



Watershed Voices – Experiences from the grassroots



February 2009

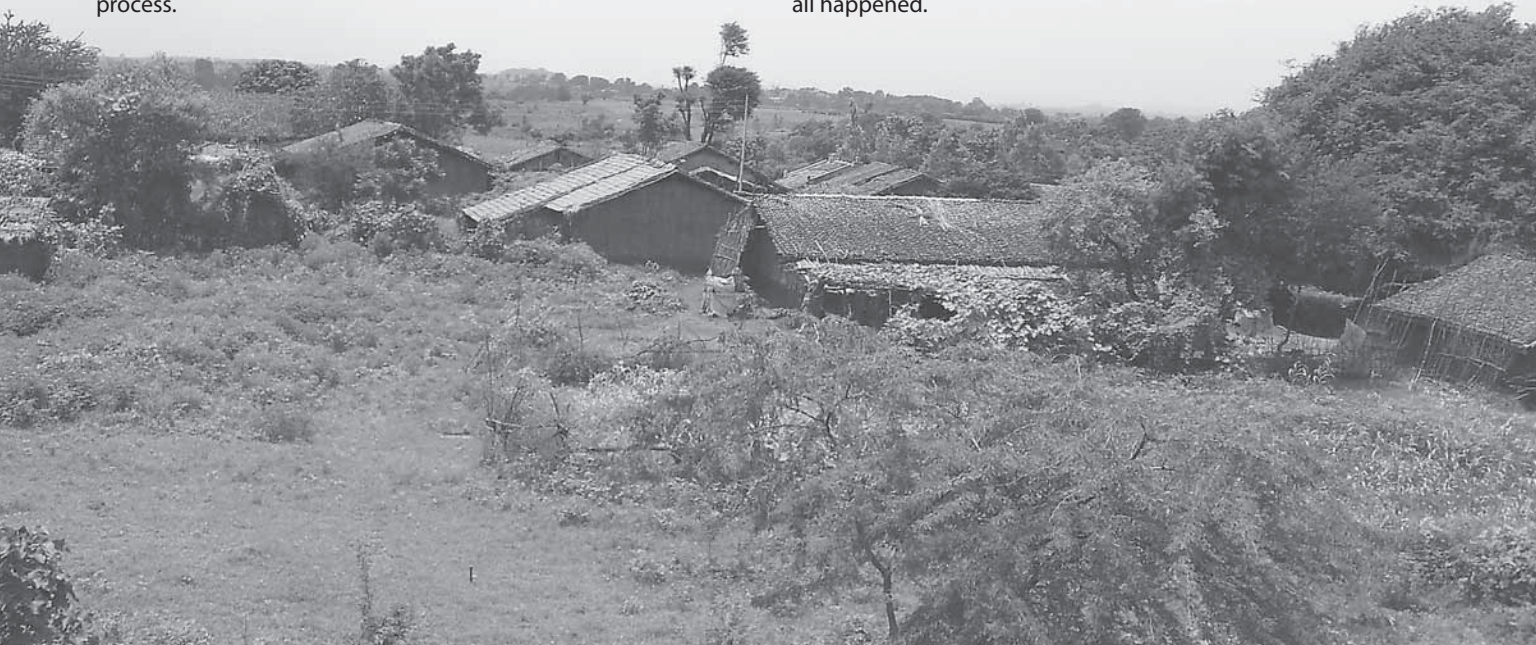
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Pimpale: A Magical Transformation

Prior to 2002, village Pimpale in district Nandurbar of North Maharashtra was just another of those barren and isolated places the residents of which had either resigned to their fate or migrated to the cities in search of work. The lack of water had turned the fields dry. The land was parched. Most of the houses had been abandoned. And there was this thick blanket of despair and misery. The village elders had assumed that there was no way out of their drudgery. In 2002, a few of Pimpale's seniors heard about the miraculous benefits of watershed development in their neighborhood, and this raised their curiosity. It was this that brought them to WOTR. After undertaking a ground study of whether a watershed project would yield the required benefits for the village, it was decided to go ahead and initiate the basic process.

Today, six years later, Pimpale has cast off its slough of despondency forever. Those who had migrated have returned to tend to their once forsaken fields. The availability of water due to a successful watershed program now provides up to three crop yields a year. In hitherto infertile land, there have been planted fruit trees. And all this has not only led to increased revenue in every family but has also brought about a holistic turn-around in the lives of the villagers. Children now go to school, women manage self help groups and take part in the governance of the village, men have been able to shake off their addiction to alcohol and seniors are able to have access to medical facilities. Pimpale is now an icon of what a watershed can do to mitigate the suffering endured for years. Here then is a report that outlines the highlights of how it all happened.



The Beginning

Pimpale is located 28 kms from Nandurbar in Maharashtra and the nearest railway station is at Khandbara which is about 12 kms from the village. Having heard lots about the watershed development program executed in neighboring Varda, some of the community leaders from Pimpale visited the site and met the team of WOTR. An informal discussion took place and it was decided that technical representatives WOTR would visit Pimpale to check out the possibility of implementing a watershed development project in the village. The team found the conditions at Pimpale to be favorable for the execution of a watershed project and the process and conditions of the program were explained to the villagers.

To be able to make them fully understand the various implications of the project, some of the villagers were taken to various watershed project villages in Nandurbar for first-hand experiences. These exposure visits had 15 men and 15 women and they toured projects such as Shrirampur, Rahuri Agricultural University, Wazda, Wanjulshet and Sangamner. A Gram Sabha was then held and the process was given a formal go-ahead. All the families in Pimpale agreed to the condition of shramdaan or local contribution. In the first phase, 100 families were chosen to take part in shramdaan.



Village Profile

Pimpale has a group Gram Panchayat of five villages. These are Phadki, Khadkiwada Palsun, Ramchandra Phali and Pimpale. At present the sarpanch is from Khadkiwada.

Number of Families	307
Population	1,410
Men	694
Women	716
Landless Families	38
Total Area of Watershed	559.23 ha
Forest Land	197.61 ha
Cultivation Land	222 ha
Cultivable Waste Land	8 ha
Rain-Fed Land	204 ha
Uncultivable Waste Land	12.11 ha



The Process

To begin with, a Village Watershed Committee (VWC) was set up with 13 members comprising eight men and five women. It was established in April 2002 and registered in November 2007 and was called the Jagruti Village Watershed Committee. It comprises the following members:

Name	Designation
Mr Divanji Noprya Gavit	President
Mrs Savitrabai Parsu	Vice President
Mr Ruwaji Adhya	Chairman
Mr Dinesh Pandit	Treasurer
Mr Poslya Shiwaji	Member
Mr Jamsu Poslya	Member
Mr Shivaji Poslya	Member
Mr Jamsu Poslya	Member
Mr Jaytya Napriya	Member
Mr Amrut Shiptya	Member
Mrs Manila Bhimsingh	Member
Mrs Sayabai Damraji	Member
Mrs Vantibai Shankar	Member
Mrs Suma Ravindra	Member



As per the guidelines laid down for watershed development, a series of programmes were initiated but the primary task was area treatment which was carried out with the use of such civil technicalities as CCT, WAT, check dam constructions, Gabian structures, loose boulder structures and farm bunds. Later, plantation was carried out. Meanwhile, to enable holistic development of the village, two health camps were held during this period along with other activities such as a farmer's melawa, women's melawa, formation of a self help group for women, linkages with forest and other government departments and horticulture plantation of mango, custard apple, guava, eucalyptus, drumstick trees, bamboo etc. Training was provided to the VWC as follows:

Training Program	Content
PPM-I	Environment Degradation, Concept of Watershed Development, Participation, Roles and responsibilities of CBOs, Field exposure
PPM-II	Review of CBP work, Planning of Development Phase(Net planning, LFA, Planning of women development activities)
PPM-III	Concept of Maintenance Fund, Management of Maintenance fund, Agriculture development issues,
PPM-IV	Registration of CBOs- VWC & SMS

Similarly, various capacity building organisations (CBOs) were also set up to take care of the several activities sparked off in the village.

Name Of The CBO	Established	Work Area
Bhajani Mandal 3	2002	Religious Functions
VDC	2002	Village Development
SMS	2002	Women Development
SHGs	2002	Women
Youth Mandal	2006	Youth Activities

In the initial stages of the program, some of the villagers did not observe the ban on free grazing. But the VDC took a firm stand and ensured the implementation of the ban. This led to the availability of plenty of fodder in the common land. A ban on tree-felling encouraged the villagers to protect the new trees in the region and the resulting effect was that it led to a good survival rate of plantation. Essentially, what strengthened the entire process was the willingness for shramdaan and the participation of women. This led to the dissolving of whatever differences of opinion and attitude were there at the beginning of the program.

The Changes

The biggest change, as was expected, was seen in the agricultural profile of the village. Paddy is the main crop in this region. Prior to watershed development, the production of rice was about 150-200 kgs per acre. But after the watershed, which included knowledge inputs in terms of better methods of farming and

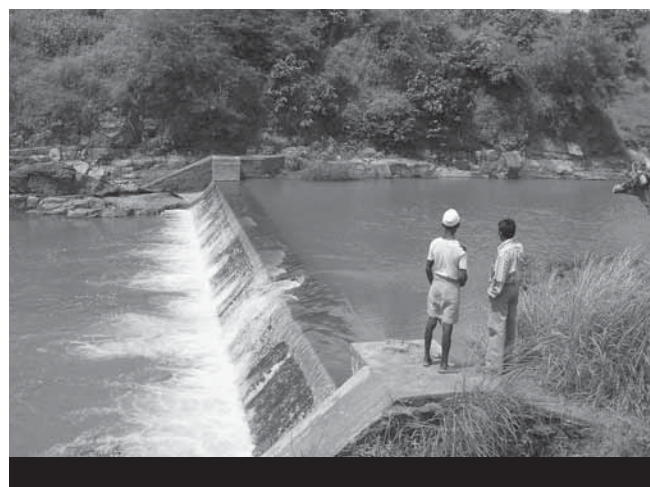


usage of good quality seeds for production, the rice yield has more than doubled. The price that the farmers could fetch before the watershed was Rs 1,000 per quintal but now this has gone up to Rs 3,000 per quintal. The production is been sold in the markets of Khandbara and Visarwadi.

During the watershed program horticulture plantation has been carried out over 7.5 ha of land in the village. The production has not yet started but one farmer has earned Rs 15,000 from the nine mango trees planted during this process.

Before the watershed development was initiated, employment opportunities were very few and 50 per cent of the families used to migrate to other places in search of livelihood options. However, with the watershed beginning to show positive results, the availability of water increased the productivity of the land developed. Increased rabbi crops led to an increase in farming activity and this led to higher employment opportunities. The ratio of migration reduced from 50 per cent to 20 per cent. People had enough work to attend to on their own fields or were hired to work in the fields of others. The land area under summer crops has been expanded and now there is work available throughout the year. Livestock rearing has provided an additional source of income due to an increased production of fodder in common land.

The biggest change has been in the governance aspect. The participation of women in meetings held by the Gram Sabha has



gone up which is quite a remarkable change from the almost zero participation before the watershed project. This is primarily because there has now set in a common bond among villagers with the focus area being the overall development of the village. Earlier, it took quite some time to convince the villagers to work towards a common goal collectively and many were under a political influence that made them resist unnecessarily. However, when the benefits of watershed became known and were realised individually, all the villagers agreed to become active participants in the program.

Agricultural Impact Per Acre

Crop	Pre-Watershed Production Per Acre (Quintals) Year Feb '02	Post-Watershed Production Per Acre (Quintals) Year Dec '06
Rice	2	6
Tur (Sowing 3.5 kg Seed)	0.5	2-2.5
Sorghum (Sowing 3.5 kg Seed)	4-5	10-12
Black Gram (Sowing 3.5 kg Seed)	1.5	2-3
Moong (Sowing 3.5 kg Seed)	0.5-1	2-3
Red Sorghum	1-2	5-6
Soyabean	0	6.4
Groundnut	4-5	10-11
Cotton	1-2	4- to 4.5
Corn (Sowing 3.5 kg Seed)	1-2	9 to 10
Chawli (Sowing 3.5 kg Seed)	1	1
Bajra (Sowing A Bag Of 5 kgs)	0	5

The following table indicates how much land was utilised for various vegetables:

Vegetable	Land Utilization
Brinjal	5.0 acres
Gawar	5.0 acres
Ladies Finger	3.0 acres
Tomato	3.0 acres
Chilly	0.5 acres



Samyukta Mahila Samiti (Sms)



To enable the monitoring and provide guidance to the individual self help groups of women, a Samyukta Mahila Samiti (SMS) was formed. Its president is Rekha Ajit Gavit and the vice president is Manila Bhimsingh Gavit. The SMS has opened an account with the Bank of Baroda at Khandbara and has a balance of Rs 13,000 as of date. The SMS has also received the first award in the 'Clean House And Clean Surrounding' category presented by WOTR. This was in the form of Rs 2,300 in cash.

To support entrepreneurship activities in the village, the Sampada Trust, a sister concern of WOTR, pitched in with financial support and distributed Rs 1,07,000 in 2005, Rs 1,64,000 in 2006 and Rs 2,35,000 in 2007. The loans were provided for agricultural development, education, and to meet expenses incurred on hospitalisation.



In Their Own Words

Rekha Ganesh

My land had been mortgaged with a private money-lender and I had not able to pay back the loan. SMS provided me the financial support to free my land. If I had not got this support, my fields would have been grabbed by the money-lender on the pretext

that it was being adjusted against the mounting interest on the loan.

Urmila Suklal Gavit

I had only one bull to cultivate my land and had been finding it very difficult since the past three years. The SMS supported me to buy a bull and now the pair is able to help me cultivate the fields better. I have already refunded the loan.



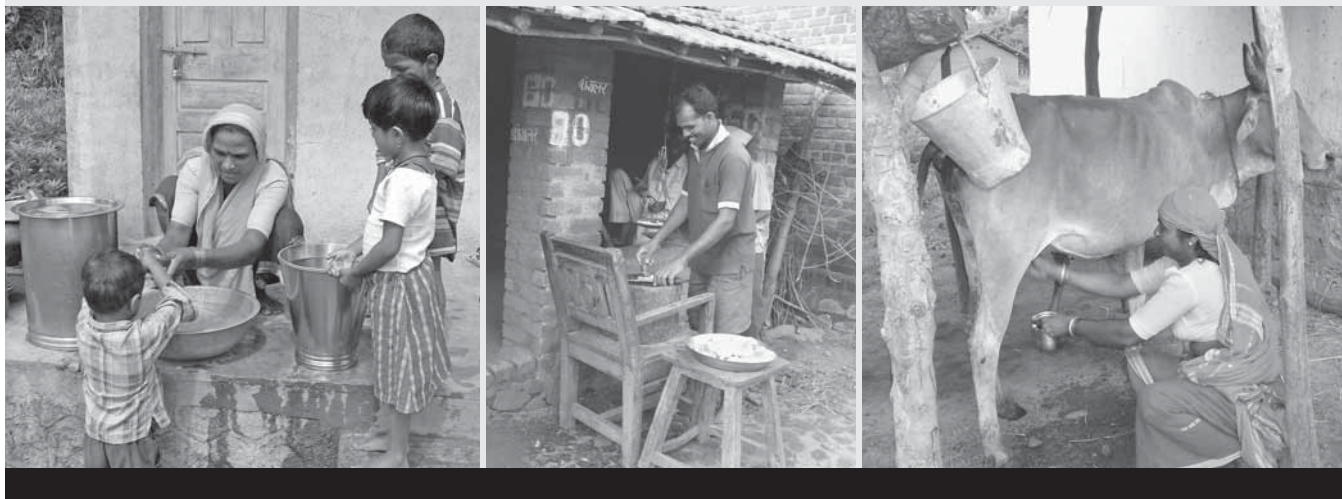
Pimpale Impact Table

No	Items	Pre-Watershed Year Feb '02	Post Watershed Year Dec '06
01	Irrigated Area: Perennial Vegetable Cultivable	4 Ha 0 Ha	50 Ha 12 Ha
02	Electric Motors Oil Engines	5 2	50 12
03	Dairy Milk (Apart From Home Consumption)	35 Ltrs/Day	100 Ltrs/Day
04	Agriculture Employment	4 Months Male: Rs 20 Female: Rs 10	12 Months Male: Rs 50 Female: Rs 30
05	Fodder Production	For 8 Months	For 12 Months
06	Cylinder Gas	None	25
07	Kitchen Gardens	No Families	30 % Families
08	Individual Latrines	None	150
09	Soak Pits	None	4
10	Number Of Wells	3	40
11	Television Sets	2	150
12	Cycles	70	110
13	Motorcycles	3	25
14	Tractors	None	2
15	Grocery Shops	3	7
16	Wells Functioning 8 Months	None	25
17	Wells Functioning 12 Months	None	10
16	Depth Of The Well	15-20 feet	30-35 feet
17	Availability Of Drinking Water	10 Months	12 Months
18	SHGs	None	11
19	SHG Members	None	162
20	SMS Members	None	18
21	Number of CBOs	1	5
22	Savings	2% Families	50% Families
23	Crop Yield	Rs 2,000 Per Acre	Rs 36,000 Per Acre
24	Vermi Compost	None	3 Units

Social Impacts

Earlier, there was no unity among the villagers but the watershed development program brought about an amazing transformation. Now they wanted to work together for the progress of the entire village and not just for themselves as individuals. The two primary negative influences in the village before the watershed were unchecked addiction to liquor and political instability that created various groups which would engage themselves in arguments. This would lead to ongoing conflicts.

The role of women was limited to taking care of household chores and none of them were expected or even invited to attend Gram Sabha meetings. Thus, their inputs were never taken into consideration and it was assumed that it is not the role of women to be a part of governance. All this changed as and how the watershed program progressed. The people now realised that factionalism of any kind does not pay dividends. Women were encouraged to take part in the decision-making process, and with an increasing load of work and responsibility, addiction to alcohol began to fade away.



Tackling Bird Flu

When, in February 2006, bird flu first hit the Nandurbar region, the immediate response of WOTR was to call for an emergency meeting of the entire field staff. It was decided then that providing the right information to the villagers would be taken up on a priority basis. The required information was then obtained from the Animal Husbandry Department of the state government, the internet and other reliable agencies.

The next day, a meeting was called in the village and all this information was imparted with an explanation of the scientific terminologies so that it would be easily understood by all. A veterinary doctor associated with WOTR answered queries and ensured that the right procedures would be followed. Copies of newspapers were distributed among the villagers so as to curtail the spread of any rumours.

As such, it was heartening to note that there was no spread of panic and the situation was not only kept under control but managed with maturity in village Pimpale. Over a period of a few days it became quite common to find villagers discussing things like 'H5N1 Avian Influenza' with the ease of medical practitioners. So much so that a visiting veterinarian was quite taken aback

to hear the villagers use such complicated terms with absolute ease.

Meanwhile, precautionary kit lime bags provided by the government were put to proper use. A committee was also formed at the village level to govern the situation. The committee collected information and conducted a survey in the village. Since it was a 100 per cent realistic survey done by the villagers themselves, the government requested for the same and used it for analysis.

What was most noteworthy though was the contribution of women. Traditionally, in villages, hens are usually taken care of by the women. They were also made aware of the disease and its consequences. When the WOTR team instructed them to destroy all the hens in the village, the women did so immediately without anyone trying to hide the hens for fear of incurring losses. All the birds were destroyed scientifically.

This attempt to tackle such an emergency also helped create a bonding between the villagers as they collectively fought to find a solution. The role of the village committee was highly appreciated for providing guidance at all times and ensuring that prevention of bird flu was kept prioritised at all times and no individual stakes or vested interests were brought into play.



Dinesh Pandit Gavit

I am a resident of Pimpale. I am 32-years-old, married, and have two children – a son currently studying in the class seven and a daughter in class five. We stay with our mother Chimabai who is now 55-years-old. I have been staying in this village for the last 12 years. I possess 1.5 acre of land which wasn't of much help because it was not fertile. I could barely manage a single rice crop which did not even last us for six months. I had to therefore migrate in search of livelihood. I am a skilled mason and I used to go to Gujarat for 2 to 3 months in a year. My wife used to accompany me and find work on construction sites.

Between the two of us, we would earn about Rs 170 per day. However, it was difficult to survive on such paltry income and we could hardly save about Rs 2,000-3,000 to bring back home. It was very tiring and we had lost all hope. We were destined to be poor and I could see no way out to improve our future. In 2002, the watershed development program was started in our village and that changed my life completely. I was fortunate to get work in the village itself. Even my wife was employed for the watershed

project. We began to earn up to Rs 350 per day and didn't have to go out of the village any more.

When a self help group was started by WOTR, my wife became a member and learned the habit of saving some money from her earnings. Gradually, as the savings built up, we could afford to construct a permanent house that cost us Rs 65,000. I also spent Rs 60,000 for installing an irrigation pipeline in my field with a heavy motor pump. All this became possible because of the SHG. My investment in the farm increased the productivity of the crops. WOTR also introduced us to several new techniques of farming and we started using the best quality of seeds. This increased my revenue five times over.

The rice yield from the farm increased from 150 kgs to 900 kgs and I was now able to produce three crops a year. I am now able to set aside a good sum of money every year and we want to use this to educate our children. I want my daughter to be qualified and independent and I want my son to become a doctor. Sometimes I think of how hard it once was to even get two square meals a day for my family. There was no support then. No one would lend me any money, not even ten rupees. But the watershed changed everything. We now have a future to look forward to.





Text and Photos: **Joseph Shinde**

WOTR is a support/resource organization having partnership with 146 NGOs across the country in the field of watershed development and related areas. So far, WOTR has reached out to over 650,000 people through watershed development covering total area of 476,423 ha. The experiences mentioned in Watershed Voices are those of WOTR and Its partner implementing watershed development programs. This publication is financially supported by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ).

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