

# **ACTIVITY REPORT**

## **(April 2016 to March 2017)**

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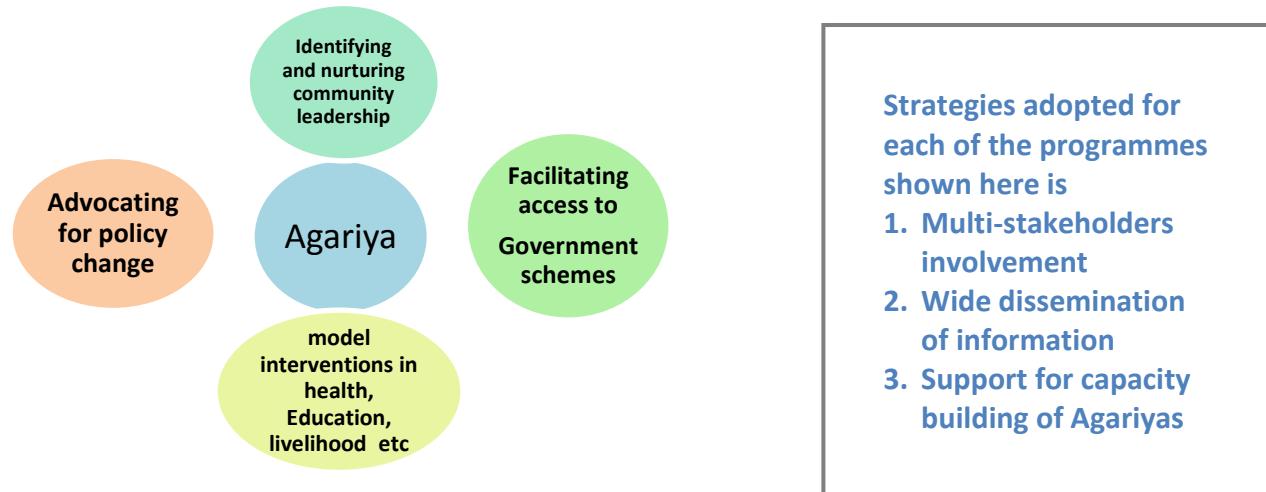
## ***A year with increasing challenges but persistent efforts:-***

### **Background:**

We began our work with began to work with traditional Agariyas, way back in 1998 - 99, by conducting study on problems faced by Agariyas and root cause of the same. A working committee consisting on concern individual and organizations was formed which not only studies the root causes, but also has series of meetings, and discussion with Agariyas from different regions and other stakeholders on probable way out from the situation. Later these efforts took a shape of an organization named as **Agariya Heetrakshak Manch**.

**Facilitating Community lead process is the Primary and Fundamental Principle that organizations works with. AHRM strongly believes that Change Process for Agariya community will come from within the community.**

Though reporting in this document has been done regarding activities This is our on-going programme, where in during reporting period, we have done some major breakthrough initiatives. We had started our work with Agariyas with basic understanding that we need to have bottom up approach, process oriented efforts based on the principles of transparency and inclusiveness in decision making and accountability towards community.



Issues of Agariya community in Gujarat, especially in Little Rann of Kutch is very complex. Thus, our programmes, with Agariyas are multi-facet but interconnected.

During Reporting period we conducted following programmes/activities:-

### **Health Camps:-**

All together 17 health camps and 3 school check-up camps were organized in Little Rann of Kutch at different parts. Health camps were jointly organized by Agariya Heetrakshak Manch and District Health office (Kutch, Patan, Morbi, and Surendrangar dist). The planning was done by having joint meeting to decide the location. Responsibilities are shared accordingly. Informing Agariyas, and supervising on making of pendal, other logistics. Health departments bears all

financial cost, including mobilizing specialists from other districts or from private hospitals.

The arrangement is done in such a way that different specialist is given separate room (made out of cloth walls, compartment) and name is clearly displayed. There will be separate space for people to seat. The medicine department will also be done separately, where in our Agariya agewan also volunteer along with government pharmacist. All the medicines are given free. Agariya agewan facilitates the dialogue, make patient understand the how the medicine to be taken, and follow-up visit date at nearest PHC.

Pamphlets are published for giving details of the camp, along with name of the doctors that will remain present. Normally people know doctors by name and it makes lot of difference in community mobilization.

Each of the camp is attended by around 350 to 400 Agariya women, men, and children. Small refreshment arrangement is also made, as people have to come from distances.

The Agariya Agewan committee puts in lots of efforts for at least 3 -4 days before the camp. On the camp day, they work as if it's their homely function.

Joint planning, implementation and joint ownership of success and faults has helped us improving health camps quality. Earlier pamphlets were not published. But in one district, fellow took this initiative, and then other two fellows, shared this with CDHO in other districts, and then it became regular practice of making a pamphlets distributed at least week before.

Lady Doctors, nurses, FHW, Anganwadi workers from the nearby villages (which are also native village for Agariyas) also made lot of difference as agariya women could feel intimacy with them.

However, we still need to improve with the follow-up system post health camp. Kids health check-up was done in Rann Shala last year. This can also be conducted monthly to track the changes in the weight/health of the children during "salt season".

### **Mobile Health Van (MHV) programme :-**

4 mobile health Vans are visiting Rann during the salt season from 4 different districts. Mobile health Van programme is looked after Primary Health center, over and above their regular coverage area of 17 to 20 villages. MHV is nothing but a Sumo Vehicle, with staff of 5 (including driver). The medicine quota is in addition to that of regular PHCs. This programmes aims to reach remote interior places with medical and health services. ICDS worker, and nearest village ASHA worker is supposed to assist mobile health Van services.

For Rann areas, for last 5 years, mobile health Van programme is run with support from AHRM. As Rann areas are wide spread, the route plans and point of contact are identified by Agariya leaders. In each of the area, agewan also becomes facilitators for health services. He takes the responsibility to guide the driver, monitor for the services, and also change the route plan if necessary.

Ideally, mobile health van sanctioned staff posts are Doctor, Malaria Workers, Male Health Workers, Female Health Workers, and a Driver. However the biggest challenge is vacancy in the sanctioned posts. As on today, 3 out of 5 posts are vacant. The situation is same in PHCs, and CHS, and district Civil Hospitals.

Amidst all these difficulties, during reporting period 4 MHVs did satisfactory job of serving near to 8500 families. Medicines were made available freely, also skin ointments which in most demand.

In addition to this, a health kit was given to Community health workers. One area, where we could not do much was training Agariya women on health. Regular training by government medical officer was done where in our women health worker also became part, but we could not arrange for field based training separately.

### **Advocacy with Government:-**

We met health minister, and Director Health and family welfare to make written representations on number of issues faced by Agariyas and gaps in health services to Rann, especially in reproductive and child health.

A special video conferencing was organized by office of the director of health and family welfare, with all CDHOs, wherein we could share critical feedback on MHV and health camps.

This indeed helped in moving things forward. Proposals for 3 new mobile health vans were put forward to "Empowered committee fund for welfare of Agariyas" and we gave detailed presentation giving rationale for this support. These were sanctioned.

Unfortunately, Aashray Foundation, who had extended their mobile medical unit service to Rann discontinued their programme for their financial limitations.

However the biggest challenge is that MHV programme is inadequate to take care of reproductive health. Thus we will involve IIPT or Population Foundation of India to suggest the model programme for Rann.

### **Rann Shala Programme:-**

For last 3 -4 years Rann shalas are run by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan - SSA - (a Project by Education department). All 26 schools are started by CRC by identifying locations by having meeting with Agariya Agewan and our fellows.

There is no specific design for Rann Shala Programme. Every district Primary officer who is also district head of SSA, chokes out some design, with some innovation or change then that of last year, as per their willingness. However continuous push from Agariya and rigorous follow-up make them accountable.

During reporting period 26 schools were run from September onwards. Out of which 14 were in Kharagodha, Zinzuwada Rann (near to Surendranagar dist) and rest all were in Santalpurn Adesar, Maliya Rann areas. In Surendranagar regular school teachers were adopted, but in other schools, Baldost (community teachers) were engaged. Learning from Patan districts, Surendranagar district too organized for milk, and nutritious ready to eat snacks for kids. Kids below the age of 6 are also included for the nasta, in the absence of Anganwadi centers.

The tents were donated by HSG hospital group; however the design was not according to the need of the desert, thus all the tents were in pieces by March.

### **Digital Learning In Rann Shalas : -**

With support from Digital Empowerment Foundation, Internet Society, Wireless for communities, and Association for India's Development & Agariya Heetrakshak Manch we started with new programme called Zero Connect.

Under Zero connect, we erected a tower at the periphery village and took a special lease line of the internet and signals were broadcasted using device fitted onto the towers.

A Digital Van consisting of an antenna on the roof, which is adjustable in 360 degree direction, and 7- 8 tablets and 2 facilitators, visits the Rann and helps kids learn using interactive videos available on net, (also some pre-loaded videos)

This teaching is for 1.5 to two hours and in groups (age wise).

At present we had selected some interactive videos in language, maths, and science for the topics covered in the syllabus of 1 to 5<sup>th</sup> std. However a detailed syllabus needs to be worked out so that teaching by teacher in Rann shala is supplemented by

E-learning.

This year with one van, and 7 tablets we could reach out to 14 schools with each school covered once in 8 days.

This programme received unexpected response from kids. It was started in March but within one month, kids could grasp, learn to search what they want to learn and handly the tablet.

During off season we might conduct similar activities with village kids to supplement village school education. This programme is getting wide publicity in India and abroad and we are very cautious that too much of media should not interfere with the kids routine.

However the biggest challenge remains with us now, is to standardize "Rann Shala Programme" so that there is uniformity in the planning and budget allocation. We also need to work with village schools so that kids are tracked from season to on season.

We have observed that many of the Rann Shala Kids are not seen in village schools and many of the village school kids are not in Rann shala. This is mainly becoz village schools do not connect with Rann schools. And in order to establish this connection what we need to work with village schools and see to it that each of the children gets migration card as required.



#### • **Securing livelihood and accessibility to Rann .**

During reporting period we had series of meeting with officials as well with elected representatives so that a common understanding is developed on the issue of "Land Rights" and FRA in LRK.

As salt is not listed in the minor forest produce, and Wild Ass Sanctuary, does not have trees, as expected in any "Sanctuary" it is becoming challenging for us to build this common understanding. Also in Gujarat, there prevails a pessimistic environment for recognizing "rights" especially when it comes to "Land Rights:

We had 4 meeting with district collector Surendrangar to discuss about how Agariya Livelihood rights fits into the Forest Rights Act 2006. Sanctuary department were very negative in the beginning, but after few meetings, they at least were ready to listen to our arguments.

We do not want to approach judiciary at this point of time, as it will be very costly, and also judiciary's approach for community rights and PILs is becoming negative.

We also had meeting with MLA, MPs to build their understanding of difference between settlements of rights in WLPA 1972, and FRA 2006.

What we have understood is that, government is ready to give some land Patta to few Agariyas, but do not want to recognize "community Rights" as community will also form part of management of the sanctuary as per provisions of FRA.

Community leaders met Deputy Chief Minister and Chief Minister and has given their representations. All of them have sent recommendation letters to department of Tribal development, but political and bureaucratic will is must to take major decision. Government has also not taken decision on "community rights of pastoralist community" in Banni forest land.

Our efforts for advocating for recognition of land rights will continue with stakeholders Forest, Revenue and Tribal Department, Elected Representatives, Community and social organizations, Salt trading associations and Media till Agariya's Traditional Land Rights in LKR gets recognition.

### **Efforts for Alternatives Energy Source:-**

Agariya Heetrakshak Manch in collaboration with VIKAS and Glow worm ltd gave low interest credit for purchase of Solar Water pump system. During reporting period over 14 solar water pump systems were given on credit, last year we have given 8 such solar water pumps with support from individual donations received locally.

There is no maintenance, or any repairing work, however entire maintenance repairing cost (if any) covered for 3 years in the insurance scheme which is especially worked out with the insurance company.



All the pumps are working well. Savings on diesel is significant and equivalent to almost 60% of the fuel cost. Parallel, we also conducted several meeting giving basic understanding of solar panel, its cleaning, rotation and angle, installation, and convertor functioning. Initially,

Agariyas were little sceptical about capacity of the panels to draw 1 lakh litre of water per day, but after seeing demonstration and result, they were very keen to purchase a pump.

We also had printed pamphlets with all specification, technical details, and cost breakup. Such information dissemination played key role in controlling the price of other solar pump companies. Agariya also learnt to choose better and efficient and affordable system.

Meanwhile, we continue our efforts with NABARD bank, and also with Government which indeed gave results. Recently a scheme for 1000 solar pumps has been submitted to GOI and hopefully it will get sanction and required budget.

### **Linking community with Welfare Schemes:-**

During reporting period around 1600 families were linked with various welfare and social security schemes like Pension, Free land plot for housing, scholarships, Alternative livelihood support scheme, Annapurna Yojana, Health Insurance scheme etc, accident claim benefit scheme etc.

### **Major Achievements:-**

- **7 hostels got sanctioned from Empowered committee Fund and will be built by sarva shiksha Abhiyaan. 3 are already ready and others in pipeline. These Agariya hostels are managed by Agariya committee, where in kids above 5<sup>th</sup> standard stay from October to March.**
- **More than Rs.3 crore was sanctioned for improving education infrastructure in the peripheral villages of LRK for having computer labs, library, school building, hall etc.**
- **Similarly budget equivalent to Rs.1 crore was sanctioned by Empwoered committee during last 5 years on mobile health van and strengthening PHC and CHC infrastructures, having water facility in village, community hall etc.**

**AHRM facilitated preparing of proposal and advocated for its sanctioning at district and state empowered committee. That has resulted into better education and health facilities for Agariya and other communities.**

### **Involving media:-**

Media is considered as one of the key stakeholders in our issue. Our field fellows involve local media, continuously. We give stories on problems of Agariyas, loop holes in government policy, positive inspiring stories, as well feature articles on

culture, history of salt farming. More than 300 news items were done in regional print and electronic media.

We could also pursue Down to Earth and The Hindu to highlight issues Land Rights in context of Little Rann of Kutch.



## **Case stories in weight lifter from Agariya family:-**

Komalben Solanki from Kahragodha Village studies in college at Viramgam bagged gold medal in weight lifting in state level sports competition. Komalben has 4 sisters and she is eldest one. Her father dilipbhai and mother Monghiben and grandparents are Agariya. Dilipbhai, earlier use to migrate to little ran of Kutch for salt farming. Now he and his wife work as Salt loading un-loading worker. His grandparents use to be a member of the co-operative of Salt.

Komalben has been very good in her studies but at very young age she is very understanding and matured. She was offered hostel facility free of any charge by college, but she refused to stay, as she wanted to help



her parents by working on weekends and holidays.

All sisters are very good in studies and her grandmother is motivating them to study against all odds. Her family has 9 members and komalben wish to work harder and fight against all odds so that her sister can attend school regularly.

She was interested in sports but in college she tried with weight lifting. In one year, she reached to state level bagging gold medal in woman's 65 kg category.



Normally in rural and interior areas, girls face many limitations to study. However Dilipbhai and his family has become example for entire community that how daughters if given an opportunity can reach to heights and bring honour to the family, community.

Today Komalben has really become an pride for her family. Entire Agariya family and Agariya Heetrakshak Manch, has decided to support Komalben and her sisters for studies, so that they can fulfil their dreams.

### Kids of Rann Shala ...

#### (1) Farooq Raja

If you happen to visit Agariya Hostel in Rajusara village of Santalpur Block in Patan District, during late evening, you will see young boy guiding his inmates for reading, monitoring on the study activity, as well doing his own studies.

He is Rarooq Mahabubhai Raja studying in 8<sup>th</sup> Std and currently residing in the hostel located in the campus of primary school in his village Rajusara, on the periphery of Little Rann of Kutch.

Mehabubhai Raja has already migrated to LRK (uparnu Rann) in late September along with other family members. There are around 900 salt farmers migrate to LRK every year for salt farming.

Farooq was studying in Rann Shala during salt season till two years back. That time he was in 6<sup>th</sup> std. Rann Shala is temporary tent type school run inside LRK near their work place. As there is shortage of trained teacher in village school, a Baldost – para- teacher is appointed to facilitate learning.



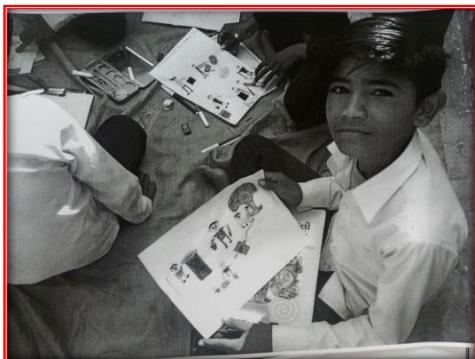
AHRM and JANPATH has been continuously demanding permanent hostel facility on the periphery, so that students above

5<sup>th</sup> std need not migrate to Rann area. There by their education and health is not affected.

As a result of our advocacy with government, 7 hostels have been sanctioned in 4 peripheral districts. Santalpur block has two such hostel, one at Rajusara village (80% Agariya population) and second one at Santalpur (which will start next year)

Mehaboobbhai - Farooq father was one of the key person who has worked very relentlessly to see that hostel construction has been done in time, and other infrastructure put properly.

Obviously, Farooq was put in the hostel. He realized that, many students from Agariya family are not keen to stay in hostel. He took lead in organizing short rally in the village for Hostel admission. Along with education student also persuade the cause of use of toilets.



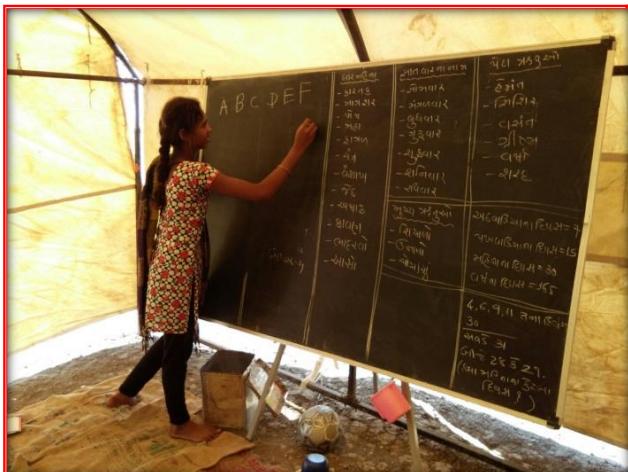
Farooq has great leadership quality. He is very good painter and teaches other children in the school. Very good in studies, and always see to it that he completes his homework and help others wherever needed.

Looking at his qualities and willingness to help other, he has been given responsibility to conduct evening study hour.

Farooq wants to become leader. He also wants that all children should stay in Hostel and should not go to Rann.

## (2) Aarti Bambhaniya

Arati had left her schooling in 7<sup>th</sup> std when she migrated to Rann in September. She is tall and she used to feel that, I look elder and everyone will look in a strange way. When Rann Shala started, Bharatbhai, and Teacher both visited her house, and persuaded her to come to school. Councilling from the teacher remove the fear that



students will laugh.

She is now one of the brightest student of Rann Shala. Her handwritings are like that of typed one, and she loves to conduct class for younger kids, whenever she gets time.

She is very good at studies, and in English. Very matured at young age, and always think about the hardship of her parents, who are making.

I am going to become teacher and make all Agariya students to go to school, finally no one will be Agariya like my father and mother.

When at home, she finishes her homework, and then helps her father in salt farm.

When Bharatbhai once visited Rann shala she requested, "Can you put me into model school next year"? There I will get to learn more. Bharatbhai has already referred her name for Model school and next year she will shift into the same.

Model school Residential Government school for selected bright students with all best facilities, and extra coaching. It is upto 12 th std.

### **(3) Sagar Bharatbhai Rasodiya**

Sagar studies in Rann shala of Soma Sahakari Mandali, one of the farthest area of Kharagodha Rann of Patodi block of Surendrangar district. He is 5<sup>th</sup> standard, but one who speaks with Sagar will be surprised to see his understanding about life and his dreams.

When someone ask him about his Rann shala, he replies with most exciting way, "*I don't mind any difficulties we face in Rann shala. I love it. Whatever may be the circumstances, I will never leave my school, as many other in our Agariya community have done. I will study till college. And will take good job somewhere, So that my parents will get relief from working in Salt farm.*"



He likes taking classes for younger kids and always ready, when teacher ask him to revise lesson for 1 to 4<sup>th</sup> std. Like all others he loves to play with his friends....

*"After going home, he is very keen to help his father, mother in whatever way he can. We are surprised by his nature, and behaviour. He is support to our family even at this young age"* says his father and grandmother.

He will then seat for completing his homework at night and will not sleep, until he revise all his lessons.

**Sagar, Aarti, Farooq are just examples of those jems in our Rann Shala. We are happy that we could support them studying, growing. We are sure one day they will change the fate of Agariya community.**