

Touching People's Lives



Shroffs Foundation Trust

Every step
I take in light is
mine forever.
Purity, Patience
and Perseverance
are the three
essentials to
success
and above all love.

Swami Vivekanand



Forward

Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT)'s success in rural and tribal development programmes has been possible because of initiatives that came from the people. Above all else SFT strove to create a bond of faith, which in turn developed beneficiaries' trust in our guidance and enhanced our ability to channelise their potential to bring development to their region.

The formation of community based organisations at the village level has enabled people to understand the issues of development. They have learnt how to resolve conflict and act in the larger interest for long-term goals. They are learning to work together as they have experienced the benefits of cooperative action.

A new generation of leadership is emerging with a clear vision of development without any bias. SFT's *Samaj Shilpi* (Social Architect) Programme is further strengthening this young leadership by exposing them systematically to varied experiences.

A cadre of young skilled workers are being groomed at the Vivekanand Institute of Vocational and Entrepreneurial Competence (VIVEC). They will fill the gap of skilled manpower required in the fast developing industrial corridor. They are equipped with knowledge of English, computer literacy and skills that are in demand in the modern world. Employment opportunities for tribal youth were very limited; this skill development programme is opening new vistas for them, providing ensured jobs with a growth potential.

The most important outcome of SFT's work is that the community has started dreaming...they know that the sky is the limit...all they need to do is bury all differences and work together to transform their world...urban amenities and a good life are now within their reach.

We are happy to present a few selected case studies of men and women whose lives have transformed in the last decade and a half through a catalytic process initiated by Shroffs Foundation Trust in their village. The case studies also give glimpses of the programmes that helped them to grow, and connect to the main stream of the society.

The case studies are a fascinating journey from deprivation to dignity...learning...and empowerment...; from scarcity to plenty and prosperity. They demonstrate how people power can be a dynamic energy that fuels the development process as a sustainable enterprise. Our title page strives to illustrate how natural resource management, mentoring, capacity building and the availability of local livelihood opportunities have brought about several small miracles in the lives of the people.

Shruti Shroff
Managing Trustee
Shroffs Foundation Trust

Vadodara
18.05.2012



Shroffs Foundation Trust

Shroffs Foundation Trust, (SFT) was established in 1980 to improve the lives of impoverished communities living in the vicinity of the Shroff Family Industry- Transpek Industries Limited, through social welfare projects. The initial efforts were given a directed thrust from 1986, when Mrs. Shruti Shroff was given responsibility to lead the organisation as Managing Trustee. She embarked on a journey that drew on the strength of: *seva* - the spirit of selfless service, *sadbhav* - the belief in social justice, a conviction that everyone has a right to equal opportunity and *vikas* - sustainable prosperity and progress for the individual and the community through revitalisation of the local resources, human, natural and cultural.

Mrs. Shruti Shroff converted her burning desire to make a positive social impact into a social enterprise, the Shroffs Foundation Trust. Mrs. Shroff combines a devotee's dedication with a social worker's heart and a business woman's mind. Very early she realised the importance of establishing strong and creative backward and forward linkages to ensure that programmes forged far-reaching synergies. "When I think of agriculture development, I think of the total crop cycle from sowing to harvesting. Our agriculture programmes are now looking beyond increased production and higher income for farmers to drudgery reduction and value addition through product development and utilisation of farm waste."

Mrs. Shroff has been deeply influenced by Swami Vivekananda's ennobling principles of practical Vedanta for the upliftment of the down-trodden and potential divinity of the soul. Mahatma Gandhi's comprehensive idea of rural reconstruction that emphasised the economic, political, social, educational, ecological and spiritual dimensions has inspired her to develop a holistic approach to rural development. SFT has successfully blended Gandhi, Ramkrishna Parmhauns and Vivekananda's philosophy with modern science and effective corporate management and governance systems. The operative strategy of the Trust is *sahaviyam karvah vahey* a Sanskrit phrase broadly translated as 'the

joy of togetherness, together we will achieve the best, together we will grow... together we will prosper'.

Her approach in the formative years of the Trust was hands-on. She engaged with the community intensively; even touring the field as a pillion rider on motor bikes to reach unreachable villages (in tribal Chhotaudepur) in the burning summer months with little protection but a small cap to protect her head.

Under her active stewardship, the Trust's sphere of activities grew from a modest medical centre established at Kalali, Vadodara, to an NGO that endeavours to bring about a total socio-economic transformation by empowering rural and tribal communities. SFT places utmost emphasis on active community participation as the key to building an empowered community. SFT has actively groomed local *samaj shilpis* (local leaders/activists) to play meaningful roles to change the destiny of their communities. SFT strives to ensure that the capabilities of the society are built to a level where the key driver of development and growth is the society itself, and institutions, government and funding agencies only remain as a support system.

Mrs. Shruti Shroff is fondly called Shrutibhabhi by the beneficiaries and the employees of the Trust. This simple endearment speaks of her total engagement with the community. A spirit of belonging permeates the work culture of the Trust and is palpable when one visits SFTs Kalali office, meets the SFT team or chats with the beneficiaries.

The Shroffs Foundation Trust has outreach activities that focus on integrated development through 11 major sectors as listed below:

- Natural Resource Management
- Agriculture Diversification
- Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development
- Development of Appropriate Technologies
- Drudgery Reduction
- Education and Literacy
- Livelihood
- Health and Medical Services
- Exploring Innovative Approaches for Rural Development
- Research, Documentation and Publication
- Disaster Response

SFTs programmes have touched the lives of more than 3,00,000 people living in 412 villages. The impact of SFT's programmes has been most significant on natural resource management and the enhancement of native livelihood opportunities. Availability of water and soil conservation through the watershed programme has been the *jadui chirag*, the hen that continues to lay the golden eggs. Water has enabled SFT to create backward and forward linkages to make land based production systems

such as agriculture, horticulture and dairy productive. Water tables have risen by 5'-15' in Chhotaudepur

Agriculture development in Kalali, Padra and Chhotaudepur and Dairy development in Banni have been heartening, the income of the programme participants has increased significantly. A rigorous outreach programme and transfer of best practices is done through the establishment of regional centres. Migration has been checked significantly. In 40 villages of the Banni cluster migration has stopped totally as water and fodder security has been addressed. In the Rangpur cluster of Chhotaudepur where SFT has been working since 1995, survival migration of small and marginal farmers and the landless has come down to about 5-10% from 70-80%.

Various funding agencies, government and independent institutions have regularly audited SFT's projects. An accredited member of Credibility Alliance, SFT has built a strong reputation for transparency and ethical practices and has won the hearts and minds of the beneficiaries, funding agencies and Government and society at large.



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One Seed Several Harvests

"If we can do the work for him, (the contractor), why can't we do it for ourselves?"



Tersing Lalsing Rathwa

Village: Khadakwada

Block: Chhotaudepur

One of the strongest components of the Watershed Programme was the decision to employ the programme participants to construct the watershed structures. In other words, the participants were paid a wage to work in their own fields. This participatory implementation strategy emerged through a discussion at a Gramsabha. It was the responsibility of the watershed *samiti* and the village population to keep a check on the contractors supplying the boulders for the project. The rates to be paid to the contractor and the quantities that had to be supplied in each truckload were common knowledge as these had been discussed in the *gram sabhas*. This transparency paved the way for active community participation and strong project ownership. When an old farmer stopped Mrs. Shroff on her visit to the site and informed her that the contractor was not supplying the contracted quantity, the *samitis* stepped up their vigilance. The contractors reacted by supplying the boulders in the middle of the night, making vigilance difficult. However, as they were suspect, a thorough stock was taken of the

quantity delivered. The delivery was found to be in short supply.

Instead of taking up the matter directly with the contractors, SFT took the matter to the people by calling a Gramsabha. The people reflected on the situation with a practical observation that put the project on a roll. "If we can do the work for him, (the contractor), why can't we do it for ourselves?" one village samiti member asked the sabha. That got everyone thinking. Was the contractor really needed?

The contractor's services were withdrawn. SFT engaged a project engineer; the local people provided the labour. 3, 88, 470 person days of employment was generated during the execution of the project. Labour charges to the tune of Rs. 117.00 lakh were paid to the local population. Funds to the tune of Rs. 29.50 lakh were collected from the community as contribution for maintenance of the Watershed structures; this fund was deposited in a bank. Over the years an interest of Rs. 9.72 lakh has been earned from the Watershed maintenance funds.

It is evident from Village Khadakwada's Tersing Lalsing Rathwa's story, as to how local people benefitted from the Watershed programme of SFT. When SFT started working in and around village Khadakwada, Tersing used to go to South Gujarat to find labour work. SFT's field team met with Tersing and asked him, if he was available to work in his own village. He happily took up the offer and started working for watershed programme. He would get seven rupees for making one meter of 'bandhpala' at the prevailing rate at that time. It was for the first time that he was getting paid for the work done, and not a fixed daily wage. He realised that the harder he worked the more he would earn. He quickly built 11,000 meters of *bandh pala* and earned RS. 77000. Now nothing could stop him, he participated wholeheartedly in the development process and strove to learn all the nuances of development work.

Tersing actively participated in the animal husbandry programme of the Foundation and trained himself as an artificial inseminator. A group well was constructed in his village under his leadership, which got the much needed water for agriculture. He and the other farmers started taking two to three crops, grew vegetables and fruits along with pulses and other crops.

Tersing was happy; he had now found prosperity in his own village. He earned enough to feed his family well, pay his children's fees. His six children started going to school and even went on for higher education. His life style changed fast. Now there was oil to cook vegetables. There was no need to drink tamarind water with some grass growing in their backyard as the day's meal.

The Watershed programme paved the way for development, it was the one seed that enabled the tribal community to reap many harvests and experience plenty where there had been want. Once the basic efforts to ensure adequate water and check soil erosion were in place, more programmes were executed in partnership with the community. It was a win-win situation for both the partners.

The Wake-up Call

"Get up, get up, we have to milk the cows... the dairy van will soon be here..."



Geeta Umansing Rathwa

Village: Khadakwada

Block: Chhotaudepur



Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT) always puts in intense efforts while starting a new programme. When starting the first Dairy Cooperative in Khadakwada of Chhotaudepur(CU) Block, the SFT team was on its toes to ensure a successful launch of the programme. No stone was left unturned.

Though the tribal community traditionally maintained cows, animal husbandry was never a profitable enterprise for them. They milked their animals for the little milk they needed and left the rest for the calves. Their animals were sickly and unhealthy and had very low milk yields. SFT introduced animal husbandry as a supplementary source of income for women. They provided technical guidance and linked them with financial institutions to buy livestock, organised veterinary services to ensure cattle health and also promoted cultivation of green fodder. Traditional *gova/s*, cowherds were brought in to teach them how to sit in squat position and milk the animals for a longer span.

SFT was successful in catalysing the formation of 9 dairy cooperatives. It had convinced the Baroda Dairy to include the 9 cooperatives in their milk circuit on the Chhotaudepur-Alirajpur road.

... It was first day for the dairy van to come and collect milk from the cooperatives. The villagers were reminded that they would now need to get up at the crack of dawn, milk their animals and come to the milk centre with their milk before 5.30 am. The dairy pickup van would be gone by six! Just to ensure a smooth run, the SFT team did a last round of counseling the previous night. They contacted co-operative members to remind them of the milk schedule. "Get up when the cock crows... when you get up...wake up the others..."

The SFT team reached the villages by 4.30am to congratulate the members with kuk-kum (bindi on the forehead) chandlas and mithai, which was the traditional Indian way of starting a new programme. Shrutiben, the Managing Trustee of SFT had also reached Rangpur the night before and was waiting to receive the cooperative members at the centre. However, when the SFT team reached the villages, they were greeted by an eerie silence. Everyone in the village was fast asleep! Even the dogs and cows were snoring!! The team went from house to house, waking every one up. "Get up, get up, we have to milk the cows... the dairy van will soon be here..."

Bleary-eyed the members got up and milked the animals. With much chaos and hullabaloo; pots brimming with milk were brought to the centre by the members. The total collection on that historic first day was 26 litres.

Success of the co-operative depends on the people who manage it; transparent management is the first requirement. SFT saw the spark in Geeta Rathwa, an energetic young girl of 18; she was offered leadership in the co-operative with the consensus of the co-op members. Geeta had studied up to 10th class. She took care of the sundry expenses for school from her earnings in the SFT embroidery initiative. She was happy to join as Secretary of the co-operative. Her salaried work added to her confidence, she was an earning member of her family now, which gave her a status in the family and the community.

She would go to the District Co-operative meetings, representing Khadakwada Dairy as an active participant. She boldly reported any irregularity or problems in the running of the dairy with the management.

Today under Geeta's leadership, the Dairy has progressed well. Almost Rs 300,000 comes to the village every month as payment for the milk, providing food security to all the members. Dairy accounts are fully computerised and Geeta has learnt to operate the computer for the dairy co-operative. The collection of dairy co-operatives that started with a mere 25 litres of milk has reached 2000 litres a day. Many more women like Geeta have been empowered through dairy and other programmes initiated by SFT.

The Winning Strategy of the Tortoise

"The mango trees are like my sons. I am not worried about my future. These trees will continue to give me returns year after year..."



Gemal Natubhai Rathwa

Village: Motarampura
Block: Chhotaudepur

In 2008, SFT was invited by Government of Gujarat to implement the Wadi program under the aegis of the Van Bandhu Kalyan Yojna. This programme was designed to increase the income of local farmers through horticulture development, specifically developing mango orchards. 222 farmers were provided saplings of amba (mango) and given the necessary training and inputs in systematic and scientific cultivation. One important guideline was that farmers intercrop with vegetables and small crops like pulses (between the mango trees).

SFT, in keeping with its culture of consultative programme planning had ensured the commitment of the community to adhere to the programme guidelines. 'We will sow today to reap tomorrow' was the programme mantra. However, though the farmers agreed to intercrop with vegetables or small crops, they planted *makai* (corn) and *dangar* (rice) with the mango saplings. The result, the mango saplings perished as they were stranded by the *makai* and *dangar* plants.

“We cannot work together unless we speak the same language of trust,” Shruti Shroff told the farmers. “If you have any misgivings you must be bold and candid enough to voice them at the forums. We can jointly thrash out solutions,” she firmly explained.

Needless to say resolving this conflict with a firm hand took time and a small negotiation. A cost-sharing formula for the replacement of the lost saplings was worked out with the farmers. That year targets were not met and the sapling replacement budget was partially unspent. The Government, the funding agency, was upset with SFT’s slow progress, which compared very poorly with other NGO’s participating in the programme. That was in the first year.

Today, four years into this five-year programme, the participating farmers are beginning to see the fruits of their labour. Survival rates and health of the young mango trees is way ahead in the SFT programme area as compared to other NGOs’ programme pockets. Their incomes have already doubled. More importantly, the farmers have learnt very important development lessons; they have learnt to take ownership for their prosperity. They have also learnt the wisdom of patience- that you have to trade short term gains if your eyes are set on the long-term benefits.

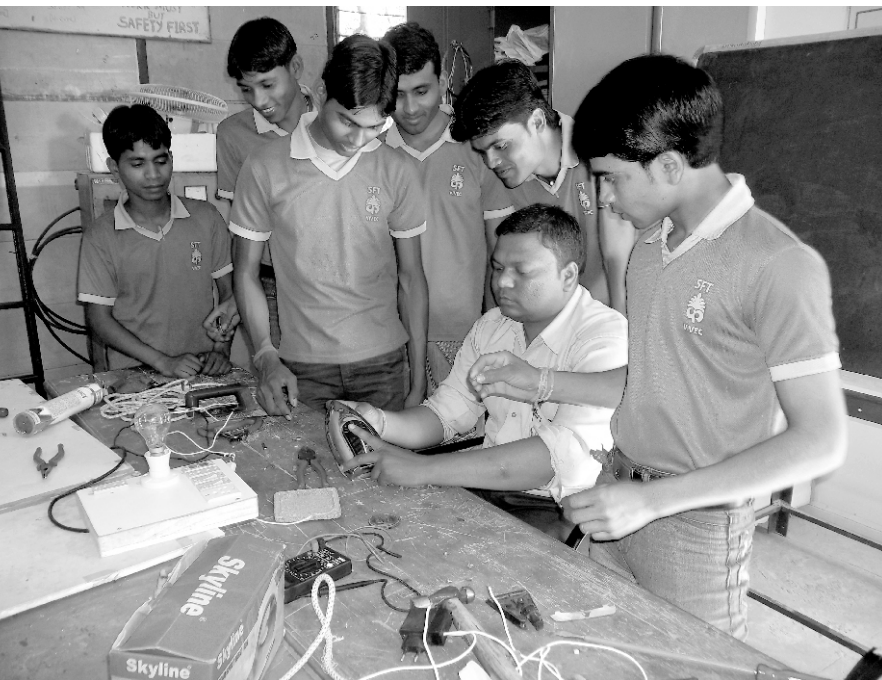
Mrs. Shruti Shroff also used this opportunity to illustrate to her team the importance of sticking to principles and ethics in the greater interest of people’s development.

In the village Motarampura of Chhotadepur block, Gemal Rathwa has planted 100 mango trees under this programme which has started giving him a handsome income of Rs.1000 per tree. At the end of five years, he knows that his mango trees will be giving him much higher returns. He says, “The mango trees are like my sons. Now I am not worried about my future. These trees will continue to give me returns year after year, even if my sons do not look after me.”



Education that Counts: Vocational Training for Tribal Youth

"Six months of vocational training has given me what a three year degree could not. We do not have the luxury of education for the sake of education."



Kisan Haraliyabhai Rathwa

Village : Odhi,
Block: Chhotaudepur

Kisan, an energetic tribal young man lived with his family in an interior village Odhi of Chhotaudepur block in Vadodara district. Educational opportunities were limited in their village and around. Kisan's father, like all fathers wanted the best for his children. Following the advice of a local doctor, he sent Kisan and his sister to do their bachelor's degree in physical education at Nagpur in the state of Maharashtra.

It took brother and sister three years to complete their studies, at the end of which they were awarded a bachelor's degree in physical education. The cost of study in Nagpur, covering lodging, boarding and fees amounted to a lakh of rupees per year for each of them.

However, the degree did not materialize into a promise. When they returned home after completing their studies they found out that the degree could not qualify them for a job. They needed an additional B.Ed. degree to be able to get job in a school as teacher in Physical education.

Meanwhile they heard about the vocational training courses offered by Shroffs Foundation Trust in their Vivekanand Institute of Vocational and Entrepreneur Competence programme (VIVEC). VIVEC offers special courses for tribal boys and girls in areas such as Electrical and House wiring, Industrial Sewing Machine Operator, Welding technician, Bedside Nursing, Desk Top Publishing etc. When the father heard about this he suggested that both of them go to the VIVEC centre at Kalali in Vadodara block for job-oriented education.

Kisan enrolled in a course in electrical and House wiring. After five months he was placed in a company for practical experience. During his course he did not have to pay any fees. His meals and dormitory accommodation were provided without any cost.

His sister Sukiben and cousin Pravinaben enrolled for the bedside nursing course. They were provided the same facilities as Kisan.

After completion of training Kisan was placed with Gujarat Automatic Gears on a monthly wage of Rs.5000, which was increased to Rs. 7,000 after a period of three months. From 1st May 2012 he has joined Apollo Tyres at a monthly salary of Rs 15,000 per month. His sister and cousin are working with Pramukh Swami Hospital in Atladara. In a short focused training of just six months, both brother and sister have become earning members of their family.

The VIVEC programme was launched in January 2011, and in a span of 16 months 12 batches of students from different trades have passed out from VIVEC. 241 students have successfully cleared their MES examination and have been awarded the NCVT certificate. All VIVEC 'graduates' are gainfully employed in leading organisations of Vadodara District and earning between Rs.5000 to 15000 per month. In other words the income of 241 tribal families has increased by at least by Rs.60,000 annually.



Najli Rathwa, The Unstoppable Urge to Learn

"I have been very lucky to receive a very good training. Even if my parents do not allow me, I am going to work in a Baroda Call Centre and earn for myself."



Najli Gamajeebhai Rathawa

Village: Khadkhad

Block: Chhotaudepur

Right from childhood Najli took a keen interest in her studies. She comes from a family of seven brothers and sisters, where only she and her younger brother are literate. The rest have never stepped into a school. Two brothers and two sisters are married. Their partners and their parents are also unlettered. The younger brother studied up to 10th class, but failed his Board exam and lost interest and gave up further studies.

Najli went to school in her own village up to 2nd standard. After that she went to Rangpur and studied at Rangpur from 3rd to 10th class. Rangpur is only three kms from her village. She stayed in a hostel in Rangpur. She passed her 10th standard board exams with 40% marks. When we asked her about the low percentage of her marks she said, "Every now and then I was taken back home to help in farming and other work at home." Her family did not understand the value of education. She always had to fight to continue her study.

After 10th class she went to Jambughoda Uttar Buniyadi Vidhyalaya in Narukot for her 11th and 12th class. She passed her Higher Secondary Board with 62% marks. She says that “there was no disturbance in my studies from my family, it was a blessing that the school did not allow us to go home.”

When she came home she still wanted to go for further studies but her parents refused to support her study any more. She tried to get admission in one of the courses at Vadodara, but she could not afford to pay the fees. Najli was disappointed. She desperately wanted to learn something that would enable her to do a job and earn her own living. She almost spent one whole year at home wondering how she could study further.

However, opportunity came her way when she met one of her classmates who studied with her at Narukot. He told her about Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) program run by Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT) in Chhotaudepur. She immediately went to Chhotaudepur on her own. She met Mr. Ali who is a Teacher at the BPO. She filled the form for admission and was admitted; finally she felt her dream would come true.

She joined the BPO course in January 2012. She has almost completed the six months course. Once she does she will be placed through the institute in one of the companies for training.

Her Teacher Alibhai says, “Najli is an enthusiastic student. She is sincere and devoted in her studies. Her attendance is very regular and she is one of the well-behaved good students. She always participates in all extracurricular activities under taken at the centre. She participates in discussions and debates and is not shy of speaking up.”

When asked what will she do after her studies, she says, “I have been very lucky to receive a very good training. Even if my parents do not allow me, I am going to work in a Baroda Call Centre and earn for myself.”

She has managed her one-time fees of Rs. 1000 for six months course and Rs. 500 per month for her bus pass.

Najli is 20 years today and looks forward to standing on her own feet and life of independence. Marriage can wait...

Seizing Opportunities that Make Life Easier

"Out of my savings I bought a water pump. It takes a farmer a whole day to water his farm. My pump has a one inch pipe that can water a small farm in two hours."



Dhanakbhai Teliyabhai Rathwa

Village: Kachhel (Kanavat)

Block: ChhotaUdepur

Most of the villages in Chhotaudepur block of Vadodara district are situated in the middle of the forest area. A large portion of the land in the area is uneven and hilly. In collaboration with the Government of Gujarat, Central Government and the Tribal Development Department, Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT) has implemented many programmes for soil and water conservation. The impact of these programmes has grown manifold as it has been followed up with agriculture and land based produce development programmes such as horticulture, forestry and dairy.

In the year 2010 in collaboration with Tribal Subplan- Government of Gujarat, an Agro Tool Bank Project was initiated in the region. As part of this project 10 young men of the area, who were interested in becoming entrepreneurs were identified. This was part of an innovative experiment carried out by SFT to provide support to small and marginal farmers for farm mechanization. Most of the farmers in the area used bullocks for cultivation. There are a few large

tractors in the area, but small farmers had to run after them to get their services, often their efforts were in vain. That is why farmers preferred to keep their own bullocks for farming.

Dhankabhai of village Kachhel (Kanavat) in Chhotaudepur received a small tractor with agricultural attachments under the Agri-tool bank project. Dhankabhai is 35 years old and is educated upto 10th standard. He has been associated with SFT since the last four years as a volunteer for the agricultural development programmes. He has worked with SFT to encourage members of his community to take advantage of SFT's programmes. His honorarium amounts to about twenty five thousand rupees per annum, depending on his work.

Initially Dhanakbhai's family members and other members from his community made fun of him as they thought that he was foolish to pay Rs. 20,000 in advance for a small tractor. "A small tractor will be useless," they opined. But Dhanakbhai was confident; he had full faith in the decision made by SFT to opt for small tractors instead of large ones. By demonstration Dhanakbhai proved that his small tractor was the need of the hour for small and marginal farmers. Dhanakbhai's monthly installment is of Rs. 3,300. He has to payback a total sum Rs. 1, 50,000. This sum also includes several attachments such as the automatic cultivator, plough, leveler, seed cum fertilizer drill, puddler autovalour, thresher etc. If he had purchased all this from the market it would have probably cost him Rs. 5,00,000.

He says "People in the surrounding villages know me very well because of my work with SFT. Ten of us have received these tractors with attachments. SFT has helped us to fix the rate for providing services to the people. Compared to a big tractor, it is cheaper to hire my small tractor. I am continuously working on different farms from the day I received the tractor. Most of my clients are small and marginal farmers. It is expensive to look after two bullocks. A small affordable tractor is a great boon for the area."

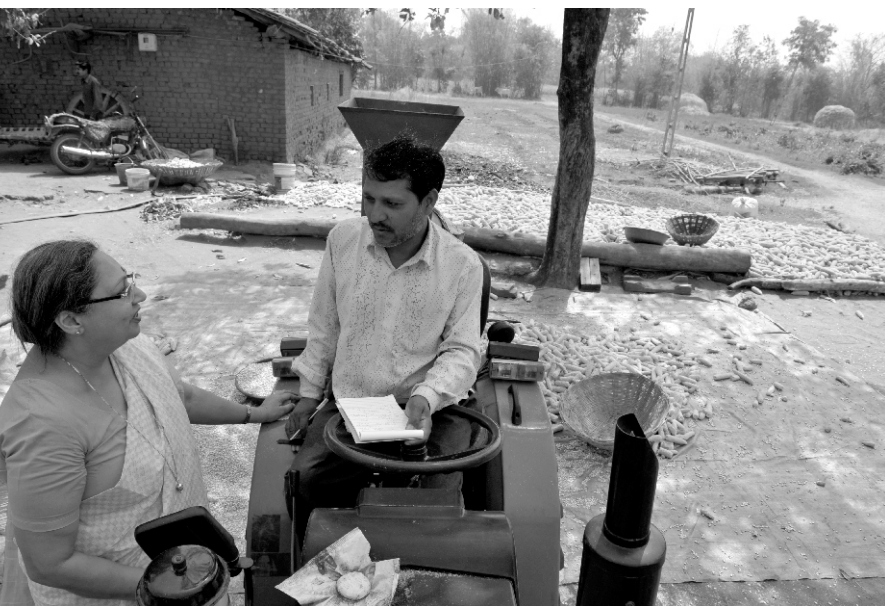
"SFT organises regular meetings with agro tool bank beneficiaries," Dhanakbhai continues. "We are required to keep a list of BPL and APL farmers whom we have serviced. There is a fixed amount which we are allowed to charge for the services that we provide. After covering all these expenses I have earned Rs. 40,000 as profit at the end of the year."

After success with the small tractor Dhanakbhai decided to go a step further as entrepreneur. He elaborates on the business opportunity he saw. "Out of my savings I bought a water pump, which I realised was badly needed in this area. It takes a farmer a whole day to water his farm. My pump has a one inch pipe that can water a small farm in two hours. In three months I have watered two hundred acres of land with this pump. This has taken care of the purchase cost of my water pump. This is win-win situation for me and my customer."

"I will pay off my tractor's loan at the earliest so that I may purchase new agriculture equipment. I will earn some more money and the farmers of this remote region will have an easier life."

My Village Matters, Fatesinh Rathwa

"I have learnt a lot from SFT. My self esteem and entrepreneurship attitude has developed because of Shrutibhabhi."



Fatehsinh Singlabhai Rathwa

Village : Judavant

Block : Chhotaudepur

Chance played a big role in Fatesinh's life. He had accompanied his father to enroll his younger brother in an Ashramshala, a residential school for tribal children. However the school authorities found his younger brother too young for residential school. Fatehsinh's father had a practical solution for this. All it needed was a swapping of clothes. The father asked Fatesinh to wear his brother's short pants and give his *langot* (loin cloth) to his brother. Thus Fatesinh was enrolled in school. He not only completed school, but went ahead and obtained a bachelor's degree in rural studies, rare in the place he grew up in.

Even as a bachelor degree holder his life was still a struggle. He could not find gainful work; he did whatever came by with or without rewards. The income from his small plot of land on which he grew indigenous crops such as *samel* and *kodri* (a poor man's rice) was meager. In the course of time he came in touch with the SFT team when they came with development programmes to his village Judavant in Chhotaudepur block. For Fatesinh, SFT was God

sent. He took a deep interest in whatever programmes they launched, utilising every opportunity to build his own capacities. He went to Anand, Ahmedabad and Vadodara for various training programmes related to watershed development, agriculture, animal husbandry and health and sanitation organized by SFT.

Fatehsinh actively participated in all programmes initiated in his village. He became the watershed secretary of his village. As secretary he successfully did the most difficult task of coaxing people to pay their contribution for the watershed programme. This was more difficult in those early days as SFT's efforts were yet to show results. As secretary he was responsible for reporting and recording all the expenses and keeping a tab on how the funds were spent in his village. He assisted SFT to maximise the use of funds that were allotted for his village through various government and non-government programmes. At times his Rathwi dialect created communication problems, but over a period of time he overcame this handicap. As he interacted with more people, his self confidence grew. He became a minute observer of human behavior and learnt to overcome his weaknesses and develop his strength.

Opportunities continued to bless Fatesinh's life. His initiative and eagerness had been noticed by SFT, he was thus selected as an entrepreneur under the Agri-tool bank programme of SFT. He is a popular entrepreneur in his area providing ploughing and other agriculture related services to small and marginal farmers, particularly through the services of his small tractor. In a year's time after all expenses were paid he earned Rs. 60,000 from this enterprise.

Fatesing says "In my life my father has certainly contributed to my development, but I have learnt a lot from SFT. My self-esteem and entrepreneurship attitude has developed because of Shrutibhabhi. My children are studying in English medium school and we all live a happy life. "

The whole village counts on him; they turn to him whenever they need help. He will even close his shop to give someone a ride on his motorbike.

The Agri Tool Bank Programme was initiated by SFT with the support of the Tribal Development Department with a view to introduce Agri mechanization in remote tribal areas of ChhotaUdepur. One of the objectives of the programme is to reduce drudgery related to agriculture by providing affordable alternatives in their village. Ten entrepreneurs were chosen and were given small tractors suitable for small lands. Attachments like maize and paddy sheller and other attachments to reduce drudgery of men and women working on their farms have also been provided to entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs were linked with banks and loans were arranged. This is a model of sustainable livelihood which may be replicated in other areas.

The Power of Change: Samaj Shilpi, Mohan Raysing Rathwa

"I feel blessed to be a Samaj Shilpi. It has given my life a direction... a meaning that makes my work a mission."



More than 15 years of work in Chhotaudepur block of Vadodara district by Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT) has inspired many young men and women to join in their village development work.

Any long term development initiative cannot succeed without strong local partnership. The visionary leaders of SFT have devised a unique programme to motivate and train a cadre of village development activists. The trained cadre of local development activist are called *Samaj Shilpis*, Social Architects.

Mohan Raising Rathwa is one such *Samaj Shilpi*, he talked about how his life changed after he became a *Samaj Shipi*. His story in his own words shows how capacity building of local individuals leads to their growth and prosperity and contributes significantly to the development of their community.

"My village Gunata is about 30 km away from the block seat of Chhotaudepur. 5 years

Mohan Raising Rathwa

Village : Gunata

Block: Chhotaudepur

back when I joined SFT as a *Samaj Shilpi*, my family income was Rs. 10,000/- per annum from agriculture. I was supporting my family of seven. We had a total of 5 acres of family land that barely supported the families of us three brothers. Shortage of water was a major problem. We brothers had to migrate to bigger cities for labour work.”

“When I joined SFT as a *Samaj Shilpi* I participated in a series of training sessions where I was imparted training in leadership and other aspects of personal development and village development. I learnt how I could contribute to nation building by serving my village and surrounding villages. I learnt how to get our entitlements, how to do financial transactions, open an account in a bank and gained deeper understanding of agriculture and other development programmes.”

“We grew cotton in my family land; because of the water shortage we were able to take only one crop in a year. During course of my work with SFT, I learnt about the drip irrigation scheme and gathered knowhow about growing chilies. I spoke to my brothers about changing the crop pattern we followed. With the help of subsidy provided by the government we could avail of drip irrigation and other inputs at concessional rates. I also joined the marketing channel initiated by SFT which brought better returns.”

“With efficient use of water through drip irrigation, we now take two crops a year. Our expense on crop protection has also reduced. Our family income has increased from Rs 30, 000 an annum to Rs 80,000 per annum. Further, I am able to give time for my children’s education because the new method saves time.”

Mohan Raisingh’s interest in the development of the people is keen and through literacy classes for women of his village he is educating them about health and sanitation, banking, savings, financial management and other relevant issues.

“I feel blessed to be a *Samaj Shilpi*. It has given my life a direction... a meaning that makes my work a mission. I am proud to help others fulfill their dreams through my work.”

SFT has developed a cadre of 50 grassroot development activists, who are assuming leadership for development of their own village and surrounding areas. The *Samaj Shilpi* programme was initiated by the SFT 5 years ago. However greater emphasis on the training of *Samaj Shilpis* has led to the development of systematic and rigorous training inputs that have also been documented in a training manual.

Kundan Rathwa, Learning to Speak the Unspoken

"When we talked about HIV/AIDS some women would accuse us of 'talking dirty'. I would feel very bad, but I knew my work was very noble so I continued my work without any hesitation."



Kundan Ramsing Rathwa

Village: Moti Sadhli
Block: Chhotaudepur(CU)

Kundan Rathwa came from a typical tribal family living in an interior village. Life in the village provided no opportunities to earn through agriculture because of water shortage, lack of knowhow about modern agriculture, and problems of soil erosion; dairy animals barely provided enough milk for the family, no specific craft had developed in the area, which could provide livelihood to artisans.

Kundan's story in her words: "In 1995 Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT) came to our area and brought with them many opportunities. It took a little time for people to trust the organisation, but Shrutibhabhi's personal touch and her frequent visits to our area inspired many of us. SFT with the support of the community were able to check soil erosion, increase availability of water and introduce modern methods of agriculture. I was a direct beneficiary of this positive transformation. With some money coming into the family, I was able to study up to 12th standard. "

"One day two of the senior functionaries

of SFT came to my place. They were looking for educated young men and women for their HIV/AIDS Link Worker Programme. I was very happy to be selected for the job. The very next day I attended a training programme at their centre. Here for the first time I heard about what HIV/AIDS was and how it could be checked. I felt so shy when the doctor talked about HIV, I ran back home.”

“I was afraid I would not be able to do this job. When I was not even able to listen what was being explained by the doctor, how was I going to talk to other young women about the issue. However, after 2-3 days I thought that this was very important information, which should be shared with all young people. Nobody knows about this dreaded disease, if our people were educated about the dangers they would make efforts to take precautions and also control their behavior. I gathered the courage and was determined to overcome my inhibitions.”

“We were given a five weeks intensive training, where we were taught about the human body, its functioning, and about different organs. Gradually our initial shyness changed into ‘normal talk’ related to the issue of HIV/AIDS. We started talking in our language that is our Rathwi dialect, explaining the dangers of HIV/AIDS and high risk behavior. Sometimes when we talked about HIV/AIDS some women would accuse us of ‘talking dirty’. They called us shameless. Couldn’t you find any better work they would ask? I would feel very bad, but I knew my work was very noble so I continued my work without any hesitation.”

“While working as a Link Worker I got more interested in human health and enrolled for six months course in nursing. After completing the course in one of the local hospitals I worked for three years earning Rs. 3000/- month as a nursing assistant. Meanwhile I got married and moved to Vadodara with my husband, who is working in a company. I soon started working in a hospital in village Dhokalia, earning Rs. 3500/- month. After the birth of my son I quit my job though the doctor offered to increase my salary. I did not want to work until my son was old enough to go to school.”

“I give full credit to SFT for my growth. Earlier I considered myself stupid because I did not know how to talk in front of a group. I did not wear my clothes properly. If the trainer asked me something I was almost always totally blank, my hands would go numb and wet with sweat and my body would shake with fear. However, our trainer was very encouraging. He sowed the seeds of confidence in us; we slowly started talking in the class. This confidence grew manifold when I started working in the field. If I had not worked for SFT, I would have been in some corner of a remote village. Today I am working as a doctor’s assistant, earning a reasonably good amount of money. I am able to give my son a decent education. I feel I am somebody. ”

The HIV/AIDS Prevention Programme of SFT recruited Link Workers from the community and trained them as Peer Educators. To make the programme acceptable, Youth Information Centres were started in the villages, where youth could play games and talk openly about issues related to HIV/AIDS. SFT has continued to create awareness and worked for prevention of HIV/AIDS for over a decade.

Malshi Marwada Discovers His True Worth

*"I am no longer afraid to look people in the eye and speak.
Fakir Mohmed's faith in me and SFTs' patient encouragement
and grooming has helped me to discover my own true worth."*



Malshi Sajan Marwada

Village : Hodko
Block: Banni

Indian Society is divided by caste, religion and class structures. In Banni area of Kutch 90 per cent of the population is Muslim. 10 per cent of the population are Harijans (one of the lowest in the caste order), and artisans.

The earthquake of 2001 had destroyed all the infra-structural systems in Kutch. Housing and water systems were the most affected. Nearly, 40,000 homes were destroyed and 60 per cent of water infrastructure was affected

National and International Funding agencies, and Governments came to Kutch in a big way, to support the redevelopment of the infrastructure. Programmes were to be implemented with active participation and contribution of the people. NGOS worked hard to create consensus in the villages.

Narrated here is the story of village Hodko, in Banni area of Kutch and how they rebuilt their water infrastructure. Water shortage led to hardships for women and deplorable

hygiene standards. Women had to fetch water from 2 to 5 kms distance for drinking, bathing and all other household needs.

The Sarpanch of village Hodko, Fakir Mohmed was a strong and upright leader. Fakir Mohmed believed in stringently following the systems suggested by the Funding Agency and fully supported SFT in adhering to the implementation methodology and procedures laid down by the funding agency. This was difficult as the village community was not cohesive - it was divided by caste and class structures. SFT worked relentlessly with the support of local leadership through an eight month long process to bring the communities together to serve their common interest and arrive at a consensus regarding the locations where the new water structures were to be constructed. It was an herculean task to bind the representatives of the nine hamlets of the village in an agreement.

Fakir Mohmed as Sarpanch (Village Headman) of the village became the chair person of the Water committee. A Harijan member was a mandatory requirement by Funding Agency. So, a shy and diffident Harijan lad, Malshi Marwada was appointed as Secretary of the Water Committee. Everyone including SFT team was shocked by this appointment. Malshi had never shown any spark or demonstrated any interest in any activity. He was always a silent observer sitting on the fringe. When he spoke to someone, he stared at their feet and spoke in a barely audible whisper. Malshi earned his living as a labourer; his evenings were devoted to devotional singing, *Aaradhi Vani*.

He attended the capacity building programmes as he could not refuse an 'order' from the Sarpanch. However, he never participated in any of the training sessions, even when prodded and coaxed. The SFT team found it difficult to judge whether he understood what was being taught or not, but they did not give up. If the community had selected him for a responsibility, it was SFT's job to groom him for the task before him. Slowly with encouragement from SFT and Fakir Mohmed, Malshi responded. The SFT team realised that his counting and writing skills were quite good compared to his education, which was only upto the 7th standard. He was shy and bit scared, but not an idiot. Once the SFT team could start a dialogue with him, things started moving. He learnt to write vouchers and do entry in the accounts books. The SFT accountant started taking him to the bank and introduced him to the Bank officials. He started operating the bank account of the Water committee. He learnt materials management, supervised the quality of the work done. He managed funds to the tune of Rs 22 lakh for various water related programmes. The Sarpanch Fakir Mohmed was always by his side. But slowly, he passed more and more responsibility onto Malshi.

When Malshi was selected by the Water and Sanitation Management Organisation (WASMO) for training, his growing capabilities and talent came to the fore. He made a presentation on the water programme of his village that amazed everyone. "Fakir Mohmed's faith in me and SFTs' patient encouragement and grooming has helped me to discover my own true worth. I am not afraid to look people in the eye anymore and speak."

Kamalsha Saiyad Unites His Village

"Come out of your narrow world view. Look beyond your nose and see how development is embracing other villages. We are the last in the development run...we have not moved beyond the starting line."



Kamalsha Alisha Saiyad

Village : Bhirandiyara
Block: Banni

Post Earth quake rehabilitation interventions highlighted the neglect and under development of some the remotest regions of Kutch.

Bhirandiyara is one such village located in the centre of Banni. The village comprises of 20 far flung hamlets spread in a 10 kms area. Each *vandh* (hamlet) was like an island, concerned about its needs and priorities. No one was willing to concede or comprise. It was impossible to plan for the implementation of any scheme or bring the people together on a common platform. They were constantly bickering and pulling each other down. The village elders were no help. In fact they added fuel to the fire.

Kamalsha, 35, the young *sarpanch* (village head) gave the elders of the village an ultimatum, when they objected to every suggestion regarding the distribution of water. He challenged them to think in the interest of their village. "Come out of your narrow world view. Look beyond your nose and see how development is

embracing other villages. We are the last in the development run...we have not even moved beyond the starting line."

"Join if you want to otherwise I will go ahead with those who are with me," was his parting comment at the *gramsabha* (village meeting).

Getting the village together was Kamalsha's biggest challenge and he did it, with threats, reasoning and cajoling and some smart administration.

Though the project took a year in the planning stage, implementation was completed in a record 4 months! Kamalsha garnered the people's participation to manage funds to the tune of 50 lakh for the water distribution programmes in their village.



Embroidery Has Given Me a Voice

"Embroidery has not only helped me support my family, it has also given me a tongue. I can travel alone to Vadodara and other cities and speak confidently to any city person."



SFT was keen to provide home-based livelihood opportunities to tribal women. They initiated an embroidery skill development programme through the formation of Self-help Groups. This was a bold and innovative experiment to bring highly skilled Kutchi women to teach embroidery to tribal women who had never held a needle in their hand.

Badviben of Rangpur of Chotta Udepur block learnt embroidery from the two women who came from Kutch and taught this indigenous skill to tribal women over a period of six months. In turn Badviben taught it to women in the surrounding villages of Rangpur.

Badviben enjoys her embroidery so much that she has inspired her family members to learn it. Her daughter-in-laws and even her sons have learnt the skill. A newly acquired skill has been passed down to the second generation just like indigenous crafts.

Badviben Samatabhai Rathwa

Village : Rangpur
Block: Chhotaudepur

A family of fifteen to feed and a very small piece of land, this additional income has made a significant difference to their lives.

Badviben is a regular saver and has learnt the ropes of basic banking. This unlettered woman has learnt to sign her name as she had enrolled in the literacy classes run by SFT. Badviben coaxes other women to save and advises them to spend it wisely for their children's education and future, buy animals or seeds and fertilizers for their field.

She has greatly benefitted from the awareness programmes on health and hygiene that SFT conducted for Self Help Group (SHG) members. Everything that she has learnt is implemented. She says "My family remembers to wash their hands with soap before a meal and after going to the toilet. We never leave the house without having a bath and wearing clean clothes."

"Embroidery has not only helped to support my family, it has also given me a tongue. I can travel alone to Vadodara and other cities and speak confidently to any city person."

Confident Badviben is in the forefront of the Shardadevi Gramudhyog Utpadak Sahkari Mandali Ltd. (SGS), a tribal cooperative enterprise registered in the year 2008 as federation of 64 Self-help groups of tribal women involved in the handicraft enterprise. It is wholly owned and managed by these women producing handcrafted products that are a synthesis of bead work of the tribal region of ChottaUdepur and acquired Kutchi embroidery skills. An indigenous craft tradition is taking root, a new generation of artisans are being born Their products are marketed under the brand name of VIVEKA.

VIVEKA products are marketed and sold in major Indian cities through franchisees, bulk orders and exhibitions.

Stitch by stitch women like Badviben have created VIVEKA as a reputed brand of finely crafted products, accreted with the Craftmark that has earned them a life of dignity and self-respect.



Bhavsing Rathwa, SFT's First Friend

"Once impoverished, today farmers of our village return from the market with bundles of hundred rupee notes and sometimes even pull out five hundred rupee notes from their pocket."



Bhavsing Udalabhai Rathwa

Village: Rangpur-Sadhli
Block: Chhota Udepur

People are the prime movers for any transformative process. A participatory development process provides many people an opportunity to engage in community building. The buried energy and hidden talent of the citizen, when channelised provides dynamic energy to the development process. These are ordinary people rising to extra ordinary heights, given the opportunity and the recognition. Their shoulders grow broader; they stand taller, hold their heads high and act with exemplary motivation, determination and dedication. Their selfless desire to see their village prosper is amazing, as it is inspiring.

Bhavsing Udalabhai Rathwa, age 62 years of village Rangpur-Sadhli is one such person. When Shruti Shroff with her team members first went to his village with a police convoy, Bhavsing was the first person to receive her with a smile. He welcomed her and put her at ease. His sense of humour and open and friendly demeanour helped Shruti Shroff to learn much

about community, their way of life and their problems.

Bhavsing mentored Shruti and Shruti mentored Bhavsing. Bhavsing taught her about tribal ways of life, their fears and strengths; in turn Shruti and her team taught him modern methods of agriculture, soil and water conservation and other development issues.

Bhavsing says, "People of our villages were illiterate and not knowledgeable. We did not have any one to guide us. In 1995, Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT) came to our village. Since then they have given us guidance." As water was not available, agriculture and animal husbandry, which were important livelihood activities in the region, could not flourish.

Bhavsing says "The Foundation started the watershed programme in our village; engineers of the Foundation taught us how to make gully plugs, check dams and nala bunds. Local village people were employed to create these structures and they got paid for their work."

Successful implementation of the programme helped SFT launch similar activities in other villages. Bhavsing's contribution in this success was very big. Subsequently Bhavsing talked to people of other villages to take up the programme in their village. Today, he is the president of the watershed committee of the area.

He also took keen interest in modernisation of agriculture. He went to Anand Agriculture University to learn agriculture related practices for cultivation of paddy, cotton, maize and pulses, and growing of vegetables and fruits. He went to Vansda in South Gujarat with the SFT team.

With the availability of water, SFT also initiated programmes related to animal husbandry. Availability of fodder helped increase production of milk. They were taught how to care for their cattle and treat them when they were sick. Through regular medical camps sick people were identified and treated. A medical center was started at Rangpur-Sadhli by SFT. Bhavsing encouraged embroidery activities for the women of his area. Many women learned embroidery and started earning additional income out of this work.

Bhavsing has been a witness to the development revolution that has transformed his area. His contribution in building a bridge between SFT and his community has been significant. He says, " My people do not have to leave the village in search of work. The children go to school, we have primary medical care, we can afford a decent meal and during celebrations we can splurge on *ladoos* and other sweets we love. Now the village grooms refuse to get married without a *band-baja*

"Once impoverished, today farmers of our village return from the market with bundles of hundred rupee notes and sometimes even pull out five hundred rupee notes from their pocket. I never thought I would see this happiness come to my village in my lifetime."

An Unlettered Widow, She Brought Development to Her Village

"Bhabhi na rajma khadhu, pidhu ane laher kari." It was eat, drink and be merry in bhabhi's 'rule.'



Jadaben Dhulabhai Parmar

Village : Mahuvad
Block: Padra

A quarter century back when Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT) started work in Padra block of Vadodara district they did not have a local office. SFT designed interventions in interior villages through mobile-doorstep services. Through these services the community was provided guidance in agriculture, cattle care and reproductive and child health (RCH). The mobile van with experts in various fields visited specific villages in rotation, at a fixed time on a pre-determined day.

Each village had one local woman who co-ordinated with the mobile team. These volunteers were trained in the role they had to play for their village. They were called *Sakhis*.

Jadaben of village Mahuvad in Padra block worked as one such *Sakhi*, she narrated her life story recently at the age of 70.

Jadaben married at the age of fifteen, her husband died soon after. Like many other widows in India, she had nothing to fall back on. In her

early years, she earned a living as a farm labourer.

SFT was quick to identify her soft nature and ever willingness to be helpful. She was enrolled as a *Sakhi*, friend, in SFTs' extension programme. She took on her new role with great enthusiasm. She was trained as a health extension worker and helped out with primary health services. She also approached the community with different schemes that SFT brought to their village-sanitation, drinking water, sanitary latrines and so on through the mobile extension unit.

Jadaben became so popular that the people elected her as panchayat (village council) member several times.

Now at the age of seventy she has taken a backseat, but encourages others to take her place.

She gives thanks to SFT and Shrutiben for her growth and says, "*Bhabhi na rajma khadhu, pidhu ane laher kari*," (eat, drink and be merry in bhabhi's 'rule') indicating how much she enjoyed her work and the attention and appreciation she earned.



"We are Looking for More Raisings"

"When auction began, just by looking at my brinjols, the business man offered double the going price, Rs. 60 for 20 kilos."



Raising Motising Parmar

Village: Nana Ekalbara

Block: Padra

In late 80s and early 90s, Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT) started working in Padra Block of Vadodara district. During those years, through the Swami Vivekanand Krishi Vikas Kendra (SVKSK), inputs in modern Agriculture and training were given to the farmers. Because of scientific guidance given by the SVKSK, farmers benefited greatly. They continued to visit the centre for guidance.

Narrated below the story of Raising Motising Parmar, from Nana Ekalbara, Padra block, who was self-driven and used the inputs available through the Swami Vivekananda Krishi Vikas Kendra to multiply his yields manifold. Educated upto class 7th, Raising is an experienced farmer. From a small piece of land, 1.5 vigha, (less than an acre) he and his father managed to earn about Rs.40, 000 to Rs.50, 000 a year. They had grown tobacco for many years, but since the last two years they were not earning much from the cultivation of tobacco.

Raising was already using the services of

SVKSK for guidance regarding seeds and plant-protection chemicals. One day he just came to the Centre and announced “I have a small piece of land with availability of water. I want to grow brinjols (eggplants) this year. I have no information about how to go about it as I have never grown brinjols before. If you give me information and guidance on how to grow brinjols, I will consider growing them this year.”

Such self-initiative is what SFT strives to enthuse and nurture. Under guidance of the SFT team, Raising sowed Krishna variety of brinjols in 1.5 vigha land. Adequate distance was kept between the plants. Water and manure were given as suggested by SVKSK. Basically the crop was taken care of scientifically. A crop protection expert also visited his farm regularly. If any insects were noticed, Raising was immediately asked to spray the specific plant-protector. When the time came to pick the crop, Raising was a happy man. He said “I knew that good quality brinjols will grow, but I did not know that they will grow in such a large quantity.”

In the first pick, he got 160 kilos of brinjol, which fetched him a grand sum, 60 rupees for 20 kilos. That was the highest rate in the market. This was because his brinjols looked fresh and healthy. Slowly the quantity of each pick started increasing; it grew to 240 kilos and even touched 280 kilos. Raising believes that when they will fully grow after 90 days, each pick will be 1000 kilos. He said “When I took the brinjols to the market for the first time everyone had said I would get Rs. 30- to 35 for 20 kilos, but when auction began, just by looking at my brinjols, the business man offered Rs. 60 for 20 kilos. This started happening every day. My brinjols were weighed and bought straight away”.

Raising is an informed farmer. Under guidance of the SFT team this year he will earn about Rs.1, 25,000 from one season alone, instead of the Rs. 40,000 to Rs 50,000 a year that he earlier earned.

In last decade, SVKSK’s activities have increased many folds. Many new programmes related to agriculture were initiated in Chhotaudepur and Pavijetpur blocks through Government Funding. Along with certified seeds, fertilizers, guidance for the crop, training and other inputs, SVKSK now also creates awareness about modern tools and agricultural equipment which reduces day to day drudgery of farmers. The process has started to expand the Krishi Vikas Kendra programme in to a knowledge and information centre providing all the information a farmer would require. The Knowledge and Information Center will have three partners, one an expert on Agro mechanization and tools, another expert who will provide inputs on best agricultural practices, while SFT’s role will of training, education, follow ups and community based programmes.

Heavy Drinker Kailash Becomes a Spiritual Leader

*"I am glad that someone cared enough for me to help
me realise my mistake in a way that touched my heart."*



Kailash, a young man of Bhorada, an interior village of Chhotaudepur block of Vadodara district, was a promising leader. His grandfather encouraged education in the family, a tradition that his father also followed. He encouraged Kailash to study by sending him to another village for his studies.

Fate dealt a cruel blow on the young Kailash. With the sudden death of his father, the responsibility of his family of four younger brothers and sisters fell on Kailash's shoulders. Kailash was determined to shoulder his responsibilities bravely. He made every effort to give the best to his younger brothers and sisters and also his village.

Kailash was a natural leader. He developed linkages with government programmes such as certified seeds and fertilizers to improve agriculture outputs in his village. However, in spite of repeated inputs through Government initiatives, the efforts were in vain because of the large scale soil erosion in the region on account of heavy rains.

Kailash Arjunbhai Rathwa

Village : Bhorda
Block: Chhotaudepur

Kailash lost heart, the pressure was too much for him, and he started drinking heavily in bad company.

Meanwhile, Shroffs Foundation Trust was convinced that to improve agriculture in the region, soil and water conservation were the crucial first steps. They initiated a watershed programme in village Bhorda. The Foundation motivated village leaders to actively participate in the programme through the formation of a village water committee. With the help of experts and active involvement of local leaders, a map was drawn to conserve water and prevent soil erosion. The plan was successfully implemented under the leadership of Kailash and others. As a result, yields increased, and farmers prospered. Kailash also greatly benefitted.

In those initial years, Ms. Shruti Shroff, Managing Trustee of Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT) was personally managing projects at the village level. Kailash's heavy drinking habit, in spite of his leadership in village development, troubled Mrs. Shroff. To discourage Kailash from drinking, she encouraged Kailash to enjoy the newly acquired prosperity of the village and his family. She continued to coax him to shoulder his responsibilities as a village leader.

One day after a long walk in the scorching heat Shruti wanted to drink water. Instead of taking water from the comfortable home of Kailash, she drank water at a poor man's home. She wanted to give a message to Kailash, that would touch his heart.

Kailash was a sensitive young man, he was deeply hurt by the rejection implied by the small act of Ms. Shruti, who was his mentor and his inspiration, drinking water in someone else's house. He resolved to give up his drinking and regain his dignity.

Today Kailash is Sarpanch (village headman) of his village. His spirituality has influenced others around him and they have taken leadership for the development of the area. Today, he can look back with pride and satisfaction as he narrates the story of his prosperity and the transformation of his village over a period of 10 years. He is very happy, he believes that some supernatural inspiration transformed his life and enabled him to inspire others towards spirituality.

"I am glad that someone cared enough for me to help me realise my mistake in a way that touched my heart," he proudly reflects today.

Farmers of Village Bhorada are now able to take two to three crops a year because the Lift Irrigation Scheme ensures their fields are watered round the year. They pay heed to SFT's guidance regarding farming practices and use certified seeds and organic fertilizers, follow crop protection schedules and ofcourse reap a bumper harvest. They do not have to migrate in search of work. Prosperity has come to stay in their lives.

Nita...Housewife who Gently Broke the Barriers of Orthodoxy

While earlier she could not look her elders in the eye or express her opinion, today she gently and firmly expresses her opinions, 'fatafat, like bursting dhani (popcorn)'.



Nita grew up in a very orthodox village family where girls were confined to the house and they did as they were told. They did not speak their mind...against conventions they abhorred or found pointless such as wearing a *ghunghat* or complain about hardships or injustice. And they did not have a right to dream.

Nita was a very conscientious daughter who learnt housekeeping diligently from her mother. She was a bright student so her father let her continue her studies till class 10. She was married soon after. Her *sasural* (inlaws house) was as orthodox and conventional as her parents. As was expected she immersed herself in her *grihasthi*- household duties and responsibilities as a housewife and daughter-in-law.

When SFT started work in her village in Talsat they recognised her potential. They worked hard at convincing her father-in-law to send her for training as an *anganwadi* worker.

Nita Shaileshbhai Thakor

Village : Talsat
Block: Kalali

He was unwilling and expressed his reservations continuously. “Housework is a handful... where is the time for anything else?” “Her work will require her to talk to all kinds of people, even the drunk men in our village, we can’t permit that.”

SFT and the Talsat Sewa Mandal persisted. Finally he relented on the condition that housework should not suffer on a single count. Nita successfully completed her training, inspite of several hurdles.

Nita had a hard time managing the house, children, family, illnesses and social responsibilities and coping with the demands and challenges of her job, but she did. She balanced her home and work leaving no room for complaint. And she did much more, stretching herself to take up new development challenges.

She was actively involved in the development of the young children who came to the *anganwadi*. She counseled alcoholics. She overcame her shyness and advised women about conception and contraception, and HIV/ AIDS and safe sex.

Nita knows everyone in the village and everyone knows her. While earlier she could not look her elders in the eye or express her opinion, today she gently and firmly expresses her opinions and speaks to people, ‘fatafat like bursting dhani (popcorn)’.

Nita wants to learn more and do more for her community. Her community has grown beyond Talsat to the villages around. Nita is the confidante of many- young and old. They come to her with their problems. She has an ear and a solution for everyone. And when there is no solution there is a smile and words of courage.





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