

Crop Diversification Brings Economic and Nutritional Security to Indian Farmers

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Today, the entire world is grappling with the adverse effects of climate change, and marginal farmers stand at the very front of this crisis. Unpredictable monsoons, depleting groundwater levels, soil degradation due to chemical farming, and market volatility together, these forces break the spine of the farmer. But from the Vagad region of southern Rajasthan, a different story is emerging. This is the story of tribal farmers who, together with their land, their traditions, and Vaagdhara, have found a path that is both climate-resilient and life-sustaining.

Vaagdhara's journey that began in Ghatol Village started with just 15 farmers who had limited resources and an unknown road ahead. But the seed of community participation sown in those early days has today grown into a mighty tree now operating across 1,168 villages in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat. Vaagdhara's primary agricultural intervention is known as the 'Sachchi Kheti' (True Farming) programme farming becomes 'true' when it connects with the earth rather than depleting it; when it frees the farmer rather than making them dependent. Under this programme, farmers receive practical training in natural farming methods. Making biofertilizers jeevamrit and ghanjeevamrit and preparing pest-control materials at home is central to it. This gradually eliminates dependence on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, freeing small farmers from the heavy expenditure that used to push them into a debt trap.

Women farmers play a central role in this programme. Traditionally, men have dominated agricultural decision-making, while women's contribution to actual farm labour sowing seeds, weeding, harvesting, cleaning grain has been far greater. Vaagdhara recognized this contradiction and made a conscious effort to bring women to the center of agricultural decision-making. Women's empowerment groups were formed, receiving both training and resources. Today, women from these groups not only speak up in the fields but also raise their voices in village-level meetings. Nutritional kitchen gardening growing diverse vegetables according to the family's needs is led primarily by women.



An exemplary illustration of this is Bahadur Charpota of Kudli village in Ghatol tehsil, who has today become an inspirational name in the Vagad region. A few years ago, his situation was like that of most farmers around him — four bighas of land, dependence on the uncertainty of monsoons, and extremely limited profit at the end of the year. After joining Vaagdhara, Gram Swaraj Group Bahadur transformed the entire structure of his farming. Monoculture gave way to mixed farming vegetables, fruit trees, and animal husbandry, all together. Dairy and goat rearing added a new and stable source of income.

Bahadur shares about his experience:

“Earlier we only waited for rain and managed with whatever grew. Vagdhara taught us that diversity in farming is the real source of income. Now if one thing doesn’t work out, another will — there is milk, there are vegetables, there are goats.”

Through this farming system, Bahadur earned an annual income of one lakh twenty thousand rupees (₹1,20,000) from his four bighas of land, and his three children — two sons and a daughter — are now pursuing higher education. His wife Asha Charpota is an equally important participant in this transformation.

Asha says:

“Since we started natural farming, we have seen a difference in the children’s food too. Earlier we had to buy vegetables from the market; now we get fresh produce from our own field. Money has been saved, health has improved, and our livelihood has also grown.”

Before Vaagdhara intervention in Vagad, most farmers were dependent on single crops like maize. This monotony multiplies climate risk manifold failure of one crop means the ruin of the entire year. Through crop diversification, Vaagdhara has dispersed this risk. Pulses, vegetables, fruits, medicinal plants — multiple types of produce on a single field not only create several sources of income but also improve soil health. Leguminous crops fix atmospheric nitrogen in the soil. Growing crops with deep and shallow roots together nourishes various layers of the soil.

With regular use of bio fertilizers and proper crop rotation, the biological structure of the soil

is improving rapidly. In this mixed farming model, goat-rearing-based livelihood has emerged as an important link for marginal farmers. The initial investment in goat rearing is low, care is relatively simple, and it provides a means of regular income. Goat manure serves as an excellent bio fertilizer for the field, and goat rearing has had an impact at both social and economic levels by providing a source of income close to home.

Farmers who previously spent thousands of rupees per acre on chemical fertilizers and pesticides now prepare biofertilizers themselves. With reduced dependence on the market, costs have decreased by 20 to 30 percent. Crop diversification and multi-layered farming have increased productivity. The nutritional security of families has been strengthened many families now grow the vegetables and fruits at home that they previously had to buy from the market.

As Bahadur Charpota says:

“Work with nature, not against it. Learn with it.”

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