

# Field Report - Ashis Panda

Alwar, Rajasthan

July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Ashis Panda is a Fellow of Asha for Education supported by Asha Austin chapter. He is not new to Asha for Education and was a Fellow supported by NYCNJ chapter till 2017-18. . It was in 2015 when I first met Ashis in Dungarpur where he was engaged in community advocacy for rainwater harvesting through water wells, and rejuvenation of ground water, water conservation and allied areas (See [https://ashadocserver.s3.amazonaws.com/1035\\_ashish\\_visit\\_2015.pdf](https://ashadocserver.s3.amazonaws.com/1035_ashish_visit_2015.pdf)).

I had an opportunity to meet Ashis again in 2023 for a new project to rejuvenate water tanks in government schools to address scarcity of potable drinking water through community mobilization and advocacy (See [https://ashadocserver.s3.amazonaws.com/1348\\_SambhaavSiteVisitReport2023.pdf](https://ashadocserver.s3.amazonaws.com/1348_SambhaavSiteVisitReport2023.pdf)). The project has since been supported by Austin chapter, while Ashis has been granted Fellowship starting 2024. Besides being a Fellow, Ashis is also the CEO of Sambhaav Trust besides being the primary coordinator of the project (Sambhaav Trust - Ecological Education and Restoration in Government Schools).

Ashis is principally based out of Dungarpur, Rajasthan, where he lives with his family. His wife is a lawyer and a consultant, and engages in providing legal aid as well as running an advocacy group for women. Ashis manages the overall organizational work for Sambhaav Trust and travels across Rajasthan, where the work is largely concentrated. In the past, Ashis has been engaged in consulting on water conservation, sustainable agriculture practices, and has been increasingly involved with biodiversity conservation and seed conservation related activities. Ashis and his family maintain a moderately sized farmland in Dungarpur, where they employ farm workers who cultivate food crops, and help produce seeds for local varieties of plants and trees.

While Ashis continues to engage in consulting work on ad hoc basis besides managing many projects of Sambhaav Trust. I must note that his work with Sambhaav, which was once a pro bono in nature, has matured with him ascending to an executive role in the organization. In his own words, Asha for Education Fellowship helps reduce the financial burden and allows for engaging in greenfield exploratory work that would otherwise be difficult, and while this seems to be the intent of the grant and there is little doubt in the value of this financial assistance, lack of structure and specific expected outcomes of such allied activities [sic] are not well understood. This is exacerbated by lack of any organized structure or forum for Fellows to share knowledge, experiences, or develop strategies and/

or visions that are complementary and aid their learning and development. I think that the burden of defining the expectations, and formulating scaffoldings that support such expectations should lie substantially with Asha for Education.

Ashis primarily engages in project specific activities, that are funded not only by AfE, but by other organizations as well. It is unclear what specific outcomes are unlocked by the Fellowship grant that would otherwise not be possible if he were to be supported through a project specific grant, for instance.

In general, Ashis's work in the sphere of water conservation and advocacy has been admirable. I have had the privilege of observing his work for over a decade and find his journey inspiring. I think a formal forum to cross pollinate the knowledge seeds (and a little structure) will help him and other Fellows immensely besides helping Asha for Education refine its Fellowship program's philosophy.

Amit Sharma

August 5<sup>th</sup> 2025