

**PROJECT: RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOR POVERTY REDUCTION
PERIOD: 2008-2011**

In your land, lie riches

By Poorva Sagar, OneWorld South Asia

Vishwanath Gangaram Malpote, 28, is in the midst of a robust harvest. As he weeds his rice field, one cannot but help admire his meticulous effort to pluck off the small undergrowth from the standing rice crops. “This time I am expecting double the output,” he says, smiling.

Situated in the foothills of the Sahyadri mountain range – also known as the Western Ghats in Maharashtra – Vishwanath’s farm in Khamboli village glistens like gold in the bright sun. A light cool breeze blows through the mango trees planted all around.

Unlike most Indian farmers whose agriculture is dependant on rainfall, Vishwanath uses the lift irrigation system, facilitated by Pune-based non-profit Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) India, to grow his paddy. In the last three years he has followed the four-step farming technique in his five acre farm, leading to a 30% increase in overall yield. The second crop cycle of *bajra*, gram and chickpeas are a bonus.



Vishwanath is happy to work in his rice field/
Photo credit: Satish Nagaraji/ OneWorld

While major part of his produce goes into domestic consumption, the rest are sold to fellow villagers at a good price. More income means better education for his children, food all through the year, and new farm equipments for his field.

Return to wealth

This prosperity is not for Vishwanath alone. Ninety farmers in Khamboli have flourished through the ‘**Rural Development for Poverty Reduction**’ project in Pune district. Run by local NGO ICA India and supported by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) since 2008, the project focuses on a four-pronged approach – agriculture-dairy-biogas-agro-forestry – to reduce poverty and create sustainable development.

The project targets 500 farmers in four villages in Mulshi *taluka* – including Jawal, Katarkhadak and Andhale. Local capabilities are honed to adopt new technologies and practices in agriculture and agro-forestry to improve land productivity. Training in dairy development and co-operative management as a lucrative livelihood option is encouraged. Biogas plants are set up to integrate clean energy production with livestock keeping as animal manure gets converted to biomass.

Insert video: [Vishwanath Malpote on the four-step farming technique]

“The amount we earn today through farming has solved our monetary problems. We no longer need to go outside our villages to earn our livelihood,” says Vishwanath. Not long ago, he was a contract labourer in Pune city, earning a mere Rs 100 (\$2 approximately) per day. The income was less and there was no time to look after his family.

The JICA supported project in Mulshi, one of the most poverty-struck pockets in Pune district, has helped to turn around the migration rate. Farmers such as Vishwanath are returning to their homes.

Water fields

Most farmers in the region practiced rain-fed small scale farming using simple traditional techniques. Urea was widely used as fertiliser that hardened and degraded the soil. The hilly terrain made it difficult to explore the groundwater.



Gopal Raghu Malpote uses the lift irrigation system to bring water to his field/ Photo credit: Satish Nagaraji/ OneWorld

The project’s lift irrigation system brought in hope by effectively tackling the problem. Water is now pumped up from the percolation dams with high pressure motors and distributed to the fields through a network of pipes and outlets.

A fee of Rs 40 is charged per hour from the farmer beneficiaries; this helps to support the salary for the operator and also maintain the irrigation system.

In Katarkhadak village, the lift irrigation system is managed by the Gosavi Baba Irrigation Co-operative

Society which comprises 70 farmers. The society is chaired by an agricultural committee that meets every fortnight to discuss farmers’ problems.

The meetings are participatory in nature and villagers make their own decisions. ICA field officer Tanaji Narayan Malpote helps the committee train farmers in four-step rice cultivation and usage of the lift irrigation system.

Insert video: [Gopal Raghu Malpote on the lift irrigation system]

Lure of milk

Sandeep Khanekar, 30, learned all about poultry and dairy management at an ICA meeting three years ago. Starting with three cows in 2008, his herd has grown to 40 milch cattle producing 150 litres of milk per day. A successful dairy farmer, entrepreneur and a role model for his village Khamboli and neighbouring areas, Sandeep now partners with ICA India in motivating small dairy farmers for higher outputs.

The ICA facilitated milk business now involves 28 farmers from the four villages who have formed the Vithal Rukmini Dairy Society, a co-operative which collects 468 litres of milk each day to sell to dairy outlets in Pune city. The fresh milk is either processed into curd, butter milk, *paneer* (cottage cheese) or delivered fresh to customers.

Farmers are paid rupees 25 per litre every fortnight – making the average monthly income of a farmer with one animal giving 9 litres of milk, about rupees 6,750.

Sandeep's entrepreneurship has inspired many – Rahul Maruti Malpote of Katarkhadak village among others. Rahul began by assisting Sandeep in milk collection and distribution. Today he owns a small dairy business of his own, and is raring to take it to the next level.

Sandeep and Rahul are examples of how ICA India has honed the leadership skills of young men who wish to create profitable futures but no longer wish to migrate to cities.

Together we grow

The project's high point lies in its integrated community development that is self-sustaining in nature. This approach has encouraged community members to fully participate in the planning, implementation and monitoring processes.

“Our capacity building and leadership trainings provide farmers with new ideas and approaches. By accepting new technologies, their attitudes have changed, their relationships have strengthened,” notes Shankar Jadhav, Executive Director, ICA India.



Prabhakar Genu Malpote delivers milk at the milk collection centre facilitated by ICA India/
Photo credit: Satish Nagaraji/OneWorld



Savita Khemse is a farmer, entrepreneur and a homemaker/
Photo credit: Satish Nagaraji/
OneWorld

A special component of the integrated approach is the biogas plant – each village has 6-8 biogas plants. By integrating clean energy with livestock keeping, the project has succeeded in changing the cooking habits of women who have now traded firewood for smokeless piped fuel.

Savita Kemse, 35, in Kemsebadi village, is a dairy farmer who has benefited from the biogas plant. She feeds it with animal manure, uses the residual slurry as organic fertiliser, and saves time on cooking!

Prabhakar Genu Malpote, 40, in Katarkhadak village cultivates rice in his two acre field and vegetables in the remaining one acre. His farm is surrounded by mangos, jackfruits and other fruit trees. His two buffaloes produce 10 litres of milk daily. His six children play around the biogas plant. Prabhakar believes this is an ideal system where farming, agro-forestry, biogas and dairy reinforce each other, as demonstrated by ICA in its trainings.

Insert video: [Shankar Jadhav on the project and its impacts]

The main achievement of this project has however been in uniting people. Families now are happier and comfortable working in their own farms. There has been comprehensive development and the project is slowly moving towards its sustainability. “We feel that even if JICA and ICA move away after few years, the villagers would still retain this unity and the capacity to maintain their own project,” says Shankar with confidence.

In coming years, ICA hopes to strengthen its relationships with many more co-operatives and self-help groups to take forward the project’s goals.

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