

## From water scarcity to sustainability: Water conservation efforts in Maharashtra

In the heart of Marathwada region, Maharashtra, where the sun beats down mercilessly and rain is a fickle friend, lie ten villages nestled along the banks of the Bobhati River. These villages, part of the Kaij block in Beed district, are home to communities who have struggled for generations against the harsh realities of drought.



**A newly constructed KT Weir on Bobhati River near Hadgav Project Village**

This is a story of how Yuva Gram Vikas Mandal (Yuva Gram), a local youth organisation, and India Water Partnership (IWP) worked with villagers to raise funds to the tune of Rs. 2.53 crores from the government and other donors in the past two years. Together with the villagers, these funds have been used to desilt and deepen ponds, construct new dug wells, lay down water supply pipelines, repair existing KT weirs and construct new weirs. Damaged earthen bunds and dug wells have been reconstructed and rejuvenated. All this has brought life back in these 10 villages where every drop counts.

Yuva Gram has been working to address water scarcity in Kaij and Dharur blocks of Maharashtra, India, since 1984. The lack of water for irrigation and drinking has meant poor harvests, land erosion, and out-migration, especially among young people.

Yuva Gram and IWP adopted a two-pronged approach to revitalize water resources and to empower local youth and village committees to help stop this exodus. Additionally, Yuva Gram and IWP began advocating for stronger government policies on irrigation and water access to achieve water security for the people and villages.

### Story of change begins in 2022

Yuva Gram knew something had to change. Thus began a year-long project in 2022 supported by IWP. The project's focus on community empowerment and reviving water resources aligned perfectly with the challenges faced by the region. Yuva Gram's plan to activate local committees and promote sustainable water management practices resonated with IWP's goals for long-term solutions. Additionally, the project had a potential for replication and indirectly support the state's river rejuvenation program.

### Local Statutory Committees empowered and youth capacitated as Stewards of Water Future

The project first targeted empowerment of the youth and local governing bodies, the Gram Panchayats (GPs) and its local water-related statutory committees such as Watershed Development Committees (WDCs) and the Water Supply & Sanitation Committees (WSSCs).

Yuva Gram and IWP believed that by uniting youth & local governing bodies, the villages could find lasting solutions to their water woes. They formed youth groups in each of the 10 project villages, with 20 young men and women each. These groups became the voice of the communities and started raising water concerns and mobilising resources from the government.



**WDC and WSSC Capacity Building Meeting in Kevad Project Village**

200 young minds were ignited with leadership training, empowered to become stewards of their water future. These young leaders, armed with knowledge, then reached out to the village elders and the Gram Panchayats. They participated in all decision-making processes, their unique perspectives enriching the solutions. A massive survey charted the state of every well, stream, and irrigation canal - a map of their water woes.

## Stakeholder Engagement

### **Building blocks of success: A path towards water security**

*This program demonstrates the power of collaboration between communities and government agencies in tackling water scarcity. By empowering local leadership, leveraging resources, and promoting sustainable practices, this initiative offers a promising solution for drought-prone areas. The program aimed to tackle water scarcity in rural Maharashtra through a series of workshops and stakeholder meetings.*

### **Identifying the challenges**

- Workshops revealed unsustainable water use and a lack of knowledge about rainwater harvesting and conservation.
- Climate change emerged as a major threat to the region's water resources.
- Young people were migrating due to water scarcity, impacting agricultural productivity.

### **Building a strategy**

- The focus shifted from individual villages to reviving the Bobhati River, a crucial water source.
- Experts emphasized water conservation practices, de-silting water bodies, and utilizing government schemes.
- Workshops promoted sustainable water use and micro-irrigation techniques for efficient water utilization.

### **Empowering the community**

- Local youth were trained in water conservation practices to become stewards of their water resources.
- Women's Self Help Groups (WSSCs) and Water User Associations (WUAs) played a key role in capacity building.
- Government programs like POCRA provided support for climate-resilient agriculture.

### **Collaboration is key**

- Convergence workshops brought together government officials, youth leaders, and community members.
- Sharing success stories from other village's motivated communities to actively participate.
- Block-level stakeholder meetings fostered collaboration between students, WSSC/WDC committees, agriculture and irrigation officials, and media personnel.

*These meetings/workshops led to the creation of a community water management plan for long-term water solutions.*

## Yuva Gram's success and IWP's critical support

*Encouraged with the huge participation of community for managing and conserving their scarce water resources, the government officials presented various irrigation schemes and offered their full cooperation to Yuva Gram. The support and fostered partnerships with government departments helped Yuva Gram in securing resources and implement water conservation projects in villages. They submitted proposals for government funding and corporate social responsibility programs, and some villages received grants for constructing new structures.*

*Yuva Gram convinced the government to repair damaged water conservation structures. They met with the Deputy Chief Minister, Maharashtra emphasizing the importance of NGO participation in river rejuvenation and collaborative policies for water security. Their dedication serves as a powerful example of the transformative potential of collaboration.*

***“Yuva Gram’s efforts garnered well-deserved recognition. We were selected for the “Chala Janu Ya Nadila” program, a state initiative focusing on river revitalization, including the Bobhati River. The district administration and state government included Yuva Gram’s representatives as Sentinel Members of the District River Rejuvenation Committee, a direct outcome of the IWP project’s interventions”*** said Mr. H.P. Deshmukh Executive Secretary, Yuva Gram.

***“IWP's technical and financial support to Yuva Gram empowered local youth and transformed them as water stewards. IWP's monitoring visits improved outputs and their feedback on inviting government officials to the convergence workshops proved beneficial. Community representatives directly engaged with decision-makers and secured government financial support. For example, Rs. 4.70 lakhs received from the Agriculture Department for desilting and deepening ponds in Kevad and Varappaon villages. Notable in this work has been the activation and strengthening of the local Gram Panchayat water committees such as the Watershed Development Committees (WDCs) and the Water Supply & Sanitation Committees (WSSCs)”*** said Mr. Mangla Rai, Project Officer & Member of IWP's monitoring team.

*The other achievement has been in conserving water and helping rejuvenate Bobhati river to stem out-migration due to water scarcity.*

For more information, please see the link: <https://tinyurl.com/yfmhdbcd>