

Good Practice Brief

Enriching Community Pastures: Villagers of Gudha Gokulpura in Bundi, Rajasthan take the Lead

Introduction

Role of Common Property Resources as a support area for farming and livestock rearing is a well established fact. This dependency on the village commons for fodder gets further magnified in the case of small and marginal farmers with limited land resources and for whom livestock rearing is an important means of livelihood. Over the past few decades, increase in human and cattle population has led to a substantial increase in biotic pressure, on these precious support areas.

Encroachment of land, unregulated grazing pressure along with several other factors has further aggravated the situation, which is today being described as the tragedy of commons. In the near future it is believed that communities dependent on natural resources are likely to be most impacted by the threats of climate change. In such a situation vulnerability of small and marginal farmers' increases further and hence makes sustainable management and development of common lands a critical component of all poverty alleviation efforts.

This good practice note based on the experiences of BAIF Development Research Foundation (BAIF), shows the importance of restoring common property resources by involving the communities directly, as a way forward for impacting positively on their quality of life.

“Protection of Commons” has led to not only increasing the output of grasses and thereby promoting livestock development, but the renewal of hydrology has led to significant increases in acreage as well as production of various crops. This has resulted in enhancement of food security amongst the small farmers.



What Was the Problem and Where?

Gudha Gokulpura is a village located in *Hindoli Tehsil* of Bundi District in the state of Rajasthan, with 270 families and a total population of 1,285 divided into five hamlets. Topography of the village is mostly hilly and undulating.

68% of the households are small and marginal farmers involved in subsistence farming and livestock rearing as the main occupation. Maize and wheat are the common crops, sown in Kharif and Rabi seasons respectively. However, due to low productivity of land 30% of the households having small land holdings do not enjoy food security and seek daily wage labour.

Almost all the households own livestock as a means of supplementing family incomes and as cash insurance during crop failures. At the onset of the programme local breed of cows were predominant at 77% of the large ruminant population followed by buffaloes. Presence of crossbreds was negligible at only six in numbers. Goats were reared as a source of supplementary income by the households. However, there was no income from sale of milk as whatever little was produced was consumed by families themselves.

The status of the village common lands was under severe stress due to overgrazing and was unable to provide sufficient fodder for supporting the cattle population. This situation was further exacerbated by encroachment of land. Inadequate fodder for animals all the year round resulted in low productivity of cattle.

Against this backdrop regeneration activities on common lands was therefore, proposed under the BAIF-ICEF project as an entry point for a larger holistic program on water resources development and energy conservation for sustainable management of the environment. Women as the primary stakeholders played a decisive role in the initiation of the project with the following set of objectives:

- ✦ To develop the village commons in order to increase the availability of feed resources for livestock.
- ✦ To demonstrate the potential role of regenerated village commons in providing support to livelihood opportunities of the communities.
- ✦ To empower the local community supported by local institutions to carry on the activities undertaken in the future.

How did the Good Practice Work?

BAIF, as the facilitating agency had a presence in the area and was working towards up gradation of cattle breeds and regeneration of wastelands, prior to initiating work in Gudha Gokulpura. This helped in the initial phase of building rapport and trust with the communities.

A spearhead team consisting of various subject matter specialists provided financial and technological support. A resource team comprising of local youth and interested members from the community helped as a catalyst to build bridges between the project team and the village community. Community Pasture Management Committee (CPMC) was formed with representatives from all sections of the village and participation by women was given due importance. CPMC was responsible for ensuring equity in usufruct rights, conflict resolution and liaison with other government programs.

A holistic location specific plan was made and implemented with active participation of the above mentioned players. The overall objective of water resources development as mentioned earlier was always kept in focus. In view of this, the interventions planned had a focus on soil and water conservation to restore soil moisture and to develop a green cover with suitable mix of grasses and tree species which could meet feed and fodder requirements of the village cattle and small ruminants.

Building upon the capacities of the CPMC to function as an independent entity was an essential component in the process of regeneration of commons and also ensured smooth transition of responsibilities for future continuity. Exposure visits to BAIF's other project areas in Rajasthan and Gujarat were organised to facilitate interactions with villagers where community participation had helped to convert barren, undulating wasteland into green pastures.

The entire process of ensuring the participation of all sections of the community, conflict resolution and consensus building has been a dynamic one. Changing strategy as per requirement and doing mid-term corrections from time to time assisted in long term sustainability. For instance, as work progressed, the need to reorganise the Pasture Management Committee was felt in order to strengthen the relationship with the existing *Panchayati Raj* institutions. The re-elected Committee comprises of twelve members - with two representatives from every hamlet with elected ward *Panch* being the President and the Secretary of the *Panchayat* being the Secretary of the CPMC too, in charge of maintaining all the records.

Another key feature of this initiative was the component of building financial security through the generation of *gram kosh* (village fund). Unanimously it was decided to contribute ten percent of the labour cost as *shramdan* (voluntary labour) for generating a corpus to meet future maintenance costs. Maintaining transparency in all the processes especially in matters related to finances instilled a sense of confidence in the system.

Equity in distribution of grasses and access to equal opportunities for all sections of the community led to a process which was inclusive. Consensus building instead of confrontation along with support from the district administration led to effective solutions to conflicts related to ownership. Holistic approach towards land and water management over the entire watershed area of the village, wherein, the common lands were a small part led to significant improvements in the quality of life for the residents of this village. Some of the qualitative and quantitative indicators of change are as summarised below:

↳ Soil erosion got controlled to the tune of 19-21 tons per ha.

↳ Of the 227 wells in the watershed area, 175 had water availability for 9 - 12 months in a year as against 88 wells before initiating work in the area, an improvement of 39 %. Monitoring of wells indicated a decline in time taken to recharge from 12 - 36 hrs in 1997 to 2 to 12 hrs in 2002, an improvement of more than 300%.

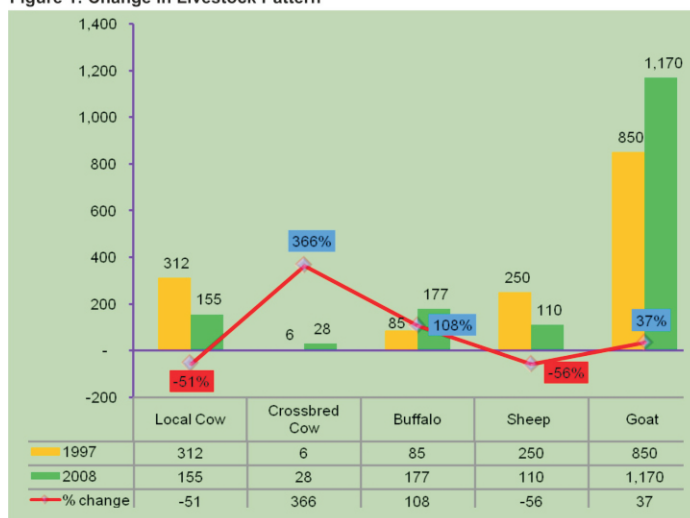
↳ The overall trend in the village shows marked increase in number of buffaloes and crossbred cows followed by goats, and a reduction in the population of non - descript cows, bulls and sheep.

↳ The area under cropped land increased in *Kharif* and *Rabi* season @ 47% and 44% respectively. Area under irrigation also increased by 88% which led to positive impacts on the yield of major crops like maize and wheat which showed an increase of 70% and 37% respectively.

↳ Increased water regime, crop productivity and food security helped to fight against the impact of recurrent drought situations.

↳ Participatory decision making processes have helped in providing a voice to all castes and to empowering women to play a key role in matters of the village.

Figure 1: Change in Livestock Pattern



- ↳ Women and children have been able to save three hours a day on an average due to improved accessibility for fuel, fodder and water requirements leading to positive impacts on their health.
- ↳ Improved capabilities of the community members towards enforcing rules to maintain and manage the commons.

Key Learnings

This good practice clearly indicates the potential and the appropriateness of investing resources – financial, managerial and technical into regeneration of common lands and its positive impacts on livelihood systems, food productivity, natural resource availability and ultimately on the community health.

Confidence building, facilitation and negotiating skills of a facilitating organisation which is a neutral body greatly assists in resolving conflicts and arriving at consensus which is a very crucial factor for success and sustainability of CPR management. Involvement of the community in planning, implementation and monitoring of activities and changes in the eco-system assists in building upon their capacities to function independently in the future.

Understanding the social fabric of the community, analysis of people's aspirations, traditional usufruct rights and power balance assists in developing an insight which could then be used judiciously in negotiating various issues transparently.

Having a clear focus on the exit policy assists the facilitating organisation in putting systems in place that function democratically and transparently as the foundation stone of the local people's institution which in turn energises its smooth functioning in favour of all and not some vested interests.

Factoring in an element of economic sustainability for community based organisations is an important step in securing future sustainability.

The Future

Based on the success of Gudha Gokulpura experience in developing community pasturelands BAIF has initiated similar programs in other neighbouring areas with financial help from the Swarn Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana of the Government of India. Developing a bottom up approach and by putting the last first certainly appears to be the way forward for effective management of common property resources.

SOUTH ASIA Pro Poor Livestock Policy Programme

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