

Rural

Rural

INTRODUCTION

The need for broadbasing YUVA's intervention across the state of Maharashtra saw the initiation of the YUVA Rural programme in the Vidarbha region in 1994. Today, YUVA Rural is an independent legal body, with its own governance structure. It is active in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra as also in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

The Strategic Plan of YUVA Rural for the period 2003-2008 identified three major areas of interventions, which form the basis of the work of YUVA Rural.

Natural Resource Management and Livelihood

The changes in the legal, economic and political framework with the initiation of the new economic policies since the 90s have led to an erosion of sources of livelihood of the rural and tribal populace. People's access to natural resources such as land, water and forests is being taken away either by the State or by the Market, leading to a situation of unrestrained and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources on the one hand and a loss of livelihood on the other, for communities dependent on natural resources for survival.

In this scenario, YUVA Rural aims at building people's capacity to enable them to restore their rights over natural resources for their sustainable livelihood by involving them in the sustainable management and equal and just distribution of those resources in a non-exploitative manner.

Gender And Other Social Discrimination

Gender discrimination represents one of the worst forms of violence of our times. Women are discriminated against just because of their sex with patriarchal structures such as the family, religion and other institutions sanctioning their disempowerment through control over their labour, mobility, fertility and sexuality. Women have unequal access to all resources – economic, political, social and cultural and face violation of their fundamental right to equality in all spheres of life.

YUVA Rural is committed to creating a society that empowers women as equal partners and ensures the promotion and fulfillment of the fundamental human rights of women.

Governance And Human Rights

A transparent and accountable governance structure is critical to the functioning of a vibrant democracy. While the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution set the legislative framework for ensuring governance by the people, local governance structures continue to be alienated from the people.

YUVA Rural works to make people aware of their basic rights vis-à-vis structures of local governance, so that they are empowered to take decisions over their and their communities' development.

KEY OUTCOMES

NRM and Livelihood

Sustainable Agriculture in Vidharbha

Vidharbha region is known for its rapidly depleting ground water resources, degradation of fertile soil with the large amounts of agro chemicals, decline in agricultural productivity and high indebtedness all of which have created an agrarian crisis that has forced many farmers to take their life.

One of YUVA Rural's programmes - the Integrated Natural Sustainable Agriculture Process (INSAP) was conceptualized as an intervention in sustainable agriculture in five districts of this region- Akola, Amrawati, Buldana, Washim and Wardha. Through mass mobilization activities such as village awareness activities, home visits, farm visits, focus group discussions, exposure visits, trainings and workshops, around 67000 farmers of 500 hundred villages in 24 talukas of these five districts have been educated on sustainable practices of farming.

With lower input costs, readily available small credit through farmers' Self-help groups (SHG) and an almost equal yield from agriculture, thousands of farmers have been enabled to move out of the clutches of money lenders, resulting in not a single farmer suicide in the 200 villages where this programme has been adopted.



Impact of Sustainable Agriculture

Shrihari Yekade is small farmer in Bhalegaon Bazar village of Khamgaon taluka in Buldhana district. He has 12 acres of land. He was forced to take loans every year to cover the high input costs in traditional farming.

In 2002, he joined the INSAP programme and was amazed at the difference it made to his farming practices. Not only were input costs much lower, the yield was almost equal to what he would have got from traditional farming, whose costs he was not able to afford. Today he is a loan-free farmer.

Under a farmers' exchange programme, Mr. Shrihari Ekade was sent to Switzerland to share his experiences with European farmers. This has further broadened his perspective towards sustainable agriculture. Today, he volunteers some of his time to promote sustainable agriculture amongst farmers in and around his village.

Traditional seeds

For promotion of traditional seeds towards food sovereignty and to reduce exploitation by seed companies, 900 acres of seed plots have been developed through farmers. 1400 acres of land has been treated for soil and water conservation through simple and local techniques. 35 roof top water harvesting structure have been prepared and are in use in the saline water belt in Akola district.

Agro-allied activity

The lack of any agro-allied activity has been one of the key reasons for farmers' suicides in Vidarbha. In an effort to promote agro-allied activity, YUVA has been instrumental in helping four farmers' groups initiate cooperative milk dairies in Washim, Buldana and Akola districts.



Importance of indigenous seeds is being shown by progressive farmers

BT Cotton study

The proceedings of an International seminar on Bt Cotton held in Sept 2005, organised by YUVA Rural, attended by agricultural scientists, farmers etc. showed that Bt is not feasible for India from many angles. As a follow-up to this seminar, YUVA Rural conducted a short-term study to monitor the performance of Bt cotton. This study has been conducted in four districts- Amrawati, Buldana, Yavatmal and Nanded in association with Swiss Aid, Green Peace and Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Comparing the performance of 200 Bt cotton farmers with 200 non-Bt cotton farmers, the study establishes that non-Bt cotton farmers obtained 68% more net income during this season though the cost of Bt Cotton cultivation was 23.5% higher than non-Bt cotton. This study will be further used for lobbying and advocacy.

An end to the need to migrate

45 families live in the village Munchgohan, situated in the north of Betul District on the Betul-Athner Road. YUVA Rural has been promoting income generating activities in this village. A women's Self Help Group - Pooja Swa Sahayata Group, is engaged in the sale and purchase of Mahua and Soyabean. Following training, they have also started fishery in the village lake.

Most of the 15 women who are members of this group were daily wage earners, migrating to Maharashtra for work. They now earn a good income in their own villages and need not migrate. Says Shivrati Bai, the President, "Earlier we used to go out (migrate) as daily wage earners, leaving our children, cattle and houses, but now we don't have to migrate. We also get easy credit from our groups whenever required".

Sustainable Livelihood in Madhya Pradesh

YUVA started its intervention in 2003 in Betul, one of the backward districts of Madhya Pradesh, in two blocks - Chincholi and Betul covering 50 villages (25 in each block) with the objective of promoting sustainable livelihood options for poor tribal communities.

More than 412 families living below the poverty line have started 38 income generating units. In collaboration with Government schemes and bank loans, an amount of Rs.28,23,000 has been disbursed in 50 Villages through SHGs and Income Generating Groups. Most of the activities are based on local resources available such as sale and purchase of agriculture produce, fishery, processing units of agriculture and minor forest produce, small-scale collective, irrigation units and petty shops.

Sustainable Agriculture in arid zone of Gujarat

On the basis of the experience in Vidarbha, YUVA Rural initiated the process of sustainable agriculture in Kutchh district of Gujarat. This process envisages not merely organic farming but also includes natural resource management through soil and water conservation measures and building farmers' institutions in the disaster prone area of Rapar. It also aims at dissemination of location-specific agriculture technologies to achieve self-sufficiency of the village as a whole, through developing self-reliant production, processing and marketing systems within the village community.

Awareness on sustainable agriculture has been spread to more than 10000 farmers in Rapar taluka. More than 300 farmers have developed compost pits and are regularly refilling the pits. 9 fodder plots in 63 acres of wasteland in 9 villages have been developed keeping for fodder security during the dry season. Krishi Samities in these villages have taken the responsibility of storing and selling the fodder. 8 horticulture plots with Mango, Chiku, Kharek, Ber, Amla have been developed and are being well maintained by the farmers. Survival rates in these plots is more than 60 per cent.

Two water-harvesting structures have been developed which have helped in recharging ground water in the surrounding area. It was observed that water table in 15 wells around the water harvesting structure at Sany has increased by 1 to 2.5 ft.

Linkages with market and marketing agencies have been established and therefore, farmers, who are practicing sustainable agriculture, are getting a 10-15 percent premium price. Farmers' organizations called Krishi Samities are functioning in each of the project villages. These institutions are now capable of negotiating with marketing agencies in order to get better prices for their organic produce.

The SADPAR (Sustainable Agriculture in Disaster Prone Area, Rahpar) programme has proved conventional thinking on agricultural practices wrong. It has been observed that not only is there no loss of production in the farmers' organic plots, but instead there is an increase in productivity, especially for millets and pulses, which are the commonly grown crops in Rapar.

Making Trade Fair

The Ministerial rounds of discussions and negotiations on the basis of Doha Development will bring in unfair proposals of trade at multilateral levels. YUVA took the lead in a State Campaign in Maharashtra under the 'Global Campaign to Make Trade Fair'. Programmes to create mass awareness among all stakeholders were undertaken. More than 11,00,000 signatures were collected against unfair trade policies. Four other organizations/ networks and their member organizations such as Zamin, Jungle, Pani Lokadhikar Andolan, Anubhav Shiksha Program, Maharashtra Organic Farming Federation and Shashwat Sheti Kriti Parishad worked together with YUVA for this campaign.

Strengthening Water Resources And Water Conservation

To restore and strengthen water resources, YUVA Rural has been working through different activities in Maharashtra as well as Kutchh district of Gujarat. In Maharashtra more than 700 ha. of land was brought under low-cost water and soil treatment an initiative that has helped to gain the ground water level. Similarly, in Rahpar Taluka of Kutchh district in Gujarat, 300 acres of land has been brought under soil and water conservation, 3 new wells were constructed, one well was repaired, 14 Roof-water harvesting tanks were built and 3 tanks were renovated that helped the recharging of 10 surrounding wells. As a result, people in the drought-prone area of Kutchh secured drinking water.

One Grass Plot of 15 acre has also been developed in a wasteland of Sonalwa village in Rahpar Taluka of Kutchh district, where around 10-quintal fodder has been grown. This fodder is being stored in the village, for use in periods of fodder shortage.

Gender and Other Social Discrimination

Mainstreaming Gender

Through the project 'Women in Distress to Women in Development', YUVA Rural has been working on issues of gender justice and gender equality. Efforts have been made through processes of capacity building and education to ensure that women are enabled to participate in decision making at all levels from the family to the community to the village and beyond. Some of the key initiatives undertaken this year and their impact are outlined below.

Campaign to end all violence against women (We Can...)

YUVA Rural has taken up the responsibility of anchoring the Maharashtra chapter of the South Asian Campaign on violence against women - "We Can End All Violence Against Women". The campaign was launched in Dec 2005 in the presence of 7000 women activists from the state, representatives of OXFAM International and stakeholders from other states in India.

The process of evolving the State-level campaign and deciding the strategies and alliance partners was initiated immediately after the launch. Regional events and workshops were arranged with the stakeholders in all regions of Maharashtra and a Plan of Action prepared.

Change Makers – people who pledge to actively campaign against violence against women have been identified and include NGO activists, lawyers, Police patils, anganwadi workers, primary teachers, primary health workers, elected representatives, gram sevaks, SHG members and youth. About 20000 Change Makers have been identified and were orientated to the campaign and their role. Five Change makers from Maharashtra participated in South Asian Change Makers' Assembly in Sri Lanka.

Counselling women in situations of crisis

In the year 2005-06, about 3894 families were counseled through 5 counseling centers in Nagpur, Bhandara, Amravati, Akola and Wardha. The first three counseling centers are being run in collaboration with the local Police Departments. All the women and some men who have been through the counseling process have become part of the Campaign against gender violence. A cadre of 340 activists have also been trained as 'bare-foot counselors' and they intervene in crisis situations at the local level.



Participation of women during WE CAN launch

Paralegal Training

In order to build and enhance the capacity of paralegals on addressing issues of women's rights with a right-based approach, YUVA Rural has initiated a paralegal training programme as part of a larger national process initiated by Janvikas, Ahmedabad. 90 paralegals from the Vidarbha region have been selected for training. They will be given 5 months training on various issues and Acts related to women.

Economic Empowerment of women

349 women's self help groups (SHGs) have been developed in Vidarbha, Betul district of MP and Rahpar block of Gujarat reaching out to more than 3500 women are involved. Many of these groups are linked to Government Programmes such as SGSY, NABARD, Swa-Sahayata Yojana etc.

Savings of these groups is to the tune of Rs. 20,00,000 and the business turnover is about Rs. 3,00,00,000. Many of these groups have started various businesses, such as collective purchase and sale of agriculture produce and minor forest produce, small-scale process industries, diary, etc. Their profit-making enterprises are helping families better their economic status.

The rise in economic status and power has also enabled women to negotiate social, political and cultural spaces which have been male dominated, with greater ease and confidence.

Mahila Vikas Parishad

The Mahila Vikas Parishad (Women's Development Council) – an umbrella organisation of women has been consolidated over the last year. This year has been marked by processes to strengthen the institutionalisation of MVP. 32000 members have been enrolled from 5 districts.

To bring greater focus and clarity on MVP's work, three chapters have been formed: a resource group, a rights group and a political group. All these groups are engaged in taking up initiatives and activities related to their chapters under the banner of Mahila Vikas Parishad. The group having political aspirations and engaged in political activities are contesting local elections of Gram Panchyat, Municipality, Taluka Panchayat and Zilla Parishad and many of them have been elected.

The MVP members are also involved in campaigning for women's entitlements over land, property as well as in promoting women entrepreneurship. More than 300 individual and group activities for income generating have been initiated.

Members are engaged in addressing social and gender issues in the society. 90 women trained as paralegals are engaged in addressing the legal cases of women, while those trained as barefoot counselors are addressing issues of domestic violence.

With the aim of initiating MVP in all villages in the next two years, a membership drive in other districts in Vidarbha was started towards the end of the year.



PRI Training for women

A barefoot counsellor rescues a girl from traffickers

Mumtaj Begum belongs to a Muslim family living in a slum Tajbagh of Nagpur city. Married off when she was a teenager to a political activist, she was a victim of violence by her husband, for many years.

'Having suffered myself, I decided to work for the cause of ending violence against women. I joined the training for Barefoot Counselors. Having finished my training, I took an oath to devote my life for curbing violence against women. I began my work by handling cases of Muslim women from my area. Here is a story of Rehana who was reported missing from her house. With our commitment and persistence, we traced and rescued her.

'Rehana is a 14 year old girl from a Muslim family, living in a village - Kamptee. Her father is an alcoholic and mother, a rag picker. Rehana used to help her mother, as it was the only source of income.

'One day Rehana's mother informed me about the disappearance of her daughter. I mobilised the women from the community and complained to the police. Unhappy over the lack of progress in the police investigation, we made enquiries, which revealed that strangers had taken the girl to Bhopal. Accompanied by other women members of Muslim Mahila Sangarsh Samiti, I headed to Bhopal. We reached the Bhopal police station in the small hours of the day. Stunned by the odd hour visit of a group of women looking for a missing girl, the police helped us in locating the address we were looking for. At dawn, we reached the house where a couple, obviously engaged in child trafficking, had held Rehana. She was rescued from their clutches, just in time. I am now following the police case and hope that the traffickers would be punished'.

Governance and Human Rights

Information Dissemination

As part of the Right to Information process, YUVA Rural runs two centres in Nagpur city and Ramtek taluka in collaboration with the Government. This year, we supported more than 26000 people by providing them services for filling their forms, making affidavits, providing them information on various schemes of Government and supporting them to secure benefits of various Government schemes.

Children's participation in fulfilling their rights

During the year 2005-06, YUVA Rural engaged with children in 27 villages of Rapar taluka to develop their vision of child rights within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Using the 'Spider Tool Exercise', 23 children's groups developed their vision for development and initiated actions in their own communities that proved they were on the path to become responsible citizens. Subsequently 23 children's groups developed small gardens in their school campus.

Emergency Preparedness Training programme was organised for 244 children in the aspects of early warning, search and rescue, first aid and psychological trauma counseling. Through such training and capacity building programme, YUVA has developed a Children's Cadre at the village level to respond to emergencies like earthquake, cyclone, etc.

Two model ICDS centers have been developed by YUVA, one in Fatehgardh and other in Adesar village. These have been handed over to the ICDS department of Kutch District. Four Child Resource Centers (CRC) have also been developed in Jhtawada, Kidiyanagar, Pragpar and Hamirpar Moti. A CRC committee that consists of students, teachers and VEC members have taken responsibility for the maintenance of these centers.

In 27 villages, YUVA has organised enrollment drives with the collaboration of the Government. We have prepared colourful posters, organised a Rally, decorated the vehicle which carried children to the school etc. Educational kits have also been distributed to the newly enrolled children.

Youth Involvement towards their rights and social development

YUVA Rural coordinates the Anubhav Shiksha Kendra (ASK) - the youth programme under the National Youth Foundation - in the central region. The programme promotes the five core values of Gender Justice, Social Justice, Secularism and Democracy, Ecological Justice, Honesty and Integrity amongst youth through the medium of alternative education and exposures. Strategically, we have focused on three themes of youth: Livelihood, Governance and Sexuality through threefold programme interventions of Youth Motivation, Youth Exchange and Youth Fellowship.

Some of the key activities and processes undertaken over the last year include:

Campaign against Private University

The Maharashtra Government had proposed a Bill that aimed at promoting and supporting private Universities in the state. The youth of ASK across the state protested against this bill through different channels. 50,000 pamphlets were distributed stating the stand of youth; 80,000 signatures were collected. Street plays, articles in newspapers and focus group discussions were organised. In addition, mass demonstrations were staged in front of the Collectors' offices and memoranda were given to MLAs and Collectors. 500 youth staged a demonstration during the Assembly session and asked the Government not to violate their right to higher education by privatizing Universities. The impact of these interventions has been that the Government of Maharashtra has deferred the enactment of the Bill.

Game4Change (Khelu Yaa - Badlu Yaa)

The National Youth Foundation (NYF) in collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, organised the Game4Change event, which aimed at young people coming together through a series of sports and cultural events in the country.

The fourth and concluding event of Game4change was organised by ASK in Nagpur from 7th December to 10th December 05. The slogan of the event was 'Manav Adhikar Samvedenshil Samaja Sathi' (We play for a transformation towards a human rights community). Various games like Kabbadi, Kho-Kho, Rassi Khech, pyramids, cricket etc. were played by people from different castes, religions and ability. The event Ambassadors – Mr. Dhanraj Palli, Mr. Geet Sethi, Mrs. P.T.Usha and Mrs. Vandana Roy encouraged the players and pledged their support to the creation of communities that respect Human Rights. The messages of Human Rights and social cohesion were taken back to the respective areas through the youth. The level of youth energy was high as was the synergy created by the event.



*Dahi-Handi:
breaking
male dominance*

National Youth Festival

A two days youth festival was organised in association with the National Youth Foundation. The theme of the National Youth Festival was sports, culture and youth in the context of communalism and human rights. Around 500 youth from different cultures, religions and from different states assembled in Nagpur on 11th and 12th December 05 to celebrate the two days National Youth Festival. The event helped in creating a sense of solidarity, while enabling youth to share experiences and have a lot of fun.

Towards basic Human Rights

Youth trained, sensitised and motivated by ASK have been involved in the forefront of many struggles. They have undertaken surveys of the effectiveness of different Government schemes (as per a Supreme Court order) and submitted the same to the Committee appointed by the Court.

Farmer volunteers and youth volunteers also collected data on farmers' suicides for the last four years. This was presented at the High Court and helped in getting the government to accept responsibility for farmers' suicides.

GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE AND OUTREACH

- 1. Maharashtra**
Direct interventions in 1000 villages of 40 talukas in 7 districts of Vidarbha
More than 25000 youth in state
More than 60000 women in the state
More than 70 NGOs in the state
Collaboration with State and Central Governments
Direct involvement with more than 245000 farmers in Vidarbha
2000 women volunteers, 2000 youth volunteers and 300 farmers volunteers supporting the organization's objects
730 Self help groups
- 2. Madhya Pradesh**
50 villages in Betul district
1146 Dalit and tribal families living below the poverty line
150 volunteers
165 people's organizations and people's institutions
- 3. Gujarat**
47 villages in Rahpar Taluka of Kutchh district
37 SHGs and 30 village betterment committees
18 Village Water Committees
230 families of small farmers



Youth of Anubhav Shiksha Kendra generating awareness through a street play as part of the MTF campaign