

Kachner: A STORY OF RESILIENCE

The resilience of people is revealed, not in how much adversity they can endure, but in how they never cease to strive for a better life.

Our land is a land of exactly this resilience, as demonstrated by the Lamani community (a Vimukt Jathi Nomadic Tribe) of Kachner, a remote tribal settlement in Marathwada, Maharashtra.

Marathwada is in the dryland of Maharashtra, (in)famous for scanty and uncertain rainfall; about 550 – 600 mm on an average a year.

Drought, with its attendant ills and perils, is thus a familiar unwelcome visitor to the region. The roads of Development (quite literally) do not pass through these parts, making life here very, very tough. The condition of any of the human-life indicators here – health, nutrition, education, employment opportunities – is dismal.

But Human Life, which is what stories are made of, does exist here. And the biggest story of Kachner is about Water. Water is also today, its biggest Success Story.

The merciless drought of 2012 which left village after village begging the heavens, the earth and the government for drinking water, did not affect Kachner. Kachner was the hero. It had water!

The story begins like this:

Once upon a time, Kachner, a village of 6 tandas (hamlets) had no water. This meant that only rainfed agriculture was possible when the rains were good. Usually, and particularly in summer there was scarcity of water even for basic needs of its 339 households. This story of water and no agriculture, led to the story of Migration. Almost all families left their homes and migrated to wherever they found work; any work to survive. Only unskilled labour on marginal wages was possible. Who can think of education with an empty stomach and parched throat? So the story of water, no agriculture and migration and education, led to the story of Poverty. This was thus a story of a vicious circle of Water Scarcity, Migration and Poverty.

People of Kachner wanted to break away from this.

WOTR's time-tested Wasundhara Approach is a project aimed at addressing issues of land degradation, water scarcity and distress migration through Participatory Integrated Watershed Development. The village community must spearhead their own quest for development. Interventions and activities are crafted according to the needs and choices of the village which would be implemented, adhering to the guidelines.

In 2007, the village approached WOTR to help them improve their quality of life, by developing local ecosystems.

Did this happen? Could the people of Kachner change their story?

At WOTR we believe results speak for themselves. The stories that follow are about the turnaround of this once-barren land. They are also a tribute to the most resilient people in existence; people we should always salute – our Anna-daata (food providers) – our farmers.

Raghu Raisingh Chavan: HOW I REWROTE MY BIODATA

If I ever wrote my bio data like job applicants in cities do, this is what it would contain: *Raghu Raisingh Chavan – 55 years old, hardly ever been to school, a wife, 5 children, owns 3 acres of land.*

What kind of job do you think I would get? Exactly. As an unskilled labourer cutting sugarcane at sugar factories.

The constant migration put a stop to my children's formal education. Their biodata would have been just like mine, if not for WOTR's Wasundhara project which was initiated in our village in 2008.

WOTR came to our village with a whirlwind of mobilisation meetings, training programs and exposure visits. Gramsabhas, which otherwise were meant to be National Holiday congregations suddenly became all about working for the actual development of our village. For the first time, even the poor were invited into the process and I was elected the President of the Village Development Committee (VDC).

The program was an intensive one and required my constant presence where the watershed treatments were being carried out. I and my co-workers learnt to manage our precious water resource and nurture the surrounding environment. What a moment it was to see water in our wells, for the first time in years! This meant that I had regular water to till my 3 acres of land. Additionally, I was being paid regular, fair wages for my participation in constructing watershed treatment structures in my own village.

Only a migrant labourer knows the value of a regular income. It means freedom from wandering, from ill health, from uncertainty. My wife and I could finally stay home and our children could finally go to school!!

Kachner has blossomed and so has my family. All my children now go to school. My son has completed his 10th standard. With enough from my income and my wife's savings in the self-help group,



Raghu Raisingh Chavan: Charting his own path

when my 2 elder daughters got married, I did not have to beg to anyone for money.

Looking back, WOTR's Wasundhara program rewrote all our life-scripts: Mine, because I could serve my community as President of the VDC, my children's because they could get educated and live a better life. My village has also benefited because people no longer ran away from it.



Babulal Shahu Chavhan: A MODERN CARPENTER

I own 3.5 acres of land, most of which is rainfed. I inherited this land and the profession of carpentry from my father. Seasonal crops and the little carpentry work I got by being the mobile carpenter in neighbouring settlements were the sources of our meagre income. When times got really tough, my 2 daughters had to miss school and work as labourers just to help us meet ends. I will never forgive myself as my daughters could study only till 7th class.

When I saw WOTR's watershed project in other villages where I went to work, I knew that this could bring about a positive change in my village – 'Drop by Drop'. So, I plunged myself into convincing the community that we needed watershed work in our village. Perhaps this was my way of making up to my daughters for discontinuing their education.

WOTR's project supported by the Karl Kubel Stiftung and the BMZ began in our village and people began to earn money while water levels in the village began to rise and ultimately helped in the increase of agricultural productivity. Now grow onions on 1.5 acres of irrigated land.

Elected as the chairman of the Village Development Committee, I led the Gram Sabha meetings and was extensively involved in the work. This raised my status in my own Tanda.

My father used to make traditional wooden agricultural implements. I continued it and used to travel regularly to surrounding Tandas (hamlet) in Ghargaon, Porgaon etc. But it did not fetch much money, while it demanded hard work. Let down and depressed, I often considered giving it up entirely and start working as a manual labourer instead, since that would pay more! But because some people still liked my work, I continued making implements.

After discussions in the Gramsabha one day, the Hirkani Samyukta Mahila Samitee, the apex body of the women's SHGs, set up through the project in the village, decided to give me a business loan of Rs. 20,000/- on monthly repayment, for my carpentry! With this, I purchased modern tools and electrical equipment. I hired 2 workmen to help improve the



Babulal Shahu making traditional wooden implements

quality as well as speed up my work. I am now a proud modern carpenter.

This project has infused new energy into both my professions. After the harvest this year, I plan to make items such as tables, divan, cupboards and sofas. The repayment of my monthly instalments will soon be complete. This has encouraged others in the village as well, to take loans and start their own business.

Real modernity doesn't mean technology that will replace human power, but appropriate technology that will reduce human drudgery and aid human creativity. WOTR's Watershed Management project has ushered in exactly such modernity to my village, and I am proud to have played a part in it.

Kavita Jadhav & Rukhmani Chavan: THE VEGETABLE FARMS

A small plot of rainfed land, uncertain and scanty rainfall and 3 children to raise. How does one manage this walking on tightrope? Kavita Jadhav and Rukhmani Chavan, like many other women of Kachner had been doing this for many years.

Every year the cloudless sky and parched land sent them to work as wage labourers in neighbouring villages. On one of these travels, they discovered the WOTR Wasundhara program at Tanda No. 3. They worked as labourer on watershed treatments and after that it was easy to bring the project to their own village. Watershed work started in Tanda No. 2 in 2008.

Construction of contour bunds, earthen bunds, nala bunds, demonstration plots for various crops, trainings and exposure visits – Kavita and Rukhmani participated enthusiastically in all the activities along with the whole village.

Soon, even if the sky was cloudless, their lands were not parched. Water stayed back in the village after the WOTR Wasundhara program. Irrigation was now possible and soil quality improved. People could now work on their own farms all year round without having to migrate in search of work outside. It was time for the next step.

“WOTR SIED gave us demonstrations of modern farming, crop methods and vegetable gardening so that we could earn more with less struggle. I planted some vegetables and by selling them in the Tanda itself, I made around Rs. 150-200 per week. Enthused with this, I planted vegetables like Gower (cluster beans), Vangi (bringle), chuka leaves, spinach, tomato, okra etc. and now I sell them at the weekly markets in Kachner and Adul villages. My son and my daughter-

in-law help me and I make between Rs. 600-1000 per week, a sum I could never have even imagined before. I have also followed this year's demonstrations and got a very good crop of ginger in 10 gunthas¹ of my land. Things can only get better”, says Rukhmani with excitement and pride.

And indeed they have. Rukhmani has built an RCC house on her farm this year and her granddaughter goes to an English medium school. “Our life is now smooth and happy, but when I think of the hard days gone by, I wish WOTR had come to our village much earlier”, she says.

Kavita tentatively planted potatoes in ½ guntha and got excellent results last year. She increased this to 1 guntha this year and harvested about 75 Kilograms to 1 Quintal. Spinach, Brinjal, Tomatoes, Okra, White Pumpkin, etc. soon followed. Now summers are spent at markets selling vegetables rather than toiling as labourer. Kavita now earns about Rs. 500-700 per week and makes a profit of about Rs. 300-400. Surely enough, this money goes into her children's education, her top priority.

“It takes a little more hard work in planting vegetables compared to the crops but then plantation costs are less and with proper planning one can get more income from vegetables than other crops. Now I want to plant flowers. I hear the market is good.” Kavita's eyes gleam with dreams and her readiness to diversify and learn new things.

She puts the project in a wider context. “In this project we work for water, for people, for animals, for saving forests. In short, it is for the welfare and development

1 1 guntha = 1089 sq.ft.



Kavita Jadhav and Rukhmani Chavan

Sheila Hari Chavan: THE GIRL WHO FELL OFF A MANGO TREE

of life itself.”

I fell off a mango tree when I was 7 and fractured my leg. For a girl from a well-off family in the city, this would have been a nice dinner table anecdote. For a girl like me, from a poor, rural family, it meant a permanent handicap.

After my fall, my parents did the best they could at home, but I was not taken to a hospital because they could not afford it. But they did send me to school and unlike many other girls from my village I studied further and completed 2nd year of graduation.

The WOTR Wasundhara program not only brought water to our village, but also thought about it's all round development. Most advantageous for me, it had interventions for women's empowerment. I got trained as a tailor under the program and now run my own tailoring shop at home. I am very proud of it.

My life has not been easy, but I have learnt important lessons. In our society it is difficult for a handicapped person (especially a girl) to get married. But it is possible for her to stand on her own feet and even support her family economically.



An empowered Shiela Hari Chavan

Parubai Eknath Rathod: A WOMAN'S LIFE

They say, sacrifice is a woman's *dharma*. I don't agree. But that was the story of my life for a long time.

When I was a child, nothing in my life was out of the ordinary. Like all other girls in my community, I was taken out of school when my family faced financial problems. In any case, one by one, all my friends got married off and I didn't have anyone to go to school with.

I remember being in tears because I wanted to study further. I remember my teacher trying to make my father understand the importance of education, that I was a good student and would do him proud. But my father chose to adamantly follow the others. So, like all girls in my community, I was also married off when I was 12 and came from my parent's house in JatwadaTanda to my husband's home in Kachner.

At my new home, we had a small farmland where I harvested sugarcane with my mother-in-law for 4-5 years. Later when I had a baby, I resolved to educate

my children, no matter what. My husband being uneducated did not understand the importance of schooling and thought I was putting on airs because I had studied up to Class 4.

It may have just been Class 4, but I was the only women in the Tanda who had some education! So people from neighbouring areas would bring me their letters to read. This and my children's schooling were the only sparks of happiness in my life, but my husband grudged over this and I never heard the end of his taunts. I kept my children in school and I kept reading and today, after 35 years my diligence has paid off.

I have 3 daughters and 2 sons, all well-educated. My 2 eldest studied up to Class 10. My youngest daughter is a nurse. My eldest son has completed his Masters and the youngest is in Class 12. It refreshes and energises me every time I see my children reading, writing and talking well. Education was not the only obstacle I had to face.

Ever since I read the first letter for the people of my Tanda, I wanted to help them more and more. When the WOTR Wasundhara Rural Development Plan came to our village, I thought, "This is my chance." I participated enthusiastically in all their activities like *shramdaan*, wealth ranking and other meetings.

Amid jeers of people around, I enrolled as a member in the committee that was formed for all this work. At home the taunts continued. "Why did you get married if you wanted to spend time working for the village? You should have taken *sanyas*... blah, blah, blah," my husband went on. But I had learnt to ignore him long back. Even though he was against it, I went to Narlewadi for my first training.

The training was the learning ground I had always longed for. We were informed about the committee's role and responsibilities, WOTR Wasundhara principles, interventions and other social and developmental topics. As a tribute to our community where everyone was a wage labourer, I suggested the name 'Shramik Gram vikas Samiti', which everyone agreed to.

Back in the Tanda, my journey continued. A bank account for the Shramik Gram Vikas Samiti for the watershed building work was opened in the name of 3 members; one of them was me. I had hardly ever stepped into a bank before, but I soon got used to going there frequently.

I was thrilled to be selected as the Vice Chairperson of the committee and now I had new responsibilities. I delegated work myself and tried to understand problems of the labour. I made it a point that I was always present while measurements for construction

were being taken. Once, when measurements were taken and the workers paid in my absence I called up the office and complained. A meeting was called immediately and after a long debate with discriminating lines like, "Taking measurements and paying workers is not a woman's job..." etc., the other members were made to realise their responsibilities and everything was resolved. I had learnt a long time back that real empowerment does not come without fighting for one's rights, and that's exactly what I did.

My life experience has taught me that when a woman dares to take an initiative, she faces opposition from home and outside. Women in my Tanda have never seen the outside world and despite being fed up with their husbands' ignorant ways, they still have to keep mum and fulfil their '*dharma*' of sacrifice. But projects like WOTR Wasundhara brought out the undiscovered best in us. Now many women like me have started coming forward and participating in village development activities. Through WOTR's program and activities – meetings, trainings, exposure visits, other people have also realised what women are capable of and it has opened doors for a woman like me to show her hidden talents. We encourage mothers to educate their daughters. Today, it brings tears of joy to me to note that there is not a single child, girl or boy in my Tanda who is not in school.

I had to leave my studies incomplete, but I will not leave my dream of participating in social development, incomplete. Through this project I have found a real platform at last.

It has been a long, hard life. But I always knew I deserved an extraordinary one.



Improvement in the living conditions

The improvement across all wealth ranking categories is visible. Prior to WSD, when land was degraded and water scarce, the households held the land jointly. Then there were 29% Households medium to large land owners; 58% Households were small landowners and 13% were landless. Today there are 25% medium and large landowners; 65% small landowners and 10% landless. During and following project implementation, large and medium sized farms (earlier jointly owned) were now divided among the sons in the family and a number of landless households were able to purchase land (from the earnings of WSD), while a few began cultivating patches of forest land.

Health and hygiene interventions have created awareness and have motivated families to adopt good sanitation practices. Today 35 Households have their own toilets as compared to the pre-project stage where

there were no toilets. Besides this, the drainage water that flowed around the homes and onto the settlement roads is controlled by 41 soak pits that were constructed in the project. This indicates the change as part of the mindset of the people.

The project has contributed significantly to providing water for domestic purposes to homes. Before project implementation, the majority of households (215) fetched water from wells owned by others. There were no private tap connections in the households. With community contribution, the project installed the pipeline in two villages where 109 households are provided with private water taps to their home. Additionally, in the project 98 water purifier units have been provided on a subsidy basis (based on wealth ranking) to the villagers. Thus project interventions have contributed to provisioning of safe drinking water. 50 HHs have benefited from construction of bathrooms.

Details of Sources of Drinking water

Watershed	Project – Phases	Households with Sources of water					
		Own well	Well owned by others	Public well	Private Tap	Public Tap	Hand pump
Total	Pre	38	215	9	0	82	0
	Post	45	129	29	115	15	22



Agriculture

Agricultural productivity of the area was very low due to poor quality of soil and water scarcity. Prior to WSD only 1.27% (6.35 ha) of the total cultivated land was seasonally irrigated. Agriculture then was taken up only during the kharif season (monsoon). Before the project 264 hectares of land was under cultivation. This has increased to 540 hectares post-WSD. Area under kharif cultivation has almost doubled (from 209 to 413 hectares); while area under rabi (winter) cultivation has greatly increased (from 53ha to 122 ha.). In this season partial irrigation is required.

Change in Land use and cropping pattern is observed

Monsoon (Kharif) Crop	Pre WSD (ha)	Post WSD (ha)
Pearl millet	67	129
Cotton	99	204
Pigeon pea	33	67
Moth bean & moong	5	9
Onion	0	3
Winter (Rabi) crop		
Sorghum	27	76
Wheat	25	43
Horticulture		
Sweet lime	2	4



Nutrition

As part of the general awareness on nutrition, a few women on their own initiated kitchen gardens that are now benefiting them by the availability of fresh vegetables. Food availability and its consumption is an important indicator of food security.

Meals in days (% HH)

Frequency of meal	Total (%)	
	Pre	Post
Two meals/day	62	31
Three meals/day	37	69
Total	99	100

This clearly shows that 50% percent of Households that were earlier taking two meals now consume 3 meals daily. A total of 69% of households now consume 3 meals a day, an improvement from the earlier 37%. This changed meal-pattern shows improvement in the consumption and the increased food availability in the project villages.



Meet Lalita Ghusinge, who is one among the many 'Health Pravartaks' (Health Promoters) trained in project villages. These health promoters are given training and they keep basic medication with them in villages. As the project villages are remote and they don't have easy access to medical stores, this has proved significant where the villagers consult and access basic medication from these health promoters. Lalita has got inspired to serve her village as a health promoter and has continued to do so, even after the project has concluded.

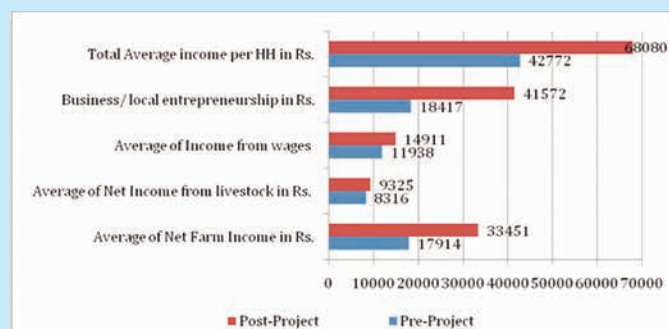
Livelihood and Socio-economic Impacts of the Project

Year after year the tribal families are kept bonded to moneylenders to whom they sell their produce immediately at the end of the harvest at very low rates. These are some of the basic reasons for the lack of income generation. This in turn leads to large-scale migration to places where income is better.

To promote the habit of savings and enterprise development by providing microfinance, 30 women self help groups involving 378 women have been formed. Entrepreneurship development trainings on various income generation activities were conducted in which 300 villagers have participated. As follow-up of these trainings, 32 villagers have joined further entrepreneurship trainings (mostly tailoring) in order to implement a (small) business idea. Additionally, income generating activities such as fodder chopper, grinding mill, grocery shop, etc., have been initiated which meet local needs while it helps to increase yearly income of some families.

Prior to WSD, 44% households migrated for seasonal wage labour. By the end of the project period, 21% households had someone migrating seasonally.

Income level Change in pre and post project period



The data in table 4.5 shows that the project has succeed in increasing annual income of households in the project villages by 59% from the pre project period. The data also shows that income has increased mainly from farm related sources (87%) and business/ other livelihood sources. Various microfinance support activities and livelihood enhancement project initiative also contributed to the increase of the household's income level.

During the drought of 2012, Kachner proved that the soil and water conservation treatments of watershed development were effective. In the heart of the drought-land of Marathwada region of Maharashtra, Kachner still had water for its people, cattle, and plants. "We pump up around 15,000 litres of water



from this well and supply water to the whole village", says Narayan Eknath Chauhan of Kachner.

But neighboring villages a few kilometers away, like Adul and Jodwadi, had a bad deal with the death of their sweet-lime orchards due to lack of water. Shaikh Akhtar of Adul had deep sadness when describing how he lost 2000 trees in his orchard because "there is simply not enough water to save them!". Similarly in Jodwadi, Gyansingh Naymane of Jodwadi village lost 500 trees, which he laments "I looked after them like my own children".

People of Kachner attribute this good fortune to the *panlot karyakram* (Watershed Development work) that the village took up. "We have worked on 1671 hectares around our hills", says Pandit Babu Chauhan, the ex-sarpanch, "it is simple really... we followed a ridge to valley approach and built a variety of structures that





slowed and stopped the water. This recharged our groundwater. This year is a bad year all around. We have had only 262 mm of rain this year, or else you would have seen our wells overflowing”.

“*Water gives life*” might be an oft-used phrase; it could almost be a cliché. However, it couldn’t be truer than it is for Kachner. Since the start of its watershed program, Kachner has experienced increase in agricultural productivity which has not only impacted their own food security positively but, as Kavita Jadhav, an SHG member explains, “We have grown cluster beans, brinjals, ladies fingers, methi (fenugreek) on our plots which we have sold in the neighbouring villages”.

Watershed Development in Kachner brought the society, otherwise divided, together. Kalpana Mohite, WOTR-staff explains – “In Kachner too we had our share of difficulties, especially when people encountered our wealth-ranking condition which employs differential contribution and benefits. Conflicts broke out. But once people saw the merits of the strategies things began to fall into place”.

This is what helped Kachner bear the impact of a drought and this is what resilience is all about: People coming together, applying simple technology to secure resources, in a weather variable condition, coming handy for generations to come.

This project has been implemented jointly by Watershed Organization Trust (WOTR) and The Sanjeevani Institute for Empowerment and Development (SIED) with the financial support of the Karl Kübel Stiftung für Kind und Familie and the BMZ.



Watershed Organisation Trust

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Supported by:



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