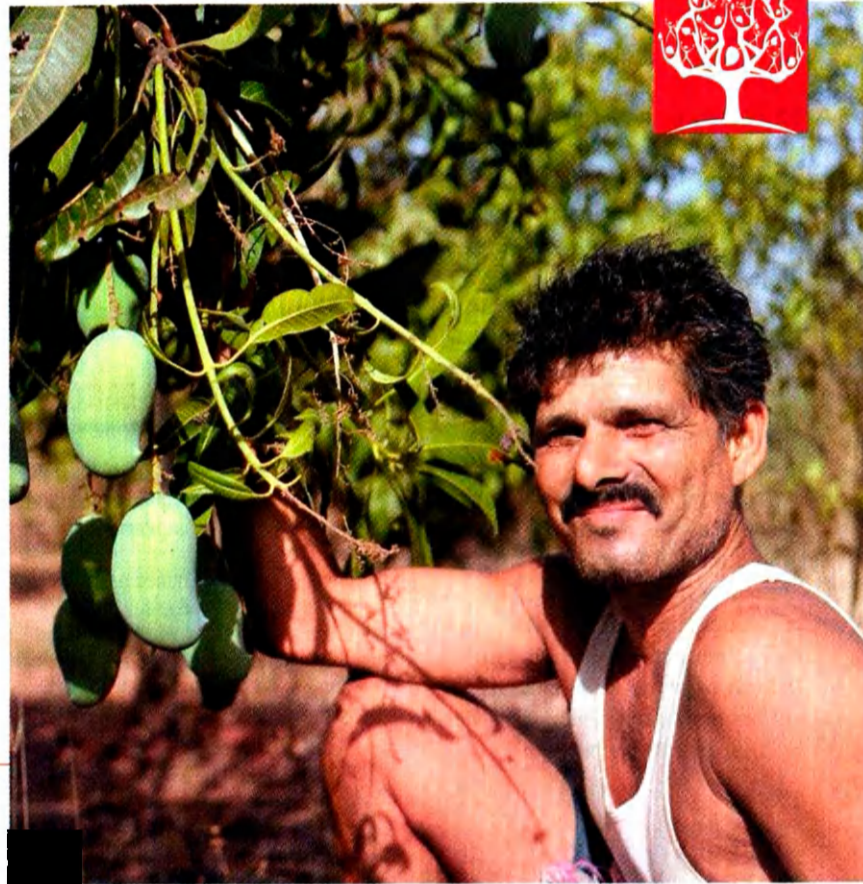


HINDUSTAN UNILEVER-VANARAI

OBJECTIVE	To improve farmers' livelihood through water conservation.
SCALE	5 villages; 325 families
LOCATION	Silvassa
ACHIEVEMENT	Over 60 million litres of water have been harvested since 2004.



PRIYAM DHAR

HUES OF CHANGE

WATER BRINGS NEW LIFE

HUL and ITC are helping farmers harvest crops twice a year through their water conservation projects.

Karthik Krishnan & Deepak Goel

RUSHI AMRUTH VAID IS ALL SMILES AS HE POINTS AT A borewell pump near his farmholding. Earlier, he explains, it yielded water only for three months. "Now there is water even in April." The availability of water has transformed life in Karchond, a village in Silvassa, about 183 kilometres from Mumbai. For three generations, Vaid's family has grown paddy here, but only in the last three years have they managed to benefit from farming. "Now, I am making more than I used to as there is water throughout the year," he explains. Vaid and the other villagers have a water-conservation project initiated by Hindustan Unilever (HUL) to thank for their changed fortunes.

In 2004, HUL tied up with Vanarai Foundation, an NGO, to help the farming community around its Silvassa plant. The farmers were barely able to eke out a living as they could grow just one crop,

during the monsoon. The rest of the year, people migrated to other places in search of work. The MNC and the NGO realised that water harvesting could transform the community's lives.

FRUITFUL EFFORTS: Now farmers in Karchond village grow vegetables and fruits in addition to paddy.

Vanarai Foundation, whose stated mission is to help villages become clean, green and self-sufficient, identified suitable spots for construction of bunds and dams to conserve water. HUL provided the requisite financing under its Project Samruddhi CSR initiative. To date, 184 bunds, 22 borewells and 20 open wells have been set up under the project. Over the last seven years, these efforts have helped conserve over 60 million litres of water. Thanks to the digging of continuous contour trenches, soil erosion has been greatly reduced in the village. As a result, the moisture holding capacity of the soil has risen, increasing its fertility and helping recharge ground water.

Now that water is easily available, farmers in the region enjoy two harvests in a year. They grow rain-fed crops like paddy during the monsoon, and wheat, pulses and vegetables during the other months. In addition, Vanarai has also helped them start horticulture plantations with mango, *chikoo* and guavas.

The farmers now have more money in



VISHAL KOUL

NEW PLANS: Villagers in Pratapgarh prepare for another harvest.

their pockets—thanks to the second harvest, their collective income has risen by ₹1.3 crore over the last six years, according to HUL's CSR report. And the community's seasonal migration in search of work has also come to an end. The project has also facilitated the building of toilets—about 130 families use a public toilet and 20 households have their own toilets. When it started out in 2004, HUL confined itself to Karchond and used it as a testing ground. After getting positive results, it extended the project to Dapada, Pati, Chisda and Mandoni villages. "This has proved that the programme can be replicated in other villages too," says Sanjay Arun Borse, Project Manager, Vanarai Foundation.

WATERSHED MOMENT

ITC is scripting a similar story in Rajasthan's Pratapgarh district, along with Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), an NGO. The 'Watershed Development Project' was kick-started in 2005 to ensure availability of water through the year. Initially, about 25 villages in Pratapgarh were covered under the project. "Open land, in chunks of 20-30 hectares, was taken from village panchayats for the watershed projects," says Rajesh Tete, Senior Project Officer, FES. Small check dams

ITC-FES

OBJECTIVE	To provide additional water for irrigation.
SCALE	Covers 812 villages, 65,000 hectares of land.
LOCATIONS	Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh.
ACHIEVEMENT	Helped farmers grow two crops a year.

were constructed on the land to retain water. ITC provided the funding while the NGO supervised the construction and maintenance. So far, they have established about six watersheds in Pratapgarh.

As with the HUL project, villagers in the region are now able to harvest two crops a year, thanks to the conservation efforts—the water that is collected is available for three-to-four months after the monsoons. "We are now able to irrigate about 30 hectares of land compared to just about three-to-four hectares earlier," says Kaaru Lal one of the villagers. "We can grow our own requirement of wheat now," he adds.

Again, as in Silvassa, the water harvesting project has put more money in the hands of the farmers as a result of the second harvest. In addition, it has helped green the area and feed the com-

munity's livestock. After the check dams were constructed, saplings of *amla*, *babool*, bamboo and *kheb*, among others, were planted. These grew into plantations and provide fodder for the livestock of the villages. This has encouraged many to raise livestock, such as goats, for commercial purposes. The sale of one goat can result in an additional income of ₹2,000-5,000 for a family. Not surprisingly, people in the community are now less dependent on loans. Today, village committees manage the entire project on the ground. All the adults in the village are enrolled as members in these institutions.

ITC has also spearheaded other developmental projects in the district. In 2007-08, under a 'Public Private Community Partnership', it jointly funded the construction of 16 watersheds in Pratapgarh along with the Government of Rajasthan. In 2009, the cigarettes-to-foods major collaborated with Nabard to develop watershed projects over 5,200 hectares of land, reaching out to another 22 villages.

HUL and ITC have transformed the lives of hundreds of villagers through their water harvesting projects. Their success has shown how much a private sector company can achieve by partnering with NGOs and with the government in driving development.

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