

# Thriving Forward



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Enhancing Women and Girls' Leadership  
in Climate Change Adaptation in the Thar Desert (EWGL), India

Annual Impact Assessment Study for the Year 2023



Co-funded by  
the European Union





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Enhancing Women and Girls' Leadership in  
Climate Change Adaptation in the Thar Desert (EWGL), India

Annual Impact Assessment Study for the Year 2023

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## **Author's Note**

Women have, for the longest time, fought diverse battles and demonstrated their ability to overcome indomitable challenges, with a fiery spirit. The experiences of women and young girls from the Thar region resonate the same. Despite the hostile and unpredictable climatic conditions, rigid socio-cultural norms, scanty resources, apathy of local and state level bodies, their confidence and strength is unwavering.

GRAVIS has been instrumental in transforming the lives of several stakeholders living in the desert regions of the Thar. For the past four decades, GRAVIS has strived to improve the lives of vulnerable and marginalised communities, by empowering them to combat the challenges imposed on them by the harsh climatic and living conditions. As part of furthering this commitment, in 2019, GRAVIS undertook a project titled Enhancing Women and Girls' Leadership in Climate Change Adaptation in the Thar Desert, India (EWGL). This project primarily aimed at empowering women and young girls in the Thar region to spearhead several community based interventions resulting in climate change adaptation and drought management. As part of this project, GRAVIS has undertaken a wide spectrum of interventions and demonstrated tremendous change, development, and progress particularly in four districts of Rajasthan- Jodhpur, Badmer, Bikaner and Jaisalmer.

I am thankful to the team at GRAVIS for their constant support, coordination and time. The team has been incredibly supportive in facilitating the discussions with beneficiaries in remote areas of the Thar.

The discussions have been insightful, interesting and I hope this document captures the true spirit of empowerment, resilience and progress achieved by the women and young girls in the project region. I hope this study opens a canvas for several such opportunities of research, advocacy and capacity building for GRAVIS.

**Jyotsna Sripada**

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## **Executive summary**

Recognising the need to acknowledge and alleviate the challenges faced by women and young girls in the Thar region, GRAVIS designed a project titled “Enhancing Women and Girls’ Leadership in Climate Change Adaptation in the Thar Desert, India”. The project is deeply driven by the objective of enhancing the role, participation, leadership and impact of women led initiatives in combating climate change and facilitating drought management.

The last four years since the implementation of this project have resulted in a significant transformation in the lives of women belonging to four districts of the Thar region, enabling them to become leaders, advocating for much a needed change in their lives. GRAVIS, through the EWGL project, has made an indelible mark in these districts, by empowering women and young girls to anchor crucial changes in their households and communities at large.

This impact assessment study is a reflection of progress achieved and challenges faced in the fourth year of the EWGL project. It attempts to capture some of the key milestones achieved, impact of the interventions on the lives of women and young girls in the four districts and areas that may be considered for future action oriented research.

The project demonstrates the importance of encouraging collective power and strength of women led initiatives to foster progress and development at multiple levels of the society. More than 1,600 women have emerged as leading examples of women empowerment and success. These women have also paved the way for young girls to bravely pursue education and stand up for their needs including clean water, toilets and schools.

The local authorities across four districts have begun to appreciate the value and contribution of such networks in improving the living conditions of the communities. The collective strength of women to lead interventions and achieve sustained impact has been demonstrated through the course of this project.

The successful creation of 160 women-led community-based networks in the first two years of the project has led to significant improvement and the fruits of this effort are being borne now. Women and young girls are catalysts of behaviour change and this has worked exceedingly well in the Thar region. All the groups have been trained in several aspects of community development, particularly signifying the role of women in disseminating information and awareness of themes ranging from health, education, menstrual hygiene, traditional agricultural practices, seed management, water storage techniques, income augmentation, etc. The training sessions are quite empowering, as suggested by all the respondents of this study and highly valued. The impact of these training sessions is evident from the confidence exuded by women and young girls in the focus group discussions.

The project has also resulted in an exceptional change in the attitudes of men and young boys in the family, who now shoulder many household responsibilities, which were earlier carried out only by women. The

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EWGL project has brought about a visible change in the way women's opinions and choices are considered, respected and promoted. All 1679 women and 159 are actively engaged in leading various activities associated with Natural Resource Management (NRM) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA).

GRAVIS has also been able to introduce and sustain several interventions that directly contribute to the food and nutrition security of people. Some of these include women-led seed banks, crop demonstrations, establishment of arid horticulture units and pastures. These interventions have enhanced the knowledge, capacities and skills of women to promote traditional methods of crop growth. Furthermore, they have created a self-sufficient model of production of climate resilient fruits and vegetables that improve the adequacy and diversity of nutrition being consumed by children and adults in the region.

While the project has achieved all its targets and has fostered women-led participation in key interventions associated with climate change adaptation, drought management and natural resource management, there emerge new set of challenges, like in a change-making process. GRAVIS can consider the following recommendations to strengthen the impact of its interventions, including fostering equal partnership in climate change adaptation, facilitating exposure visits for replication/melas for engagement, creating spaces for interaction with local authorities and government functionaries and mobilising resources to enhance financial, policy and programmatic literacy. Having carefully woven several key components relevant for the canvas of women empowerment, it is hoped that GRAVIS will continue to expand the horizons of hope for many more women and young girls, enabling them to thrive forward!





## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Women and young girls in the Thar region often endure years of physical drudgery, emotional exhaustion and agony owing to multiple factors. For decades, the burden of harsh climatic conditions, has been disproportionately borne by women and young girls. Behind their veils, every woman in this region has a poignant tale to narrate—a story that entails struggle for survival amidst extremely challenging conditions. Despite them essaying a pivotal role in the development narrative of the region as farmers, cultivators, caregivers and agricultural labourers, their physical, emotional and psychological needs are barely discussed.

Recognising the need to acknowledge and alleviate the challenges faced by women and young girls in the Thar region, GRAVIS designed a project titled “Enhancing Women and Girls’ Leadership in Climate Change Adaptation in the Thar Desert, India”. The project is deeply driven by the objective of enhancing the role, participation, leadership and impact of women led initiatives in combating climate change and facilitating drought management. In order to achieve this objective, GRAVIS has carefully considered the socio-economic, cultural and geographical determinants in order to devise and implement strategies. These include creation of women-based collective networks such as intergenerational learning groups and self-help groups, physical construction of rainwater harvesting units and empowering women and young girls with the necessary information and capacities to pursue challenges and overcome them.

The specific outcomes and outputs envisaged as part of the EWGL project are enlisted hereunder :

- Outcome 1 : To enhance voice and effective participation of women and girls in drought mitigation, NRM and CCA through an inter-generational 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)
- 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
- 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



The women-led groups have spent a considerable amount of time discussing key issues such as inadequate number of schools and anganwadis, lack of adequate water supply channels, lack of engagement with local authorities, poor access to healthcare facilities, and other social and cultural factors. As custodians of socio-economic and cultural transformations in their respective communities, the women and young girls have contributed to a paradigm shift. The shift is primarily towards acknowledging women's role in climate change adaptation, natural resource management and has resulted in a ripple effect.

The last four years have resulted in a significant transformation in the lives of women belonging to four districts of the Thar region, enabling them to become leaders, advocating for much a needed change in their lives. GRAVIS, through the EWGL project, has made an indelible mark in these districts, by empowering women and young girls to anchor crucial changes in their households and communities at large. The project demonstrates the importance of encouraging collective power and strength of women led initiatives to foster progress and development at multiple levels of the society. The past four years has resulted in the establishment of strong, committed and stable women-based groups that have collectively evolved as powerful links between the beneficiaries, the local authorities and the community at large.

This impact assessment study is a reflection of the fourth year of the EWGL project. It attempts to capture some of the key milestones achieved, impact of the interventions on the lives of women and young girls in the four districts and areas that may be considered for future action oriented research. As GRAVIS continues to help women and young girls of the Thar region thrive forward, the impact assessment study is an opportunity to review the progress that has been achieved thus far and to offer emerging areas of research that command intervention.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts an analytical approach to examining the impact of the interventions undertaken by GRAVIS in the fourth year of EWGL. This impact assessment has been executed based on evidence generated through primary and secondary sources. Focus group discussions with women and young girls belonging to ILGs and SHGs in the project site emerged as an important method for evidence generation. That apart, narrative reports that were drafted during the fourth year of implementation of the project were significantly relied upon to compare the targets envisaged at the beginning of the year and achievement of the same. Case studies/testimonials of beneficiaries constituted an important source of learning for the preparation of this document. These testimonials provided a crucial perspective into the lives of women and young girls in the Thar region, including their socio-economic and cultural barriers, channels through which support can be harnessed for overcoming these barriers and the importance of women-centric discussions. The study has been enriched by the insights provided by the coordinator and field staff of the project, particularly in terms of how women groups are organised, how their meetings are conducted, what is the nature of discussions as part of these meetings and how the groups have contributed to significant transformation. In terms of scope of the report, the assessment has been carried out in accordance with the log frame of the project, including the outcomes and outputs (outlined in the



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introduction). All outputs and outcomes have been evaluated against a set of predetermined criteria. These will be enlisted as part of result assessment in the upcoming chapters. Evidence has been extracted from beneficiaries in all the four districts-Jodhpur, Bikaner, Badmer and Jaisalmer.



## Chapter 2

### Assessment of progress achieved

This chapter will primarily outline the progress achieved and impact created as a result of each of the activities implemented as part of the EWGL project. The first part of the chapter will focus on assessing the outputs while the later part of the chapter will focus on outcomes envisaged as part of this project.

#### Output Assessment

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

Indicators used to assess the output achieved are enlisted hereunder:

- 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

A significant part of the interventions undertaken by GRAVIS is direct field action, steered by community based organisations and networks. These networks are anchored by a group of trained project coordinators and staff of GRAVIS. Over the past four years, the team at GRAVIS has strengthened its presence in the Thar region by actively engaging with members of all communities, including the most vulnerable and marginalised groups. This has been spearheaded by an able team of project coordinators, field level staff and community workers.

In order to augment their efforts and enhance the impact of interventions undertaken, GRAVIS has drawn on the expertise of a wide pool of practitioners including civil engineers, sociologists, gender consultants, and agri-horticulturalists. These experts have contributed significantly to the planning and execution of interventions including the design/construction of rainwater harvesting units, farming dykes, community seed banks, etc. Their contribution is rooted in the fundamental understanding that women must be promoted as the custodians of climate change adaptation, natural resource management and drought management.

The project and field staff of GRAVIS have a very clear understanding of the expected outputs and outcomes envisaged as part of this project. Interactions with the project staff indicated that they have been well oriented with the scope, methodology and interventions planned for the fourth year. More importantly, the staff were found to be adept with all the social, cultural, economic, geographical and climatic barriers that



confront the communities living in the Thar region. All the field workers associated with GRAVIS are driven by a deep sense of passion and commitment to improve the difficult conditions in which the communities live. In fact, many such field staff of GRAVIS have emerged as role models for women and young girls in the four districts where the project is currently being implemented. Interactions with the women and young girls reveal how they have been inspired by the courage, will and commitment demonstrated by the field workers and that they are driven to pursue the path of empowerment not merely for themselves but also for the entire community as well. Many such women have emerged as leading examples of women empowerment and success. These women have also paved the way for young girls to bravely pursue education and stand up for their needs including clean water, toilets and schools.

Through its enhanced capacities, the team at GRAVIS has also facilitated the building of a strong connection between the gram panchayat (local authority) and the community based networks such as the ILGs and SHGs. The local authorities across four districts have begun to appreciate the value and contribution of such networks in improving the living conditions of the communities. The collective strength of women to lead interventions and achieve sustained impact has been demonstrated through the course of this project. This can be considered a huge milestone in its pursuit of achieving climate change adaptation through an empowered network of women and young girls.

Undoubtedly, GRAVIS has played a pivotal role in promoting gender equality and climate change related actions.



*Awareness generation workshop in progress*

**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



Indicator used to assess the output achieved is enlisted hereunder:

- 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 creation of the proposed number of ILGs and SHGs was successfully completed in the third year of the implementation of the project. The successful creation of 160 women-led community-based networks in the first two years of the project has led to significant improvement and the fruits of this effort are being borne now. Women and young girls are catalysts of behaviour change and this has worked exceedingly well in the Thar region. For instance, women who didn't have access to schooling are now inspired to pursue to same for the children. Breaking through shackles of a patriarchal social construct, women have stepped forward to take up the responsibility of ensuring that their children are studying in schools and in cases where schools are not accessible, women and collectively demanded for the setting up of the same. This is just one of the many such instances that have emerged as success stories anchored by women groups in the project region.

As per inputs shared by the field personnel, all the groups have been trained in several aspects of community development, particularly signifying the role of women in disseminating information and awareness of themes ranging from health, education, menstrual hygiene, traditional agricultural practices, seed management, water storage techniques, income augmentation, etc. The training sessions are quite empowering, as suggested by all the respondents of this study and highly valued. The impact of these training sessions is evident from the confidence exuded by women and young girls in the focus group discussions. Many of them are vociferous, passionate and clear about the changes that they desire to witness.

The EWGL project has certainly resulted in the establishment of several strong and resilient groups of women and young girls who are determined to bring about changes in their lives. These groups, over the past three four years, have continuously worked towards empowering themselves with the knowledge, skills, capacities and wisdom. These have been leveraged by the women-centric groups to advocate for access, availability, adequacy and stability of basic necessities. They have emerged as the forefront of the collective movement to transform the lives of people in the community. That apart, one of the most positive developments driven by this project is the ownership of rainwater harvesting units, farming dykes and arid-horticultural units. Every time a *taanka*, *khadin* or AHU is constructed, the ownership is in the name of the eldest woman of the household. The details of the construction are proudly displayed on a board outside every beneficiaries' household. This has not only recognised the importance of women's participation in decision making and distribution of resources, but has resulted in a significant change of behaviour amongst the men folk of the communities. Testimonials narrated by several women indicate that their families have started to value their contribution and encourage them to engage with spaces that enable them to freely communicate, exchange and learn from experiences of other women. Platforms such as the ILG and SHG meetings have emerged as a crucial space for women and young girls to thrive forward.

**Table 1:** Achievement rate of output 1

Indicator	Target as per Proposal	Baseline in 2021	Status in 2021 (as per IAS 2021)	Status in 2022 (as per IAS 2022)	Status in 2023	Achievement rate
Number of ILGs and SHGs fully trained on gender and development	ILGs-80	0	32	80	80	100%
	SHGs-80	0	32	80	80	



*ILG training in progress*

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

Indicator used to assess the output achieved is enlisted hereunder:

- 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

The ghonghat or veil for women in Rajasthan has been a cultural practice for several years. While it was considered an essential practice to offer respect to the elders and men of the family, it has also been a way to limit the participation and interaction of women with others. Traditionally, women were disallowed from stepping out of the house, unless it was for a medical reason or for fetching water for the household.





Women's role was limited to caregiving, domestic chores and agriculture and very rarely were they seen breaking away from these impediments. They were not considered equal stakeholders in decision making, resource management or village development. Enslaved in physical drudgery, confronted with harsh and hostile conditions, their lives constantly revolved around a mundane routine, that often impacted their physical, emotional and mental health. Despite undertaking arduous tasks to support the family, women and young girls' needs have been given the least importance in a patriarchal society such as the Thar region.

Although the ghoonghat system continues to be practiced in the Thar region, it has not stopped the women from engaging in spaces meant for their empowerment. The EWGL project is one of the many efforts undertaken by GRAVIS to persuade women to step out and stand up for their needs. Demanding for adequate infrastructure, accessible services, establishing dialogues with local authorities, disseminating information and knowledge, are some of the achievements of these women led groups that deserve credit. The women benefitting from the project based interventions have themselves acknowledged the massive transformation in their roles, responsibilities and more importantly, their confidence. The women proudly display a sense of accomplishment when they speak of how their family members now encourage them to participate in village level meetings. This project has resulted in a large pool of women-led networks that exhibit the power, strength, ability and commitment to anchor community based initiatives, primarily aimed at CCA and drought management.

The project has also resulted in an exceptional change in the attitudes of men and young boys in the family, who now shoulder many household responsibilities, which were earlier carried out only by women. The EWGL project has brought about a visible change in the way women's opinions and choices are considered, respected and promoted. At a household level, women are in a better position to take decisions with respect to management of their resources. Given the fact that interventions such as *taankas*, *khadins* and AHUs are named after the women, it has contributed to a greater sense of equity.

This sense of equity is reflected in platforms such as SHGs, ILGs, VDCs where women lead discussions, identify issues and collectively arrive at solutions that will benefit the household as well as the community. It is this attitude that has brought about a significant change the lives of several families in the four districts, for whom the women-led groups have actively advocated for interventions. Women have led the process of collectively identifying families in dire need of *taankas* and *khadins*. They have also encouraged women to set up AHUs near their households so that they may be able to reap benefits of a diverse and healthy harvest. More than 160 collective groups (SHGs and ILGs) have been formed and spearheaded an integrated approach where water, food and nutrition and income security are augmented.

Apart from identification of potential beneficiaries, women have also led the process of knowledge exchange, information dissemination, informal learning models and action-oriented research that heavily relies on traditional knowledge and wisdom to ensure CCA. This traditional knowledge and wisdom has also been leveraged to combat health and nutrition related issues among families. Older women of the collective groups often share their experiences with younger women to help combat the challenges



imposed on them because of social, cultural, physical and emotional factors. Through this integrated approach, GRAVIS has ensured a sustained and stable system in place where women are anchors of the overall development process in the Thar.

**Table 2 : Achievement rate of output 3**

Indicator	Target as per proposal	Baseline in 2021	Status in 2021 (as per IAS, 2021)	Status in 2022 (as per IAS 2022)	Status in 2023
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 EWGL project has brought about a visible change in the way women's opinions and choices are considered, respected and promoted. At a household level, women are in a better position to take decisions with respect to management of their resources.



**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

Indicator used to assess the output achieved is enlisted hereunder:

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

Over the last four years, the EWGL project has made an indelible mark in the lives of people in the four districts of Jodhpur, Badmer, Jaisalmer and Bikaner. An integrated approach, encompassing crucial components such as gender equity, socio-cultural and economic upliftment, formation and capacity building of women-led networks, in order to contribute to the larger goal of climate change adaptation, drought management and natural resource management. Each of these components is an important cog in the wheel of empowerment.

The construction of rainwater harvesting structures is an effective strategy to combat water scarcity and have been instrumental in facilitating easier access, sustained availability, judicious usage and optimal utilization. These have also emerged as cost effective, climate resilient, safe and hygienic systems that do not consume a lot of resources for the purposes of construction and maintenance. The project achieved 100% completion of this particular intervention whereby 72 rainwater harvesting units were constructed in the third year. While the families continue to benefit from the physical structure, the intervention has created a ripple effect of sorts as it is being led by 1679 women and 131 young girls. From being passive observers, women and young girls have become active agents of the development process in the four districts. From being direct recipients of the benefits of rainwater harvesting units, women and young girls have assumed the responsibility of bringing about such changes in others' lives as well. Their energies are now redirected to identifying families that need such interventions and ensuring that the process is completed. The interventions designed as part of the EWGL project has placed women and young girls at the forefront, leading initiatives at a community level. What is truly inspiring is that every woman and young girl in these project areas is willingly accepting the change in their roles and responsibilities and taking them up with unwavering enthusiasm. Their willingness to learn new skills, to engage with other women, to adapt and overcome challenges despite the harsh conditions is commendable. Interactions with them reflect a passion of women for steering change and achieving progress in the remotest areas of the Thar. The EWGL project, at the end of four years, has certainly created a large pool of resilient women, who, if provided an opportunity, can inspire women from nearby villages and districts to pursue the process of change.

**Table : 3** Achievement rate of output 4

Indicator	Target as per proposal	Baseline in 2021	Status in 2021 (As per IAS, 2021)	Status in 2022 (as per IAS, 2022)	Status in 2023
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.	The women and young girls continue to engage in discussions, taking forth the cause of CCA and NRM. All 1679 women and 159 are actively engaged in leading various activities associated with NRM and CCA.



*Beneficiary of a taanka under the EWGL project*

**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

Indicators used to assess the output achieved is enlisted hereunder:



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

Food and nutrition are imperative for existence and access to productive resources to achieve the state of being food and nutritionally secure, is fundamental. Through the EWGL project, GRAVIS has been able to introduce and sustain several interventions that directly contribute to the food and nutrition security of people. Some of these include women-led seed banks, crop demonstrations, establishment of arid horticulture units and pastures. These interventions have enhanced the knowledge, capacities and skills of women to promote traditional methods of crop growth. Furthermore, they have created a self-sufficient model of production of climate resilient fruits and vegetables that improve the adequacy and diversity of nutrition being consumed by children and adults in the region. This year has witnessed a considerable increase in the number of interventions undertaken (as in table 4) and has resulted in nearly 87% achievement of all targets as envisaged as part of the project proposal.

As part of a broader umbrella of activities, crop demonstrations, community seed banks, AHUs and restoration of pastures were undertaken in all the four districts. These activities have not only contributed to an enhanced produce for households but has also ensured in successful transition to sustainable and climate resilient crop cultivation. The crop demonstrations, anchored by key agricultural experts associated with GRAVIS, has ensured that beneficiaries adopt sustainable practices of farming, preventing soil erosion, ensuring soil fertility and facilitating the availability of diverse and nutritious produce. The community seed banks are particularly useful in the Thar as it helps combat the hostile conditions in a collective manner. It helps overcome the paucity of good quality seeds and is available for all, irrespective of the size of their landholding. This equitable distribution of local variety of seeds is imperative to tide over the challenges associated with climate change. Similarly, the utility and value of AHUs is well reflected in the discussions with the community members. This fourth year of the project has witnessed the setting up of 60 AHUs across the four districts and has certainly transformed the food security situation of families. The past four years has witnessed the setting up of 240 AHUs. Many families have vouched for the easy access and availability of multiple fruits, vegetables and greens, that is facilitated through the setting up of AHUs that are well protected with fencing, are maintained well through the water stored in *taankas*, and managed by the women of the family. Additionally, the restoration of pasture lands has provided further impetus to those engaged in animal husbandry. 100% of the proposed number of pasture lands have been restored.



Table 4: Achievement rate of output 5

Indicator	Target as per proposal	Baseline (2019)	Status in 2021 (as per IAS, 2021)	Status in 2022 (as per IAS, 2022)	Status in 2023	Achievement rate
Number of women-led initiatives (supported by the European Union) through which food insecure people are receiving assistance	908	0	324	386	788	87% completed in year 4. Remaining to be executed in year 5.
Community seed banks	300	0	80	280	300	100% achieved
Crop demonstrations	300	0	120	180	240	80% completed in year 4. Remaining to be executed in year 5.
Arid Horticultural Units	300	0	120	180	240	80% completed in year 4. Remaining to be executed in year 5.
Pastures	8	0	4	6	8	100% completed in year 4.

**Assessment of Outcomes**

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

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

Women require a conducive environment whereby they receive adequate support from their families and the community to pursue development changes. This environment must provide an opportunity for women and young girls to put forth their problems, seek insights and mutually learn from the experiences shared. In a region like that Thar where social and cultural practices determine the extent to which women are allowed to participate or engage with any aspect outside their homes, women empowerment almost seems like an indomitable task. Encouraging women to step outside their homes, nudging them to speak and put forth their opinions, be in the forefront and participate in meetings, advocate for significant changes in the community, were unheard of, a couple of years ago. However, the Thar region has witnessed a positive wave of change, thanks to the persistent efforts undertaken by a wide spectrum of stakeholders, spearheaded by GRAVIS.

The EWGL project entailed significant efforts undertaken by the project team to provide an enabling





Each step taken forward is a milestone in the lives of the women and young girls, whose engagement in the ILGs reflects resilience, commitment and confidence to bring about change.

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 principles of Sarvodaya (which means “all rising but last person first”) and *Gram Swarajya* (which means village self-rule”) are key drivers of all projects undertaken by GRAVIS and have a strong bearing on the ways in the which the interventions are planned and executed. The fundamental understanding is that communities must be empowered to manage all the resources effectively, equitably and optimally, so that all persons have access. This is particularly relevant for poor, vulnerable and marginalised sections whose access is limited and restricted due to various socio-economic and cultural factors. GRAVIS acknowledges the fact that those belonging to poor, marginalised and vulnerable sections are more burdened by the impact of climate change and thus must be prioritised.



*SHG training in progress*





In order to achieve this, GRAVIS has proposed the concept of community driven and community owned management of resources where an elected group of members (constituted as part of the VDCs) collectively decide who are the beneficiaries that are in dire need of *taankas* or AHUs or *khadins* and other interventions that may enable them to combat climate change in a better manner. The VDCs comprise a heterogeneous group of men and women, belonging to all caste and religious groups, who come together to alleviate the problems faced by people confronted with impact of climate change. The work of the VDCs is augmented by the support provided by the ILGs and SHGs. The EWGL project has created 160 such groups that have played a pivotal role in identifying beneficiaries in the community, disseminating knowledge and wisdom on traditional practices for storing water and moisture, traditional agricultural practices that can overcome the challenges of drought and climate change, importance of local and climate resilient varieties of seeds, health and hygiene. The ILGs and SHGs, through their active participation and engagement with the community, have reached out to the most marginalised groups of people living on the community and have ensured that they have access to a sustained supply of clean water.

This year also witnessed the implementation of five dissemination events, twenty village dialogues, and forty awareness campaigns on NRM, gender and drought mitigation. These events have been instrumental in enhancing the role of women in combating several challenges associated with climate change and NRM. Through the conduct of such events, GRAVIS has ensured that the community is sensitized to the importance of women in discharging crucial responsibilities at a household level and community level. These have also enhanced the confidence of women to speak up for their needs and collectively demand for changes in the infrastructure, quality of services at schools and AWCs and more importantly, lead the movement for CCA, NRM and drought mitigation.



## Chapter 3

### Emerging issues and way forward

Coping in stark conditions like in the Thar region requires immense grit, courage and resilience. The people of this region, over the past few decades, have learnt to evolve with the dynamic climatic conditions, overcoming some of the toughest challenges imposed on them. Particularly, the women and young girls of this region have demonstrated unparalleled determination in using the scarce resources and opportunities to live a life of sufficiency and self-reliance. While the project has achieved all its targets and has fostered women-led participation in key interventions associated with climate change adaptation, drought management and natural resource management, there emerge new set of challenges, like in an change-making process. Addressing these challenges is an on-going process and requires constant re-iteration. As a way forward, GRAVIS can consider the following recommendations to strengthen the impact of its interventions.

**Fostering equal partnership in climate change adaptation:** In a short span of four years, the EWGL project has resulted in a set of intended positive outcomes. One of the most effective ones is the successful implementation of women-led initiatives. However, interactions with the women and young girls has indicated an unintended negative outcome. One such outcome is the decreasing participation of men in the decision-making. While the women's role and importance in the development discourse has undergone tremendous change, making them leaders and custodians of resources, there is a visible change in how men are participating in this process. Many women in the focus group discussions indicated that while they enjoyed being at the forefront of decision making, they wanted men to be equal stakeholders in the process of achieving progress. This meant they wanted the men to be more active in the discussions at the household and community levels, interacting with the local authorities, participating in awareness generation programmes, taking part in child-care activities, etc. Some of the women mentioned that they observed a slackening attitude among men towards women-led initiatives. Although this is perhaps visible in few households and is perhaps an outlier in terms of the intended outcomes of the project, it may be useful to consider intensifying the behaviour change/awareness generation programmes. Envisaging equal partnerships for men and women and creating spaces for such interactions, in the development processes, can be useful for the future endeavours of GRAVIS. Some of the ways in which this can be achieved are through counselling sessions, training/capacity building workshops, curating activities oriented towards behaviour change, demonstration of successful models where men and women are equal custodians in the development process, etc.

**Exposure visits for replication/melas for engagement:** One of the most important components of this project has been the creation of women-led groups (ILGs and SHGs). A significant part of this project was devoted to identifying women and young girls, encouraging them to collectively come together, form the ILGs and SHGs, and consistently meet every month to discuss, deliberate and disseminate knowledge and



wisdom on a wide spectrum of things. In other words, a system has been created at a community level where women are anchors of several key processes that directly have a bearing on their living conditions. The vibrant interactions with the women are testimony to the fact that these groups are independent, skilled, well-equipped and determined. While these groups have strived to bring about many changes and have successfully managed to do so at the end of four years, one gap that continues to remain is the interaction with women from neighbouring villages and districts. Women and young girls have repeatedly mentioned the need for such interaction through exposure visits as they are keen to inspire other women, learn from other communities and replicate their learning across various platforms. This is one recommendation that has emerged from the change makers themselves and therefore, must be considered. GRAVIS may use future opportunities to organise melas (village fairs), invite communities from nearby villages whereby there is a combination of structural, formal and semi-structured, informal modes of learning and exchange. These melas may be organised periodically to encourage more number of women to participate and lead the change-making process in their respective villages. These melas can be used as a platform for demonstrating successful models, practices and benefits of climate change adaptation, drought mitigation and natural resource management. This way, GRAVIS can reach out to a larger number of people, enabling them to take forward the approaches and implement them.

**Creating spaces for interaction with local authorities and government functionaries:** The power of collective networks such as ILGs and SHGs is unmistakable. Considerable success has achieved in strengthening their capacities to advocate for interventions and ensure these are executed. As a step further, GRAVIS may consider widening their scope of activities including interactions with government functionaries, department officials local authorities, etc. Processes such as social and environmental audits of government schemes at service delivery points such as schools and anganwadi centres, etc. are extremely important and need to be advocated for. That apart, the women led networks can expand their scope of activities and reach out to schools, anganwadis, etc to speak about the impact of their work. This way, they are bound to inspire young children and adolescents to adapt climate resilient practices, be sensitive to the socio-cultural and climatic challenges they are confronted with. These young children and adolescents may also be inspired to pursue academic and professional paths that may help alleviate the problems they are facing.

**Need for mobilising resources to enhance financial, policy and programmatic literacy:** Another recommendation that emerged from the women themselves is the need for literacy programmes. Many women belonging to the ILGs and SHGs have realised the value of sending their children, especially girls, to school. Although the women never had a chance to go to school, they are hoping to enhance their skills. Some of them are also aspiring to appear for grade 10 and grade 12 examinations. As part of the integrated approach, GRAVIS can consider conducting /facilitating literacy workshops for women so that they are capable of contributing to the development process in a better manner. Additionally, efforts can be made to enhance the policy, programmatic and financial literacy of women. The interventions as part of the EWGL project have resulted in augmented incomes for families and this an opportune time to introduce initiatives



such as these so that women can manage their resources optimally. That apart, policy and programmatic literacy, encompassing information of several schemes and entitlements for women and young girls, will be very helpful.

The EWGL project has placed women and young girls at a higher pedestal of development. The progress reflected in the lives of women and young girls living in the four districts underscores the importance of having an integrated approach to combating climate change. Having carefully woven several key components relevant for the canvas of women empowerment, it is hoped that GRAVIS will continue to expand the horizons of hope for many more women and young girls, enabling them to thrive forward!

### Case study 1: Arid Horticulture Units bridging the nutritional gaps in community

Rachna Devi lives with her family in Sinhda village of Phalodi block. Like other families of Thar region, her family also face challenges due to lack of rain, water scarcity, poor health due to unavailability of food, etc. Frequent drought is a common phenomenon in the region that makes the situation worse. Her husband had to migrate to a city so that he can earn sufficient income for the family. Owing to their extremely poor financial condition, Rachna's children do not have access to adequate nutrition. They do not go to school either.



*Rachna Devi and her AHU*

Rachna became a member of the ILG in her village. She started actively participating in the ILG meetings and during one of the meeting she came to know about the initiative of establishment of AHU under EWGL project of GRAVIS. She was determined to establish one for her household as well. She put forth a request for an AHU in the VDC meeting and soon, the AHU was set up and she received fruit bearing plant saplings from GRAVIS. She also received training on how to maintain the AHU.



Rachna undertakes key activities of AHU including irrigation, weeding, pruning, fertilization etc. She is hopeful that the plants will bear fruit soon. She uses the grass grown in her AHU to feed the livestock. The green fodder available from the AHU increases the milk production from livestock. Rachna is able to sell this milk now earns a considerable amount, thereby reducing the financial burden on her family. Rachna is hopeful that in future, she can sell the fruits borne the AHU, to further increase the family income.

### Case Study 2: Capturing rainwater in farm fields through *khadins*

Tara Ram and his family lives in Tekra village of Phalodi. He works as a labourer and his family needs depends on his daily wages. He earns Rs. 500 per day, which merely fulfils the basic needs of the family. They cultivate millets and pulses in monsoon season to feed their family. The production from this rainfed farming is barely sufficient for the family's annual nutritional needs. Thus, he does not sell the farm produce. Moreover, he does not have enough financial support to build farm bund at his farm. The absence of which, causes soil infertility, less ground water recharge, soil erosion and hence less agricultural production as the rain water wash off the nutrient rich soil from farm.



*Khadin of Tara Ram*

With the help of one of his neighbours, Tora Ram started participating in Village development committee's meeting. There, he came to know about the EWGL project and its activities. After, attending several meetings, he discussed his issues with the VDC members. They analysed the situation and approved his proposal to construct *khadin* at his farm with the help of GRAVIS under the EWGL project.



A *khadin* was built in Tora Ram's farm land. This enabled capture of ground water will helps in sowing at least two crops. The *khadin* also helped in controlling soil erosion and increased soil fertility. The lush green trees and increased grass production are reflective of the improvement in soil nutrients and moisture retention. Tora Ram can have higher agricultural production and could sell the surplus harvest to earn additional income. He is thankful to the project and GRAVIS that enabled him to utilize the full potential of his farm.

### Case Study 3: Ensuring water security through *taankas*

Usha lives in Sinhda village of Jodhpur with her family. Her family's primary source of income is rain-fed farming. She lives with her husband, children and mother-in-law. Her family owns a small piece of land on which she cultivates crops to fulfil her family's basic nutritional needs. Like other families in the Thar region, her family faces major challenges due to water scarcity. Usha has to walk long distances to fetch water multiple times in a day for her family's daily needs. Her daughters help her in fetching water and this consumes most of their time. Acute water shortage affects agricultural production, availability of fodder for the livestock and the health of all. There are commercial water suppliers in the area, however, these are unaffordable. There is a hand pump near her house but it pumps saline water that causes harmful effects on the health of all.



*Usha with her taanka*

Usha attended an ILG meeting organized under EWGL project by GRAVIS. She informed them of her situation and her family's daily struggle. The ILG suggested that Usha's situation may be discussed during the VDC meeting.



Soon, a *taanka* was constructed near Usha's house. Thanks to a good spell of rain, the *taanka* captured sufficient quantity of water, catering to the household needs. Usha no longer has to ensure the arduous task of fetching water by walking long distances. Her daughters can spend this time gained in studying. The water collected through the *taanka* serves multiple needs including tending to personal hygiene, health, drinking water for the livestock, etc.

Usha firmly believes that the *taanka* construction not only gave them a healthy way of living but also augmented their income security.

#### **Case study 4: ILG- Empowering rural women**

Puja is a teenager and belongs to Tokla village of Kolayat block of Bikaner district. She is an active member of intergenerational learning group (ILG) of her village. She holds the responsibility of bookkeeping in her ILG group and is very proficient in it.

Puja comes from a Rajput middle class family, who have been supportive of girls pursuing their education. Puja has shown effective leadership within the ILG and has emerged as a confident, brave and resilient young woman. Earlier, she was shy and introvert. She preferred staying at home after school. She was introduced to ILG in one of the meetings organized under EWGL project. She became the member of ILG and started attending ILG meetings.

Puja is quite intelligent and her participation in ILG meetings has fostered her leadership qualities. She organises group meetings now and she encourages girls to pursue higher education. The ILG meetings have been instrumental in young girls and women acquiring new skills, including anchoring public programmes and awareness generation programmes. In addition to sending girls to school for higher education, families are also encouraging them to participate in competitions organized at different levels. The involvement of rural women and girls in ILG training and meetings have broadened their perspective on importance of female education and empowerment.



*Puja is a strong Leader*



## Acronyms

AHU-Arid Horticulture Unit  
CCA-Climate change adaptation  
EWGL- Enhancing Women and Girls Leadership  
Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti  
ILG-Intergenerational Learning Group  
NRM-Natural resource management  
SHG-Self-help Group  
VDC-Village Development Committee

## Glossary

Anganwadi-This means a “courtyard shelter”; the centre has been set up to provide a package of nutritional and health services for children below six years of age, adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers.

Beris- A Beri is essentially a pitcher–shaped shallow well that is used to store rainwater.

Ghoonghat- Ghoonghat (also ghunghat or jhund) is a veil or a scarf that a woman wears to cover her head or face

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.

Mela- It is used in the Indian subcontinent for all sizes of gatherings and can be religious, commercial, cultural or sport-related. In rural traditions melas or village fairs were (and in some cases still are) of great importance.

Naadis- Naadis are village ponds, found near Jodhpur in Rajasthan. They are used for storing water from an adjoining natural catchment during the rainy season.

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.





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**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 in over 2,000 villages reaching a population of over 2 million and has established over 4,000 Community Based Organizations (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.