentiating between those who followed the system and those who did not. Those who did not follow the system were not given gate passes or challans and also faced a cut in the price of supplies made by them. This soon led them to change their errant ways.

When decisions are taken locally, the results are always better: Centralized decisions are often difficult to manage especially with few human resources. It works best if decisions are taken at the local level. The solutions and decisions were taken by the farmers in their respective groups and not at the larger collective level. They came

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total supply Biomass. (tonne)</th>
<th>No. of labour days generated</th>
<th>No. of benefited farmers</th>
<th>Extra income of farmers</th>
<th>Average income of farmers</th>
<th>PO corpus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14134</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>11307200</td>
<td>5783</td>
<td>583339</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: Assessment of Extra Income of Labor and Farmers by ACF
out with better solutions and the members were also particular about adhering to them.

Conclusion

The case has shown that farmers are able to do something even when they had earlier not experienced any such process. They have evolved with time as they found their engagement giving them higher returns. They have evolved from being just a biomass-selling institution to a true farmers’ institution.

They now procure seeds and other inputs and trade them before the season. They continue to do the AFR business as it gives them the greatest returns. They have, through their own understanding, made this process so streamlined that they are able to do larger volumes of trade without much difficulty.

Making Use Of The Additional Income

Shri Sukhdev Mali of Pratapura village made an additional income of Rs 12000 by selling the biomass from his eight hectare agricultural land. He used this income to pay Rs. 3000 towards his child’s school fees and also purchase a wheat pounding machine. He is confident about making more out of his investments in future. Similarly, Shri Jeeyaram Gurjar also paid for his child’s school fees with his extra income and used a part of the money to buy better quality seeds for the ensuing season.
Farmers’ Choro

An intervention on Information Centre
Introduction

Working with farmers to improve their livelihoods has been one of the primary objectives of ACF since its inception in 1993. In the initial days ACF’s efforts focused on providing farmers material inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pest control or devices like traps. It was then an important initiative as many of these inputs were beyond the reach of farmers. However, with changing times ACF realized that farmers today require information on what they need to do in agriculture more than they need material support. Getting the correct information on time helps farmers take informed decisions. Hence, from 2010, ACF started forming farmers’ groups at the village level, in Kodinar district of Gujarat, to help them obtain information. It also realized that reaching out to farmers must be made cost effective. The groups provided a platform to reach out to a large number of farmers at one go. ACF subsequently evolved the concept of having a village information centre (VIC) that would provide information on critical inputs, at the time when it is most required, i.e. when the farmers come to purchase inputs. The VIC today is an established farmers’ knowledge centre. The report describes ACF’s efforts in achieving this.

Context

The ACF team was aware that lab-to-land projects required methods to disseminate scientific knowledge on agricultural practices to the farmers. The dissemination of such knowledge about practices developed at research stations had to be done on time. However, one must also be able to disseminate the messages
right. There must not be any aberration in the message as it makes its way from the scientist to the farmers. There are often distortions in what is actually proposed and what is understood and implemented by the farmers. This leads to wrong or even harmful practices. The cost incurred in taking information to farmers has also to be taken into account.

The government has created many channels to reach out to farmers. There are agriculture departments and their functionaries from the state level to the block level. However, many of these prefer to remain immersed in paper work rather than reach out to farmers. The extension services in a village are guided more by private interests. It is often seen that a slightly educated businessperson, who runs a shop dealing in seeds, chemicals and fertilizers, does the extension. However, what gets done in the name of extension is usually a mockery of the available knowledge. Business interests remain the prime consideration of these entrepreneurs. The hapless farmers have to depend on them for the supplies and have no other sources to cross-check.

Adding to the problem is the sheer mass and variety of information that the farmer is bombarded with by way of advertisements. Radio programmes cannot be taken as gospel truth as many are sponsored by business interests. Every second person suggests a different solution and the farmers are confused. They ultimately adopt questionable practices like excess spraying of pesticides and insecticides, application of higher doses of fertilizers than what the soil actually needs and application of more water than the crop's actual requirement. All this adds up to the economic loss of the farmer; spoils the land; and contributes to environmental damage. ACF realized that such problems called for a solution and reaching out to the farmers through a system managed by the farmers themselves might be the right approach. For many years ACF had been organizing farmers into small groups and deputing its experts to interact with these groups on a regular basis. But all these processes had been costly, time-consuming and ineffective in reaching out to many. Over time, ACF realized that its approach must change. An information centre started in Kankhiya village in 2011 and controlled by a village level Agricultural Development Committee (ADC) emerged as a solution. ACF realized the strength of this farmer-centered knowledge hub and replicated in other locations. This report describes how this system evolved; how it is currently managed and operated; as well as the changes it has been able to bring about in terms of agriculture and livelihoods in the villages.

**Intervention**

As mentioned above, ACF had been following an approach of taking knowledge to farmers from agricultural scientists since 1993. The ACF team had among them, scientists with formal education in agriculture. They would go down to the agricultural fields and interact with farmers; sometimes on a one-to-one basis or as groups. Training farmers in agricultural practices, conducting demonstration plots and carrying out on-farm trainings were some of the extension methods applied by ACF. This was the strategy to develop the human capital. However, as indicated ACF’s reach was also limited.

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) project that started in 2010 in Kodinar, served as an eye-opener. Its mandate included working with the farming community and aggregating them into smaller groups called learning groups (LGs). The farmers in learning groups shared among themselves the knowledge of cotton package of practices (POP) to make farming sustainable. The number of groups has increased over the years. It began with 45 groups in 12 villages in 2010; by 2015-16, it aims to reach 246 learners' groups in 75 villages

Initially, forming these groups was not an easy process. The ACF team had to deal with
farmers’ queries and apprehensions. Farmers were quite reluctant to come together only for the sake of getting information or sharing their understanding. But these issues were dealt with and ACF has been able to reach out to 75 villages to date. But as ACF went on forming more groups, it also realized the difficulty of being in touch with all of them on a regular basis. It was quite impossible for a small team of agricultural experts to run around meeting all the groups in these 75 villages. ACF had to be innovative.

The team hit upon the idea of selecting some persons from the villages who would be interested in reaching out to farmers and provide them agricultural training. They selected 12 persons from the 75 villages. However, the team consulted the learning groups while making the selection. Pressure came from political lobbies to select some specific persons. Since these para-professionals were to receive an honorarium, the pressure mounted on ACF to select certain people with connections. ACF could thwart these pressures by making the LGs take the lead role in selecting the para-professionals from among themselves. ACF subject experts thereafter provided inputs to these nominated para-professionals on various aspects of farming, which included Integrated Disease Management, Integrated Pest Management, Integrated Nutrient Management, Soil and Water Management among others.

These para-professionals also received handholding support from the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) team as well as from ACF. They were capable enough to resolve most of the basic queries of the farmers. The number of para-professionals today has reached 54 and they operate in as many villages. However, since they were part of the Better Cotton Project, in most cases the terms of reference were cotton-centric for all these para-professionals. As the intensity picked up, farmers who grew other crops in their farms started seeking information about them as well. The para-professionals had little understanding on other crops and hence approached KVK and the ACF team to help them out. In addition, the demands of the farmers also moved from agricultural knowledge to information about the supplies of inputs as well. A meeting carried out with farmers in three villages, namely Kankhiya, Dhamlej and Singsar, led to a solution.

The representatives of farmers from the LGs of Kankhiya formed an Agricultural Development Committee (ADC), naming it as the Sahara Kishan Club, in August 2011, to work on these issues of the farmers. The para-professionals from the village were also associated with the ADC. The ADC thereafter negotiated and networked with businesses and apart from obtaining the services of the para-professionals; also obtained many of the materials which they otherwise found difficult to source from the market. The ADC did not have money to purchase the items but aggregated the demand and also pooled in the money as advance to buy these supplies. ADCs were supported in this venture by ACF experts.

Buying as a group gave them benefits of scale economics. The ADC as well as the farmers who went through the ADC earned some profits by the end of the first season, and then there was no looking back. With revolving fund support from ACF, the group expanded its operations. It reached out to more farmers and with more inputs. It received loans from a cooperative bank to carry on its business and had a turnover of Rs. 2 million during 2014. The ATMA project gave an award of Rs. 20,000 to this ADC for its role. Other villages soon followed suit and the ADC of village Dhamlej carried out a business of Rs 2.9 million, providing services to 290 farmers.

As the news of the ADC in village Kankhiya reached other villages, more villages showed interest in having their own ADC. It was important that apart from doing the work within their own village, ADC’s should get together to have a super structure. ACF discussed the
possibility of a Farmers’ Company and efforts in this direction helped in the birth of the Somnath Farmers’ Producer Company Ltd. (SFPCL) in March 2013. The SFPCL also provided support for licenses and sourcing quality inputs for other village ADCs and during 2013-14 it managed to have a business turnover of Rs. 10.9 million.

All these experiences were adding up. Farmers were getting access to quality inputs at a cheaper price than what the market offered. But they were still far from getting timely and accurate agricultural information. This issue was bothering the ACF team as well the ADC members. An approach was devised in which farmers coming to source inputs would be given information from the ADC. An expert linkage was developed wherein an expert from the KVK or from ACF would be contacted by the ADC. The problem of the farmer would be resolved through this process. It is this approach which slowly developed into the Village Information Centre (VIC).

These VICs are managed by para-professionals. Farmers reach out to the para-professionals at these centres and clarify their doubts after consulting them. The para-professionals first seek to understand the farmer’s problem and only then provide the material inputs that are sought. Often they suggest something different from what the farmer demanded as it would provide a better solution. All this has helped the centres gain prominence. The para-professionals also advise farmers on the doses and the limitations (of specific inputs such as fertilizers or pesticides.).

Wherever the para-professional fails to find a satisfactory solution, s/he contacts the ACF or the KVK expert and after discussing the problem with them, offers the solution to the farmer. Para-professionals, as well as the KVK and ACF specialists also undertake visits to farmers’ fields on a regular basis. As the intervention evolved, it was important for the VICs to be provided with a support institution and a structured system to make them more effective. Monitoring the efficacies of these VICs was also required. ACF thought of establishing a Cluster-level Knowledge Centre (CKC) in some central locations so that all the VICs falling within the cluster could use its services.

The Coastal Salinity Prevention Initiative known as Kharas Vistarotthan Yojana (K Vy) and the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) project are managed in ten clusters (of which nine have CKCs) located in the 75 villages. These CKCs are managed by trained para-professionals who have passed the 12th standard examination. S/He is the link between ACF on one hand and the VICs in the villages on the other. S/He is also the link between the VIC and the SFPCL.

The work of the VIC is managed by the ADC and all the cluster level ADCs together manage these ten CKCs. Over the years and through deliberations among the members of ADCs, it has been possible to outline the role of the VICs, the coordinators of these VICs as well as those of the ADCs. These roles are elaborated in the annexures. One can see the meticulous planning done to define the role of the coordinator who operates the VICs and the role of ADC which is charged with the responsibility to manage the functioning of VIC and supporting the VIC whenever required.

The VIC is usually housed at a central location in every village. The building is hired or is leased out by an ADC member. In some cases, the government infrastructure in the village is used to house the centre. Each of these centres has some minimum infrastructure such as table fans or ceiling fans. The centres have posters, audio-visual materials, books, pamphlets and other extension-published materials for farmers visiting the centre. ACF also provides subscription charges for agriculture magazines, books and newspapers for each VIC. The centres have contact numbers of ACF and KVK experts so that farmers can call to seek information.
Farmers come up with different issues to these centres (see box).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Queries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seed selection, rates and reliable sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where to test the soil sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which pesticide to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing of fertilizer and pesticide application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to identify crop disease/pests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of crops for particular season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government schemes and ACF interventions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The para-professional who is the VIC coordinator listens to the issue and suggests a solution to the farmer. A follow-up on the suggestion is also done if required. Often this is much appreciated by the farmer. The coordinator receives inputs from ACF and KVK from time to time and s/he also seeks support of the CKC as needed. By the end of December 2014, the VICs have reached out to a total of 6721 farmers. There are nine CKCs as well. The records of these VICs show that in 2014, 19177 farmers reached out to the information centres to source information. Over 7642 queries raised by the farmers were solved and another 3272 farmers got critical inputs from the centres at a fair cost. Many farmers now approach the VIC before they buy a product.

Outcomes

There are many outcomes that can be directly attributed to this intervention. These are:

**Reaching out helps farmers to put knowledge into practice:** To date, more than 19,000 farmers from the 75 villages have reached out to these VICs. About 7,642 farmers sought the support of these centres to get their queries answered. Most of the problems were resolved by the para-professionals playing their roles. In certain cases inputs were received from ACF as well as from the KVK subject matter specialists

**Para-professionals are esteemed in the village today:** A para-professional would have remained an ordinary person had s/he not got into this new role. People now know the para-professionals as not merely the son or daughter or spouse of so and so but as a person who has something more. They are consulted; their advice valued and is respected.

**Farmers have come together:** Ten years ago, farmers were all alone in their farms, each struggling to make ends meet. The story has now changed. They have come together, sharing their learning and experiences. They have different institutional spaces for themselves today. The VIC is one of these. The farmers can access information and are able to share their concerns. Others also come to know about solutions that worked. Some get corrected in the process.

**Home-grown Professional**

Mr. Rasikbhai Poriais of Sonpara village probably would have continued as an unemployed graduate who had to be content farming his father’s land. However, things started changing for him when he got selected as a para-professional. Two years in this role and his skills have elevated him to the role of the Cluster Coordinator.

His work is not limited to his own village – but to over ten other villages now. He is a known person among every farmer in this region. His advice is sought not only on technical matters in agriculture but also on procedures for obtaining schemes and support from the government.
Learnings

As the ACF team carried out the work, it always looked back at what had been done and what was the outcome. There have been desired, some undesired and quite a few unpredicted outcomes. However, these have added to the learnings. Some of these are shared here for the benefit of practitioners elsewhere:

Farmers need guidance and if provided they can work wonders: Agriculture is not seen as a profitable venture anymore. One of the reasons has been that we have not been able to take the knowledge developed at universities and research stations to the farmers. The above case has shown that farmers need this vital support. Those who have incorporated the advice in their farming practices have improved productivity. If many such information centres are established, it will take us towards a green information revolution.

A farmer-centric approach will ensure success: Keeping the farmers’ interest at the centre of any intervention; creating a space that allows for proper information dissemination; and helping farmers make an informed choice is instrumental for success. Almost all radio and television programmes that are aired come up from the understanding of the information-giver but rarely from the demand of the information-receiver. This effort demonstrates the central role of the information receiver who decides what he/she needs to know. This is perhaps truly participatory.

It is more productive if facilitators do not become the decision makers: Para-professionals were selected by the farmers’ groups from among themselves. They were from the same villages and communities as the farmers themselves. There was an existing element of trust in the person chosen or nominated to be a para-professional. In this way ACF ensured that they selected someone they knew and someone they would listen to later. The higher level of acceptance of whatever the para-professional says among the farmers is mainly because he is one of them – one who will stay there and one who will be accountable if crops fail. In short, farmers can rely on him more than anyone who does not represent them.

Conclusion

This intervention is far removed from the routine kind of interventions where farmers and their organizations are promoted to obtain inputs for agriculture. This intervention is about a farmers’ institution managing an information centre which helps farmers with information prior to their taking the decision to buy inputs. The system is effective as farmers are now thronging to these centres before they purchase their inputs. They receive guidance for each stage of the cropping process, and are able to make an informed choice. This intervention is thus differently placed amidst interventions that most of us have seen in the area of agriculture.

Making Informed Decisions

Manishbhai Balubhai Parmar from Advi came down to the VIC to learn about certain aspects of disease management in groundnuts. The ADC from where he later purchased inputs, specifically Trichoderma, helped him to control the problem. He got to know the exact quantity to be used, the time when it had to be used and other details. The end result was that his problem was resolved and he had a crop output that was 30% more than what he had the previous year. There are many others like Manishbhai who have similar stories to narrate.
Cementing Livelihood

A case of empowering rag pickers and ensuring environmental sustainability
Cementing Livelihood
A case of empowering rag pickers and ensuring environmental sustainability

Sanjay Kumar Choudhary

Introduction

The case documents an intervention carried out by ACF with the underprivileged community of Baloda Bazaar, in Bhatapara district of Chhattisgarh. The Dewar community, mostly landless and illiterate or semi-literate, and lacking in skills and resources, do not have many employment opportunities before them. Most households belonging to this community therefore engage in rag-picking activities. The report describes how ACF engaged the community in supplying Alternate Fuel Resources (AFR). Since the community was already engaged in collecting rags in the area, it gave them the opportunity to supply plastic waste to Ambuja Cement Limited (ACL) and increase their income. Through efforts made by ACF, the Dewar community members were organized into Self Help Groups. These households were enabled to trade their collection and earn a substantial amount of money, thus improving their economic and social conditions.

Context

ACF had initiated various developmental initiatives in the villages around the company plant since 2005. Prominent among them had
been projects that addressed the livelihood issues of rural households. ACF had taken up activities around agricultural development with farmers. It had also initiated many different skill development activities with the youths in Baloda Bazaar.

The people of the Dewar community are settled in and around three villages near the Ambuja Cement plant. There are a total of 56 families with a population of 289. The community is classified under the Scheduled Castes (SC) but within the SC community they are ranked the lowest. They are among the poorest of the poor in the villages and do not have much employment opportunities. With no land holdings, these households are found to be mostly engaged in the collection of kabad which includes broken glasses, iron materials, plastics and paper. Some households are a bit more enterprising and rear pigs and poultry.

The gender division of labour shows that men are involved in the collection and purchase of kabad from villages and its sale to wholesalers; while the women work at home to segregate the rags. They are also involved in the rearing of pigs. Very rarely do the women go out to collect rags. As per the directives of the government Gazetteer dated 4th March, 2011, the ACL plant, as an Obligated Entity, was required to generate a minimum quantum of electricity, based on its total energy consumption. In response to this directive, ACL proposed to have a renewable purchase obligation. ACL proposed replacing the use of coal with some percentage of Alternate Fuel Resources (AFR), including renewable energy such as solar and wind energy and AFR such as plastic and bio-mass wastes.

The directives stated that use of solar energy could amount to a minimum of 0.5 % of total consumption and non-solar energy could go up to 5.25% of the total consumption. In the non-solar energy category, biomass could make up 3.75% and the remaining 1.50% could be from wind, hydel-power and other non-conventional resources. ACL estimated that AFR in the kiln and the power plant would demand approximately 90 MT/day of plastic wastes, which would be about 6.5% of ACL’s total fuel consumption. This was an opportunity for ACF to engage the Dewar community to supply plastic waste to the company. Since the community was already engaged in this activity, they could now directly supply ACL with the wastes instead of trading with any other middlemen.

**Intervention**

The intervention incorporated ACL’s policy on sustainable and environment-friendly processes. At the same time, it integrated ACF’s mandate of working with communities around the ACL plant. In mid-2011, ACF began discussing the concept of AFR within its own team. The team decided to approach a well-known scrap dealer from within the Dewar community. This turned out to be a wrong move, as the person did not understand why he had been picked to supply waste to ACL and suspected something was afoot.

However, based on a business proposal offered by ACF, he agreed to supply plastic waste at a price of Rs. 10 a kg. Later, the team realized that he was a middleman who had to make his own efforts to segregate the plastic waste. Since this hiked up the price, ACF had to think of another solution. It was difficult to rope in other rag-pickers to start supplying, as there was a risk that this person might discourage others; instigate them to hold back their supplies; or disallow them to trade at a price lower than what he had quoted.

The ACF team was forced to relook at its strategy and its approach. It stopped discussing the issue further with the traders but continued brainstorming within the team to find out ways to capitalize on the opportunity of linking the community with ACL in supplying the plastic wastes. It was then that the team hit upon the idea of tapping the women of the community.
The team members had seen some women of the Dewar community in Rawan village (the village closest to the cement plant) picking rags in some project villages. The team decided to strategically approach the women.

The first meeting with the women was conducted in October, 2011. While discussing the concept of AFR with them, the ACF team also broached the idea of starting a Self Help Group (SHG) to help them save some money from their earnings. The team also discussed with them issues such as health and hygiene. The women were aware of similar efforts being done with other communities in their villages. Hence it was not very difficult to convince them to form SHGs. They could see how such an initiative could provide them the twin benefits of saving as well as receiving loans. They also understood that once they formed an SHG, they could take up some income generating activity, one of which could be supplying plastic wastes. Since these women were already supplying the waste to the middlemen, they had no problem in supplying it to ACL instead.
ACF had been working on health and education interventions in these villages for some time. Along with the business venture, ACF also focused on bringing in certain health-related practices in the Dewar community. It began working with children, and initial efforts included supporting them with slates, pencils and books for their education.

ACF also undertook some infrastructure development programmes. Two hand pumps were installed, and women took the lead in identifying the location for the same. A cement road too was constructed through their village. These processes helped ACF build a rapport with the community and gain their trust. Meetings with women helped women realize the scope and potential of coming together as an SHG. They could earn more money as well as have the security of accessible loans at the time of need.

The institution building process: After a series of meetings and discussions held over six months, the women of the Dewar community agreed to have their own Self-help Group. Thus the Puja Swayam Sahayata Samuh was formed in March 2012 with 11 members. During the group meeting, the members decided to collect plastic materials, polythene bags and other plastic wastes from nearby villages. Since polythene bags were strewn everywhere one not only had to collect them but clean them of dust and dirt as well. It was easy to collect, but tough to clean. The women also decided to spread out to other villages and even purchase waste from others.

ACL had put down certain quality parameters to be followed for collection of plastic wastes. So a meeting of ACL representatives, ACF, and the SHG members was convened to explain the quality parameters to be adhered to while supplying wastes to the company. The SHG group also mutually decided a price for the supply once they understood that pricing had to be based on the calorific value of plastic. The price was determined at Rs. 6 per kg. The quality control department of ACL was also engaged in the process as it determined the quality of the supplies. These discussions proved beneficial as members could clarify their doubts and queries. The women realized the basis of the pricing and also realized how they had to be conscious of the quality of the plastic they sold.

The ACF team was also engaged in helping the SHG women obtain better and more supplies of such waste. They negotiated with the maintenance staff of the Ambuja colony and consequently, the SHG women were allowed to collect plastic waste from every household once every week. To make the plastic-waste collection from the colony easier, an awareness camp was organized for the residents of the colony. Segregation of dry and wet wastes was explained; and they were asked to store plastic wastes in different bins. ACL also provided the bins to all households in the colony to facilitate the process. Initially the SHG members were hesitant to go to houses of the colony alone. The ACF team accompanied them a few times to dispel their fear and now it has become a regular affair.

Capacity building phase: ACF also stepped in to help the SHG group to obtain vendor registration and complete other formalities required of any vendor supplying materials. Vendor registration required opening of a bank account, which was done with the Chhattisgarh Gramin Bank at Arjuni. For an SHG, vendor registration is a secure mechanism for timely payment and for maintaining financial transparency, and it turned out to be well worth the trouble.

ACF organized training programmes to build the capacities of the SHG members on banking procedures with support from the Chhattisgarh Gramin Bank. The AFR department supported the training on Geo-Cycle6. The members of the SHG were also provided inputs on basic health and sanitation; and safety measures. After its registration as a vendor, the group provided a quotation to the company and they received their
first work-order on its basis. The group supplied 40 MT of plastic wastes and within a week, they received their first payment.

The challenges encountered: Engaging a group of women with little literacy to initiate a business venture with an industry was not easy. These women had no earlier experience, except the experience of collecting waste and handing it over to the middlemen. But these same women have now mastered the art of procurement and its distribution. They understand the intricate administrative processes as a vendor. They are now adept at preparing quotations; getting the work orders; supplying the plastic wastes; weighing the plastic wastes with the vehicle at plant gate; conducting the safety check and checking of receipts; weighing the empty vehicle to determine the weight of plastic wastes after disposal of material at the AFR yard; and submission of bills.

They are aware of the other processes involved such as the sample checking of plastic waste by
ACL’s quality control department; and are patient about bill processing time. The group had to understand each of these steps and know for sure what they needed to do at each stage. Today, they are confident about the process and are able to guide others as well. However, there were many challenges that the group had to encounter before these processes became streamlined.

These included finding transportation at lower costs, stringent safety processes that they had to adhere to during the delivery of the waste at the AFR yard and importantly, managing the internal conflicts within the group members while they went from door-to-door to collect plastic wastes. Sometimes the members did not adhere to the prescribed quality parameters and every one would therefore get a lower price. These challenges were understood and worked upon as the group gained insights and developed a system within them.

Regular meetings with the AFR department of ACL helped them to sort out the quality issues. The sharing of the money received from ACL was done on the basis of the quantity of plastic wastes collected and supplied. These records were maintained within the group. Sometimes there were other interpersonal issues during which the ACF team would have to play the role of arbitrator and try to smooth out the differences that had cropped up. The group members of the SHG attended the SES (Social Engagement Scorecard) workshop with other stakeholders. This gave them the opportunity to share a common platform with other villagers and discuss various developmental issues of their villages. They realized that they too had a say in many matters and this gave them confidence.

**The scaling-up:** After about four months after the formation of the first SHG in Rawan village, the women members from Arjuni village approached ACF. They too wanted a similar initiative in their village. An SHG called Sai Swayam Sahayata Samuh was formed with 11 members.

The members of both groups save Rs. 50 every month. They are regular in conducting the monthly meetings and also revolve their savings within themselves. The inter-loaning among members is a regular feature in all meetings. Within a month of its formation, the second group also applied for a vendor dealership with ACL for supplying of plastic wastes. They too have received work orders and have been supplying the material since then. The plastic wastes are being collected by the group from Ambuja colony, nearby villages and purchased from other villages and towns. These are purchased at a rate of Rs. 2.50-3.00 per kg. The groups also incur a modest cost in transportation which works up to 25 paise per kg.

The reduction in the price of fossil fuels across the globe has had its impact. There was a corresponding fall in the price of this alternative fuel. The price fell from Rs 6.00 a kg to Rs 4.90 per kg. This created a lot of confusion among the members as they thought that this was a method adopted to arm-twist them. A lot of discussions had to be conducted, with the AFR team of ACL joining hands with the ACF team, to explain the logic behind how the new price had been arrived at. Some understood the logic, whereas some did not. But the members continued to supply the plastic waste as the profit margins still stood at about Rs 1.65/kg including their own labour cost. In 2014, each of the groups supplied 100 tonnes of plastic wastes to the plant.

**Outcome**

Rag picking is a menial activity and often undertaken by the socially and economically poorest of the poor. The Dewar community is considered among the “lowest” in the hierarchy of castes and hence do not get employed by others in other vocations. This venture by SHG members is not one that brings in an additional income. Their engagement as a group has provided them with security, and a sense of dignity in their vocation. More than economic well-being, the
engagement of these women has helped them in many more ways. Some of them are:

**The women rag pickers are now masters of their enterprises:** The humble, unassuming women rag pickers have today mastered the art of collecting, transporting and delivering the plastic wastes to the company. They have grown both in terms of the quantity of procurement as well as delivery. While in 2012 they had supplied 26.10 tonnes of plastic material, this amount leaped up to 448 tonnes in 2013. During 2014-15, they have supplied 200 tonnes and are expected to do more before the end of the financial year. These achievements have been possible because women came together. They have regular meetings and also attend all capacity building programmes organized by ACF. They have understood that though the work is simple, managing business needs a different approach; and hence training and capacity building are essential. The groups have expanded their horizons. They get the collections from across various locations; negotiate the price; and fetch the plastics to be supplied to the company.

**A sustainable employment guarantee programme is on the anvil:** Together both the groups have supplied 674.51 tonnes of plastic wastes in the last two and a half years. The total income derived by these groups and their members from this is to the tune of Rs.3.82 million. The average earning per household is approximately Rs. 74,314, which is about 473 days of employment equivalent for each household. This is being viewed as a better option by the women, than being a labourer, who is guaranteed only 100 days’ work per year by the state.

**Once ostracized by others, they are now people’s representatives:** Their achievement in growing from marginalize drag-pickers to an established SHG with business dealings with an industry, have won them and their families social recognition. Their voices are today heard in the village level meetings conducted by ACF or other community based organizations. A huge indicator of their success has been the fact, that a member of the Dewar community not only contested a local body election; but won it as well.

**Meeting unmet needs:** As part of a community with low sources of income, families had been unable to fulfil many of the needs. The members have invested their income to meet these once-unmet needs. The members have purchased household items like motorcycles, utensils and televisions; two of them have laid the foundation for a brick-walled house; and two of the group members have used the money to get their daughters married. Outstanding loans have been repaid, children are enrolled in schools and they have an improved access to food. The fact that women have brought about these changes has been an very empowering factor for them.

**Empowering Families And The Community**

Smt. SangeetaMarkam’s husband, Shri GangaramMarkam, won the Panchayat election held during January 2015 by 25 votes and was elected as Panch member of Rawan Gram Panchayat. Contesting an election was something he had never thought of, even in his wildest dreams. However, as he saw his wife bringing in money not just for their home but also for development in the village, he decided that he also must do something more. He plans to bring in development work for his hamlet through his participation in village matters.

**Learnings**

Implementation of an idea calls for a lot of hard work and struggle. This has been demonstrated by the ACF team through this project. Some of the learnings are:
Groups are always better to work with, than individuals: The ACF team learned that to initiate such type of intervention it should not approach a single person. On the contrary, it should work with groups, and reach out to more people. Working in a group may be difficult at first, but yields success in the long run. In a group, people bring in varied skills, balancing each other's abilities and limitations. The sum performance is always higher than that of an individual. This has been proved in this intervention as well.

Working together makes people grow together. This is true even in business: Doing business together not just helps one to earn money, but also to earn recognition.

Knock as many doors as possible: When the women realized that plastic waste was in short supply at their location, they made efforts to reach out. They tapped traders, rag pickers and even the municipalities; thus widening their network, and achieving their targets.

Conclusion

This intervention has helped ACL to use an alternative fuel resources such as plastic; and thus save on fossil fuel. It has helped in reduction of harmful gases from burning of coal. Importantly, women from the rag picking community have found a secure source of income by procuring plastic wastes and providing them to the company, as vendors. Their earnings have helped improve their social conditions. The process has thus helped cement the livelihoods of 22 families, enabling them to dream of a better future.

A Dream House In The Making

Sangeeta Makram always dreamt of a brick house, but never had the money or resources to build one. However, the money that she earned through her hard work in obtaining rags from other villages, as part of the SHG, enabled her to purchase bricks. She worked with the mason, building up her pucca home brick by brick.

After years of living in a kaccha home, her new home symbolizes her determination to move ahead in life, on her own terms. As her belief in herself increased, she also invested some money to purchase ducks. She has been selling eggs and now plans to increase her stock. She knows that dedicated efforts will take not just her but her family too towards a better future.
Maaneeru (Our Water)
Introduction

Access to safe drinking water is a basic human need. However, this need continues to remain an unattainable dream for many. Many underprivileged communities, particularly in rural areas, continue to drink water that do not pass the minimum quality parameters. This case describes an intervention which helped supply potable water to the residents of a few villages in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

The people of Nadikudi in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh were used to drinking water with high concentration of total dissolved solids (TDS). The water also contained other chemical and biological pollutants. The water they drank was thus, a major reason behind deteriorating public health.

ACF had been working in nine villages spread across three revenue mandals of Guntur district since 2005. ACF evolved a solution to this problem. It installed water-treatment plants in villages, with community support. These treatment plants have helped many households to have access to pure and safe drinking water.

The Context

ACF’s offices in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh are located in Nadikudi panchayat. Most of the villages in this location are characterised by poor infrastructural facilities. During the process of exploring and understanding the needs of communities, the local staff of ACF conducted community meetings at various levels. The interactions with different communities revealed
that access to adequate and safe drinking water is a major issue in all the villages. Villagers who consumed the ground water suffered from arthritis, typhoid and various water-borne diseases. Those who had resources at their disposal purchased drinking water from private sources at Rs. 10-12 per 20 litre. Those who had no such option continued to drink the ground water which took a toll on their health. Once ACF identified this issue, it strove to work towards mitigating the issue of drinking water facing the community. The ACF team brainstormed to find a suitable and community-managed solution to this issue.

**Intervention**

After having identified the problem of drinking water in 2007, ACF consulted water experts, the Rural Water Supply Department and the Rural Water Supply department of the state government. The team also examined solutions being implemented at other locations. Naandi Foundation, an agency involved in implementing safe drinking water projects in Andhra Pradesh and with many successful models to its credit, was approached as well. A meeting with the agency, held in December 2007, resulted in a tripartite agreement between Naandi Foundation as the technical partner, ACF (as the facilitating agency), and the community (beneficiary) as the financial partner. In order to assess the quality of the water, a few samples of ground water were sent to the laboratory for analysis. The water analysis reports revealed that ground water in the villages had many unwanted chemicals and most of them were much above the permissible levels. (Table 1)

There were many reasons for the presence of TDS in water. Mainly, it was the cumulative result of indiscriminate digging of bore wells, leading to a depletion of ground water levels. An examination of the data collected during the baseline survey revealed that with nine bore wells per hectare of agricultural land, the situation was not likely to improve in the immediate future.

The use of chemical inputs in agriculture worsened the situation. About 31% of the water samples had nitrates in quantities more than the permissible level of 45 mg/litre – a feature consistent with the use of chemical fertilisers. In addition to this the Palnadu region also has plenty of limestone deposits leading to excess calcium in the ground water. Finally, after reviewing the water analysis reports, the water experts suggested establishing the Reverse Osmosis (RO) water purifying system in the villages as a solution.

The intervention was costly from all accounts. Establishing a single unit would cost over Rs. 6,00,000 in plant and machineries. The detailed costing of a single RO plant of 1000 Litre per hour capacity was obtained from the technical partner, wherein it was seen that the different cost

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Desirable potable limits (as per IS: 10500)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Total dissolved solids</td>
<td>Mg/l</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>&lt; 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Total hardness as CaCo32</td>
<td>Mg/l</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>&lt; 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Alkalinity to Methyl Orange as CaCo (Calcium carbonate)</td>
<td>Mg/l</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>&lt; 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Fluoride</td>
<td>Mg/l</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>&lt; 1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ground water analysis report
components included Rs. 3,50,000 for the RO plant; Rs. 1,50,000 for the building to house the plant; and the remaining amount of Rs. 1,00,000 for drilling the water bore; installing a single horsepower submersible pump set; electricity connections and other incidental costs.

One could provide for this one-time cost as a subsidy. However, that alone would not solve the problem. A system also had to be in place to ensure that the RO plants were maintained and that people paid for the services. The second part required a much different approach of community sensitization and management.

Towards Community-ownership: The water testing report and the possible solution were discussed with the community at length. Since the community was facing the very concrete problem of drinking water, it was not difficult for its members to agree to the proposal in unison. However, they were quite rigid when it came to sharing the cost of the intervention. Since ACF had faced similar situations earlier, it wanted the community to share the project cost as the first step towards the community owning the process. After many consultations with the Gram Panchayat, village elders, community leaders, cooperative members and members of the
women self-help groups (SHGs), the villagers of Ambapuram came forward to establish the 1000 LpH RO plant while agreeing to contribute towards its cost. Shri Datla Rama Krishna Reddy, a farmer-cum-businessman of Ambapuram village, volunteered to contribute his land for the RO plant. Another leader from the village, Shri Lokasani Shankar Reddy, persuaded the ‘Milk Association’ members to contribute Rs. 2,00,000 towards the construction of the building to house the RO plant.

The ACF team also engaged in a dialogue with the Sarpanch who could take the lead in passing the resolution to get the electricity connection. By this time, the rest of the villagers too had come forward with their own contribution of Rs 22000. Thus a contribution of Rs 2, 00,000 could be obtained from the villagers – both in cash and kind (land). The other two partners thereafter put in their contributions to fulfil the total fund requirement to start the construction of the building and establish the RO plant. The RO plant was set-up within the next few months and the villagers started getting the water at a cost of Rs 2 for a twenty-litre can.

Over the next two years Naandi Foundation guided the ACF team and the Gram Panchayat at each step of the process. The RO plant was a collaborative venture of the ACF and the Gram Panchayat. The two years helped the villagers and the both the Foundation (ACF and Naandi) teams learn the management skills which were critical to managing a water supply plant. The cost of water at Rs 2 per 20 litres was arrived at after calculating the running costs which included expenditure involved in maintenance, electricity, and honorarium for the person who operated the plant and sold the water to the villagers. The cost of running a unit of this size came up to Rs 11,000 per month, of which the cost of electricity was about Rs 5,000 and the cost of the caretaker another Rs 3,000.

The village committee that looked into the management did a back-of-the-envelope calculation to arrive at the figure of Rs. 2 per twenty litres of drinking water. It calculated a requirement of 20 litres every second day per household. It understood that if half of the 826 households obtained the water, water worth Rs 12,390 per month would be sold. It also calculated that if the RO plant was operated for seven hours every day, it would be able to produce 7,000 litres of water, which would service the need of 350 households with 20 litres every alternate day.

After the success of the first RO plant, the ACF team initiated a dialogue about the same intervention in other villages. It also organised exposure visits of villagers from Gogulapadu and Alugumallepadu villages to the Ambapuram RO plant. These exposure visits proved effective. It helped the leaders to start the discussion in their own villages and encourage others to join in to help establish the RO plant. ACF had maintained that such an RO plant could come up only when villagers joined hands not just in accepting the idea, but also in contributing their share of the cost. The meetings in both the villages then had ‘contribution’ as its main agenda.

The villagers came forward to contribute towards the necessary infrastructure. The next year, i.e. in 2009, two more RO plants were established in Gogulapadu and Alugumallepadu villages. The contribution of the people of Gogulapadu village turned out to be interesting by itself. (Table 2).

In Gogulapadu, the Farmer Field School (FFS) and the SHG members took up the responsibility of managing the affairs of the RO plant. The contribution model of the community however, differed in the case of the other village,
Alugumallepadu. Here, 12 community members contributed Rs. 5,000 each and the Gram Panchayat provided a place measuring 50 Sq. Yards in the premises of the Mandal Parishad School. The cost got significantly reduced as the building and the land cost were not incurred in this project. The Gram Panchayat provided its own infrastructure. After having successfully implemented three RO plants, the ACF team was optimistic about taking the project to a fourth village. In 2010, the fourth RO plant was established in Budavada village. Interestingly, though the technology was similar, the processes differed in terms of raising contribution from the community. In Budavada, 150 SHG members together contributed Rs. 30,000 and the SHG federation added another Rs. 4,000. They then convinced the Gram Panchayat to allocate the

Table 2. Contribution details of RO project - Gogulapadu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description of contribution</th>
<th>Amount (Rs.)</th>
<th>No.s /quantity</th>
<th>Total amount (Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Village community (FFS group of NPM Chilly)</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>30 individuals</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Women SHGs</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>12 SHGs</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Households (out of 650 HHs)</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>350 HHs</td>
<td>1,75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Gram Panchayat</td>
<td>Land</td>
<td>192 Sq. Yards</td>
<td>1,60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>4,85,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
land. Since the RO plant at Budavada was of a smaller size, with a capacity of 500 Litres / hour, the costs too came down substantially.

Similarly, in Narayanapuram, ACF tried out a different model of people's institution to manage and run an RO plant. It partnered with two registered Community Welfare Societies in Narayanapuram village. These societies had eight and 12 members respectively. The societies mobilized funds on their own; identified a suitable location for the plant; and then approached ACF to contribute the balance on the financial front. By 2013, ACF could replicate this intervention in seven villages and establish eight community-managed RO plants. The villages had RO plants of different capacities, depending on the population of the village and the contribution from the members. The capacity varied from 200 litres per hour (Alugumallepadu) to 1000 litres per hour, as in five out of the eight RO plants.

**Water distribution system:** The distribution and maintenance of water supply are the responsibility of the members of the village level committees. The role of the ACF in all the cases has been limited to technical support and backup. The villagers can buy the water at a cost of Rs. 2 to Rs. 3 for 20 litres. They can either purchase coupons for the entire month or purchase water on a cash and carry system. In both the systems, the beneficiary (consumer) is required to obtain the water from the RO plant. They are also expected to bring their own containers, fill the same up and carry the water back home.

**Management and book-keeping:** Each RO plant has hired the services of a person from within the village to run the plant. The committee of the RO plant appoints the person on a fixed monthly salary. This person is expected to run and maintain the plant as well as maintain the books of accounts. The person maintains a cash book; receipts and expenditure register; meeting register; and a TDS record book. The financial transactions which the person does are verified on a weekly basis and in some cases on a fortnightly basis.

**Working model:** ACF experimented with two different models; the community-managed model and the society-managed model. The community-managed model has two sub-models, viz. SHG managed model and non-SHG managed model. Out of these two models, the SHG managed model has proved to be the most effective and functional. Some of the pointers which established the success of the SHG model are listed in table 3.

**Challenges encountered:** The establishing of the RO plants has not been an easy affair. It was not merely a technical intervention that required a technical solution. It was also a human intervention that required stakeholders to contribute to and manage the processes. Some of the challenges that were encountered included dealing with village dynamics and politics. Dealing with the community – from the very first day of discussions – required one to deal with many such issues. Vested interests often obstructed the process. The team had to be vigilant and also take steps to educate the community to deal with such issues. The committee members who run the RO plants now deal with these dynamics quite effectively. This has been possible as they are the owners of the intervention – something that ACF always wanted to achieve.

**Outcome**

The running of eight reverse osmosis plants in seven villages has taken quality potable water to over 6000 households. With more people consuming this water, they are less prone to suffer from diseases that they had earlier been suffering from. Some of the outcomes of this intervention are as follows:

**Even the poor can afford pure water:** There were private suppliers supplying water in some villages. They made a lot of money, charging
Buying this water was a luxury for most of the households. Poor households could hardly afford to buy water. But now, with water available for Rs. 2 to Rs. 3 per 20 litres, pure water is now within the buying capacity of all households. Even poor households buy water regularly.

As per records maintained by all the RO plants, the drinking water intervention has reached 6000 households in seven villages.

Morbidity figures have shown reduction: There has been a marked decrease in the prevalence of water-borne and other diseases such as typhoid, arthritis, jaundice and diarrhoea, and consequently a reduction in health expenditures. Discussions in the villages reveal people mentioning a fall in health expenses by almost 70 %. Health care professionals too have reported a reduction in some of these diseases in these villages.

The community is upbeat: The community has realized its potential and its ability to manage such a project. With some RO plants having been in operation for almost five years now, the committees managing the affairs are confident of taking up many other projects of similar nature. They have demonstrated their ability to work together and achieve their common goals, and this has given them the confidence. ACF is confident today that if projects are given to the community it will not have to worry much about its sustainability. People will be able to manage the same.

Learnings

The ACF team tried out different institutional models to see which one was most effective. Some of the critical learnings that the team derived from this intervention are:

One should do such interventions with SHG federations: Since the SHG federation is well organized and it is their members whose practical needs are addressed through this process, they would give their best to make it successful. Ensuring systems like book keeping, monitoring of daily transactions, and liaising with government departments are what they do on a regular basis. Thus they found it easy to do the same for this intervention as well. The project succeeded because of this.

Contribution from community is essential. It leads to community ownership and hence sustainability: As a result of the efforts made by
ACF to ensure that the community owned the project in its entirety, the community members were encouraged to mobilise resources towards the initial cost. This helped community to own and participate aggressively in making the project their own.

Nothing should come free. One must pay for obtaining quality services: Each and every household who wanted to obtain the water had to pay for it, sometimes in advance and sometimes in through the ‘cash and carry’ system. The guiding principle has been 'pay for the services before availing of it'. This has kept the credit size bigger than the debit side. The units run on profits and are able to manage maintenance, replacement of spare parts and other expenditure without asking for any further contribution from ACF.

Conclusion

Five years of hard work and intensive thought lie beyond the development of this system which involves establishment of eight RO projects spread across seven villages. The outcome of the project has been beneficial to the community; and the learnings from the process can serve as guidelines for future initiatives.

The intervention has made safe drinking water accessible to all, and has lived up to its name –*Ma neeru* (our water).
Strengthening Institutions, Bringing Prosperity
Introduction

In an arid state like Rajasthan, water is a scarce resource but the scarcity is aggravated due to misuse and inefficient management of this resource, rather than low rainfall alone.

Water Users’ Association (WUA)\(^2\) is an institution on which rests the management of water for any irrigation project. The need for such institutional arrangement arose out of the large scale misuse and inequitable distribution of water, the latter contributing to water-related conflicts. In Rajasthan, WUAs were formed after the enactment of the Rajasthan Farmers’ Participatory Irrigation Management System (RFPIMS) Act in the 1990s.

The Water Resource Development Department was assigned the responsibility of forming and strengthening the WUAs after the commencement of the Rajasthan Water Sector Restructuring Project (RWSRP) in 2002-03. Support from the WRD (Water Resource Development Department) and voluntary organizations were also taken in this respect.

Since this approach was target driven, i.e. it focused on the formation of many WUAs rather than on strengthening them, very soon most of these WUAs became defunct and ineffective. The pessimistic argument that not much could be achieved through WUAs was gaining momentum. It was therefore a challenge for ACF to reverse the argument.

Context

Rajasthan, the largest state of India, is also one of its driest. A significant part of its land is notified as desert. The state faces recurring droughts. The western part of Rajasthan forms the ‘Great Thar Desert region’, where the annual rainfall is as low as 450 mm. In terms of per capita availability of water, Rajasthan ranks the lowest in the country. This clearly reveals a critical resource situation and grave deficit of water for the people of the state.

Scarcity of water is generally associated with low rainfall, but the actual reasons are manifold and often do not come to the fore. In the districts of western Rajasthan, like Pali, Jodhpur, Jalore, Sirohi and Barmer, one would come across farmers using flood irrigation methods to irrigate their farms. This requires a large quantity of water, thus overstraining a scarce resource. The water use in the agriculture sector makes up for 83% of the total water consumption and participatory irrigation management (PIM)\(^3\) as a water management system holds the key to water use efficiency.

There are other perennial issues that characterize agriculture in Rajasthan. Low agricultural productivity, poor management practices, financial constraints and low investment in agriculture are a few of them. These reasons have led the state government to launch various water/irrigation sector projects with the understanding that they will help improve the current agrarian situation of the state. Under the Rajasthan Water Sector Restructuring Project (RWSRP), not much attention was paid to the process of strengthening the WUAs which could have played multiple roles including distribution of water among users; maintenance of the system; collection of water charges; and if need be, even resolving disputes. The role of the WUAs was not conceptualized beyond their formation and hence they all stood as vestigial units in the water management paradigm.
ACF had been involved in water management programmes in the region. Hence, when the Grameen Vikas Trust (GVT) was roped in by the government under its RAJAMIP programme, GVT approached ACF to join hands in the endeavor to strengthen the Water User Associations. ACF was involved in the initial baseline survey which revealed that though 78% of the farmers were using the water in the command area, there were issues on quantity and regularity of supply.

The study also revealed issues ranging from design faults to damage of infrastructure (e.g. leakages) to that of farmers at the head of the canal usurping the chunk of the resources leaving only a little for the rest. At times, siltation in the canal networks meant that water could not reach the tail-end farmers. The problems were not attended to as the Water Users’ Associations did not play their role. The WUA members had little understanding of how to deal with such issues and the need to involve the Irrigation Department to resolve the technical ones. In short, strengthening the WUAs was seen as an important task by ACF in this project.

Interventions

As has been discussed, the RAJAMIP project had several partners with GVT being the lead partner. All the partners were charged with the responsibility to augment the capacity of the existing WUAs and make them run the affairs of managing the irrigation projects, particularly the network of water distribution channels in the command area. The intervention here describes some of the specific steps that ACF adopted to make this happen.

Building understanding about current status of WUAs: One of the first tasks taken up by the ACF team was taking stock of the situation at ground zero. It understood the problems through interactions with the farmers and the existing WUA members, and also gauged the social dynamics that were being played out in the command area. One common observation was that in the majority of cases, the community was simply not aware of the existence of an institution charged with the responsibility to manage the irrigation water. In some cases the Sarpanch (village head) of the PRI had some idea, but in most cases the awareness was only of the existence of such an institution and not of its role.

Since the work was spread over a large geographical area, it was somewhat difficult for the ACF team to reach the locations on a day-to-day basis. ACF was, at the time, working only in the district of Pali. The project had to be carried out in several other districts like Barmer, Sirohi, Jodhpur and Jalore. Although many of the districts were adjacent to Pali, they were still far away. Some of them were as far as 200 km if not more. Added to all this was the herculean aspect of the work that had to be done. The project was to revive 45 WUAs located in 121 villages of six districts and involved working with 31000 farmers (see Table 1). Thus, for the project to be successful it was imperative for the ACF team to overcome the barriers of distance.

The first interactions and breaking the ice: The very first process was to understand the status of the WUA across the region. Once it was done, the ACF team started contacting the community members and initiating an informal dialogue with them. The team also approached the Water Resource Department (WRD) so that it could supply the list of Members of Management Committee (MMC) of each of these WUAs. These were the names of the villagers and it was made available to the team in no short time. Some members of the community were slightly hesitant on hearing that some agency (ACF) had been given the role of restructuring and reforming the existing processes.

In fact, some of the people who opposed the ACF’s efforts were comfortable with the existing system as they were the ones who benefitted from
it. They did not want a new system that would tell them to behave differently and honour a pre-decided system. These people misguided the community and many a time threatened ACF team members with dire consequences. But there were many others who were discriminated against and who suffered under the present system. They too were in need of water for their farms. They came forward and showed an interest in reviving the WUAs. All this helped the ACF team to gauge the mood of the community and act accordingly.

The next task for the ACF team was to engage the community to come together for a dialogue. The team realized that it must seek the support of village level officials of some key government departments and make them join the team in its discussion of the issues with the villagers. This was soon done and the officials came to the village and spoke to the community about the project and about the agency (ACF). The engagement of government officials helped ACF to draw the support of the local bodies, particularly the PRI members. Slowly the environment was created wherein it was possible for the team to conduct orientation meetings for the WUAs. This process took up to four months in some villages. Thereafter, regular monthly meetings with WUAs became a routine event.

**Capacity building of WUAs:** The designing of capacity building programme of WUAs was done by Irrigation Training & Management Institute (IMTI), Kota. The design elements included orientation meetings, monthly meetings, and activities like mass awareness camps, training on record keeping etc. Other components included training of MMCs, exposure visits of presidents of WUAs, meetings of members of the general body, understanding of the tariff structure and soil testing, among others. WUA members were also given trainings in transfer of management and operation and maintenance. Each of these trainings were done at specific intervals within the WUA so that members of the WUA would be able to see the relevance of the same and make it part of their practice.

The exposure visits of the WUA presidents were carried out when the conditions were ripe. An exposure visit to Jalgaon at Shri Datta Pani Wapar Sansthan in Maharashtra was organized. The exposure visit acted as an eye opener for many. The WUA members of the Jalgaon
Irrigation Project were doing much more than what was stipulated in the Rajasthan Charter for PIM. The WUAs in Maharashtra were making their irrigation plans, were involved with crop planning, collecting water tariff, and undertaking various other activities. They were also resolving their internal conflicts and were diligently maintaining the records of all transactions. This visit made many resolve to act. But it was not easy for them. They faced stiff opposition from their own fellow farmers. Charging for water usage was a thorny issue for many.

The farmers wanted the charges to be collected by the Irrigation Department and not by the WUA. Further, the people were opposed to paying the annual membership fees. In most cases, the farmers had been getting water free. In some cases they would manipulate the actual land area and pay lower fees. Though the Rajasthan Project stated that the role of WUAs included collection of water fees, it was difficult to make the farmers understand. The ACF team decided to get the MMC of the WUAs to undergo training at IMTI, Kota. This training on PIM and roles and responsibilities of WUAs helped a few more to see the rationale behind the practices such as annual membership fees and collection of water tariffs. Some were convinced while others took time to get convinced.

Next, the WUAs had to be convinced to make their own irrigation plan. This was important as the plan would pave the way for equitable distribution of water among the farmers of the command area. Support of the DTSG (District Technical Support Group)\(^5\), which comprised the District Collector; Director of Agriculture and heads of some other departments, were sought. The DTSG guided its field level officials to help each WUA form a Technical Support Group, i.e. WTSG\(^6\), to provide technical support at the field level.

In each WTSG there were four members. They included the President of the WUA, one prominent farmer from the command area and two other nominated members from the WRD and Agriculture department. The WTSG thereafter promoted a few subcommittees at the WUA level such as the Irrigation Committee, the Chak Committee (Irrigation planning committee) and the Construction Committee. In each of these committees representatives included farmers from the head, middle and tail region of the canal network. As the irrigation committee had to play a major role, the WUA incorporated the membership of two government officials, namely the official from the WRD and from the agriculture department.

These subcommittees thereafter required specific inputs and capacity building support to play their role. IMTI, Kota designed a module of training for the members of these subcommittees of WUA. Four Community Organizers were recruited from the local community and sent to undergo the training at IMTI. These community

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Source: Voter list of WUA provided by concerned WRD offices
organizers went through a Training of Trainers programme (ToT) in two phases for four and three days respectively. They were thereafter expected to carry out similar trainings with each of the WUAs. The community organizers played these roles and also handheld the sub committees. For example, they helped the WUAs to develop the plan for distribution of irrigation water as per the agricultural plan.

**Training WUAs to maintain records:** Some WUAs were already doing some kind of record keeping, but they were not always regular. However, many did no record keeping as they had no one to maintain the records. ACF suggested that they appoint a local person to maintain the records. However, these people had to be paid and the government had made no provisions for such a scenario. The WUAs therefore had to dip into resources from the water tariff to make this happen. After discussion with the 45 WUAs, they employed water-masters to maintain records and to collect water tariffs. Trainings of these water-masters were conducted by the ACF team.

**From capacity building to full implementation:** Many of the WUAs had developed good contacts with the WRD during the capacity building phase. They had also received support from the government to rehabilitate the technical snags in the system. The government support however, came with a rider. The farmers had to bear 15% of the cost of rehabilitation. It was difficult for many WUAs to be convinced about this contribution. However, after a lot of deliberation, 38 WUAs signed a MoU with the WRD.

These WUAs used part of the annual membership fees and the water tariffs collected from the farmers to pay for the rehabilitation. Out of the 38 WUAs, seven have completed the water course rehabilitation and the remaining 31 are about to complete it soon. Some of the WUAs have been given “Certificate of Appreciation” for their work on water management. To encourage the efforts of the WUAs, the government has also provided support for office building and furniture. The support up to Rs.10,000 would probably be enough to help each WUA start some process.

**Outcome**

The four years of engagement to build the capacity of the water users’ associations, have provided specific outcomes. These are:

**One has an institution in place which is alive and kicking:** Even though there was a similar institution in place earlier, it did not have the capacity to operate. The members had no skills to manage the distribution, leave alone the higher level responsibilities. However, thanks to the intervention, the WUAs are now able to make chak plans, are able to resolve irrigation related conflicts, collect water tariffs and supervise the implementation of canal network rehabilitation. The institution is fair and democratic, with representation from all sections and locations of the network.

**The system in place is transparent:** Today one has a structured and effective system in place. Records are maintained by the WUA representatives. These include Meeting Register, Stock Register, Cash Book, Ledgers, and Inward and Outward Registers. All the WUAs have bank accounts, a definite chak Plan, a list of farmers who are members and details of the command area. The WUA record keepers maintain the estimates of work, copies of MoUs and all records of all transactions done by the institutions. They give receipts against the collection of water tariffs and membership fees. These practices have kept system open, fair and transparent. Farmers in the command area know for sure that the system which is in place is actually serving their common interest.

**Water today reaches every single farmer:** Efforts made by the team to build the capacities of the WUAs have made them active. The WUA strictly follows the warabandi method of irrigation.
Canals are today open for 24 hours and members get the water when their turns come. The last farmer in the command area, however, gets the water first and this is how the system operates.

**WUAs and WRD are now partners:** The relationship is equal and not top-down. WUAs are the decision makers collecting water tariffs, and regular operation and maintenance of the 27 dams under their command. The WRD provides the support on the techno-financial front when called for. But it does not interfere, nor decides against the course of management plans that the WUAs come up with, unlike earlier.

**The WUAs as institutions are sustainable:** Earlier the WUAs were ghost institutions. Many existed only in name to adorn the records of the government while others had no clue about its existence. The scene has now changed with farmer-members meeting regularly. They have smaller sub committees to tackle various issues, and are involved in fee collection, *warabandi* and crop planning. The institutions have potential to continue for a long time – until some other better institutional design replaces them.

**Learnings**

The engagement of the ACF in the process of strengthening the capacity of the WUAs and their office bearers and members has provided the opportunity to learn to make natural resources-based institutions work for their members. Some of these are:

*Sustainability of an institution will depend on how one builds in democratic principles as part of its decision making processes:* The ACF team gave maximum emphasis on building the process of democratic functioning in the WUAs. The decision making process by the office bearers was made as transparent as possible. Emphasis was laid on ensuring that consultation was done with every member. Today these processes have led to making the institutions free from conflicts. It has helped each WUA to realize its responsibilities and work for its members.

**One must be flexible when it comes to evolving management processes:** The guidelines of the project mandated WUAs to conduct two meetings every month and prescribed what it should discuss. ACF did discuss these guidelines with WUA members but left it to them to decide. ACF has realized that prescriptions of this nature can only be suggestive and not mandatory.

**Let the insiders decide:** The role of an external agency is restricted to that of facilitation and not deciding on behalf of the insiders. When it was decided that each WUA had to contribute at least 15% of the cost of water course rehabilitation, issues cropped up. The meetings of the WUA General Body discussed the issue and realized that the large farmers would be able to pay their share in cash, while the smaller farmers should be given the option to contribute in cash or in kind. The farmers’ body evolved its own mechanism to manage this component. They divided the water course and paid 15% of the cost incurred on its length.

**Conclusion**

This intervention has helped to revive many defunct WUAs. Today these WUAs have been able to initiate the *warabandi* method of irrigation and have established a fair system of equitable water distribution. The efforts have increased participation of the farmers in decision making processes and has reduced conflicts. The farmers have a platform where they can come and discuss their problems. This is however, a modest beginning. These institutions may discuss many other need-based problems in the future. This intervention has proved that investment in building capacity can play an important role in natural resources management.
No Tobacco In My Village!
Introduction

People generally tend to show an interest in interventions that bring in immediate and visible changes. They participate in such interventions and even demonstrate their readiness to contribute towards the cost. However, such keenness is often lacking when it comes to interventions that ask people to modify their behaviour. The community is generally slow to accept the fact that behaviour change is essential. Community members fail to perceive the relationship between behaviour modification and well-being. The present case depicts an intervention carried out by ACF in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra where an essential part of the process lay on behavior change in the community. Today, Mangi Bu, one of the villages in Chandrapur district, has shown the path. It is the first village to be declared ‘Tobacco-free’. This report depicts the story of how this transformation happened.

Context

ACF had been working in Mangi Bu village since 2002. The work was initiated through a reproductive health programme, which was managed by women volunteers from the village locally known as the Swasthya Sakhis. These women health volunteers worked with pregnant and nursing mothers and provided them support through health education and advice for ante-natal and post-natal care. As the work picked up, the Sakhis became well-known in the village and often took on leadership roles at various fora. ACF was also engaged in health interventions in many other villages and maintained records on morbidity.
One particular aspect that it kept confronting was the issue of tobacco-related diseases. A large number of women too were found to be consuming tobacco. The Monitoring Indicator System also provided data on children being born with deformities and women facing miscarriages. Discussions with experts pointed to the possibility of such incidents being related to tobacco consumption.

The health awareness programmes for children started by ACF in schools also threw up some alarming information on the oral hygiene of children. Small children in the age group of 8-12 were getting addicted to chewing tobacco. Villagers in general congregated around shops selling chewing tobacco, betel leaves and betel nuts. A walk around the village would reveal used pouches of chewing tobacco strewn all across. A growing number of people from all ages and all walks of life were getting addicted to chewing tobacco.

Responding alertly to the information, the ACF had initiated a campaign in 2007 on ‘Say No to Tobacco’ in 24 villages with support from Salam Mumbai Foundation. The programme worked on creating awareness in the community on the ills of tobacco consumption. By 2011, this campaign had reached over 60 villages. However, nothing very encouraging came out of this campaign except that villagers became somewhat aware of the ills of tobacco consumption. However, one small village, located in Rajura block of Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, was moved by the campaign.

This village, known as Mangi Bu, located at a distance of 55 kilometres from the district headquarters, has a population of 8172. The villagers belong to tribal communities, banjara communities and Other Backward Castes. Majority of the population are Buddhists and they are mainly involved in agriculture and labour work. The efforts of some villagers together with support from ACF have now helped the village to be free from the menace of tobacco. Selling and/or consuming tobacco is banned in Mangi Bu. Anyone doing so is liable to be punished by the community.

**Intervention**

The work to make one village free of tobacco may appear to be a simple proposition, but this has probably been the most difficult milestone to be achieved by the team. Difficulties arose from all unknown quarters. Support though, also came in from many fronts. The path to success was a chequered one indeed.

When the first campaign was launched across 24 villages in 2007, a startling revelation came to the fore. The parents of children who were consuming tobacco were not just consuming the product in front of their children, but were also offering the same to the children. As a result, small children in the age group of 6 to 14 were hooked to chewing tobacco. This made the task before the team quite formidable – how could the children be made to comprehend the ills of tobacco when their parents were sharing the product with them? Why would the children listen to outsiders when their parents were giving them quite the opposite advice? The difficulty was compounded by the fact that the teachers in schools too were in the habit of chewing tobacco and would order the children to fetch the products from the village shops.

Asking the teachers to stop doing so would antagonize them and probably lead to the ACF team being debarred from campaigning in the schools. In some villages where the team directly confronted the teachers sending children on the errand of buying tobacco, the teachers were severely annoyed and made all efforts to instigate others, particularly the leaders and some influential parents, to go against the campaign. However, all these difficulties did not deter the ACF team from going ahead. On the contrary, their resolve strengthened and they began to...
strategise their actions. Instead of going to the entire village, the team decided to interact with smaller groups from different sections of the community and discuss with them the dangers of tobacco consumption. With these smaller groups the team used different methods to take the discussion ahead. For example, they started working with the children in the schools.

The team organized theme-based poster, drawing and essay competitions and also began to give rewards to children who gave up tobacco. Different festivals and important days were used to organise the competitions as a part of general celebrations. Games and sports became an important vehicle of communicating awareness. A rangoli competition on the theme of ‘no tobacco’ brought out hidden talents and also helped people to express their anguish against tobacco. It communicated more than what the team could have otherwise communicated. Gradually, some people began to express their feelings and concerns about tobacco consumption.

In all these processes the ACF team involved the school management committee, tantamuktamsamiti, the village panchayat, the village health committee, and the water supply and sanitation committees. It involved the youth groups and women’s groups and provided them with information. The intensity of the team’s efforts resulted in some inroads into the minds of people. Some tobacco-addicted persons tried to give up tobacco.

However, the nicotine content of the tobacco, which caused the addiction in the first place, produced withdrawal symptoms in many of those who tried to quit. They suffered from weakness, stomach cramps, trembling of limbs and headaches. They could not combat the withdrawal symptoms and soon returned to their addiction. The tobacco which they consumed had begun to consume them and there seemed to be no escape.

Things were made more difficult by the fact that tobacco items were openly sold in the village shops. The shopkeepers also carried out a campaign against the ACF team and convinced people that tobacco consumption had little negative impact. For these shopkeepers, selling
tobacco was a profitable venture and they would not be otherwise convinced simply on health, ethical or moral grounds.

ACF thus initiated the concept of forming Model Villages. A committee was formed in some villages including Mangi Bu. This was the *Adarsh Gaon Vikas Samiti* (Model Village Development Committee). The responsibility of this committee was to ensure *Swachhtta* or cleanliness of the village. But used tobacco pouches and wrappers strewn all over the village came in the way of cleanliness. The committee therefore decided to work on it. The committee members decided to be the ambassador and role model in this mission and not to consume tobacco and its associated products. They also pledged to motivate others in the village to give up consuming tobacco.

One of the committee’s first actions in this regard was to make Shankar Sumbhaji Todase, a young man studying for Bachelor of Arts degree and in his final year of college, a member of the Village Development Committee (VDC). Shankar had been addicted to *gutkha* (a tobacco product) since the age of 15.

A huge village-level rally was organized on 2nd October, 2013. The rally made such an impact that many village shopkeepers decided to burn the tobacco products they were selling and stop selling them. However, the momentum was short-lived. After about a week the shopkeepers bowed to the demand of some individuals and went back to selling tobacco.

This experience gave the ACF team some clues to the strategies that the Village Committee needed to adopt. The availability of the product within the village had to be restricted. The VDC discussed the issue in the Gram Sabha held on 18th October, 2013 and could pass a resolution to make the village tobacco-free. In the Gram Sabha, the Police Patel (an earlier arrangement of the British Raj where law and order of the village was under the control of this person) also informed the participants of the Tobacco Control Act of 2003 and the Committee demanded compliance to the Gram Sabha resolution. On the basis of the resolution, a week’s notice was given to all shopkeepers to withdraw the sale of tobacco and its products. An oral warning was also given that legal action could be initiated if they did not adhere to the Gram Sabha decisions.

Mangi Bu village had a total of six shops selling tobacco products. Each of them sold tobacco products worth Rs. 1200 per day on an average. Since the profit margins were exceptionally high, the shopkeepers were not in favour of the resolution. They decided in unison not to comply and also engaged in conspiratorial politics to prompt villagers to act against the VDC. However, many realized that the shopkeepers were acting from their own vested interests. Some remonstrated with the shopkeepers that the latter would have to bear the expenses of medical treatment if anyone from the village developed oral cancer. But all arguments fell on deaf ears as the shopkeepers continued doing their business. The VDC gave a month to the shopkeepers and hoped for better sense to prevail among them.

When things did not move ahead, the VDC organized another Gram Sabha and a decision was taken to act against these six shopkeepers. The VDC members, some prominent villagers and members from the women’s group approached the local police station armed with the Gram Sabha resolution. They informed the officer-in-charge at the police station of the course of events and how they had waited for over a month before deciding to approach the police.

The police personnel acted quickly. The six shopkeepers were called to the police station and warned of legal action if they failed to adhere to the village resolution. The shopkeepers realized that it was a lost case. They made a verbal commitment to the effect and soon stopped selling tobacco and any products associated with tobacco thereafter.
The VDC later moved for another resolution at the Gram Sabha. This resolution imposed a fine of Rs. 1000 for trading in tobacco and associated products and Rs. 700 as penalty if someone in the village was identified as consuming tobacco. Since then, the village has been free from tobacco.

Outcome

Almost a year has passed since tobacco selling in the village has come to a stop. Some of the changes witnessed are:

‘Khush hal din’ (happy days) are round the corner: There were many women who were experiencing problems in menstrual health. Not only infertility, but miscarriages were quite common. The Swasthya sakhis have reported some reduction in such issues among women. Women, adolescent girls and Anganwadi workers report similar stories. Money wasted on tobacco earlier is now used by families on the education

Villagers have realized that strength lies in unity: The incident of being able to stop six shopkeepers from selling tobacco in the village, has given a lot of courage to the villagers. They have realized the strength of coming together. Today they are able to collectively decide on many issues linked to village development. They are now gearing up to stop alcoholism in their village.

The image of the village has since changed: MangiBu’s courageous step against tobacco consumption has caught the attention of the local government. The government has started taking interest in carrying out development work. Some of the unfinished projects are now being attended to by the local government departments. At the same time, the hardwork of the villagers are being commended by other NGOs. One of the Swasthya Sakhis, Ashatai Matte from MangiBu, was awarded Rs 1,00,000 by the Narotam Sekhsaria Foundation for her efforts in the health and anti-tobacco campaign.

There are not one but many leaders: Today Mangi Bu has not one, but around 8-10 individuals who, as leaders, have become the face of the village. One of them, Ganpat Chaple, a member of the
Leading by Example

Shankar was consuming gutkha worth Rs 100 per day. The efforts of the committee succeeded in motivating him and he decided to give up. Being educated he could see the message and read for himself the negative effects of tobacco consumption. For two months after he quit, he remained a troubled man. He suffered from shivering in his limbs, was lackadaisical in work and also had constipation. His gutkha-consuming friends tried hard to get Shankar back to their fold. But Shankar’s determination made him tide over this difficult period. Soon the withdrawal symptoms subsided. When he was nominated to the Adarsh Village Development Committee, he was seen as a person who had successfully quit tobacco. He could motivate other addicted youth with his own example. He was instrumental in leading the VDC from the front.

VDC, had received threats from the powerful lobby involved in selling tobacco. He remained unmoved. Ashatai too has proved her mettle, while Shankar inspired and motivated the youths of his village with his own example.

Learnings

For the ACF team involved in facilitating change, it was a process filled with challenges. The team took some missteps, but at the same time, rectifications too also evolved from the process. Some of the learnings are:

**Messengers can also become the reason for change:** People from the village who were inspired and who decided to inspire others, worked hard to influence people to give up chewing tobacco. These messengers worked from social, economic and religious perspectives to advise people on the ills of chewing tobacco. These messengers were trained and given inputs. They became the change agents. It is important for programmes of this nature to have many such foot soldiers to work together.

**Development can also mean changing behaviour:** This is a tough prospect and the case shows the levels of difficulties encountered by the ACF team. However, the consequence is that the village will be better off and the villagers will experience a better quality of life as a result of this action.

Conclusion

The work described in the case illustrates the processes initiated. The result lies before us. Villagers have laid down a model of change. MangiBu is not alone today. Adjoining villages including Khairguda, Thutra and Loldoh too have joined its ranks as tobacco-free villages. Many more are gearing up to acquire the status.

Swasthymy Dhansampda

**Health is Wealth**

A school teacher of MangiBu feels that the tobacco-free village will not only contribute to better health of the people but also improved wealth. He has observed an increased interest in education among children. Many of these children who were tobacco addicts earlier are now showing interest in studies. This has happened as the village has freed itself of this menace.
Biographies

Narendra Kumar Gupta works as the Area Programme Manager with ACF at Bhatinda.
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Kalpana N. Bhende works as Project Executive with ACF at Chandrapur.
Jyothi Khandale works as Project Officer with ACF at Chandrapur.
Nabarun Sen Gupta
Has been into designing of this write shop to capture the latent knowledge of practitioners. Has done similar write shops with Government, NGOs and CSR Foundations. Has over 20 years of experience in the development sector and have worked with Academic institutions and field level implementation.

Dr. Braja Sundar Mishra
A former Government Officer having over twenty years of pan India working experience. Has worked with Government of India, Corporate, Academic Institutions and had been a Consultant to government on policy studies, corporate in CSR, NGOs and INGOs in programme/impact evaluation.

Dr. Bharti Gaur
A freelancer and has over 20 years of experience in the academic and social development sector. Have been associated with issues of public health, social mobilization gender and livelihoods with the competencies of research, mentoring and guiding.

Devkant Vishwakarma
Is an artist by profession and works with ISRO as an artist. His depiction has come out as sketches capturing the processes undertaken and the outcomes.

Shibaji Bose
A former journalist has over 15 years of experience in documenting evidences through case studies, technical reports, and research reports in the spheres of livelihood, climate change and health.
Our Own Institution: The Story of a Farmer-managed Producer Company

1. Narendra Kumar Gupta works as Area Programme Manager with ACF at Bhatinda. Rajesh Kumar Suthar works as Project Officer with ACF at Bhatinda.

Shaping the Dreams of Farmers in Tribal Areas

1. Amol Gawande works as Associate Project Coordinator (BCI Project) with ACF at Chandrapur and Pritam Kore works as Project Officer (BCI Project) with ACF at Chandrapur.
2. Commission: The charges farmers pay to the middlemen or village traders @ 2 to 3 % on procured cotton
3. Arhat: To receive cash payment on same day of delivery, farmers need to pay 1 to 1.5 % extra commission
4. Dharmada: Charges of Agricultural Producer Market Committee paid by farmers
5. Mamul: Charges paid by ginners to vehicle drivers as commission; ultimately it is deducted from the farmer’s account.

Optimizing Agro-Waste for Self-Sufficiency

1. Ram Bharos Gujjar works as Project Executive with ACF at Rabariyawas.
2. AFR Committee consists of HoDs of ACL and BoD of Shri Balaji Farmers' Producer Company.

Farmers’ Choro: An Intervention On Information Centre

1. Choro: A word in the Gujarati language, meaning ‘forum’
2. Kirit Jasani works as Project coordinator with ACF at Ambujanagar and MeghalSoni works as Training officer (KVY Project) with ACF at Ambujanagar.

Cementing Livelihood: A Case Of Empowering Rag Pickers And Ensuring Environmental Sustainability

1. Sanjay Kumar Choudhary works as Programme Manager with ACF at Bhatapara.
2. Dewar – a scheduled caste community of Chhattisgarh state mainly doing rag-picking activities
3. Kabad – waste material
4. Chhattisgarh State Rajpatra, dated 4 March, 2011, issued by Chhattisgarh State Electricity Regulatory Commission
5. Data as per ACL purchase department
6. Waste management company of Holcim
7. Acknowledgement: The writer would like to acknowledge the work of Mr. Abhay Pratap Singh (Project Coordinator) and Ms. Manjusha Doshi (Project Officer) of ACF, Bhatapara towards organizing the women into SHG, helping in strengthening the institution and helping the group to run this business. Special thanks to Ms. Pushpa Verma (Sahyogini, Women Empowerment & Development Programme) for her efforts.
Maaneeru (Our Water): A Community-Managed Safe Drinking Water Intervention

1. Ramaraju Varakavi works as Team Leader with ACF at Nadikudi and Baburao Madugula works as Project Assistant with ACF at Nadikudi.

2. Mandal are administrative units for Local Self Governance in AP. They are smaller than the Blocks and a few Mandalas together makes a Block.

3. Naandi Foundation: It is a professionally managed Charitable Trust established in 1998. It works in 14 states in India.

4. Acknowledgements: The authors would like to acknowledge the efforts of P. Sudhakar and K. Radha Krishna, both Project Executives with ACF, Nadikudi, since its inception (2005). Both of them have played an important role in the community mobilization process. We would also like to thank V. Kushal Rao, Sr. Manager, Ambuja Cements Limited, Nadikudi, whose encouragement and support made the intervention possible.

Strengthening Institutions, Bringing Prosperity

1. Bhuvnesh Sharma works as Project Officer with ACF at Rabariyawas.

2. WUA- Water Users’ Association is a body comprising all the farmers of the command area of any particular water body (Pond/Tank/Dam)

3. PIM- Participatory Irrigation Management refers to a management approach that embraces the involvement of the people who directly use the irrigation water: farmers

4. MMC(Members of Management Committee) - It is a democratically elected body of a water users’ association responsible for management & distribution of water of a particular water body

5. DTSG (District Technical Support Group) – It is a committee of district level officials (heads of departments) with the District Collector as Chairman. It was formed to provide technical support & guidance to all WUAs of the district

6. WTSG- WUA Technical Support Group- It is a WUA level group formed for individual WUAs to provide support & guidance in making water distribution plan, crop plan, tariff collection etc. It comprises WUA president, one aware farmer of the command area, and field level staff from agriculture & WRD department.

7. ToT- Training of Trainer-organizational staff, who is responsible for project implementation and who has undergone designed training programmes, delivered these trainings to the WUA members for their capacity building.

8. Warabandi method of irrigation- A rotational method for equitable distribution of the available water in an irrigation system by turns fixed according to a predetermined schedule specifying, day, time and duration of supply to each farmer of the command area

No Tobacco In My Village!

1. Kalpana N Bhende works as Project Executive with ACF at Chandrapur and Jyoti Khandale works as Project Officer with ACF, Chandrapur.


3. Banjara: A nomadic community

4. Tantamukt Samiti: The village-based anti-tobacco committee.

5. Gutkha: A tobacco derivative that is primarily chewed.

6. Police Patil: A nominated individual from the village who serves as a law and protection officer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACF</td>
<td>Ambuja Cement Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACL</td>
<td>Ambuja Cements Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFC</td>
<td>Agricultural Development Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFR</td>
<td>Alternate Fuel Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGM</td>
<td>Annual General Meeting</td>
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<td>AoA</td>
<td>Articles of Association</td>
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<td>BCI</td>
<td>Better Cotton Initiative</td>
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<td>BFPCL</td>
<td>Bathinda Farmers’ Producer Company Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>BoD</td>
<td>Board of Directors</td>
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<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>Bio Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Chartered Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>CKS</td>
<td>Cluster-level Knowledge Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>CV</td>
<td>Calorific value</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIN</td>
<td>Directors Identification Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSC</td>
<td>Digital Signature Certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>DTSG</td>
<td>District Technical Support Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>FBG</td>
<td>Farmers’ Business Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>FFS</td>
<td>Farmers Field School</td>
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<td>FPC</td>
<td>Farmers’Producer Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>GFPCL</td>
<td>Gadchandur Farmer Producer Company Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>GVT</td>
<td>Grameen Vikas Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMTI</td>
<td>Irrigation Training &amp; Management Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kcal</td>
<td>Kilo Calorie</td>
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<tr>
<td>KVK</td>
<td>Krishi Vigyan Kendra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kvy</td>
<td>Kharas Vistarothan Yojana</td>
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<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Learning Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>LpH</td>
<td>Litres per Hour</td>
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<tr>
<td>MACP</td>
<td>Maharashtra Agriculture Competitiveness Project</td>
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<td>MMC</td>
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<td>MoA</td>
<td>Memorandum of Association</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Metric tonnes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>NABARD</td>
<td>National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Government Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>Permanent Account Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIM</td>
<td>Participatory Irrigation Management</td>
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<td>PNBFTC</td>
<td>Punjab National Bank Farmers’ Training Center</td>
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<td>PoP</td>
<td>Package of Practices</td>
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<td>PRI</td>
<td>Panchayati Raj Institutions</td>
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<td>RFPIMS</td>
<td>Rajasthan Farmers’ Participatory Irrigation Management System</td>
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<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>Reverse Osmosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>RoC</td>
<td>Registrar of Companies</td>
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<tr>
<td>RWSRP</td>
<td>Rajasthan Water Sector Restructuring Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Scheduled Castes</td>
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<td>SES</td>
<td>Social Engagement Scorecard</td>
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<td>SFPCL</td>
<td>Somnath Farmers’ Producer Company Ltd</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHG</td>
<td>Self Help Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>TDS</td>
<td>Total dissolved solids</td>
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<tr>
<td>TIN</td>
<td>Tax Information Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>ToT</td>
<td>Training of Trainers programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>VDC</td>
<td>Village Development Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Village information centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>VLB</td>
<td>Village level body</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRD</td>
<td>Water Resource Development Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTSG</td>
<td>WUA Technical Support Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>WUA</td>
<td>Water Users’ Association</td>
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</table>
1. Flow chart for formation of Farmers’ Producer Company

- Village level awareness camps about the project
  - Formation of Learning groups (LG)
    - Capacity building of LGs
  - Formation of Farmers’ Business Group (FBG)
    - Capacity building of FBGs to do business activities
  - Formation of Farmers’ Producer Company through capacity building of FBG members
    - Registration of Farmers’ Producer Company through election of BoD
      - Capacity building of farmers for business activities and development of business plans

- Plan for establishment of seed processing unit
- Business by Farmers’ Producer Company
- Linkages with NABARD and other agencies for financial support

This process may take approximately two years

This process may take approximately six months

Support from NABARD

Formation of Farmers’ Club and registration
A. Role of VIC coordinator

1. Daily running of the centre: S/he will have to open the centre for minimum three hours a day
2. Maintain registers for visitors, physical stocks and financial turn over
3. Active participation in ADC/VDC meeting
4. Regular participation in capacity building programmes
5. Obey the decisions taken by committee
6. Handle the centre like effective manager and search various options for income generation to make it sustainable and profitable
7. S/He is completely responsible for the centre's physical and financial transactions.

B. Role of ADC (Agriculture Development Committee)

1. Selecting the location: Committee will have to select the proper place and rented room for the centre. Gram Panchayat or other village cooperative/institution's building may be used for the same if it suits the purpose. If possible, the centre should be situated at the mid-point of the village or where maximum people can visit easily.
2. Appointment of VIC coordinator: The village committee will have to appoint the person as VIC coordinator and also need to fix his/her remuneration and norms.
3. Maintenance of centre: It includes the arrangement of daily cleaning, drinking water, electricity toilet facilities etc.
4. Regular monitoring and review: The Committee will review the progress of the centre regularly and modify it if required.
5. Fund raising activities: The Committee will have to plan different chargeable activities based on community needs.
6. VIC collaboration: VIC can collaborate with bank or Government/Non-government organization or with others in relevant activities, i.e. awareness, filling forms, education/training etc.
Ambuja Cements Ltd has been working for community development in and around the Company’s manufacturing location through its community development arm, Ambuja Cement Foundation (ACF). Today, ACF works in 21 locations in 12 states, on various issues including water resource management agro-based livelihoods, skill based livelihoods, health, education and women’s empowerment.

ACF’s work in community development is in line with its mission statement ‘Energize, involve and enable communities to realize their potential. Stakeholder engagement is key to all of ACF’s interventions. Programmes are designed, developed and implemented with the direct participation of the community members. ACF has over the years partnered with many NGOs and Governmental organizations for its developmental programmes.