

Field Report

Sambhaav - Alwar, Rajasthan
July 9th, 2025



The rain and water logging had made the road trip from Delhi take longer than anticipated, despite the heroics of Suraj Singh at the wheel it was 11am, 30minutes behind schedule by the time I picked up Ashis from the rendezvous point at Shiv Shakti Restaurant opposite Rajgarh (राजगढ़) railway station. We made our way to Talab (तालाब) to fetch Kunjbihari, an experienced grassroots worker who has been associated with Sambhaav since 2004, and formally engaged since 2022 serving as a primary liaison with the government schools in the region. Over next 5 hours, we visited four Higher Secondary schools - Fulela, Bandikui, Dharampura, and Titarwadi where Sambhaav has made its interventions

Fulela Higher Secondary School, Dausa



We made our way to Fulela higher secondary school (उच्चतर माध्यमिक विद्यालय, फुलेला) and reached by 1:25pm where we met with Manish, the other associate working for Sambhaav in Alwar region. Along with the staff of teachers who were patiently waiting for us after the regular school hours. Unfortunately the school was dismissed for the day and we missed the opportunity to interact with any students. Fulela has a large capacity water tank that is recharged with the rainwater and is actively in-use. Rainwater is harvested and fed into the tank through plumbing that Sambhaav helped bootstrap. All except one of the older sections of the building (due right of the entrance into the school campus) are now connected to the water tank.



[clockwise form top] 1. Inspecting the water level in the tank, 2. Harvested rainwater in the water tank, 3. Subsubsuble pump in the courtyard, 4. The connectivity chamber in the courtyard - (right to left) - Manish, Kunjbihari, teachers from Fulela school.

The teachers seemed encouraged by the work and the water sufficiency this has brought to the school which earlier relied on paid water tankers for its daily supply of potable water.

With water sufficiency the schools are also encouraged to develop a kitchen garden and plant fruit trees. This school, with constant engagement of Manish and Kunjbihari has made good progress in plunging fruiting trees and a garden that can eventually supply seasonal vegetables for the mid-day meals. The progress in this front remain slow and challenging especially due to the constant care that a kitchen garden needs, especially during the holiday breaks in the school. The school teachers also continue to show interest in construction activities, expecting Sambhaav to invest in infrastructure improvement projects despite Ashish's encouragement to instead tap into school development funds or local participation.



[clockwise from top] 1 &2. Inspecting the piped installed in the rooftop to feed rainwater into the water tank.



Ashish discussing the progress with the school teachers. Manish is in right foreground

Sambhaav also helped coordinate a student exposure tour to a nature park and nature conservatory nearby which was well received by the school staff and students alike. A strong desire was expressed to conduct such exposure tours on a regular basis, however it seems the logistics have become difficult - BEO approvals are difficult to come by and require collecting written ward consents, besides the prohibitively high costs. While we were able to interact with any students, the teachers shared both the enthusiasm and the challenges of the exposure tour which helped sensitize the students to the water and local biodiversity conservation.

Overall, this school seemed to have made visible and ideal progress towards water sufficiency.

With Manish as our latest passenger, we headed out to Bandikui Higher secondary School. Kunjbihari used this time to narrate his journey of working on water conservation and advocacy; starting with his long association with Tarun Bharat Sangh, Rajendra Singh, Anupam Mishra et al and eventually with Sambhaav. His grassroots work spanned over four decades with over 503km of watershed work, including but not limited to 22km of Naduwali river restoration work, and rejuvenation of Sakatwali river, Naduwali upper and lower basins. It was enlightening to hear the grassroots perspective of how the interventions, role and outcomes of the NGOs in the region have shifted and evolved over years and increasing pressure on water systems, and rapid loss of biodiversity due to mining and allied activities.

Bandikui Higher Secondary School, Dausa



1. Bandikui school courtyard after overnight rainfall.



2. Unkempt water tank surrounded by vegetation and Aravali hill in the background.

Bandikui (बंदीकुई) is nestled in the Aravali hills and is surrounded by beautifully dense vegetation. It is a large school but seemed in a much worse condition than Fulela. Large portions of the unkempt playground and school entrance were waterlogged due to incessant rains. The school was expectedly dismissed by the time we arrived but the staff was still present working after hours that we had a fruitful conversation with.



To the left of the playground there was a seemingly dilapidated structure covered with old growth and vegetation. This is one of the largest water tanks in the region with storage capacity of 250K (2.5Lac) liters of water. It has been poorly maintained, shabbily constructed and left unfinished by the contractor due to non payments of dues, such that overtime a rear portion of the tank has tilted and sunk into the soft undersoil.

The tank is otherwise seemed structurally intact but left unmaintained and unused. There is no plumbing connectivity into the water tank and the school continues to rely on water tanks for its supply of potable water. The school has taken some steps to plant new trees on the courtyard but seemed less enthusiastic to Sambhaav's interventions. Kunjbihari and Manish clearly have more work to to in order to further cultivate relationship, and develop influence with the administration of this school.

Dharampura Higher Secondary School



We reached Dharampura Higher Secondary School (राजकीय उच्चतर माध्यमिक, धर्मपुरा) well past the school hours at 3:40pm. We entered the school premise through a small pedestrian door that was kept open at the request of Kunjbihari. This is one of the larger schools where Sambhaav has made some intervention to rejuvenate and recharge the water tank. The main school building has installed the plumbing and chamber to inspect the connectivity. However, it didn't seem like that there was sufficient rainfall in this area to sufficiently recharge the water tank.

The school premise, especially the connection chamber (that connects pipes to main watertank) was littered with plastic waste. And lack of any filter connecting into the water tank risks the litter to make its way into the water tank. I advised Kunjbihari and Manish to consider installing a filter mesh at the mouth of the plumbing feeding the water tank to protect it from litter, and sensitize the students (and staff) against littering, especially plastic pollution from sachets and bottles. This school continues to use a old water tank (see figure below) for most of its potable water needs.



[clockwise from top] 1. Old tank that is fed through paid water tankers still in use for potable water supply, 2. Unkempt connection chamber littered with plastic waste and no filters to protect the plastic from entering the water tank, 3 & 4. Rainwater harvesting piped feeding into the chamber with visible sagging and unlevelled installation.

Titirwada School



Our last stop was the school at Titirwada Khurd (तीतरवाड़ा खुर्द) which is ornate with a unused elevated water tank right at its entrance with an epitaph (sic) declaring its impressive dimensions, perhaps as a cover of its inutility. Titirwala is also a large school with a elaborate playground with beautiful views of lower Aravali ranges, and rich vegetation all around.

The school has a large capacity water tank at the back of its main building buried in the seasonal growth exacerbated due to monsoons. Sambhaav has helped install

plumbing and pipe connectivity from the terrace of main building to the water tank and we inspected the newly constructed connectivity chamber - which was covered to avoid any litter and overgrowth in contrast to the Dharampur school. The pipe connectivity was poorly installed and visually exhibited similar problems as Dharampurs school. In general the quality of infrastructure work seemed relatively casual.



[clockwise form top] 1. Water tank surrounded by dense vegetation and seasonal growth, 2. Overhead water tank at the mouth of the school that is not in use, 3. Playground with lower Aravali mountains in the background, 4. Open area behind the school building site for a potential kitchen garden.

Observations & Recommendation

1. In general I'm encouraged by the progress that Sambhaav has made in short time in the region. However the efficacy of the intervention significantly depends on the appetite of the school administration and participation of the students and their parents. Clearly there is limited progress in few schools while persistent intervention and advocacy seems necessary at the moment. It is unclear whether the program outcomes will sustain after the intervention and the investments cease. It must be noted that all the schools where Sambhaav has intervened had the basic and the most costly piece of infrastructure - the water tank - developed and available, but was either never put to use or had decayed due to apathy and want of maintainance. It seems plausible for this program of water tank rejuvenation, despite of its sensitization intervention with students and community to fall victim this apathy overtime. The school administration tends to be demonstrably enthusiastic in infrastructure development, specifically aided by Sambhaav whilst being tepid towards self funding or community mobilization. It seems a stronger and sustained investment in sensitization and awareness campaigning is warranted to improve odds of sustainability of this intervention.

2. I strongly advise extending sensitization program to address plastic waste disposal. As the use of single use plastics has dramatically increased in rural areas, there is a dearth of sensitization programs to inform about plastic waste management, micro-plastics leaching into the water and harmful environmental effects of single use plastics. At the minimum Sambhaav should intervene to sensitize students and community to protect waterbodies from plastic pollution and limit indiscriminate littering in and around the water tanks and other similar sources of water. I strongly feel that this intervention at school will help raise awareness against littering in general that increasingly plagues the common lands.

3. This project is leveraging and rejuvenating the pre-existing infrastructure of large capacity rainwater harvesting water tanks through cleaning the tanks,

and installing absent or broken plumbing of feeding pipes. The efficiency of the tank feeding lines and efficacy of the tanks that haven't effectively been used in years is not immediately measurable. It is typically when the monsoons rains arrive when the actual deficiencies or leakages become apparent than require further investments. It might be advisable therefore that the funds allocated for infrastructure to be assessed over two year cycle - an initial investment in water tanks and needed network and a subsequent smaller investment to amend deficiencies and defects that manifest after the first monsoon that infrastructure is put to use. It seems that the project attempted to keep some funds to address the expected mending of infrastructure that were assessed as unspent funds and were deducted from the subsequent funding cycle resulting in net deficit for the project. And adjudicating the infrastructure components over two year cycle adjusting for natural and expected follow-up investment might be a better model given the nature of infrastructure improvement work this project is undertaking.