

Tribals develop fisheries in Dimbhe Dam

SHASHWAT

Background

The Dimbhe dam was constructed in Ambegaon block, Pune district, Maharashtra and completed in the year 2000. It is built across 2202 hectares of land and caused the displacement of 1253 families. 11 villages were submerged fully and 13 others were partly affected. Today 19 villages are located at the fringes of the reservoir that irrigates almost 14,000 hectares of land. Although the reservoir positively altered the downstream areas due to irrigation and supported growth of all sorts of vegetables, fruits and flowers yet it is unfair to the families who have been displaced and have had to bear the cost of development without being given their share reaping out of such development.

The local people, almost completely the tribal population, were pushed to upstream areas and were placed on resettlement or compensation programs. They lost their means of livelihood and were slowly being pushed deeper into poverty. In 2003, barely 25-40 families were fishing from the reservoir. However the catch was inadequate even for self-consumption and grossly insufficient to provide them with a secure income.

Initiative

The Dimbhe Reservoir Area Poverty Alleviation Program was launched with the aim of achieving holistic and sustainable development in the region by utilizing natural resources and optimizing the skills and traditional knowledge of local tribals.

- The initiative was taken up by Budhaji Damse of Shashwat (non-governmental, non-profit organization) who believed that something positive had to be done with the full involvement of the displaced tribal people who paid the cost of development.
- People from approximately 19 villages were engaged in the discussion and deliberations regarding the issue. Members of the 'Bargi Dam Displaced and Affected People's Association' guided the voluntary organizations throughout. The local people formed an association deciding on a token

membership fee. The tribal women organized themselves into 32 self-help groups across the various villages in the area.

- The then Divisional Commissioner of Pune, Mr P D Karandikar, after his visit to the area in February 2004 envisaged a proper framework for the poverty alleviation program of 38 tribal villages situated in the catchment area.

Fisheries, cultivation of drawdown land (that is available at the edge of the reservoir when the water level of the dam goes down) and the **making of new paddy fields with stone bunds** on steeply sloping lands owned by the farmers were the three main activities that were taken up in the area.

Advanced technology and innovative methods were employed to improve reservoir productivity such as, use of advanced fish culture techniques like cage culture and pen culture, rearing of ornamental fish for commercial purposes and planting green manure crops in fields which would submerge under the dam waters for a few months, every year. Doing so would help in achieving the twin objective of attracting greater catch for the fishermen when the water level was high and producing a higher yield of wheat that was planted in these lands when they were not submerged in water.

There have been many difficulties faced from time to time by the local people. In 2007 heavy rains washed away the fishing nets due to heavy floods. In 2008 a pest attack on a large number of teak trees surrounding the reservoir made it marshy, causing their fishing nets to intertwine and incapable of catching any fish. In 2011, all five gates of the dam were opened for a day and a half due to heavy precipitation which led to loss of about three tons of fish. The fisherfolks incurred a loss of about Rs 2.5 lakh; similar loss happened in 2013. Annual catch dropped to 14.98 tons in 2013-14 because fish escaped downstream after opening of dam gates for flood control and poor catch in other seasons due to climatic factors. However after each incident the tribal people have braved their loss and rebounded back successfully.

Outcome

Today the 273 members of 'Dimbhe Jalashay Shramik Adivasi Machhimar Sahakari Society Maryadit, Digad' own over 147 boats, more than 2000 kg of fishing nets and have harvested up to 31.17 tonnes of fish annually with gross sales Rs 19.94 lakh and wages paid to fishers Rs 8.50 lakh in 2012-13.

A mini hatchery is in operation since 2013, with the first fish seed breeding completed unassisted by the tribal fishers in August 2014, and a small ice plant is also working now; both gifts from the Central Institute of Fisheries Education.

Due to the combined efforts of tribal fisherfolk women and men, the voluntary organization Shashwat and various government departments and scientists of a national level research institute; the local people have now overcome their problem and have managed to achieve a sustainable livelihood for themselves.

Not only have they effectively fought their impending poverty but also contributed to the health of the environment in which they live as the community pledged not to use fertilizers or pesticides. The Dimbhe reservoir as a result, is completely free of pollution and the fish bred are 100% organic.

AWARDS

Shashwat was awarded the prestigious global **EQUATOR PRIZE** as well as the **Special Recognition Award for Freshwater Resource Management** by the EQUATOR INITIATIVE of the United Nations Development Program at the RIO+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 20 June 2012. UNDP India's resident representative, Ms Lisa Grande, and the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Mr Prithviraj Chavan, felicitated the Shashwat team again in May 2013, at Pune.

Sources

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Web links

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<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/Ambegaon-NGO-wins-United-Nations-Development-Programme-award-Equator-prize/articleshow/14791317.cms>

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