

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from a research study carried out in five talukas of Banaskantha district between April and October 2002. These talukas are Palanpur, Vadgam, Dhanera, Vav and Tharad.

Baseline Socio-Economic and Demographic Survey

1. Dalits in these five talukas range between 10% to 16% of the total population. This proportion is higher than the proportion of dalits in the state of Gujarat which is 7.41%.
2. 28% of the dalits in these five talukas own agricultural land. Only 18% dalit households cultivated their land last year, and only 9% earned an income from cultivating their own land. Another 8% of the households cultivate land as share-croppers, with more than half of the share-croppers being in Dhanera.
3. About a fourth of the households own milch animals. However, only about a third of these livestock-owning households reported sale of milk.
4. Casual labour is the most common source of livelihood among the dalits in these five talukas. The other sources of wage income are government jobs (13%), agricultural labour (11%) and skilled labour (10%).
5. Per capita income was calculated by adding up income from four sources, viz, cultivation on own land, cultivation as share-cropper, sale of milk and wage and salary income. The highest annual per capita income is Rs. 6,349 in Vadgam, followed by Rs. 3,997 in Dhanera, Rs. 3,196 in Palanpur, Rs. 3,044 in Vav and Rs. 1,452 in Tharad.
6. Income from salaries and daily wages is the biggest contributor to household income, except in Tharad taluka, where casual labour is the primary source of household income.
7. With the exception of Palanpur where no share-cropping income was reported, dalits in all five talukas reported income from all four sources.
8. The relative contribution of the different income sources to household income varies in the different talukas. In Dhanera, Vav and Tharad, three or four of the income sources are all equally important. In Palanpur and Vadgam, wage income contributes a much greater share of household income than the other income sources.
9. Almost half the households are currently in debt, in most cases to a moneylender from one of the savarna castes. The most common reasons for taking the loans are social expenditure or sickness. These are also the dominant reason for mortgaging and selling land. However, a very small number of dalits have mortgaged or sold their land.

10. About a third of the dalits are members of civic bodies or voluntary organizations. This relatively high proportion is due to the credit cooperatives and the Banaskantha Dalit Sangathan promoted by BSC. Excluding membership in these organizations, membership in civic bodies is very low, except in Vadgam, where 21% of the males are members of cooperatives, credit societies, employee associations etc.
11. The main types of benefits from government schemes have been land for house construction (20%), funds for building the house (15%) and scholarships for children's education (18%).
12. Dalits in Vadgam and Palanpur fare the best in term of literacy, education and household income. They also have better housing quality and better access to water and electricity. Longevity is also highest in Vadgam followed by Palanpur.
13. Dalits in Tharad are the worst off in all these respects.
14. Dalits in Dhanera engage in a much higher level of agricultural activity than dalits in the other four talukas. Dhanera dalits report the highest levels of agricultural and dairy income compared to dalits in the other talukas.
15. Comparing the well-being of castes, Vankars come out the best in terms of literacy, education, longevity, housing quality and wage security.
16. Overall, Chamars are only marginally better off than Valmikis. Housing quality is somewhat better among Valmikis and income security is also higher because a higher proportion of Valmikis have salaried jobs. The latter have also benefited more from government schemes.
17. The social marginalization of Valmikis is seen in their negligible membership in civic-bodies, including those promoted by BSC.
18. It is evident that the well-being of dalits depends more upon their physical location than their caste. For instance, literacy rates for Valmikis and the Chamars in Vadgam and Palanpur are far higher than the average for their caste.

A Closer Look at Women and Family Health

19. Women who enter school but drop out before completing class XII, drop out most commonly after Class V or Class VII. Where overall education levels are higher, dropping out is more common after class VII; in areas with lower educational levels, it occurs after Class V.
20. The most common reason for dropping out of school given by women was that they need to help at home. Not wanting to study further appeared as the second most common reason. However, the voluntary discontinuation of schooling is higher among populations

where education levels are higher, for example in Vadgam taluka or among the Vankars and Pandyas.

21. Actual literacy rates among women, using a practical testing method, indicate that the rate among dalit women in the study area is 15-16%. Another 7-9% of the women are somewhat literate. These figures are significantly lower than the self-reported literacy rates of 36% (as per the household survey).
22. The average age at marriage for women is 15.43 years. There is no significant difference in the average age at marriage for younger and older women. The average age at which the woman goes to reside in her conjugal home (*aanu*) is 18.09 years.
23. There is no significant difference between the age at marriage across talukas or castes. However, the age at *aanu* is somewhat lower for women in Tharad and Valmiki women in all the talukas – both these represent groups which are socio-economically weaker than the others.
24. The average number of pregnancies per woman is 4.97. It is lower among Vankars and Pandyas who are economically better off than the other castes. Vadgam taluka has the lowest average number of pregnancies at 4.4.
25. More than four-fifths of the deliveries total took place at home (81%) while the remaining took place in hospital. However, increasingly dalits are opting for hospital deliveries, and 41% of the deliveries for women in the 18-25 age group were in hospital. The rate of live births for deliveries at home is marginally better than the rate of live births in the hospital.
26. Infant mortality in the five talukas is 44 per thousand live births and child mortality is 30 per 1000 live births. The infant mortality rate for dalits in the talukas studied is lower than the rate for the state of Gujarat (62 and 21 respectively).
27. Two hundred and forty-five women (32 %) reported going out for wage work in the women's survey. This is a far lower than the proportion of women working reported in the household survey, which was 143. Given that the women were selected from the households which were respondents for the household survey, this finding once again indicates the under-reporting of women workers in most surveys with male respondents.
28. Ten percent of the women reported having income generating skills that they were currently not using for any income generating activity. Embroidery and sewing were the most common skills. Lack of funds and lack of marketing opportunities were the most common reasons for not engaging in these activities.
29. Looking at participation in major household purchases as an indicator of participation in decision-making, we find that almost two-thirds of the women are involved in such decision-making, both in terms of selecting the item and being present at the time of purchase.

30. In terms of mobility of women, 81% of the women have traveled outside the village unaccompanied by male members of the family, while 73% women have traveled outside the village accompanied by male members of the family. A large proportion of the unaccompanied visits (49.5%) are to other villages within the taluka or as far as the taluka headquarters.
31. From the 756 households surveyed a total of 37% households reported that one or more members of the family had suffered a common illness in the last six months. In terms of rate of common morbidity, a rate of 11 per 1000 for a one-month period was reported. This is significantly lower than the national rate of 56 per 1000. For major and chronic illnesses, the rate for our sample works out to 59 per 1000, which is higher than the national rate.

Patterns in Discrimination and Atrocities Against Dalits

32. Dalits cannot be spoken of as a homogeneous group. Internal discrimination between dalit castes exists in varying degrees, particularly among Valmikis who are almost 'social pariahs'.
33. Overt discrimination and discrimination in public spaces against dalits has gone down in the last ten years. A strong exception is the temple, where strict norms of separation are maintained. In private spaces, traditional discriminatory norms continue to be adhered to.
34. The primary factors responsible for reduced discrimination against dalits are:
- i) Exposure to urban life and the lack of discrimination there;
 - ii) Education among dalits and non-dalits has created better awareness;
 - iii) Similarity in dressing styles and in types of utensils etc. used;
 - iv) The Atrocities Act which makes discrimination a criminal offence.
35. The key factors responsible for continued 'inferior' position of dalits are:
- i) poverty;
 - ii) poor self-esteem;
 - iii) lack of information;
 - iv) low level of awareness
36. There is a high degree of variability in the types and extent of discrimination observed today. The key village level variables that account for these variations are the proportion of dalit population in village *vis-a-vis* non-dalit population, awareness level and educational level of dalit population in village, proximity of village to urban center and the presence of a traditional dominant caste in village. Individual level variables are economic status of dalit, educational level of dalit, and the self-confidence of dalit.
37. Younger non-dalits that have had exposure to urban living are less likely to discriminate. This is particularly so when they are away from their native village

38. While ritual discrimination in public is on the decline, the savarna castes continue their efforts to maintain their economic and political superiority. This is evident in the difficulty experienced by dalits to benefit from government schemes that would improve their economic and social position.
39. Non-dalits are able to harass and intimidate the dalits and deny them their rights because, they have greater economic power; the law and official system is on their side, and because the dalits are afraid to challenge their authority for fear of a backlash.
40. Most dalits are afraid to challenge the status quo. Challenging the system is easier in unfamiliar terrain - with known persons it is very difficult.
41. Where dalits accept their 'inferior' position and make no attempt to increase their social and economic well-being, or assert themselves as equals, violence against dalits is relatively less. However, as soon as dalits try to come out of their depressed position, violence against them begins occurring. Violence against dalits is a tool to intimidate them.
42. Bonded labour, though unlawful, continues to be prevalent in Vav and Tharad talukas. Dalits seem to opt for this system because it provides them with lump-sum money when they need it. Even though such bondage means physical hardship, poor remuneration for labour and loss of freedom, dalits feel that it offers them some kind of security. This is critical in the face of negligible employment opportunities in these areas.
43. Comparing talukas, more discrimination is reported in Vav and Tharad talukas than in Palanpur and Vadgam. The extent of discrimination, particularly in the public sphere, thus varies with the level of overall economic development in the taluka.