

TV Software Firm Gets Programmed To Harvest Water

A UTV-floated nonprofit, Sophia alumni and Rotary Club come together to undertake water harvesting in Raigad off Mumbai

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RAMABAI, 45, could have easily passed off for just another rural migrant who arrived in the city to eke out a livelihood. But for a woman who was determined to make a positive difference to the community, this was not to be. In fact it all started off on a query with Nirupa Bangar, a former employee with the Rural Development Cell of Ion Exchange, where Ramabai worked as a domestic help. "What is your work all about?" she had once asked. And when Ms Ramabai heard that Ms Bangar's work involved purifying drinking water, the reply only added to her curiosity. For she wanted to know how water purification can help in those places where even having a drop of water is almost a far cry. When Ms Bangar readily addressed even this query, it signalled beginning of the

initiative to change the course of an entire lifestyle of a village in Raigad that is tucked 165 km away from Mumbai.

Village Vihule Khond in Raigad district, from where Ramabai hails, has a number of people working in Mumbai as their land back home is arid and there is no other source of livelihood. The village folks have formed a Mumbai Chapter and meet regularly. Ms Bangar met up with the village expatriates, and thus was set into motion the plan to provide drinking water to the village.

Most villages in India do not have any permanent source of water like wells, borewells or lakes for drinking or agricultural use. As a result, for most of the year barring a few months after the monsoons, the women in villages have to walk miles to fetch drinking water for their daily use. Says Darshana Kembale, a villager at Vihule Khond, "I

walk 7 km to fetch two *handis* (steel pitchers) of water per trip. I make two trips every day. I would like to help my husband by supplementing our meagre income but cannot do so as I have to fetch water, collect wood and then tend to the household." This is the stark reality in most villages.

Water scarcity affects farming and only one set of crop can be harvested each year when there is availability of water during the monsoons. As farming and livestock raising are the main occupations of the people in the villages, water availability is the limiting factor for their socio-economic activities.

Thanks to Ramabai's efforts, The Society To Heal,

Aid, Restore, Educate (SHARE), a non-governmental organisation and corporate social responsibility wing of UTV Ltd, along with Sophia College Ex-Students Association and Rotary Club of

working between the villagers and the social organisations. The cost of the entire project, which took four months to complete, was Rs 2.50 lakh. SHARE provided Rs 50,000, Rotary Club of Bombay Metropolitan Rs 1.70 lakh and the balance came from individual donors. Besides, SHARE also sends its staff to monitor the project at regular intervals.

The ponds are able to hold 31 lakh litres of water for most of the year and recharge groundwater. This helps farmers to cultivate a second crop.

Around 150 acres of land, which were lying idle for eight months owing to lack of water, will now be brought under cultivation again.

Murtuza Motiwalla, managing trustee, SHARE, says

that they have been focussing on the upliftment of villagers around Raigad district. "We have been striving hard to restore the green belt in the valley. With technical guidance from researchers at the Ion Exchange India Ltd, a research study was conducted which revealed that the area is rapidly becoming non-productive, owing to loss of soil and lack of groundwater."

Dr Ajit Gokhale, a consultant in natural solutions, who speaks with the villagers and counsels them on the advantages of rainwater harvesting, says the offshoots of the programme on the village are manifold. "The villagers are made aware that deforestation has to be curbed to prevent soil erosion."

The Rotary Club of Bombay Metropolitan has completed the first phase of ecological economics and plans to embark on the reforestation aspect. Manoj Mehta, presi-

dent, Rotary Club of Bombay Metropolitan, says, the club is planning to plant and raise a thick cover of trees around the two ponds so that the local flora and fauna flourish, thus nursing back the ecology in the area.

The success of the programme has geared the Sophia College Ex-Student Association to do more. The association is presenting a play *Westside Story* on October 18 and 19 to raise funds to cover more villages. The association, SHARE and Rotary Club of Bombay Metropolitan have begun the process of discussions with the villagers in the adjoining village, Mandaraj. "Our problem is the lack of toilets," says Ramesh Sakpal, president of the village committee. Smiles Dr Gokhale, "We can do all that provided you folks join hands to make drinking water available throughout the year." Mr Sakpal nods in agreement. ♦

