

---

## NM SADGURU WATER AND DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION, GUJARAT

Roopsingh Marubhai Baria, a Bhil tribal, was forced to migrate seasonally. Today this wage earner is an employer for tribal women in a nursery and floriculture unit in Bharasda district of Dahod, a semi-arid zone and under-developed region of Gujarat. Plants are grown in net houses using just a fine spray. Flowers blossom abundantly as does the concept propagated by the NM Sadguru Water and Development Foundation.

Dhaburi village is a green oasis amid brown undulating scrub. On the Hadaf river, members of the village's Lift Irrigation Co-operative are carrying out maintenance work on a check dam. They proudly point to the fields of *bhindi*, brinjal and groundnuts. New and increased crop yields have enhanced income by 75 per cent.

When Sadguru's director, Harnath Jagawat, and his wife Sharmishtha, a development professional, first mooted the idea of using water as a catalyst for social change, focusing on community-based water resources development, they faced skepticism. "Many felt it was not an NGO's business to go into the irrigation sector. But after talking with the Bhils for a year we realized their paramount need was ensuring water supply to their fields throughout the year. Education or health interventions were of no use unless one could check migration and stabilize life in the village. The government did not have a sole monopoly on water. We found a gap and made our entry."

Jagawat, whose background was rural, but who had worked as an industry manager by default, dreamed of transforming life for the rural poor. "But in those days there were no examples of those with technical expertise working in villages. Financially it was deemed to be a big risk."

Nevertheless the Jagawats set up Sadguru in 1974, initially working out of a small room in the tri-junction of Dahod. The first lift irrigation scheme was at Shankerpura in 1976. Subsequently the Sadguru model, built around four major activities – check dams, lift irrigation, watershed development and afforestation – has transformed rural lifestyles for over three decades.

A team of 90, with hundreds of volunteers who form the backbone of the organization, has seen the waters flow with benefits percolating down to the rural poor in the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

More than 400 tribal villages now have no drinking water problem even during successive drought years.

Under the co-operatives, tribal communities



*Harnath Jagawat (at front right), of Sadguru Foundation*

themselves manage more than 500 community water resources schemes on a sustainable basis.

Distress migration, which was between 50 to 70 per cent, has come down to less than 10 per cent of the population in each village.

The increased stability has translated into an increase of 300 per cent in school attendance in

---

many of the villages.

The Jagawats' innovative approach has been possible because of a generous stream of funding by the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, not only for specific projects, but also with a corpus fund of Rs. 40 million (of a total grant of Rs. 100 million). Says Jagawat, "The Tatas have been very open to ideas and encouraged experiments. They are much more pragmatic about the need for a corpus fund than other Indian and foreign donors." One of the hostels in the Sadguru Training Institute at Chosala is named Tata Villa in recognition of this contribution.

Jagawat, himself, intensely pragmatic, views an NGO's role as that of a consultant for people's activities. Sadguru is, therefore, one of the few NGOs that actively partners with the government and yet expresses its opinions freely and frankly. In Rajasthan, it has received great encouragement and become a major player implementing various



*Check dam at Borkhedi*

government-supported programs in Jhalawar. Its expertise, particularly in micro-watershed development, has influenced government policies and it has been nominated on various district, state and national committees.

Much of Sadguru's success has come because of its ability to effectively harness people power. For example the co-operative for the Khejadiya lift irrigation project in Dag, Jhalawar that looks after the operating of pumps, water

distribution and recovery of water charges has made a net profit in just two years. It is now willing to contribute in the capital cost of a new lift irrigation scheme.

In Gujarat, Sadguru helps the tribals, new entrants to farming, to plant high value horticultural crops and floriculture in their small land-holdings and form women co-operatives. Ramilaben Rathod who earned Rs. 65,400 in one year cultivating and selling roses and marigolds provides one example. Sanjeeda Taj, senior program officer, explains how SHGs are also being trained in marketing skills for the vegetable and fruit produce.

Training is viewed as an important tool in community development. The Sadguru Training and Research Institute in Chosala has excellent infrastructural facilities with heightened sensitivity to women's needs. Not only are women allowed to bring their children along during training, but



*Fields after watershed treatment in Kalakhunta watershed*

facilities are also provided for an attendant to look after them.

The movement that began as a trickle will hopefully become a torrent. Jagawat and his team now envisage a second green revolution – when the model can be replicated in other states and the institute becomes a focal training centre for Afro-Asian countries that meet food requirements on less land through appropriate technological interventions.