

CARVING NEW PATHS



Co-funded by
the European Union

Gravis

HelpAge

International

CARVING NEW PATHS

Enhancing Women and Girls' Leadership
in Climate Change Adaptation in the Thar Desert, India
Annual Impact Assessment Study for the Year 2022



Co-funded by
the European Union





Carving New Paths

**Enhancing Women and Girls' Leadership
in Climate Change Adaptation in the Thar Desert, India
Annual Impact Assessment Study for the Year 2022**

Written & edited by
Jyotsna Sripada

Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS)

3/437, 458, M.M. Colony, Pal Road
Jodhpur – 342 008, Rajasthan, INDIA
Phones: 91 291 2785 317, 2785 116, Fax: 91 291 2785 116
E-mail: email@gravis.org.in
Website : www.gravis.org.in

ISBN 978-81-966767-5-9

© GRAVIS 2022



CONTENTS

Author's Note

Executive Summary

Chapter I Introduction	09
Chapter II Progress achieved	11
Chapter III Insights for the future	21
Case studies	24
<i>Acronyms</i>	28
<i>Glossary</i>	29



Author's Note

The role of women and girls in addressing the challenges imposed by climate change is indispensable. For centuries together, women have played the crucial role of procuring water, managing, and maintaining households amidst acute scarcity of resources. Despite the role they play, women and young girls have been confronted by several socio-economic and cultural barriers that have deprived them of their ability to participate, decide and take control of key decisions impacting their lives and their contribution to natural resource management (NRM) and climate change adaptation (CCA).

GRAVIS has been in the process of contributing to and strengthening NRM and CCA strategies in the State of Rajasthan for the last few decades. The ongoing project titled “Enhancing Women and Girls' Leadership (EWGL) in Climate Change Adaptation in the Thar Desert, India” is one of the many efforts undertaken by the organization towards empowering women and girls in the region to adapt and overcome the arduous climatic, social, economic and cultural barriers. This is the third annual impact assessment study of the project that seeks to measure the progress and impact made by the project interventions in the four districts of Rajasthan-Jodhpur, Badmer, Bikaner and Jaisalmer.

I am extremely thankful to the field team at GRAVIS for their generous support and time. The team has been gracious enough to render all the support I needed in terms of facilitating, translating, and coordinating with the field team and target groups. This study is built on the crucial insights provided by all the participants, especially women and young girls. I am extremely grateful to them for their time. I am hopeful this impact assessment study will pave the way for further strengthening of the project interventions. I thank the organization for this enriching opportunity to delve deep into the lives of strong and resilient women. Their lives, experiences and stories are truly inspiring, and I do hope that they will see many more horizons in future.

Jyotsna Sripada
Public Policy Consultant



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GRAVIS is currently anchoring a project titled, Enhancing Women and Girls' Leadership (EWGL) in Climate Change Adaptation in the Thar Desert, India, funded by the European Commission. The project is being implemented in four severely drought-hit districts of Thar region, namely Barmer, Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur.

This is the third annual impact assessment report for the EWGL project, for the year 2021-2022. This report measures and documents the achievement of outputs and outcomes as against the targets achieved in the previous year, 2020-21. In addition to the assessment, the report also includes key barriers to the implementation of the project goals and proposes recommendations that may be considered to strengthen the same in the future course of the project.

The EWGL project, three years since its inception, has resulted in tremendous change. A brief conversation with any of the women belonging to the ILGs and SHGs speaks volumes of their confidence, enthusiasm and resilience. The project has broken several socio-cultural and economic barriers to enable women and girls to play and pursue a larger goal, as envisaged. In a short span of three years, the project has resulted in establishing a strong community-based network of more than 1600 women leaders who are capable of confidently putting forth their opinions, concerns and demands, a change that was unthinkable a few decades ago. Women and girls, who are a part of these ILGs and SHGs, enjoy a sense of empowerment and purpose. More importantly, they enjoy a greater sense of identity, and this can certainly be attributed to the project interventions envisaged under the EWGL project.

While the short-term impact of the project has been achieved successfully, GRAVIS may continue to strengthen these by diversifying and increasing its beneficiary base, expanding the number of physical construction projects, focusing on income generation activities, to mention a few. All these interventions are crucial for cementing the impact that the project has made so far, and ensuring that in future, it paves way for greater participation of women and girls in addressing climate change.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Women, especially in hostile arid regions such as the Thar desert, constitute a high percentage of vulnerable and marginalized communities that are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood. Their primary role involves ensuring household water supply, energy for cooking and heating, and food security. Despite the central role they play in managing and safeguarding their households from several risks and vulnerabilities, women have limited access to and control of environmental goods and services; they have negligible participation in decision-making, and are not involved in the distribution of environment management benefits.

GRAVIS is currently anchoring the EWGL project in CCA in the Thar Desert, India, funded by the European Commission. The project, having braved two years since the onset of COVID in 2019, seeks to contribute to enhancing women and girl's leadership and voices in drought mitigation, NRM and CCA. Through a wide spectrum of interventions, GRAVIS seeks to place women at a higher pedestal of development and empowerment, breaking through social, cultural and economic barriers. The project is being implemented in four severely drought-hit districts of Thar region, namely Barmer, Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur.



District wise map of Rajasthan, India



This is the third annual impact assessment report for the EWGL project, for the year 2021-2022. This report measures and documents the achievement of outputs and outcomes as against the targets achieved in the previous year, 2020-21. In addition to the assessment, the report also includes key barriers to the implementation of the project goals and recommendations that may be considered to strengthen the same in the future course of the project.

Structure of the report: The first chapter of this report includes an introduction to the goal, objectives, expected outcomes of the project. This is followed by a detailed chapter on the results of the third impact assessment study (2022). The report concludes with a final chapter on the key challenges that were observed during the impact assessment and associated recommendations that may be considered to overcome these challenges as the project goes forward.

Design and Methodology: The third impact assessment study has been carried out as per the log frame of the project. The project documents provide for a list of indicators against each output and outcome, and these have been adopted for the purpose of assessment. The tools for this study have been designed to capture information from primary and secondary sources. These include:

- Review of project reports including baseline report in 2020 and impact assessment studies in 2020 and 2021
- Focus group discussions with field personnel (virtual)
- Structured and unstructured interactions with project coordinator
- Focus group discussions with members of Intergenerational learning groups (ILGs) in four districts where the project is being implemented (virtual)
- Examination of case studies and testimonials by beneficiaries

CHAPTER II: PROGRESS ACHIEVED

The outcomes of this project are enlisted as follows:

- **Outcome 1:** To enhance voice and effective participation of women and girls in drought mitigation, NRM and CCA through an intergenerational learning approach
- **Outcome 2:** To create an inclusive environment where all the community members and local leaders and institutions contribute to setting up clean water and sanitation for all (without any discrimination)

The outputs of the project are enlisted as follows:

- **Output 1:** Enhanced capacity of GRAVIS as the local Civil Society Organization (CSO) to promote gender equality and climate change related actions
- **Output 2:** 80 strong, sustainable Intergenerational Learning Groups (ILGs) created and trained, and 80 existing Self-Help Groups (SHGs) identified and trained, to benefit the project villages, and as a resource for the future



ILG training in progress



- **Output 3:** An enabling environment created for women and girls, to lead on drought mitigation, NRM and CCA
- **Output 4:** 800 rainwater harvesting (RWH) structures constructed under the leadership of women and girls for community use and as demonstration models for future replication
- **Output 5:** 908 Women led initiatives (300 Community Seed Banks (CSBs), 300 crop demonstrations, 300 Arid Horticulture Units (AHUs) and 8 pastures) organized for food and nutrition security

Outcome assessment

The assessment has been made to compare the progress achieved with respect to each intervention, as compared to the results presented in the IAS 2021 study. A preliminary analysis indicates that the project is well on its way to a successful completion and has achieved the desired targets for the first three years of implementation.

This section specifically discusses the evidence that supports the realization of both the outcomes.

Outcome 1: To enhance voice and effective participation of women and girls in drought mitigation, NRM and CCA through an intergenerational learning approach

Indicator 1: The level of confidence of women and girls in drought mitigation, NRM and CCA

The impact assessment of this outcome is based on the evidence generated and analyzed from the focus group discussions with ILGs across four districts, review of case studies, interactions with key informants such as the project coordinator and field coordinators at the district level.

The EWGL project, three years since its inception, has resulted in tremendous change. A brief conversation with any of the women belonging to the ILGs and SHGs speaks volumes of their confidence, enthusiasm and resilience. To gauge the impact of ILGs in the lives of women and young girls, four FGDs were organized separately in each of the districts. The women were invited to participate in the virtual discussions and share their experiences and insights. These discussions proved to be very engaging and inspiring. The women are enthusiastic, confident and determined to bring about changes in the community, concerning key issues such as girls' education, climate change, water and sanitation and health, to mention a few.

The ILGs have emerged as a very important platform to cater to the needs of women and curate solutions based on traditional knowledge, wisdom and rich experiences of the older generation. The ILGs, comprising a heterogeneous group of women, is a mutual learning platform where problems and challenges are put forth and solutions are drawn. This process of knowledge and experience sharing has empowered women with the confidence, capacity and independence to take decisions that concern them or their children. Several testimonials of women emerged as they narrated how their lives were confined to household chores. Women did not have a voice or a platform to participate or even merely express their

opinions or concerns. The concept of ILGs has transformed the lives of these women by not only providing a platform for them to exchange their experiences or problems but also by enabling them to step out with a purpose. Women can step out without having to be concerned about social or cultural barriers. They no longer must seek permission from their husbands or mothers in law to attend such meetings. Interestingly, the ILGs have impacted their lives so much that in many cases, the male members encourage them to finish the household chores so that they can attend their meetings. In some cases, the men even accompany them to their monthly ILG meetings. The women now enjoy a greater sense of identity, purpose, respect and confidence.

The key themes discussed during the monthly ILG meetings are crucial to developing their capacities in addressing drought mitigation, climate change and natural resource management. One such example is the introduction of traditional methods of grain storage and water storage, which is often anchored by women belonging to the older generation. The women discuss in detail the various measures and methods that can be used to conserve water, promote crop growth and crop diversity and promote health and hygiene. That apart, the women also discuss ways to ensure gender equity in education and livelihood opportunities.



Women undergoing SHG training



The EWGL project has successfully created a strong network of women who are resilient, eager, well capacitated, and deeply committed to addressing challenges imposed by climate change. The project has resulted in the establishment of powerful women-centric groups that are able to voice their concerns in public and are able to mobilize the strength to seek solutions. The ILGs have also established strong linkages with the local administration, village development committees and functionaries. These linkages are a crucial part of the project implementation and play a pivotal role in empowering women and young girls to advocate for changes.

Result assessment of Output 1: Enhanced capacity of GRAVIS as the local CSO to promote gender equality and climate change related actions

Indicators:

- Knowledge level of GRAVIS staff in terms of how to plan, implement and monitor women and girls' led climate change action
- Recognition by local authorities of GRAVIS in all parts of Thar Desert
- Number of quality of new proposals and/or subject related research reports led/authored by GRAVIS

The project team has been constituted based on three factors-expertise in the field of NRM and CCA, experience in the field of women empowerment and leadership, and willingness to undertake the responsibilities envisaged under each position. Orientation workshops and meetings were organized with the project team through the course of the project. Furthermore, the team is constantly kept abreast of the challenges, developments and measures to strengthen the planning, implementation and monitoring of interventions at the grassroots level.

Interaction with the project team indicated that all the members were aware of their roles and responsibilities, as envisaged in the project proposal. The team was found to have more than a decade of rich experience in the field of natural resource management and climate change adaptation, and specific interventions planned to empower women and girls. All the team members were identified as those belonging to the intervention implementation regions and well versed in the local dialect. They were also sensitive to the traditional and cultural practices of the beneficiaries. That apart, the team members were found to be adept with the traditional knowledge and skills required for construction and maintenance of *taankas*, *khadins*, AHUs, community seed banks, and *beris* (percolation wells). The field workers across all the four districts were found to have rich experience in engaging with ILGs and SHGs.

GRAVIS, as an organisation, has consistently demonstrated its strength and determination in pursuing an array of interventions in order to contribute to the core goals and objectives including NRM and CCA, by placing women and young girls as the custodians of this transformation. The ILGs, village development committees (VDCs) and SHGs also work closely with the local authorities to bring about the necessary changes, as envisaged in the project. As part of this endeavor, GRAVIS has taken up the responsibility of designing several project proposals that are aimed at making communities in Rajasthan



self-reliant, resilient, and significantly prepared to respond to challenges imposed by climate change. An exhaustive list of publications of various projects have been uploaded on the organization's website. These publications illustrate a wide range of interventions that have been designed, encompassing a diverse set of themes and have been successfully implemented.

Result assessment of output 2: 80 strong, sustainable ILGs created and trained, and 80 existing SHGs identified and trained, to benefit the project villages, and as a resource for the future

Indicators: Number of women groups (existing or formed) fully trained on gender and development and CCA disaggregated by ILGs (groups formed) and SHGs (existing groups)

The EWGL project implementation relies heavily upon the abilities and strength of community-based groups/networks to bring about lasting impact. The community-based groups such as ILGs and SHGs have been instrumental in identifying the list of beneficiaries belonging to poor and marginalized sections, facilitating monthly meetings and training sessions, interacting with local authorities and advocating for change at the community level. Evidence from primary and secondary sources indicate that the EWGL project has successfully constituted 80 ILGs and strengthened 80 SHGs across 4 districts, in 16 villages in the State of Rajasthan. The constitution of these groups was completed within the first year of the project itself. The next two years have been dedicated to strengthening their capacities.

Indicator	Target (as per proposal)	Baseline (2019)	Status in 2021 (as per IAS 2021)	Status in 2022	Achievement rate
Number of ILGs and SHGs fully trained on gender and development	ILGs-SHGs-	ILGs-0 SHGs-0	ILGs-32 SHGs-32	ILGs-80 SHGs-80	100% achievement

Result Assessment of Output 3: An enabling environment created for women and girls, to lead on drought mitigation, NRM and CCA

Indicators:

- Change in the attitudes of members of the community, especially the men and boys, supporting women and girls' leadership in women and girls' led drought mitigation, NRM and CCA and on ILG approach

There has been a significant transformation especially with respect to the attitudes of members of the community. Interactions with a varied group of beneficiaries indicates that men and boys have begun to acknowledge the position, role and contributions made by women in taking care of their families. Many women acknowledged that, previously, prior to joining the ILGs, they couldn't step out of the house alone. They were dependent on their husbands or sons to accompany them on the smallest of errands. Furthermore, the women had to take "permission" from their husbands to attend meetings or any other occasions. However, the project interventions have resulted in a positive change in the mindsets of the



men and boys of the families. Men and boys have understood the importance of women participating in ILG meetings and encourage them to do so. Discussions revealed that in many families, some of the men enthusiastically enquire about when the ILG meetings are scheduled and are very supportive of the women attending the same. The EWGL project has successfully transformed the attitudes, mindsets, and approaches of men, making them an integral part of women empowerment. The various themes discussed as part of the ILG meetings have emerged as valuable lessons for women to manage their resources in an effective and efficient manner. Having witnessed the phenomenal impact that these meetings have had on the daily lives of families, men and boys in the community have begun to acknowledge, encourage and value the participation of women in NRM and CCA activities. Men and boys take part in household activities such as procurement of drinking water, milking of cattle and agricultural tasks that were earlier restricted to women. The men and boys voluntarily undertake tasks and contribute to the overall management of the household. Furthermore, they are more forthcoming when it comes to discussing issues concerning women such as health, hygiene and resource management.

The community's perception has undergone tremendous change as well. The project interventions have successfully resulted in the community acknowledging, supporting and encouraging the role of women in key meetings such as those organized by the Village Development Committees (VDCs) and the local Panchayat.

Indicator	Target (as per proposal)	Baseline (2019)	Status in 2021 (As per IAS 2021)	Status in 2022*
Change in the attitudes of members of the community, especially the men and boys, supporting women and girls' leadership in women and girls' led drought mitigation, NRM and CCA and on ILG approach	Positively changed community attitudes towards women and girls leading drought mitigation, NRM and CCA activities and understanding of the intergenerational learning approach.	Rigid attitudes about letting women and girls lead and lack of understanding on the intergenerational learning approach	There has been a gradual shift in the community attitudes as shown by the fact that ILGs have been formed and are functional. It is reported that there is also a gradual shift in the attitudes of men. They are beginning to perform household tasks that were previously reserved for women like milking of cattle, fetching drinking water etc.	There has been significant progress in the attitudes of men towards the participation and contribution of women in drought mitigation, NRM and CCA.

*The change in perceptions and attitudes of men and community members has been measured using a qualitative approach. The achievement of this output is part of a larger process and is evaluated based on the underlying principle that there is more scope for qualitative strengthening throughout the course of this project and beyond.

Result Assessment of Output 4: 800 RWH structures constructed under the leadership of women and girls for community use and as demonstration models for future replication

Indicator: Number of women and girls leading the creation of these RWH structures and food and nutrition activities



The interventions planned as part of the EWGL project have provided an opportunity for women to step out of their households to take on more powerful and enabling roles. Women and young girls have been at the forefront in terms of taking on leadership roles, facilitating training, awareness generation, information and experience sharing, participating in development programmes, supervising the implementation of physical constructions and above all, anchoring the interventions that have a direct bearing on the drought mitigation and climate change.

As of today, there are 1679 women and 159 girls who have anchored initiatives associated with construction of 800 rainwater harvesting structures in all the four districts. These structures have enabled enhanced access to clean water for drinking and household purposes. The project has successfully reached out to all the proposed number of beneficiaries-women and girls, under whose leadership and participation, the RWH structures have been constructed.

Indicator	Target (as per proposal)	Baseline (2019)	Status in 2021 (As per IAS 2021)	Status in 2022
Number of women and girls leading the creation of these RWH structures and food and nutrition activities	1600 women and atleast 160 young girls	0	1679 women and 131 girls enrolled as members of ILGs. Under their leadership, 72 <i>taankas</i> , 72 <i>khadins</i> , 14 <i>beris</i> and 3 village ponds have been restored	1679 women and 159 girls have been identified and included as part of ILGs. All construction works have been completed. The percentage of women and girls leading the construction of RWH has been 100% achieved.

Result Assessment of Output 5: 908 Women led initiatives (300 Community Seed Banks (CSBs), 300 crop demonstrations, 300 Arid Horticulture Units (AHUs) and 8 pastures organized for food and nutrition security

Indicator: Number of food insecure people receiving assistance through interventions supported by the European Union

One of the key objectives of the EWGL project is to ensure food security by way of establishing community seed banks, arid horticulture units and pastures. Women have also been oriented with the necessary knowledge, information and skills to perform agricultural tasks in a sustainable and resilient manner. Crop demonstrations, provided by agricultural experts and supported by the field team of GRAVIS, have been instrumental in emphasizing the importance of traditional methods of crop growth. These interventions have enabled women to be in control of and have access to sources that ensure availability, adequacy and equitable distribution of food based on the needs of each family member. The third year of this project has witnessed considerable progress. The project is halfway towards achieving the proposed targets for the entire term of 2019-2023. In the year 2021-22, women have successfully anchored the development of 100 CSBs, 60 AHUs, 2 pastures and have participated in 60 crop demonstration sessions.



Indicator	Target (as per proposal)	Baseline (2019)	Status in 2021 (As per IAS 2021)	Status in 2022 (Number of new units established)
Number of food insecure people receiving assistance through interventions supported by the European Union	908	0	202	222
Community seed banks	300	0	80	100
Crop demonstrations	300	0	60	60
Arid Horticultural Units	300	0	60	60
Pastures	8	0	2	2

Outcome Assessment

A preliminary analysis indicates that the project is well on its way to a successful completion and has achieved the desired targets for the first three years of implementation. This section specifically discusses the evidence that supports the realization of both the outcomes.

Outcome 1: To enhance voice and effective participation of women and girls in drought mitigation, NRM and CCA through an intergenerational learning approach

Indicator: The level of confidence of women and girls in drought mitigation, NRM and CCA

The impact assessment of this outcome is based on the evidence generated and analyzed from the focus group discussions with ILGs across four districts, review of case studies, interactions with key informants such as the project coordinator and field coordinators at the district level.

The EWGL project, three years since its inception, has resulted in tremendous change. A brief conversation with any of the women belonging to the ILGs and SHGs speaks volumes of their confidence, enthusiasm and resilience. To gauge the impact of ILGs in the lives of women and young girls, four FGDs were organized separately in each of the districts. The women were invited to participate in the virtual discussions and share their experiences and insights. These discussions proved to be very engaging and inspiring. The women are enthusiastic, confident and determined to bring about changes in the community, concerning key issues such as girls' education, climate change, water and sanitation and health, to mention a few.

The ILGs have emerged as a very important platform to cater to the needs of women and curate solutions based on traditional knowledge, wisdom and rich experiences of the older generation. The ILGs, comprising a heterogeneous group of women, is a mutual learning platform where problems and



challenges are put forth and solutions are drawn. This process of knowledge and experience sharing has empowered women with the confidence, capacity and independence to take decisions that concern them or their children. Several testimonials of women emerged as they narrated how their lives were confined to household chores. Women did not have a voice or a platform to participate or even merely express their opinions or concerns. The concept of ILGs has transformed the lives of these women by not only providing a platform for them to exchange their experiences or problems but also by enabling them to step out with a purpose. Women can step out without having to be concerned about social or cultural barriers. They no longer must seek permission from their husbands or mothers in law to attend such meetings. Interestingly, the ILGs have impacted their lives so much that in many cases, the male members encourage them to finish the household chores so that they can attend their meetings. In some cases, the men even accompany them to their monthly ILG meetings. The women now enjoy a greater sense of identity, purpose, respect and confidence.

The key themes discussed during the monthly ILG meetings are crucial to developing their capacities in addressing drought mitigation, climate change and natural resource management. One such example is the introduction of traditional methods of grain storage and water storage, which is often anchored by women belonging to the older generation. The women discuss in detail the various measures and methods that can be used to conserve water, promote crop growth and crop diversity and promote health and hygiene. That apart, the women also discuss ways to ensure gender equity in education and livelihood opportunities. The EWGL project has successfully created a strong network of women who are resilient, eager, well capacitated, and deeply committed to addressing challenges imposed by climate change. The project has resulted in the establishment of powerful women-centric groups that are able to voice their concerns in public and are able to mobilize the strength to seek solutions. The ILGs have also established strong linkages with the local administration, village development committees and functionaries. These linkages are a crucial part of the project implementation and play a pivotal role in empowering women and young girls to advocate for changes.

Result assessment of Outcome 2: To create an inclusive environment where all the community members and local leaders and institutions contribute to setting up clean water and sanitation for all (without any discrimination)

Indicator: Number meetings of ILGs and SHGs women with local administrative units for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management

The first and second years of the project have been utilized for the creation of the requisite number of ILGs and SHGs across all the four districts. With 80 ILGs and 80 SHGs operating on a regular basis, the EWGL project has successfully established a robust network of women-led and community-based units that prioritize key issues associated with development. The ILGs and SHGs work in close relation with the VDCs and community volunteers to identify a list of beneficiaries who are in dire need of interventions including *taankas*, *khadins*, AHUs, etc. The ILGs work in a collective manner to determine a list of beneficiaries, that is then submitted to the VDCs. The members of the VDCs, after conducting a



screening and verification process with the support of community volunteers, finalize the households that will benefit from specific interventions. The entire process of beneficiary selection is conducted in a streamlined, unbiased, inclusive, and collective manner. The ILGs, VDCs and community volunteers work together to achieve a common goal of effective and efficient management of resources, while ensuring equitable and adequate access for the most deprived households in the community. In the third year of implementation, a total of 64 meetings have been organized for the ILGs in all the four districts. The third year has witnessed an average of 16 meetings being organized in each district, with an average attendance of 8 women and atleast two young girls per meeting. In the same period, The ILGs have spearheaded the establishment of 72 *taankas*, 72 *khadins*, 60 AHUs, 2 pastures, 14 *beris* and revival of 3 community ponds, across all the four districts. The construction of rainwater harvesting structures has facilitated unrestricted access to clean drinking water to a significant number of community members in the project intervention areas. The ILGs, along with the support of VDC and community volunteers, have successfully ensured the availability of clean water for atleast 8-9 months in a year, reducing the dependency on water sources located very far. The ILGs have inspired women across different age groups to participate in meetings and contribute to the collective decision-making process. This intervention has paved the way for the creation of strong, resilient, confident women leaders, who are able to overcome several barriers, to make a lasting impact on the community, especially in terms of drought mitigation, NRM and CCA.



CHAPTER III: INSIGHTS FOR THE FUTURE

The EWGL project, in its third year of implementation, has achieved tremendous progress and has made significant strides in the project outputs and outcomes. Through a large network of well trained and well capacitated ILGs and SHGs, women have successfully led interventions addressing NRM, drought mitigation and facilitating CCA. The impact of these interventions is sustainable, ensuring that the benefits are reaped not just by the current generation but by the future generations as well.

Apart from devising measures and constructing physical RWH structures that have ensured continuous availability of safe drinking water, the ILGs have emerged as a very important platform to empower women and young girls with the voices to speak and raise concerns about issues that matter to them the most. The women are familiar and confident enough to speak on topics such as NRM, drought mitigation and CCA. They are better equipped to highlight issues that concern the development of their children, especially girls. Through the FGDs, there were many experiences that illustrated the grit and resilience of these women to persuade their daughters to complete their education. Several young girls are now able to raise their voices demanding for greater access to employment opportunities in their village.

While the first three years of the EWGL project have successfully witnessed a transformation in the participation of women in issues concerning climate change and NRM, there are still few areas of development that can receive greater focus in the remaining course of the project. Several instances documented during the FGDs with women and young girls in all the four districts pointed towards the need for equitable access education, vocational training, micro-financing, establishing crucial linkages with markets, health facilities, to mention a few.

GRAVIS may consider the following recommendations to enhance the leadership of women and girls and thereby strengthen the implementation of the EWGL project:

Behavioural change at household and community level: While women and young girls are able to attend the ILG meetings every month without being confronted by any barriers, there were a few instances documented during the FGDs that indicated that they are not able to implement these changes at a household level. Women, especially in *Badmer* district, Aati village, reported that their family members do not take their suggestions and opinions seriously. The community volunteers and VDCs may be roped in to organise awareness generation and behavioural change programmes at a household and community level to change the perceptions of family members. Although a long-term process, these interventions can enable the generation of a larger pool of women and young girls who are inspired to contribute to drought mitigation, NRM and CCA.

Participation and representation in local meetings: A common observation across all the four districts was that they demanded greater participation and interactions with the local panchayat. The members of ILGs felt that this linkage could be strengthened further, and they would be in a better



position to put forth their problems and seek support for interventions including the establishment of *Anganwadis*, health centres, etc.

Diversifying the composition of ILGs: Some of the discussions with women indicated that inclusion of Anganwadi workers and Auxiliary Nurse Mid-wives (ANMs) in the ILG meetings every month would be very helpful in throwing light on the specific practices to be adopted in terms of health and hygiene. GRAVIS may consider involving such government functionaries in ILG meetings on a regular basis so that there is mutual sharing of knowledge and experiences between the women, enabling them to prioritize requirements in terms of health and well-being. This can further strengthen their ability to put forth concerns to the local *Panchayat* as well.

Vocational training and income generation: As a next step towards strengthening the role of women and girls as leaders in community development, all the women in ILGs mentioned the need for vocational training in specific activities such as sewing, *papad* making, *agarbatti* making, etc. The women expressed a need to facilitate training in basic skills that can augment their household income. In addition to the role that they play in identifying and facilitating benefits for families such as RWH, AHUs, strengthening of community-based water resources, etc, the women in all the four districts believed that additional income sources would help them contribute in a concrete manner, ensuring that their families are able to access better facilities and accumulate a significant amount of savings as well. Such activities would have a direct impact on the health and well-being of the women and their family members. Furthermore, this can be expanded by establishing/facilitating linkages between the women and small shops/micro enterprises so that their products are absorbed as part of the supply chain.

Awareness on Government schemes: Members of ILGs in two districts-Jodhpur and Bikaner, highlighted the need for greater interaction with the community volunteers to gain information on the current schemes and benefits provided by the Government of Rajasthan. This information would be helpful in deciding and approaching the Local Panchayat and concerned departments to avail benefits including pension, maternity benefits, health services, housing, etc.

Exposure visits: The EWGL project has resulted in a large network of women and girls who inspire, motivate, and persuade other women to lead key interventions associated with community development; they directly contribute to the larger goal of drought mitigation, NRM and CCA. However, majority of these women have never stepped out of their villages, except in cases where they move on account of marriage. To sustain the efforts that have been made to establish and train the ILGs, GRAVIS may consider facilitating exposure visits for the women and girls belonging to ILGs. These exposure visits may include visits to nearby cities or district headquarters where women and girls are able to observe, learn and practice crucial lessons that emerge. Such visits would help build their confidence further and support them with knowledge and information about key practices concerning health, hygiene and education. That apart, women can learn about agricultural practices, crops and seeds that are more



tolerant to climate change. These are a few examples of how exposure visits can be used as a strong tool/method to empower women and girls.

The EWGL project has broken several socio-cultural and economic barriers to enable women and girls to play and pursue a larger goal, as envisaged. In a short span of three years, the project has resulted in establishing a strong community-based network of women leaders who are capable of confidently putting forth their opinions, concerns and demands, a change that was unthinkable a few decades ago. Women and girls, who are a part of these ILGs and SHGs, enjoy a sense of empowerment and purpose. More importantly, they enjoy a greater sense of identity, and this can certainly be attributed to the project interventions envisaged under the EWGL project.

While the short-term impact of the project has been achieved successfully, GRAVIS may continue to strengthen these by diversifying and increasing its beneficiary base, expanding the number of physical construction projects, focusing on income generation activities, to mention a few. All these interventions are crucial for cementing the impact that the project has made so far, and ensuring that in future, it paves way for greater participation of women and girls in addressing climate change.

CASE STUDIES

Achieving food security in Khariya Mallinath The inspiring story of Badhu Devi

Badhu Devi belongs to a poor family in Khariya Mallinath village of Bikaner. She lives with her husband, in-laws, and children. This family of seven members struggles in getting proper nutrition from their diet and has insufficient resources to fulfil their daily needs. The sole earning source is agriculture in the region which is rainfed. Compelled to comply with the social and cultural norms strictly followed by the community, Badhu Devi has not been able to pursue a livelihood opportunity. She was determined to do something on her own to earn an income after attending SHGs meetings. She discussed her issues with ILG and requested for financial and technical support from VDC. The ILG and VDC approved her request to establish AHU at her farm. Fruit-bearing trees were planted there to provide her with nutritional and economic benefits of the same. Badhu Devi grows vegetable crops in the space between the trees in her AHU.

Badhu Devi and her family is gaining benefits from the AHU by getting nutrition-rich fruits and vegetables. The whole family is motivated to take proper care of the trees planted in AHU. Badhu Devi can get vegetables from her own AHU and does not have to spend money in the market for buying vegetables. She is expecting to have a good harvest from fruit trees too. This can provide her with additional income to support the needs of her family.



Beneficiary of AHU in Khariya Mallinath

Ensuring water security for the most marginalized The power and grit of an ILGs in Rajasthan

Tulsi devi belongs to an underprivileged family and is a daily wage earner. She lives in a nuclear family with her husband and three children. The household income earned by Tulsi and her husband are barely sufficient to meet the daily expenses. Confronted by acute water scarcity in their region, one must store water for months to avoid fetching water from long distances. Lack of water in their area also restricts their water usage even for bathing and washing. Tulsi's family migrates to other places for work as there are neither employment opportunities nor basic facilities in their village. Seasonal migration affects the health and nutritional status of their family and also hampers their children's education.

Bhawari Devi, who was a member of the ILG in her village observed the daily challenges faced by Tulsi Devi and discussed the same with VDC. They unanimously decided to provide her financial and technical support to construct taanka under the EWGL project of GRAVIS. In July 2022, a taanka was constructed in front of her house with the support of GRAVIS. It got full of water in the heavy rainfall in the month of August. Tulsi Devi and her family are thankful for the EWGL project of GRAVIS. This taanka can provide water for up to three to four months for their family. It helps in storing rainwater. Tulsi's family no longer must depend on sourcing water from alternate and expensive sources such as tanks. This intervention has also controlled their seasonal migration to some extent and reduced the school dropout rate. The construction of taanka at their house enabled them to consume clean water and opt for sanitation and hygienic practices. With this, her family can lead a healthy life and her children can now attend school regularly.



Taanka construction ensuring water security for one of the beneficiaries under the project

A story of pursuance

Tulsi Devi's path to enhanced water security

Tulsi Devi is a widow from a poor family who has suffered a lot of hardships in her life. After her husband's demise, she has struggled to support her family. She worked as a labourer miles away from her home to fend for her family. To procure water for drinking and household purposes, Tulsi Devi had to travel nearly 5-6 miles. Her eldest son also passed away a few years back, so she had to bear the responsibility for his family too. As of today, Tulsi Devi supports 11 members in her family including 3 women, 1 man, 3 daughters and 4 sons. The area she lives in is very dry and drought prone. The land of her farm is flat and lopsided and therefore it leads to soil erosion, affecting the fertility of the land. This severely impacts the quantum of crop produce in her farm.

Tulsi Devi put forth her issue in front of VDC, SHG and ILG in her village. The VDC member Hurma Devi informed her that GRAVIS, as part of their EWGL project, can provide support for construction of khadin, taankas, beri, AHUs etc. Tulsi Devi put forth her proposal of khadin construction at her farm in VDC meeting. The VDC approved her proposal and the khadin was constructed in June 2022 at her farm. Tulsi Devi was ecstatic after the construction of khadin and hoped for a good spell of rain so that it could enhance the crop produce in her farm. She was immensely thankful to GRAVIS for providing her with the khadin. The khadin ensured that water is retained in her land, and this has resulted in a 60% increase in yield, as compared to the previous year. The increase in agricultural produce has ensured that Tulsi Devi's income is augmented and strengthened on a long-term basis. The additional income will pave way for improving their standard of living, health and education. The khadin construction will also help the neighbouring farmers in controlling soil erosion from their farms.



Beneficiary of khadin to improve water availability and strengthen crop production

A new ray of hope Enhancing water security in Handa

Shankar Ram Meghwal is from an extremely poor family who rears sheep and goats to earn a living. He also farms during the monsoon season to supplement his income. Due to the lop-sided piece of land as a farm, the rainwater always flows away outside the farm and results in soil erosion and a very low yield at harvest. The land was losing its fertility due to the continuous flow of water during monsoon. This led to a huge problem for his family. Shankar has 3 sons, of whom one is married. Shankar's wife passed away 3 years back. They live in the dry and arid zone and thus, there is always a scarcity of food grain.

There has been the implementation of rainwater harvesting activities including construction of khadin beri, taanka and nadi under the EWGL project of GRAVIS in Handa village. It has helped communities to utilize rainwater for agriculture and their households. Shankar Ram discussed his problem of soil erosion in the ILG meeting conducted on 12-2-2022 and requested support for Khadin construction at his farmland. The VDC and ILG approved his proposal and the construction of khadin for Shankar ram was completed by July 2022. There was good rainfall and thus great water retention by the khadin. Shankar was also provided with seeds of Guar for trail farming. The trial attempt was successful as there was a high yield of Guar. Due to high temperatures in summer, there was a decline in the production of grains but construction of the khadin has helped the family to retain water in the soil. Due to water retention in khadin on Shankar Ram's farm, the soil will remain moist leading to enhanced crop production and plant growth. This may also contribute to reducing temperatures, improving availability of nutrients and nutritious food for the families in the neighbourhood. It is hopeful this this story will inspire several families to carve a new path of hope.



Khadin constructed at Shankar Ram's farm in Handi Village



ACRONYMS

AHU	-	Arid Horticulture Unit
ANM	-	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
AWC	-	Anganwadi Centres
CCA	-	Climate Change Adaptation
CSB	-	Community Seed Banks
CSO	-	Civil Society Organisations
EWGL	-	Enhancing Women and Girls' Leadership
ILG	-	Intergenerational learning group
NRM	-	Natural Resource Management
RWH	-	Rainwater harvesting
SHG	-	Self-help group
VDC	-	Village Development Committee

GLOSSARY

Beris- It is a pitcher-shaped shallow well that is used to store rainwater

Guar- Guar or cluster bean is a drought-resistant leguminous crop that is generally cultivated in northwest India

Khadin- It is an ingenious construction designed to harvest surface runoff water for agriculture. These are embankments built across the lower hill slopes lying below gravelly uplands.

Taanka- It is a traditional rainwater harvesting technique, common to the Thar desert region of Rajasthan, India. It is meant to provide drinking water and water security for a family or a small group of families



**3/437, 458, M.M Colony,
Pal Road, Jodhpur - 342008,
Rajasthan, India
Phones: 91 291 2785 317, 2785 116
Fax: 91 291 2785 116
Email: email@gravis.org.in
Website: www.gravis.org.in**

GRAVIS is a leading Non-Governmental Organization working in rural India in the States of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. Since its inception in 1983, GRAVIS has worked with over 75,000 families across 1600 villages reaching a population of over 1.6 million and has established over 4,000 CBOs. GRAVIS believes in participatory community development that blends traditional knowledge and modern sciences and promotes equality.

GRAVIS is registered under Rajasthan Societies Registration Act and under section 80 (G) and 12A of IT Act, 1961 of Government of India with tax exemption status.