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Nashik farmers save water and grow more

Priya Shieth

Sonashi (Nashik), Oct 14

"I have a small piece of land, which yields two to four quintals of rice. We consume most of it and the rest is sold," says Laxman Bhangre, 38, a farmer in Sonashi village in Maharashtra's Nashik district. He earns Rs 15,000 a year that is barely sufficient to support his family. This year, as part of a water conservation project, he has adopted a four-step method of paddy cultivation and expects to harvest some extra quintals of rice.

An estimated 120 tribal families in Nashik district have benefited from the water conservation project initiated jointly by Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) and Maharashtra Institute of Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (MITTRA), an NGO promoted by Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation (BAIF). The farmers each contribute Rs 300 towards the project, which is a public-private partnership involving local communities, while HUL contributes Rs 1,000 for every participating farmer.

The project is a part of

HUL's Sustainable Living Plan and aims to help tribals adopt improved agricultural practices that promote effective utilisation of water. "The project is expected to deliver results over five years and benefit 900 families in the region," said Ms Meeta Singh, Head, Corporate Responsibility, HUL.

STEP CULTIVATION

The effort involves introducing step cultivation method and creation of trenches to tap rainwater for agriculture. "The extraction of earth to create the watershed was carried out from February to April this year. Farmers have already planted a variety of cash crops on the ridges. All the barren land has been converted to cultivable land," said Jitinn Sathe, Project Leader, MITTRA. "There used to be a lot of seasonal migration during December to May. I don't think it will happen this year," he added.

At the end of five years the project aims to create an additional 287 acres of cultivable land in these villages, increase crop production by 50 per cent, and generate employment.



For better harvest: Women collect water from a developed natural spring in Sonoshi village in Maharashtra's Nasik district. The provision was a part of the HUL-MITTRA water conservation project.

Construction of check dams for irrigation, spring development to provide drinking water for human consumption as well as animals, construction of bunds, and seeding and planting on the bunds are some of the other activities under the project. The water harvesting and utilisation project (spring development) costs Rs 1.98 lakh while the check dam project costs Rs 8.11 lakh. "One spring water facility serves 50 families in our district. We clean this facility weekly. Our children fall ill less frequently now," said a villager, referring to the drinking water facility that supplies 70,000 litres a day.