

## Good Practice Note

# Development of Village Institutions for Equitable & Sustainable Access to Natural Resources



**REGION : South Asia**  
**COUNTRY : India**  
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**DISTRICT : Udaipur**

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# **Development of Village Institutions for Equitable & Sustainable Access to Natural Resources**

<b>Good Practice Owner</b>	<b>SEVA MANDIR</b>	
<b>Good Practice Champions</b>	<b>Authors:</b>	Rimjhim Pandey, Ronak Shah, Sunil Nepak
	<b>Reviewers:</b>	Sanjay Joshi, Shefali Misra
	<b>Contributors:</b>	Bhimji, Bherulal Meena, Devilal Menaria, Gangaram, Lalsingh Devra, Laxman Devaji Meena, Madhav Tailor, Nanjiba, Rama Meena, Rameshchandra Meena, R. K. Khetrapal, Samarathsingh Chauhan, Shailendra Tiwari, S. N. Bhise, Suresh Sharma, Thavaribai
	<b>Content Editors:</b>	Anita Paul, Mamta Dhawan, Ruchita Khurana, Sheila Koyyana

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## 1. Background

The paradigm shift towards decentralised natural resource governance has been intensively debated in development discourses during the last few decades. The centralised and protectionist policies of earlier periods have failed to conserve resources and deprived local communities from gainfully continuing with their traditional livelihood systems based on resources obtained from the commons. As a result, the need to reconsider inclusion of communities in governing their natural resources (especially the forests and open pasture lands) emerged, which has now been widely accepted as a step in the right direction. Local institutions and its associated processes of governance at the grassroots provides a suitable platform to those households, who are directly associated with the benefits derived from such commons, to voice their opinions in making decisions concerning these resources. Due to their social moorings, flexibility, cost effectiveness and ability to promote a more inclusive and holistic approach, the involvement of local institutions is gaining prominence in the development of rural areas.

The good practice of developing local institutions in order to promote equitable and sustainable availability of natural resources and services for poor livestock keepers was initiated by Seva Mandir in mid 1980s. After two decades, the practice has effectively demonstrated its robustness in gripping local community dynamics and assisting in providing better opportunities for livestock rearing. Till March 2009, Seva Mandir has been successful in developing 178 community pasture lands covering an area of 2,896 ha and 21 JFM sites on 990 ha by following the model of initiating change and development by building capacities of community based organisations.

During 1995 to 2005, the *samuh* local institution) of Jhabla has facilitated the process of ecological restoration of 150 ha of forest lands that were completely degraded, encroached upon and over grazed. Through community forestry programmes, the village institution successfully initiated the process of developing their degraded commons and more importantly continue to maintain them in the post-intervention period. This document illustrates the practice of local institutional development and its role in pro-poor livestock development, in the context of village *Jhabla* in Udaipur district of Rajasthan in the western part of India.

### *Location*

Udaipur District (Figure 1), situated at the southern tip of Rajasthan, covering an area of about 13,419 sq. km. Forested area constitutes about 34% of the total geographical area of Udaipur district. The District has a population of 550,000 with males constituting 53 % and females 47 % of the total population (Census 2001). Udaipur has an average literacy rate of 77 %. The District is strewn with numerous pockets of tribal

**Figure 1:** Map of Boisother showing Location of Itahla



settlements, most of which have very low literacy, 11% for males and 4% for females. Scheduled tribes account 34% of the District's total population. Of the District's 3,117 villages, 1,310 villages have greater than 51% of tribal population. Main tribal groups of the region are the *Bhils*, *Meenas* and the *Garasiyas*. The rainfall patterns in the region (Figure 2) fluctuate and range from about 400 - 650 mm.

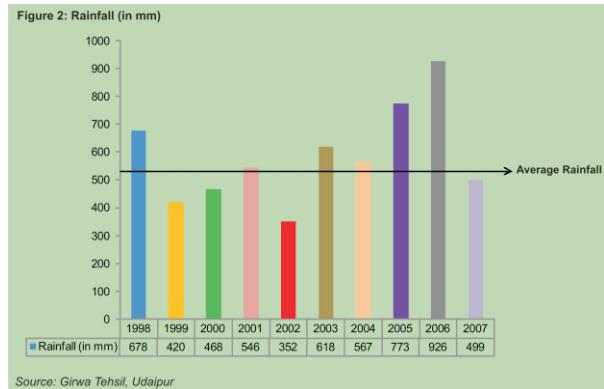
*Jhabla* is a tribal habitation, located in *Girwa Tehsil* of Udaipur district. The terrain of *Jhabla* is hilly, and is spread over a few kilometres. The settlement is distributed across the four widely spread hamlets, named *Upla Fala*, *Nichla Fala*, *Sasdi Fala* and *Nala Fala*. Out of the total land of 2,204.65 ha in the village, about 448.27 ha of land comes under forest cover. A major chunk of land in *Jhabla*, about 1,485.64 ha comes under revenue land thereby reducing the private ownership to 270.73 ha. *Jhabla* has a population of 344 households (Census 2001) inhabited by a total number of 1,944 people comprising 988 males and 956 females. Average household size is 6 persons per household. The entire population belongs to the *Meena* tribe. Literacy rate in the village is 67% for males and 31% for females. Significant numbers of these households still live in extremely poor conditions and struggle to meet their basic needs.

Till a couple of years ago, *Jhabla* did not have proper road connectivity and a *kuchha* road that was unusable during rains connected the village to the outside world. However, recently, *Jhabla* has been connected by a link road to a nearby village and from there to Udaipur through a national highway. The basic amenities in the village include partial electricity, a few hand pumps and wells, a primary school and three *Rajiv Gandhi Pathshalas* (Primary Schools). However, due to the fact that *Jhabla* is spread over a large area, the number of students in the school is limited. The government health facilities in *Jhabla* are semi functional.

### **Livelihood Pattern**

Livelihoods in rural areas of southern Rajasthan have traditionally been dependent upon land, livestock and locally available resources from the forests. A majority of the private land in *Girwa Tehsil* is utilised for cultivation despite the fact that most of the people have negligible or no sources of irrigation. Of the total area under cultivation in the district (17.58%), only 28% of the cropped area has access to some form of irrigation. Farming in the area is primarily geared for meeting subsistence needs. Nearly 50% of all farm families cultivate land under one ha in size. Livestock keeping is another major source of income and Udaipur district has the highest livestock density in the State - 88% of the households are involved in animal husbandry practices.

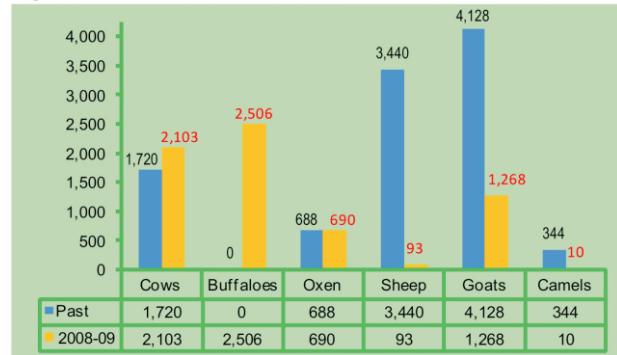
In *Jhabla*, farming has been the mainstay of livelihoods of the rural population. However, agriculture is predominantly rain-fed, and, over time the productivity has significantly reduced due to adverse climatic conditions, degraded land quality, fragmentation of land holdings as well as lack of options for irrigation facility.



Livestock production, like in other semi-arid agro-climatic conditions, has always been an essential supplementary source of livelihood for poor tribal households of Jhabla. A large majority of the families in Jhabla rear animals and the livestock comprising presently mainly of Cows, buffaloes and in the past goat and sheep (Figure 3).

In the recent years, community members especially the youth have also shifted to wage labour, as an additional livelihoods option, to meet the deficit in food and economic security. Accordingly, seasonal as well as permanent migration has become a common phenomenon with the male adults and youth migrating to nearby urban centres. According to the villagers, on an average fifty of their male members work in the neighbouring marble mines every year.

Figure 3: Livestock Profile of Jhabla



### **The Problem**

The village institutions that existed in the area since traditional times were in the form of *Jati Panchayats*<sup>1</sup>, which were not development oriented and hardly paid any attention to the cause of the poor as they are generally found to be biased in terms of gender, caste and power. As a result they were used primarily by the powerful people for concentration and abuse of power. Ironically, although the community of *Jhabla* belonged to one tribe of *Meena*, it was still fragmented and lack of coordination among people was highly prevalent.

Later, during the colonial period, the traditional institutions were replaced by appointment of *mukhia* or *pradhan* by the rulers to collect tax from local communities, as well as to exploit local resources for their own benefits and control governance at local levels. After the end of colonial rule, like in many other places in the country, these institutions collapsed or were captured by powerful individuals who basically abused power. In the absence of any governing institutions, common property resources suffered the most.

Following independence, historical land use patterns in the region were codified. Well-forested uplands were designated as forest lands, low lands as agricultural land, and the intermediate and pastoral wastelands were distinguished as commons. In the process, the higher caste families with larger and better land holdings got concentrated in low lands and tended to rear large ruminants primarily for milk and draught power. While, those in tribal areas, because they had been pushed to hillier and less productive tracts, were more inclined to rear small ruminants and utilised biomass from upland forests.

At this time, most of the people used to keep at least a third of their land holdings as fallow land locally known as *beeds* (private wastelands) to facilitate fodder sufficiency. However, rising human and livestock populations, environmental degradation due to unregulated and unsustainable use of resources, over-exploitation, encroachment of common lands and adverse weather conditions, over the course of several decades, led to the degradation of community common lands. Encroachment of commons was one of the key factors for reducing the resource base for livestock sustenance, as it constrained the access for marginal farmers. Moreover, increase in population led to

<sup>1</sup>Caste in several parts of India is referred to as *Jati, nati* or *nat*. Every caste has a *Jati Panchayat* (caste leaders) and *Jati Panchayats* (caste assemblies). The main role that a *Jati Panchayat* plays is to uphold and guard the customary practices that form the identity of the caste. In most castes these customary practices take on the symbolic value of caste 'honour' and identity and if transgressed or acted against can attract punishment, ranging from monetary fines to being declared an 'outcaste'. *Jati Panchayats* also regulate social relations and conduct of the *jati* members – they mediate disputes in marriages, property and inheritance

further fragmentation of land holdings which led to a decrease in privately owned pasture lands as more and more land was brought under cultivation of food crops.

Before Seva Mandir's association with the village *Jhabla* in 1980, the services at the rural level were very poor. This was the time when there was no approach road to the village and camels were the only means of transportation. The villagers used to face a lot of hardships as far as their subsistence and economic needs were concerned. Being largely isolated from the outside world, the villagers survived on rain-fed agriculture and produce collected from the forests. Livestock in large numbers were reared in every household during 1980s. Livestock in the region have traditionally proven to be invaluable insurance against crop failure, providing much greater returns in times of water scarcity than agricultural products. The possession of good number of livestock was always looked upon as a sign of economic stability, and the money lenders used to give loans easily to big livestock rearers, as they were sure of repayment of their loans through sale of livestock or their products. This kind of easy credit facility was however, denied to the poor livestock keepers due to uncertainty of repayments.

With the increase in number of households and the resulting increase in pressure on the available resources, one of the major problems that came up for livestock rearing was the unavailability of enough fodder, as the productivity of forest and revenue lands in the village was severely low. These common lands, like in most of the other villages in the area, were degraded and under intense pressure due to over-grazing. Further, a few households had encroached upon the common lands, thereby, hampering access to such lands particularly for the poorer inhabitants. As a result, these poor families had to go to neighbouring villages of *Saroo*, *Nenbara* and *Sera* to get grass. Such inequitable sharing of common resources in *Jhabla* was creating a wide gap in the society by providing the powerful landholders with better economic opportunities and pushing the poor towards increasingly scarce resources. Also, absence of proper governing systems led to severe degradation and deterioration of common property land, leading to instability and uncertainty in food security and livelihood options.

## 2. The Practice

Seva Mandir's association with *Jhabla* began in early 1980s with the Adult Education Programme. Later, they undertook multi-pronged interventions on private as well as common lands in *Jhabla* through development of people's institution involving all villagers. The local institution or the *Samuh* formed in 1988 has a membership of 239 households and is the main force behind holistic development of the village.

Due to lack of options other than unskilled wage labour for tribal communities in the urban economy, the only alternative for economic advancement was to optimise the land use patterns along with maintaining ecological security on a priority basis. It was recognised that efforts for collective action and community-owned and managed biomass production had become the need of the hour.

Most of the Commons in the project area were under contested ownership and illegally encroached upon by individuals. As a consequence, the task before initiating the development of common land was to free the land from encroachments. While this could certainly have been done through legal channels, it was felt, that the involvement of local institutions and leaders would make this process more participatory and sustainable along with strengthening cohesiveness within the community.

A key Learning over the course of Seva Mandir's work with communities has been the need for an appropriate mechanism that could serve as a neutral yet shared platform for participatory development. Out of this realisation, the idea of the *Gram Vikas Kosh* (GVK) was developed - an innovative concept that aims to strengthen village institutions through the creation and management of a village level corpus fund (*Kosh*), formed through people's contributions and owned by them. The fund provides a common platform for people to come together, discuss their problems and form a development agenda, while simultaneously providing the financial resources for undertaking necessary actions.

Building upon the capacities of community members for democratic management and effective utilisation of the fund was crucial for promoting self-reliance. In order to make this fund operational, the *samuh* (village group) elects an executive committee, called *Gram Vikas* Committee (GVC), consisting of both men and women from different social backgrounds. This committee is responsible for administration of the *Kosh* and to initiate suitable village level development activities.

The first GVC of 11 members in *Jhabla* had 50% representation of women members. Due care was taken to ensure representation from all hamlets, making it a common platform for village development. The first natural resource development activity taken up in *Jhabla* was the wasteland development programme. The programme, undertaken in the second half of 1980s, involved plantation on private wastelands with individual farmers. The activity aided in improving the availability of fodder in the village to a certain extent.

Development of individual wastelands done a few years back was not enough to

### **Box 1: Local Institutions for Pro-Poor Livestock Development**

Creating and sustaining the capacities of local institutions and their elected executive committees is an in-built phenomenon of Seva Mandir's local institutional development programme. The members of these committees are regularly given training in various aspects of village governance, which involves conflict resolution, and evolving mechanisms, rules and regulations for equitable distribution of common resources. In addition, during execution of the proposed plans, the members are trained in different technical aspects such as design, measurement etc. The multidimensional skills imparted to the GVC through various training and workshops helps them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in an effective manner.

The role of village institutions - *Samuh* and GVCs - is dynamic in nature and they function differently at various junctures. The role of the village group starts from identification of the right natural resource development programme for the village. The GVC, through a consultative process, selects and plans the development interventions for the habitat. The process ensures that the development planning is close to the realities and the needs of various sub-groups of the community.

The process of removing encroachers, mainly undertaken by GVC and *Samuh* members, passes through a series of negotiations, consultations and resolutions. At certain times, members also exert peer pressure and social exclusion to compel removal of encroachments. Since, the final outcome of these processes are based on general consensus rather than impositions, it is to a large extent accepted by the villagers as well as encroachers.

Moving further community-based natural resource management models are comprised of creating enclosures in order to facilitate the process of natural regeneration of land. The work undertaken on forest lands include fencing, soil and water conservation activities, digging pits, plantation and re-plantation, weeding, hoeing, protection and management. During implementation of these activities, the role of GVC shifts to supervision and monitoring of the planned work. The members of village committees make sure that households from different segments of the community receive equal opportunities for labour. A member of the committee is appointed temporarily for keeping attendance of labourers and the payment of wages are made only after the verification of site and payment sheets by the functionaries of GVC.

The function of GVC does not end with the completion of project implementation. The GVC in consultation with the *Samuh* forms different norms and regulations for smooth management of the developed assets and judicious distribution of benefits and most importantly ensures and instils a sense of discipline amongst the community members to follow the established patterns.

meet the increasing demand of the livestock of *Jhabla*. Only those households which had a considerable amount of land were able to feed their cattle from their own land. Since most of the households were marginal farmers they hardly possessed any private wastelands to grow fodder for their animals. This fodder shortage led to low milk production, as the cattle could not get sufficient feed, let alone a nutritious diet.

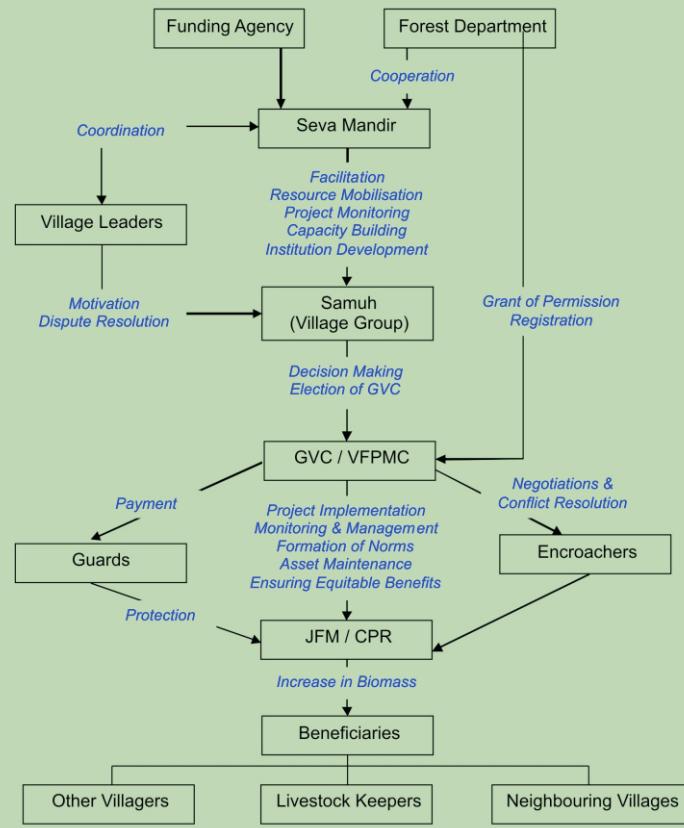
Consequently, the community recognised that their forests of 450 ha were the only sustainable source of fodder in the long run. In mid 1990s, the villagers thus decided to take up work on their forest lands under the Joint Forest Management Programme (JFM). The intervention was intended to regenerate the degraded forest land, while devolving the responsibilities of protecting and managing these forests to the village

community. In 1996, *Jhabla* got their Village Forest Protection and Management Committee (VFPMC) registered with the Forest Department (FD). Most of the members of the VFPMC belong to the GVC, making co-ordination within the *Samuh* strong. The VFPMC comprised of 13 members, which included four women members as they were the ones who cut and fetched grass for their animals. In order to give them more voice in decision-making, an additional women's sub-committee of 8 members was also formed as per the JFM guidelines. Micro plans detailing the proposed plan of action were then formalised and submitted to the forest department for concurrence which was executed after a tripartite agreement was signed between the VFPMC, Forest Department and Seva Mandir as the facilitating agency.

Since 1996, the VFPMC has actively worked in collaboration with Seva Mandir to

develop their forest lands. Till 2006, the Joint Forest Management work has been completed on 150 ha out of 450 ha forest lands. Of these, work on the first 50 ha was undertaken in late 1990s and got completed in 2001, while the remaining 100 ha was developed by 2006. The forest land development process consisted of the construction of a boundary wall around the sites creating an enclosure around the area, constructing check dams and trenches for land and moisture development, planting new trees of various local as well ecologically useful species, and undertaking direct seeding of grass and a few tree species. Expenditure to the tune of Rs 10-12,000 per hectare was made for implementation of soil and moisture conservation measures. During this phase the GVC of *Jhabla* fulfilled the various functions as the nodal agency (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: The Process**



Based on the importance of involving locals as custodians of natural resources, Joint Forest Management (JFM) has emerged as an important intervention in management of forest resources. This programme seeks to develop partnerships between local community institutions and the State forest departments for sustainable management and joint benefit sharing of public forest lands while ensuring environmental sustainability. The central premise is that local communities who are dependent on such forests have the greatest stake in its sustainable management.

The official ground for JFM was prepared by the National Forest Policy of 1988 which envisaged people's involvement, particularly of women, in meeting their basic forest related needs and in managing their local resources. This was followed in 1990 by a circular from Ministry of Environment and Forests providing guidelines for the involvement of Village Communities and Voluntary agencies in regeneration of degraded forests. The guideline for implementation of JFM also outlines the usufruct rights and has a provision for communities to have a share in the resources generated through sale of harvest.

The effective and meaningful involvement of all the stakeholders – communities, civil society organisations and the respective state forest departments were brought on a common platform for the first time under this mechanism and 22 states of India participated by making necessary variations to suit their respective requirements.

### 3. Achievements & Outcomes

One of the factors behind the success of local institution of *Jhabla* has been its strong conflict resolution mechanism. The GVC members had to get involved in direct negotiations with the encroachers before undertaking the development of JFM sites. When physical activities were started on the first JFM site of 50 ha, two villagers had encroached about one ha each. The committee successfully evicted those households after a few rounds of negotiations. Subsequently, on the second site also, three villagers had encroachments of around one ha, who were again evicted by the committee successfully after negotiations. Other minor conflicts during execution of activities related to payments were also resolved by the GVC with help from influential village leaders who took the responsibility of organising and uniting the villagers for resolving the issue and revitalising the faith of people in the GVC.

Apart from developing and protecting the forests, the most important feature of *Jhabla* GVC is the formation and effectual execution of norms for protection, management and equitable distribution of grass obtained from the sites. Initially, guards were appointed to keep watch on the sites, and catch rule-breakers. Their honorarium initially was paid from the project budget and currently is being met from the interest earned on GVK. Interestingly enough presently two women guards have been appointed to keep a watch on all three sites.

The village institution has also created norms for equal distribution of grass produced. For instance, post-monsoon, the JFM sites are opened for an agreed number of days during which all households are allowed to go and cut grass for their animals which has increased tremendously due to protection and soil- moisture conservation efforts. As a result, the poorer farmers neither have to take their animals to nearby villages for grazing nor have to purchase grass from outside, which has saved them a lot of money. In fact, villagers from surrounding villages now come to *Jhabla* to get grass from JFM sites. The drudgery of women has also reduced, giving them more time for agriculture and household chores. In return for their share of grass, the households have to contribute a fixed amount of money into the village development fund.

The direct benefits of improved access and availability of fodder and feed for livestock development has primarily been received by around 40-45 households, who do not have sufficient land to grow fodder for their animals and have to depend on common lands of the village. These households, after forest land development intervention, as shown in the table below, have harvested on an average 60,000 to 65,000 bundles of grass (1-2 kg per bundle) every year from the JFM sites. Earlier these people had to spend a considerable amount of money (about Rs. 500 - 1,000 annually by each household) for buying fodder from distant places. But, this easy access to fodder has helped in improving their incomes to a great extent.

Furthermore, the *samuh* has also created norms for defaulters in order to penalise households whose animals are found grazing in the protected areas. At present, the penalty for grazing one small ruminant or cattle is Rs. 12 and Rs. 51 respectively. This puts a check on trespassing both by the community members and by those from the neighbouring villages. Such collections are then deposited in the GVK which currently, is about Rs 450,000.

Table 1 shows the grass output from JFM sites and corresponding contributions to the GVK:

<b>Table 1: Grass Output &amp; Contributions to the GVK</b>								
Description	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of Households Benefitted	98	75	62	131	98	43	42	119
Number of Grass Bundles Harvested	30,000	42,720	68,244	70,095	97,530	78,530	65,520	110,560
Contribution to GVK (Rs)	3,029	2,301	860	7,300	10,600	3,610	840	6,760

In the year 2008, the local people had abundant grass available with them and did not need to cut grass from JFM sites. Grass was finally cut and utilised by people from other villages and hence the GVK contribution is low in comparison to other years. This was certainly a loss to the village development fund, but the issue was wisely taken as a lesson by the committee members. In 2009 the committee maintained a strict guard and sold extra grass to external agencies to avoid any kind of loss to the GVK fund. The amount obtained from sale of grass was wisely deposited in the *Gram Vikas Kosh*.

Post project implementation phase *samuh* and the GVC continues to be an active player in initiating other developmental activities in health, education and building infrastructure for the village in association with Seva Mandir and other players.

### **Outcomes**

A key outcome of the good practice has been the revitalisation of land that was once highly degraded. With regard to livestock husbandry, besides assisting in saving money that used to be spent by livestock keepers for purchasing fodder during summer months, it has also ensured the availability of fodder in the village itself. This is a prime factor in the reduction of drudgery of women, as they do not need to travel long distances to get grass for their animals, fuel wood and other forest produce required to meet the household needs. The quality of fodder grass has also improved.

As stated by one of the residents, Bherulal ji Meena, "Earlier there was no management of the forest resources in the area and our livestock was starved because of fodder unavailability but now we are able to arrange sufficient fodder for our livestock from the JFM sites."

Improved fodder status is one of the major achievements gained by the strengthened institution base in *Jhabla* that has proved to be a boon for the village livestock. The major benefit is being availed by people rearing large ruminants as compared to those having more number of small ruminants because large ruminants can be easily fed on fodder harvested from the JFM sites. However, the smaller ruminants continue to graze outside the JFM boundaries in the rest of the forest area and due to a lack of lopping policy within JFM enclosures, cannot avail the benefits of increase in biomass from such sites.

Lastly, the work on common lands has assisted in building social capital in the community. Migration has reduced slightly and people have felt the positive impacts that have come out of the interventions initiated by the local institution, giving the villagers more spare time and monetary savings. With increased fodder availability, few of the

progressive farmers who possess good amount of bigger ruminants are hoping to take up dairy development and farm based activities in near future. The small ruminants are also now a good source of cash income due to improved purchasing power of the community members.

Shankar Rama ji Meena, living in close proximity of the JFM site, did not have any livestock when he parted from his father 8-10 years ago. Due to lack of finance he was unable to buy oxen and had to borrow them from others for ploughing his fields. For the past few years he has been engaged in the activity of cutting and selling the fodder bundles from JFM site. With the earnings, he bought livestock for his household. Presently, he owns two oxen, one buffalo, one cow and five goats. The goats are providing an income up to Rs. 800 – 2,000 annually. The ghee made from the milk is also providing an income of up to Rs. 700 - 800 annually. Also the available livestock is now a good source for dung manure for the agricultural fields.

Another resident Lakshman Deva ji Meena only had one cow and two goats 7-8 years ago. As the fodder conditions improved through management by the village institutions, he also was able to buy one cow, one buffalo, two oxen and four goats and believes that he will be very soon earning a good income through his livestock.

## 4. Lessons Learnt & Conclusion

- ※ Enabling communities to change the traditional mind set of patron-client relationship is a slow process which is deeply contested by groups with vested interests.
- ※ Appropriate norms for institution building should be created through a participatory process.
- ※ Addressing concerns of all the stakeholders of common property resources and ensuring equity of rights for the marginalised sections of community is by no means an easy task.
- ※ By resorting to stall feeding practices, further development of cattle can be advanced with more success.
- ※ Presently Joint Forest Management mainly benefits / favours large ruminants. There is a need for JFM interventions to be expanded and designed so as to favour small ruminants also, eg. a suitable lopping policy needs to be institutionalised.
- ※ Despite the interventions taken up through this practice the role of women still needs strengthening so that they have an active role and contribute in facilitation of village institutions, particularly around natural resource management.
- ※ A long term role of a facilitating agency is crucial to provide inputs, both financial and technical, before the practice can become self-sustaining.

Unregulated and unsustainable use of forests in the past has impacted negatively on livestock rearing as a suitable livelihood option. Breakdown of customary practices along with reclassification of land ownership post independence which alienated the communities from their traditional rights over Forests are critical factors that may be attributed for the fast erosion of productivity of such lands.

Community-based forest management programs and the devolution of management responsibilities of eco-restoration activities to local institutions along with a provision for benefit sharing is a way forward for overall community development. Recognising the importance of such partnerships the Government of India initiated the implementation of Joint Forest Management as an inclusive social process for enhancing natural resource base leading to multiple benefits like increased productivity of land and rise in water table which in turn leads to sustainable improvements in the socio-economic conditions of the user groups. Currently 22 States are implementing JFM which needs to be streamlined further as yet another option to enable decentralised and inclusive systems of governance for management of natural resources.

Hence, the need to have a shared vision of reflecting normative concerns among the different stakeholders is of paramount importance for development of forest resources.

The NDDB-FAO **South Asia Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Programme** (SA-PPLPP) SA PPLPP is a unique livestock development program that aims to 'to ensure that the interests of poor livestock keepers are reflected in national as well as international policies and programs affecting their livelihoods'. It endeavors to do so by a) creating spaces for and facilitating dialogue among the actors playing a direct and indirect role in the livestock sector of South Asia, and b) drawing from and using lessons from field experiences to influence livestock-related policies, programmatic and institutional changes towards the benefit of poor fe/male livestock keepers in the region.

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**Seva Mandir** is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working for the development of the rural and tribal population in Udaipur and Rajsamand districts of southern Rajasthan. The work area encompasses 626 villages and 56 urban settlements. In total the organization reaches out to around 70,000 households, influencing the lives of approximately 360,000 persons.

Seva Mandir focuses on – (i) Enhancing people's capabilities for self-development by working for improved literacy levels, better health status and sensitization against oppressive gender relations, (ii) Creating sustainable improvements in the livelihoods base by revitalizing the natural resource base of communities, (iii) Strengthening village institutions by creating an alternative paradigm of power structures and community interactions that reinforce the positive forces of cooperation, transparency, equity, justice and responsible citizenship.

*For more information kindly visit their website at <http://www.sevamandir.org/>*

## About this Good Practice

This Good Practice Note illustrates the practice of local institutional development and its role in pro-poor livestock development in the context of village *Jhabla* in Udaipur district of Rajasthan in the western part of India.

The work initiated by Seva Mandir in late 1980s has borne fruit as after two decades it demonstrates its robustness in gripping local community dynamics and assisting in providing better opportunities for livestock rearing. It highlights the need to reconsider inclusion of communities in governing their natural resources especially the forests and open pasture lands, which is a step in the right direction.

## SOUTH ASIA Pro Poor Livestock Policy Programme

A joint initiative of NDDB and FAO

*Regional Office:*

NDDB House (6th Floor) PB 4906, Safdarjung Enclave

New Delhi - 110029, INDIA

Tel: +91 (0) 11 2619 7851 / 7649 • Fax: +91 (0) 11 2618 9122

E-mail: [saplpp@sapplpp.org](mailto:sapplpp@sapplpp.org)

Website: [www.sapplpp.org](http://www.sapplpp.org)

### Partnering Institutions

BRAC  
BRAC Centre  
75 Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212  
BANGLADESH  
Tel: +880 2 8824180-7 Extn: 2311  
Fax: +880 2 8823542, 8826448  
E-mail: [saleque@sapplpp.org](mailto:saleque@sapplpp.org)  
[saleque.ma@brac.net](mailto:saleque.ma@brac.net)

Department of Livestock  
Ministry of Agriculture  
Thimpu  
BHUTAN  
Tel: +975 (0) 2 351102  
Fax: +975 (0) 2 322094, 351222  
E-mail: [tshering@sapplpp.org](mailto:tshering@sapplpp.org)  
[naip@druknet.bt](mailto:naip@druknet.bt)

BAIF Development Research Foundation  
Dr. Manibhai Desai Nagar, NH 4  
Warje, Pune 411058, INDIA  
Tel: +91 (0) 20 25231661  
Fax: +91 (0) 20 25231662  
E-mail: [sepawar@sapplpp.org](mailto:sepawar@sapplpp.org)  
[sepawar@baif.org.in](mailto:sepawar@baif.org.in)

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