

Break from work

From February to mid-May (3.5 months), I was at our parents' home in Vijayawada and Chennai, for the birth of our first child. I was hence on a break from work in Dungarpur / Rajasthan during this period.

While on the break at home, I visited Selvam and Gunasekaran (with whom I had worked with last season) at Erode for a few days, and visited their farms and some of the work they do.

I made a brief visit for a few days to Timbaktu Collective, and spent time with the Dharani program team members, which whom I had worked in my previous stint.

I also met Santhosh in Bangalore, and updated him about the progress of work.

Working with Sambhaav

As mentioned in previous reports, as part of the preparatory process of taking up work on land/water in Dungarpur, I have teamed up with Sambhaav Trust for support, who I have been in touch with for about 2 years now.

The process of taking up development work in villages as guided by Sambhaav is:

- 1 Building rapport with villagers
- 2 Learning at a personal level through:
 - 2.1 Study of selected learning materials from time to time
 - 2.2 Visiting work being done in other regions and spending time with local team members and villagers in each region to understand the local conditions, social/technical details, process through which the work has been done and results achieved.
- 3 Participate jointly in work ongoing in other regions along with other team members.
- 4 Taking up community-level work in Dungarpur, at one or a few locations within a village, after dialogue with the local villagers.
- 5 Expanding work within a village and in other villages, by establishing initial models of work and after one's own capacities and confidence are built through practical work done.

In this period, rapport building in Manatgaon village has continued through village visits and stays, which I resumed after returning to Rajasthan from the home trip.

The visits to work done by Sambhaav in other regions started in January this year, with a two-week trip to Jaisalmer region and a short trip to Jaipur. This two week trip included "Salt of Life", an annual event organised by Sambhaav. A short note I wrote afterwards on my reflections from this event is uploaded on the Asha site here:

http://www.ashanet.org/projects-new/documents/1035/Salt_of_Life_Visit_to_Jaisalmer_Note_for_Sambhaav.pdf

I have continued the visits, and in this reporting period made one long 15-20 day trip to Jaisalmer and Barmer in Rajasthan and spent time visiting field areas and with local team members and villagers in each region, to understand the work done.

In the coming months, this personal level learning process through more visits will continue. Along with this work on stage 3-4 of the process will be initiated.

Research and Documentation – Water/Agriculture

Along with the visits to Sambhaav's work areas, an additional component of work that has emerged is research and documentation of the work being taken up through the Sambhaav network in Rajasthan and 5 other states, with a purpose to showcase models where communities successfully manage their natural resources – land, water, forests, livestock. This work has continued in this period.

This R&D work is being taken up in collaboration with the India Water Portal, which is a web-based platform initiated by Arghyam Trust, who also partner with Sambhaav in their field programs.

Learnings from the past year of work

- Some of the major trends in the village are the increasing area of cultivation of Bt Cotton-seed (a cash crop) and consequent increase in private bore-wells. Decline in forest cover and lack of any traditional systems of harvesting/conserving water and soil are leading to a definite long-term decline in its groundwater resources, as well as a continual erosion in the top soil (base of its agriculture).
- There is also an increasing dependence on non-local seeds and agri-inputs, as well an increasing dependence on the market for sale of produce as well as for purchase of food.
- Migration from the villages continues to be high indicating that natural resource-based livelihoods (land, water, forest, livestock – the traditional occupations) in their current state are not able to support the desired income and food security of the people.
- Experiments in agriculture initiated last season with a few farmers have had some impact in terms of savings of about Rs. 2000-3000/family/season by use of non-chemical pest repellents and by additional yield in paddy through SRI practices. However, this minimal though positive impact, does not have enough momentum to trigger a development spiral amongst the community. These experiments nevertheless have helped build a close relationship with some families, understand local realities with respect to agriculture of the region as well helped me understand how to make various organic preparations.
- Considering the increasing importance that villagers are giving to water and cash crops, initiating work on water harvesting and conservation, may provide significantly large benefits to the community and in the short term (based on the impact, I have seen from my visits to Sambhaav's work areas), considering the ample availability of rainfall in Dungarpur. The development spiral triggered such, using the medium of water, can build in work on other themes which do not have as much impact in the short-term later in time, but nevertheless crucial for long-term sustainable management of natural resources.

Plan of work for the coming year

- Initiating community-level work on water harvesting and conservation in Manatgaon village. Financial support for the physical works taken up, will come from Sambhaav Trust apart from the Asha fellowship, and any local government program funds (wherever feasible).
- Initiating similar rapport-building process as in Manatgaon, in 2-3 other villages in the district.
- Continue personal level learning process through relevant reading, visits to Sambhaav's work areas and interaction with their team members, and participate jointly in work ongoing in these regions.
- Documentation of community-based models of natural resources, through Sambhaav's work network, in collaboration with India Water Portal.

Budget

The budget requested for the coming year - Aug 2010 – Jul 2011 (12 months) is **Rs. 240,000/- (Rupees two lakh, forty thousand only)** along two line items.

Item	Particulars	Total (Rs)
Fellowship	Rs. 15,000 / month * 12 months	180000
Work-related expenses	Rs. 5000 / month * 12 months	60000
	Total	240000

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