

WEPS IN ACTION



PRINCIPLE 6

**PROMOTE EQUALITY THROUGH
COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AND
ADVOCACY**

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CASE STUDY : TATA CONSULTING ENGINEERS LTD (TCE) OVERCOMING BARRIERS: TCE'S SUPPORT FOR WATER-CONSERVATION AND WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

LESSONS LEARNED

- Community engagement and participation were key to the success of the company's water security and sustainable livelihood programmes.
- The project focused on farmers, primarily tribal women, and generated buy-in through frequent community meetings, the involvement of local village bodies, and diligent documentation of these meetings.
- Successive livelihood training programmes, along with continued support for selling to wider markets, enabled these women to improve their financial independence, challenge societal norms, script their own success stories, and act as role models for other women in their communities.

CONTEXT

Tata Consulting Engineers Ltd (TCE) started an initiative on water security and sustainable livelihoods, which has, to date, enabled 489 women and girls (325 women, 164 girls) across 190 households in tribal communities in India to significantly reduce the hours they spent on unpaid activities, such as fetching drinking water from far-off locations, and instead devote those hours to sustainable earning opportunities. The initiative, in collaboration with local communities in three villages in Maharashtra, led to the construction of freshwater ponds, ensured access to mechanical water wheels (water storage drums), and created enhanced awareness about water conservation and sanitation techniques. Following the increase in water availability, TCE also trained the

local women in improved agricultural techniques and cultivation methods, including flowers and vegetable cultivation, and the planting of mango and cashew saplings. The initiative also proactively raised awareness on health, sanitation and COVID-19 preventive measures. TCE also helped organise these communities into three Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and trained them in banking, account handling, book-keeping, setting up microcredit facilities and using digital banking services through a mobile app. The programme's ultimate aim is to ensure that women in these communities no longer need to travel long distances to collect water, have greater financial independence and are more empowered within their families and communities.

The Tata Group's core aim of giving back to society is grounded in the spirit of serving both the country and community, the seeds of which were sown more than a century ago by the founder of the Tata Group of companies, Jamsetji Tata. "In a free enterprise, the community is not just another stakeholder in business, but is in fact the very purpose of its existence," Tata, a prolific philanthropist, had once said. Tata Consulting Engineers Ltd (TCE) Corporate Social Responsibility programs, too, aim to support the most disadvantaged while staying relevant in local and global contexts, in line with the sustainable development goals (SDGs). This particular initiative had focused on SDG 1, which is poverty eradication, SDG 3, which is ensuring good health and well-being, and SDG 8, which aims to ensure decent work and economic growth.

ACTIONS

When TCE launched the program in 2019, they identified three extremely water-scarce hamlets - Dapti, Malghar and Navpada - in the Palghar region, around 180 kms from Mumbai. The women in these hamlets walked between two to four hours every day to collect water from water bodies miles away.

"For women, it is a particularly grueling daily ritual. In India, close to 54 % of rural women, including adolescent girls, spend an estimated 35 minutes getting water every day to fetch water from far-off water bodies," Nidhi Mehendiratta, TCE's Chief Human Resources Officer and Head of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Ethics said. "And when they get home, they must complete their other household chores: cooking, washing, bringing up the children, even helping on the family farm."

TCE invested around INR 30 to 40 lakhs (USD \$39,990 to \$53314) per year in this project, implemented in collaboration with a local partner - BAIF Institute for Sustainable Livelihoods & Development - to develop sustainable solutions for the communities in these villages. The progress of the project is monitored closely through quarterly reports, site visits and continuous interaction with associates, who work on the ground, and weekly meetings with the local communities. Quarterly reviews are shared internally with the CSR Team. Comprehensive updates on the progress of the project are also shared in the company's annual report.

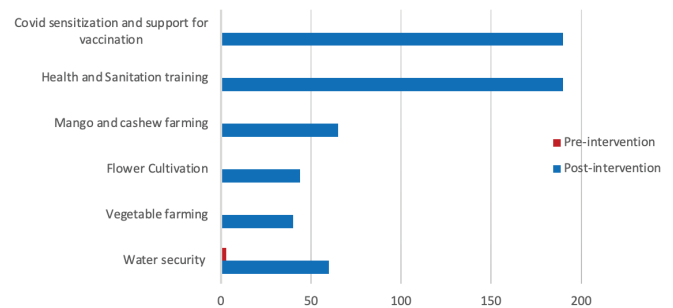
The project was planned in different phases spread over four years - the first phase that lasted for two years between 2019 and 2021, focused on reducing migration to cities by resolving water scarcity in the three villages. In subsequent phases, TCE introduced sustainable livelihood programs that were aimed at empowering the local women through various capacity-building activities, including training in horticulture, floriculture and fruit plantation. The drinking water and sustainable livelihoods initiatives were aimed at reducing women's unpaid labour (fetching water from far-off locations for hours every day) and introduce them to sustainable livelihood options that would financially empower them and allow them an equal standing in their communities.

All interventions implemented as part of the project have been actively led by women. Various need-based interventions were implemented to build capacity, including hands-on-training to women throughout the project period. These included (refer to the figure):

Spiralling environmental challenges, including water scarcity, is threatening the survival of tribal and indigenous communities in India. Infrastructure development in certain predominantly agricultural areas have been slow, owing to geographical remoteness and relatively inaccessible terrains. Confronted with severe food and water shortages, the population in these regions often migrate to cities, where they are exploited in low-wage, informal work that do not allow them to lead a healthy and dignified life.



NUMBER OF BENEFITTING HOUSEHOLDS (PRE- AND POST-INTERVENTION) (SELECTED)



Additionally, TCE supported the women to organize themselves into Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the villages and actively participate in the project planning and execution. The SHGs initiated collective marketing of some of their produce, including oil seed and black gram, generating a 10% increase in profit margin. TCE also helped them in setting up microcredit facilities by briefing them on available options and training them to calculate interest rates. Women were able to procure loans to meet their expenses from a cooperative fund. Some women used the loans to invest in additional income-generating activities, like goat rearing or running small businesses such as grocery stores in the village. TCE also connected these women with digital banking services through a payment system linked to their national identity cards. To help them negotiate this better, they selected a woman from the community and trained her to work as an "e-Dost" (translated loosely as a friend to assist with digital activities), and help them with using various e-banking services such as checking bank balance, paying bills online, making money transfers, and making cash withdrawals.

CHALLENGES

Early on, however, TCE had realized the crucial importance of community buy-in and participation to mobilise action. In the beginning, they faced stiff resistance from landowners, who refused to allow the company to build freshwater ponds on their lands that would ultimately benefit the larger community. The second, and the hardest, challenge was to change the mindset of families - who considered women's primary responsibilities to be housework and caregiving - to allow women to participate in the training programs.

In response, the company generated buy-in by involving the residents in every stage of the process. They engaged with the landowners through continuous discussions and convinced them to share their land. They also managed to secure support from the local village government body ("Gram Panchayat") and ensured all agreements were compliant with existing laws. Once the water security initiative was in place, women were more confident to address their livelihood challenges.

RESULTS

The project built 12 water ponds across the three hamlets, as well as provided water wheels to the local communities for easy transportation and storage of the water. Taken together, this gave the residents access to 1.8 crores liters (47 million gallons) of water for a period of nine months post the monsoon season. Following the intervention, the communities, which were only growing paddy (most of which was for personal consumption), were able to diversify to other produce such as groundnut, tomato, lemon, pumpkin, papaya and millets. As part of the project, horticultural plantations came up over 65 acres of previously barren and water scarce land, and 13,000 trees were planted across 65 land plots.

Solar streetlights were installed, and two schools were renovated across the three hamlets. When the project had started, water scarcity prompted almost a 100 percent seasonal migration from these hamlets to nearby cities every summer. However, once this was resolved, seasonal migration declined by almost 49 per cent. Livelihood skilling enabled the local women to sell 10 percent of their overall produce of oil seed and black gram in the market. As a result of the intervention, there was an increase in average annual income from INR 14,000 (USD \$186) to INR 30,000 (USD \$399) for 169 households, who participated in the program¹.

Overall, a focus on continuous training and development, field visits, weekly meetings, Gram Panchayat support, supply of good quality saplings to the community, microcredit initiatives, digital services support, SHG trainings and community participation led to positive outcomes. Moving forward, TCE would like to inspire deeper trust and faith in the local communities through more field visits and interactions.








"We started the initiative to improve the lives of women through health and socio-economic activities, focusing on three key areas of development-health & nutrition, meaningful employment, and improved access to financial services," Mehandiratta said. "Based on the lessons we learned through our initiative, other organisations could also focus on similar steps. This would not just benefit women but also the wider community that the initiative has tried to serve."



THE ROLE OF WEPs


The WEPs helped TCE focus their CSR efforts to promote gender equality through community initiatives and advocacy. The organisation was able to apply the principles to make its CSR activities more inclusive.


¹Results of floriculture and vegetable gardening interventions. The results from the other interventions are in progress.

- Principle 1  Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
- Principle 2  Treat all women and men fairly at work- respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
- Principle 3  Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
- Principle 4  Promote education, training and professional development for women.
- Principle 5  Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
- Principle 6  Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
- Principle 7  Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

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