

In dry Vidarbha, Village reaps a rich harvest

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In the past, Hatgaon village and the surrounding areas located in the cotton bowl of Vidarbha have been in the news for farmer's suicides, but that may soon be history. Hatgaon has become the first village to own a minor irrigation project which it partly built and is now operating and maintaining on its own.

The project was formally handed over to Hatgaon at a function in Wardha on Saturday. The neighboring village of Dhotra also secured ownership of its irrigation dam.

The Rs. 2-crore project, partially funded by KfW, the German development bank, began about three years ago. The drought-ridden village now has a dam, built on a local nullah, with over 1 million cubic meters of water. The project is being managed by village's water User's Association (WUA)

Under the participatory Irrigation and development process—restricted to 100-250 hectare irrigation area—KfW provides one third of the project cost, while the villagers have to fund the rest—either by way of cash or labors. Maharashtra Water Resources department's Local Irrigation sector provides the technical assistance while a local NGO—in case Wardha—based Dharamitra—is roped in for motivation and administrative guidance.

Since last year, 94 of the 10 families in Hatgaon are reaping rich dividends. Not

only have their yields increased, but have no longer have to depend on a single cotton crop as they are able to produce as many as three crops annually. The gross agricultural production of the village by Rs. 5 lakh per annum.

“I used to get only three-four quintal of cotton till last year. This year, I had 12 quintals of cotton. More over, I also have a second crop of wheat and a third crop of hot weather gram”, says Husen Raut, a farmer in the area. So. Although the last cotton picking is usually done in January, Raut still has about two quintals of cotton left in his field.

Similarly, Bapurao Meshram's three acres of land yielded just one quintal of cotton last year. This year, he got bumper 12 quintals. He also sowed soyabean and got six quintals of gram. While he invested Rs.12, 000/- his returns added up to Rs. 30,000.

“Earlier, we had nothing to do after the kharif crop, so most of us would work as laborers in neighboring villages. Now, we are busy even at this time of the year. We had never grown Soyabean, wheat and gram”, says Maroti Thakre.

But acceptance took time. In fact, the German bank had tried to peg the project in Bihar and Rajasthan, but failed. “Progress was initially slow as the participatory Irrigation and Development Process was a new concept. Initially, the farmers expected the government to pay

for everything”, recalled Kevin Smith, the project’s Indian consultant. “ The farmers’ incomes have increased by three –five times in the first season, and they have been able to recover their investments in a single year”, he added.

“ Collection of water charges in a government projects is very poor and the cost of maintenance very high. In participatory projects like these, people learn to behave responsibly as the onus is on them,” pointed out K K Badhe, a retired sub- divisional engineer of the Local Irrigation Sector who has been roped in as consultant. Badhe reports to the Pune- based supervisory body called Technical Assistance Team (TAT),

Comprising technologists, sociologists, agronomists, marketing experts and an NGO coordinator.

M N Khadse, an activist with Dharamitra, was confident that the project was sustainable in the long run too. “ it is not like cooperative bodies run by politicians. The WUA body is elected for a five- year term, after which fresh elections are held,” he said.

Besides Hatgaon and Dhtra, Dharamitra is undertaking two more projects at Bibkhed and Kasari in Buldna district of Vidarbha.

Move to improve rural power scheme

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NEW DELHI: in an effort to ensure the revenue sustainability of the Rajeev Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY), maintain infrastructure and provide uninterrupted quality power, the power Ministry has made development of franchisees mandatory for management of rural distribution network.

The franchisees could include non – governmental organizations, user’s associations and cooperative or individual entrepreneurs. This is expected to help in minimizing the Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT & C) losses besides improving the rural power distribution system. Under the accelerated Power Development and

reforms Programme (APDRP), the Ministry has also advised the State power Utilities to franchise the electricity distribution system in such towns where the AT & C losses are comparatively high and the utility itself fails to reduce the losses significantly.

All the 27 States implementing the Yojana, having executed tripartite agreements, have consented to deploy franchisees. Since the launch of the Programme in April 2005, the implementing agencies have reported electrification of 32,052 villages and intensive electrification of 7,413 villages during the first phase till March 2.