

# Stories of Change

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## 1. Tribals at Amirgadh get their Rights



*Village leaders at the Gramsabha to discuss rejection of applications under FRA.*

Located in the arid Banaskantha district of north Gujarat, over 58 percent of the population in 81 villages around Amirgadh belong to scheduled tribes and the area ranks extremely low on the development index. For generations, the tribal families here have lived off the forest lands in the area and permissions to access these lands is a lifeline for them even today.

While forest land has been protected by the government, it allows rights to Tribal communities across the country. However, the process for permission is complicated. Applications are made under the Forest Rights Act and go through a multi layered process that involves permissions from and coordination between Forest Rights Committee (FRC) and District Level Committees (DLC).

Each year lakhs of claims are filed and thousands of genuine claims are rejected due to poor documentation, lack of awareness about procedures and corruption, leaving several tribal families in distress.

In this region alone, nearly 2500 claims have been filed of which only 1726 were approved and over 1600 were rejected. Sulepani is one of the most backward of the 81 villages in the Taluk and here only 12 claims were approved and over 400 rejected.

The situation is similar in most surrounding villages like *Sonvadi, Richadi, Savniya, Heda, Ghoda, Vaghriya, Sarla*. Lack of coordination between FRC, DLC and District Administration, technical difficulties in mapping through GPS, and sheer lack of understanding of the law in many cases has led to such abysmal number of permissions being granted.

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In some cases, though permission was granted, local forest officials did not allow the tribal families to cultivate.

It is to understand and address these issues that Human Development Research Center (HDRC) organised a daylong meeting with nearly 22 local village leaders under its Inclusive Rural Governance Programme. Following the intervention, a day long gram Sabha was organised on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2020 at Sulepani village. The primary objective was to review rejected claims and offer legal advice for immediate action.

To help the claimants, two senior lawyers were invited to be part of the Gram Sabha and they offered legal advice based on orders passed by the High Court of Gujarat. To ensure focussed redressal of issues people were categorised into four separate groups.

First was those with rejected claims. This was further divided into claims rejected by the forest department and claims not approved by the gram Sabha. A fourth group for filing new claims was also created.

A draft letter was prepared to seek an urgent review of rejected claims with the help of the FRC and a visit was organised to submit to the DLC and the District Collector. Following this, 10 claims were immediately approved and others are being considered.

The HDRC intervention led to a confidence boost for the tribal villagers and their awareness of their rights under the FRA increased. They also understood how to approach the FRC for sustained action.

It led to three village leaders filing application to district level officials with a copy to the Chief Minister. A forest rights leader has even filed a form at the district level to demand their Community Forest Resource rights to ensure that individuals do not have to file separate applications.



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## 2. 35 Tribal Villages are Educated of their Forest Rights



*HDRC workshop with 56 participants in Ahmedabad*

To ensure that Tribal communities which have lived off the forest aren't deprived of their traditional source of livelihood, they are granted community rights under the Forest Rights Act. But often their requests are trapped in paper work and bureaucratic red tape starving them of a living.

A state with a high ratio of Tribal population, Gujarat has received over 7000 Community Forest Rights (CFR) claims, of these only 3000 have been granted. It is to intervene and ensure action on the ground that HDRC did a field study in 102 villages tribal villages in the tribal dominated Sabarkantha, Banaskantha and Panchmahal districts of the State.

The studies revealed that even in cases where CFR has been granted the communities are denied access to the forests as they have not been able to take subsequent steps like forming of a Resource Management Committee (RMC) which is mandatory under the Forest Rights Act (FRA).

Interestingly, in some villages, while RMC was constituted on paper by the Government even members of the Committee were not aware about it! This reveals that in many cases Tribal forest rights remain just a paper dream.

A total of 35 villages were identified for immediate action and these were classified into three categories. First were the ones where CFR claims were approved and the community wants to implement it on the ground.

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Second was where CFR claims were rejected and third was communities which were not even aware of CFR and had not filed claims.

Once this classification was done a systematic plan was prepared. In the first case, it was simple guidance that was required to create systems to start implementing the rights with the help of district authorities. The tribal community was educated on how to go about this process.

The second and third category of cases required sustained intervention and coordination with Forest Rights Committee (FRC), District and Subdivision Level Committees (DLC and SLC). Legal experts reviewed and advised on filing future claims in cases where claims were rejected.

In cases where CFR was not even filed it emerged that the villagers received very little help or advice from local FRC and DLCs. After some basic process of information gathering at the village level, HDRC organised a two-day work shop in Ahmedabad on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2020.

56 representatives, including women from the villages, took part in this exercise. The key aspects which were focussed on was the Forest Rights Act 2006 and subsequent rules that were introduced in 2008 and 2012.

The participants were educated on the role of FRC/DLC/SLC and procedures to submit claims for CFR. They were also made aware of participatory mapping of villages.

As a result of the program, CFR plans were implemented in 35 villages. A strategy was put in place by which gram Sabha would even act against forest department digging land without prior information to villagers.

In villages where CFR claim has not been submitted awareness campaigns were conducted to help with procedure to submit claims and a total of 35 villages in 7 blocks, 5 villages in each block filled form for CFR!



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## 3. Ensuring PDS functions for the Tribals in Meghraj

Public Distribution System or PDS is a lifeline for lakhs of families that live below the poverty line in India. It is the mechanism to ensure that basic ration of grains and essentials reaches those who cannot afford private shops. Unfortunately, in several places the PDS supplies are syphoned off by greedy shop owners who brazenly flout norms and rules resulting in severe hardship for the poor.

A classic example of PDS shops flouting norms is in the Tribal dominated Meghraj Taluka of the backward Aravalli district in Gujarat. The PDS shops that cater to nearly 42 villages in the area are open only for 3 to 6 days of the month though the government gives them enough ration to function for 24 days.

Faulty biometric system to identify beneficiaries meant that thousands of families had to wait for long hours to receive their ration. Quality was abysmal and shop keepers took advantage of poor awareness amongst villagers and denied them the allotted rations.

HDRC activists had intervened on other issues like land and human rights in several of these villages and when this issue was brought to their notice, they organized a drive to corroborate the allegations.

A cursory investigation showed that the allegations were true and soon after that representative from 23 villages – 15 where HDRC had intervened on other issues and 8 new ones – were called for a meeting. They were educated of their rights under the Right to Food Act and how to file complaints with higher authorities.

Around 40 representatives from the 23 villages participated in these meetings and they were all given detailed pamphlets highlighting their rights and procedures to ensure they are not cheated. Following this the village representatives mobilized people in their villages and a joint memorandum was submitted to the district officials and those in charge of the Taluka.

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The memorandum demanded that the shops be open for 24 days in a month, the immediate replacement of faulty biometric systems and action against shop keepers who refused to heed to request from community leaders. It also demanded the constitution of Village Vigilance Committees to help the government verify and take swift action in such cases.

Following this, the Mamlatdar, the officer in charge of a Taluka, issued clear orders to all ration shops to remain open for 24 days in a month and provide quality ration to the people. The order threatened cancellation of licence of errant shopkeepers.

42 Village Vigilance Committees were formed and PDS shops are now open for 24 days providing reasonable quality of grains. Licences of two shop keepers who did not follow the circular were cancelled.

This action has boosted the confidence of the villagers in the system and has brought about a sustainable change and ensured they can no longer be cheated by errant shop keepers.



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## 4. Landless Dalits of Porbandar Fight for Land Rights



કેટેગરીમાં (૧) નોર્ડેશનલ આ શોર્ટ ફિલ્મની વાવિ  
ફિલ્મ મેકર્સ (૨) અમેચ્યોર લઘુત્તમ ૧ મિનિટની  
ફિલ્મ મેકર્સ (૩) સ્કૂલ-કોલેજ મહત્તમ ૨ મિનિટની  
સ્ટુડન્ટ (૪) માહિતી પાવાના રાખવામાં આવી છે.

**સોરાષ્ટ્ર દલિત સંગઠન ની  
ખાસ બેઠક યોજવામાં આવી**



ગીર સોમનાથ જિલ્લાના કોડીનાર તાલુકામાં મિટિંગ  
મળેલ. જેમાં બહોળી સંખ્યામાં લોકો ઉપસ્થિત રજામાં.  
આગામી સમયમાં સંગઠનને મળેલ કચેરા અને આગામી  
કાર્યક્રમો વિશે માહિતી આપેલ. આ તકે ગોવિંદભાઈ ચાવડા  
સહિતના સંગઠન નિમિષિઓ હાજર રજામાં હતા.

**હિતુભા ફરાર થયો તે સફેદ ફોર્ચ્યુનર**

While the Gujarat government has been eager to ensure land allotment to industrialists, hundreds of landless Dalit families in the State have to struggle for land rights.

For instance, records show 45 lakh hectores have been allotted to 55 corporate houses in the state, but despite a prolonged campaign for allocation of surplus, waste and ceiling land to the landless and thousands of the lakh and twenty thousand petition filed by landless Dalit and Adivasi families remain pending.

HDRC field studies focussed on Dalit families in Bavdavadar, Khgeshri and Ramnagar villages of Kutiyana Taluka in Porbandar district of Gujarat's Saurashtra region. It was found that 17 families in Bavdavadr and 13 in Khgeshri were not allotted land and had given a memorandum to the District Collector.

Intriguingly, in Ramnagar village land allotted by the government was re acquired by the authorities without any prior notice. Several petitions and demands for an explanation from district authorities have gone unanswered.

HDRC activists organised two rounds of meeting with the villagers to create awareness of land rights and legal provisions. The meetings also aimed at training the landless families in going through documentation and bureaucratic procedures for land claims.

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Pamphlets with explanatory material and information were distributed and these even contained application forms. The district association also submitted a memorandum to the collector on 9/1/2020 demanding immediate initiation of administrative procedures.

Since, 1947 landless families in 35 villages in the area have been demanding rights and as a result of HDRC intervention the taluka level association along with village leaders is campaigning for the rights of the landless. They were able to draft letter and document their campaign as a result of training from HDRC.

As a response, district level officials initiated the first forward step and issued a letter for speedy allotment of agricultural land. As per this letter, records of the Taluka magistrate show that on 23/1/2020 land was allotted to families in 10 of the 35 villages and it is under process in the rest of the villages.

HDRC campaigns also helped Dalit families realise that land was not just a source of livelihood, but also gives them dignity in the village social setting. This has inspired several Dalit families to realise the importance of land allotment.



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(Case Studies from the Inclusive Urban Governance programmes Awaz Adhikar Zumbesh: Housing initiative project)

## 5. Makeshift Shelters to a Permanent Home

Each day thousands of homeless families arrive in India's bustling cities in search of life and livelihood. They often end up on pavements in huts and over the years create their own roadside slums.

A classic example of such a population are the hundreds belonging to the Tribal Devpu-jak community who have been living in temporary shelters in Ahmedabad over the last four decades. 22 such families were living on the roadside in the busy Shahibaug area of the city.

They have no documentation and they live off daily earning from activities like driving an auto rickshaw or selling toys and doing embroidery work. They have used sticks and sarees to build temporary houses on the roadside which are often demolished when political leaders or bureaucrats visit the area.

Those who demolish their houses hardly care for where these families, of 5 to 7 members each, go and have never allotted proper housing for them. So, a few days after a demolition they return to the same pavements and rebuild their temporary houses. This is how they have lived for over 40 years now.

The purpose of the *Awaz Adhikar Zumbesh (AAZ)* project of HDRC's Inclusive Urban Governance Programme is to ensure that such families get permanent housing. For over three years AAZ volunteers and workers have been educating these families on their right to education, food and housing. Through sustained efforts these families got documents, like Aadhar card, PAN card, ration card which are necessary for applying to the government housing projects.

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While getting them permanent housing was a long-drawn process, these families were provided temporary plastic shelters to protect them during rainy seasons. Their houses were made of sarees and they would all be drenched during the monsoons, but plastic shelter from donations protected them till they got permanent shelters. Mobile education vans were also brought to the areas and the children in the community began understanding the value of education.

Most of those living here did not even have birth certificates and all this documentation was obtained through constant follow ups. Armed with documents, the AAZ volunteers and community members approached UCD authorities in Ahmedabad.

Sustained follow-ups ensured that the 22 families here were allotted houses under the Prime Minister Awaaz Yojna near the Bodakdev Rajpath Club and the families moved in there soon after allotments.

AAZ's Ravibhai was instrumental in ensuring these families got permanent houses as he has been working with them for many years to build a trusting relationship.



*Ravibhai at the site where the 22 families were given new houses*



### 6. 40 families get a Home in Chandkhed

The aim of the *Awaaz Adhikar Zumbesh* (AAZ) initiative under HDRC's Inclusive Urban Governance Programme is to ensure that there is hope and progress for those living on the streets of cities like Ahmedabad without even the most basic of necessities like water, sanitation, and a concrete shelter.

While swanky cars swirl into the bustling Adani Petrol bunk in Laxminagar Chapda in Chandkhed area of Ahmedabad's Sabarmati ward, there is little concern that was shown to nearly 60 families living on the roadside in makeshift homes.

Like in other parts of the city, these families are mainly from the Tribal Devpujak community and most of them moved to Ahmedabad in search of work nearly two decades ago. For the last 16 years these families have made the pavement on the busy road their home.

Wooden sticks tied with sarees is what they have called as home and most of them earn a daily wage from activities like driving autorickshaws, embroidery work and selling toys. Each family has five to seven members and together they are a community that was orphaned by the authorities.

Often, even their temporary homes would be smashed by municipal authorities clearing the roads of the city, but little was done to ensure permanent homes for these families.

AAZ has been working with this community in Chandkhed for over three years and slowly started spreading awareness amongst the people about their rights and entitlements. However, the only way to claim for those is with documentation and this nomadic community had none.

Through a cumbersome documentation process most of the members got Aadhar cards, voter IDs and even birth certificates. Government run mobile school vans were introduced in the area and the children began getting educations.



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However, even as this process was going on, the civic authorities would demolish these houses for road widening projects and the families had to shift from one place to the other. They even went on a protest and held placards demanding permanent homes.

Finally, after a prolonged battle under the guidance of community leader Chanabhai Bijalbhai Raval, 40 of the sixty families were allotted government-built houses in Chandkhed area giving the families a sense of security that they never experienced before.

Demands for housing by 20 of the families was rejected due to insufficient documentation and AAZ activists are working on rectifying these discrepancies. Hopefully, the remaining 20 families too will get concrete housing soon.





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(Child rights and child development programme stories)

## 7. Bhumikaben goes back to School!

In a remote village of Banaskantha district in Gujarat, 8-year-old Bhumikaben's life would have gone wasted without any education had it not been for the intervention of HDRC Child Rights and Child Development Programme which works to bring girl children to school.

Bhumikaben's father is an agricultural labourer and her mother takes up odd jobs to augment the family's income. Though Bhumikaben was going to a government run primary school in the village, she dropped out after her older sister got married.

It is common for girls in such a socio-economic setting to drop out of school and take up domestic chores to supplement the family income. No one in this village society bothered about the young school going girl grazing cows.

When HDRC staff and girls group visited Bhumikaben's family and urged her father to send her back to school, his response was a categorical no. He remarked, *"If my daughter goes to school, my wife has to stay back at home to look after her and that would mean lesser income for the family"*

For an entire academic year, Bhumikaben stayed out of school and was taking care of household duties while her mother went out looking for daily jobs. Patiently, HDRC activists continued to engage with the family and tried convincing them to send the girl back to school.

A local school teacher and citizen educator were also enrolled to convince the family to send her back to school and finally all these efforts paid off. Bhumikaben was back in school for the start of the next academic year.

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One reason the family was convinced to send her back to school was because the local teams portrayed to them the stark difference in the life of educated girls as opposed to those who did not go to school. This really struck a chord with the family.

A happy Bhumikaben got to wear her favourite school uniform again and was thrilled when she told the local HDRC staff that, *"I have many friends to study with, again!"*

## 8. Taral the Young Education Crusader

Having passed her 10<sup>th</sup> standard, young Taral Ankitaben decided to join a campaign that would help several other girl children in her village. She and a group of young girls in the Ruppura village spread awareness on the need for educating girls. Taral is the president of the group and is a highly motivated leader.

Her work has made Taral famous in her village and she has built a close rapport with several families. Her affectionate nature is endearing and armed with a smile she has been able to convince several families to send their girls to school.

So, when Human Development Research Center (HDRC) conducted a meeting and shared details of a few children who migrated out of the village every year with their families for work and hence did not receive proper education, Taral took it upon herself to ensure those children went to school.

Taral and some of her friends visited the families that migrate frequently and established a relationship with them. She would visit them often and ask them why they did not ensure education for the girl children.

She would go with the citizen educator and other members to convince the families and reason out with them benefits of schooling and opening the opportunities that were available. Despite initial reluctance from the parents, after a month of sustained efforts Taral achieved a break through and the parents finally agreed to send the girls to school.

Since then, migrating families ensured that the girl children stay in the village and attend school even when the parents go out in search of work. Taral's aim is a child migration free village and she is slowly marching towards it!



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## 9. Ensuring more Teachers for the Children of Bordiliya

The government run primary school at Bordiyala village in Danta Taluka of Banaskantha district is a stark example of miserable realities at the grass root level. The school has only three class rooms for students from 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> standard.

There are just two teachers and a headmaster who attend to all the classes and children of different age groups. As a result of shortage of rooms and teachers, children of different age groups were clubbed together with very little attention on the education being imparted.

Low quality education with poor infrastructure led to a high dropout ratio and even children attending school ended up with little or no learning. This was alarming and defeated the entire focus on primary education to improve the lives of thousands of underprivileged children.

Having observed the situation, the Human Development Research Centre (HDRC) team decided to intervene to improve the quality of schooling at Bordiyala and the issue was discussed with the School Management Committees (SMC). Under the Child Rights and Child Development programme HDRC organized meetings to sensitize the people about the value of deeper involvement of teachers in educating the children. The importance of adequate number of teachers to impart high quality education was emphasized.

During the meetings, parents were encouraged to record their grievances in the school complaints book. After recording their complaints, the issue was followed up for action with the authorities with a formal application to recruit more teachers for the school.

The local citizen educator and HDRC team followed up with the headmaster. The team went along with the headmaster to the Block Resource Centre (BRC) to inquire into progress on the complaints.

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These follow-ups at the center revealed that the application for more teachers had not even been forwarded to the concerned authorities. The SMC refused to leave the centre till the necessary action was taken and only after such a strong protest did the BRC promise to forward the request the very next day.

Within 20 days from this intervention two more teachers were appointed to the school taking the total number of teachers to five. While even five teachers may not be enough for the whole school it has helped ease the stress on the students and headmaster. There is hope that in future a few more teachers will be appointed.

The issue of inadequate teachers is not restricted to this village school. Six primary schools in this block alone had a very poor student teacher ratio and with the efforts of the SMC and citizen educator sufficient number of teachers were ensured in five of the six schools

24 out of the 45 villages in the area had also reported shortage of staff and efforts of the Child Rights team, citizen educator and SMCs ensured that almost 80 percent of vacancies were filled up. The entire campaign also helped spread awareness amongst people in the area to the problems in schools and has ensured that there is campaign for improving quality of teachers and infrastructure in government schools.



### 10. Revelations from an Annual Learning Audit-

While working on ensuring more children go to school, adequate number of teachers and better infrastructure it is important to constantly assess the impact on children who are going to school and whether they are learning and benefitting from education.

Human Development Research Centre (HDRC) does an annual assessment of what the children have learnt through a learning audit. The aim of this audit is to identify issues faced by children and weaknesses in the system. Following this an action plan on how to solve the problems is prepared.

The audit assesses children from standard 2-3 and standard 6-7. The younger children, classes 2-3, are given chits with questions and they respond orally and in writing. The 6-7<sup>th</sup> standard kids are given 15 minutes to write an essay or paragraph on a particular topic. This helps assess the ability of the children to read, comprehend and respond orally and in writing.

The audit is done in presence of School Management Committees (SMC), Girls' group, Headmaster of the school and Community Members to ensure it is transparent and credible when children are graded on their performance.

Several students, nearly 90 percent of them, could manage only low grades of C and D in this year's audit and that was disturbing. Community members were concerned that the children got low grades despite having 70 to 80 percent attendance and asked if the teachers were responsible for this.

The teachers revealed at the audit that though many children came to school they left soon after mid-day meals were served. They also pointed out that the children did not pay attention in classes. The teachers shared with the parents that children should make an effort to study at home after classes to improve their grades.

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This conversation sensitized parents to the need to monitor the progress of their children and several parents promised to ensure that their children do not return home after mid-day meals and attended school through the day. The audit helped bring accountability to the programs that have been implemented and was greatly appreciated by parents and teachers.

## 11. A Girl Child Turns into a Teacher, Leader!

15-year-old Nandani Himmatbhai Vala is testimony to the power of HDRC's children's camp. She belongs to the backward Valmiki community and is a leader of the children's group in the poor quarters area of Ahmedabad.

Nandani's parents ensured that she went to school and the young school girl began bringing the benefits of education back home. She taught her grandmother Jashuben, who leads local self-help group, to read, write and sign documents!

Though reticent and shy, Nandani is full of grit and innovation. As leader of the children's group, she has organised several group activities in Killol Kendra. She initiated the child-to-child learning project. Initially, some of the boys in the group did not like taking orders from a girl leader, but Nandani stood firm and slowly ensured that she gained everyone's respect.

She has motivated around 9 children in the area to attend school regularly and helps them in their studies. Her involvement in larger social issues was evident when she organised, on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020, a candle light vigil after a girl from her community was gang raped in Hathras in Uttar Pradesh.

She made sure that 11 girls and boys in her group and local women's collective were part of the candle light vigil which helped build community awareness and brought focus on safety of women.



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(Three cases studies of the skill development program clubbed into one piece)

## 12. Imparting the Skills to Succeed

23-year-old Mukesh Bhaskar grew up in extreme poverty at the Piplag village in Amreli district of Gujarat. His father's meagre income as a farm labourer had to fend for a family of five which included Mukesh's two brothers. However, Mukesh's parents ensured that their children received basic education and passed 12<sup>th</sup> standard.

Though Mukesh went to the local Industrial Training Institute after finishing his 12<sup>th</sup> standard and learnt some technical skills, he lacked confidence and the ability to present himself before a group of people. This was a major hurdle to getting jobs.

Struggling to move forward in life, a friend of Mukesh told him about HDRC's Skill Development Programme. Once he enrolled for the course, Mukesh's life changed dramatically. He learnt to speak English and, most importantly, how to speak confidently before a group of people. He also learnt how to respond to customers.

All of this has helped him make a mark at a new job as a technician at the Jalaram Suzuki, a motorcycle dealership in Amreli, where he earns nearly Rs.6000 a month. He speaks to his customers and managers with confidence and hopes to rise in his career, thanks to the Skill Development Programme.

Like Mukesh there are hundreds of young boys and girls whose lives have changed after attending the Skill Development Programme. Hiral Ninama grew up in the rural Bhiloda area of the backward Aravalli district. Her father is also an agricultural labourer and she was keen to help him in providing for the family. Her two older sisters are married and she wanted to make sure that her younger brother and parents had financial support from her.

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The quest for confidence and a career brought her to HDRC's Skills to Succeed Programme at Bhiloda Center. Soon, Hiral began speaking in English confidently and joined a big retail clothing brand as a saleswoman. She now works in a swanky mall in Ahmedabad city and earns eleven thousand rupees a month. This wouldn't have been possible without the Skill Development Programme.

Like Hiral and Mukesh, 20-year-old Lata Solanki's life changed after taking the course. She is from an extremely poor family in Alua village of Botad district and after she was unable to clear her 10<sup>th</sup> standard exams her future seemed bleak.

Fortunately, she heard of the Skill Development Program and decided to attend it in Ahmedabad city. This was the first time she stayed away from her parents, but once she started attending the program the girl grew in confidence and bloomed to find a career.

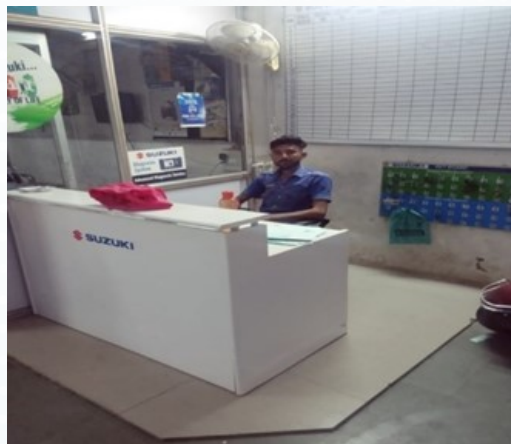
The shy village girl is now a sales executive at a supermarket and earns 8000 rupees a month. She is the only salaried member in her family and manages to send some money to support her parents every month.

Hiral, Mukesh and Lata are just a few examples of success from the programme and to make it more effective there are constant review meetings and feedback to improve its reach and quality of training.



**Lata Solanki**

**Mukesh Bhaskar**





(Case studies on the power of a women's cooperative)

### 13. Defending Taraben's Honour

35-year-old Taraben Nareshbhai Katara lost her husband at a young age and is the sole breadwinner for her daughter and two sons. Despite the tragedy in her life, she is full of grit and has lived an independent life of dignity at the Venpur village near Bhiloda town of Aravalli district.

She was given a small piece of agricultural land by her husband's family and that is her only source of livelihood. Apart from a rigorous daily routine of hard agricultural labour, Taraben is also a member of the managing committee of the local Women's Cooperative- the Jyoti Adivasi Mahila Bachat & Dhiran Sahakari Mandali Ltd.

Being part of the co-operative gives women, like Taraben, a sense of social security and helps them find livelihoods when they do not have work on the fields. It was the protection and power of the cooperative that ensured justice for Taraben when her own brother-in-law became a threat to her safety and the safety of her children.

Katara Prakashbhai, her late husband's brother, is an alcoholic and one day when Taraben was out for work in the fields, he stormed into her house in an inebriated state. He smashed the door and started breaking things in the house.

Taraben's young daughter was alone in the house and when the little girl screamed for help, he threatened to kill her with a stone. He chased the little girl as she ran to her neighbour's house for protection. Hearing the commotion, Taraben rushed back to her house and Katara began verbally abusing her.

Fortunately, the local villagers came to Taraben's support and even beat up Katara and sent him back home. But the villagers and the panchayat could not force Katara to pay for the damages and also could not ensure that he would not misbehave with Taraben again.

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Desperate for protection, Taraben called members of her co-operative for help. When the members of the cooperative reached and questioned Katara along with Panchayat leaders, he refused to answer any of the questions.

Following this, the village Sarpanch told the women from the cooperative to take whatever action was necessary and offered the full backing of the panchayat. The women demanded that Katara give a written undertaking that he would never trouble Taraben and that he would fix the door he broke in her house and other damages immediately.

Katara refused to do that, but the women forced him to sign on a written undertaking. They threatened him that if 50 of them came to help Taraben today, over a 1000 would come again if he ever misbehaved with her.

Such a strong response from the women ensured that Katara paid for the damages and repaired the door in Taraben's house within five days. It has also ensured that no man in the village would dare to misbehave with Taraben or any other vulnerable woman in the village.

Even the panchayat leaders congratulated the women for protecting Taraben and spread the message of social security that comes with being part of a co-operative. Apart from such protection, the cooperative also gave Taraben a loan to build a new house.

All this has inspired Taraben to spearhead a campaign for the co-operative and has also ensured that more women join it .



### 14. Sevantiben Ensures her Children are Educated

The dream that her children would all be educated is what inspired 47-year-old Sevantiben Dharmendrabhai Gamit, a widow in the Mahuvas village to join the Nari Shakto Mahila Vikas Savings and Lending Cooperative Society at Unai in south Gujarat's Navsari district.

A few years ago, Sevantiben's three children dropped out of school because their mother and sole breadwinner couldn't support their education with her meagre income as a daily wage labourer in the farmlands of their village.

This is when Sevantiben decided to look for new ways to ensure that she could fund her children's education. She simply could not bear the thought that her children would have to work on the fields like her.

Fortunately, she came across the cooperative in the nearby Unai and decided to join it. She would take part in all their meetings and started a regular savings. Once she started her savings account, she could take a loan from the cooperative which helped fund education of her three children.

The rest as they say is history. Today, Sevantiben's first daughter is a nurse, another daughter is doing her bachelor's degree in Social Work and her son is in his 12<sup>th</sup> standard. Single handed, the gritty mother has secured a better future for her children.

But Sevantiben did not stop at that. She went on to take a loan and bought a tractor, nine cows and buffalos. She has virtually set up a small farm enterprise which even employs labourers. She has taken up the role of secretary of the co-cooperative and is even actively involved with the village Panchayat.

Her involvement has helped in building roads and toilets in her villages. Being a widow, she offers special attention to other widows in the village and has ensured that 8 such women get a pension and support from the government.

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She has also ensured smooth functioning of the Public Distribution System in her village and is a role model for young and older women to emerge as leaders in a rural society!

**Sevantiben Dharmendrabhai Gamit Village: Mahuvas, Ta. Vansada, G. Navsari.**

**Name of the cooperative:** Shri Nari Shakit Mahila Vikas Savings and Lending Cooperative Society Ltd. Unai



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## 15. Induben Discovers the Power of Organic Farming



Her 3 Bighas of agricultural land (a little less than two acres) in Navaghra village of Meghraj Taluk in Aravalli district of Gujarat is the only source of livelihood for Damor Induben Kanubhai. She lost her husband a few years ago and the produce from this land must suffice the needs of her six children, three daughters and three sons.

Often, farmers fall into a debt trap when they employ poor agricultural techniques and become reliant on expensive seeds and machines for their crop.

A few simple, traditional techniques, like drip irrigation and mulching, could be a lifeline for farmers like Induben and ensure that they get steady and sustained income from the soil. Spreading awareness about such techniques and supporting women farmers like Induben with technology is an integral part of Swabhoomi Kendra's efforts. Workers in these Kendras are supported by a state level network of more than 40 NGOs and CBOs called the Working Group for Women and Land Ownership (WGWLO). The Human Development Research Center is a part of this network and they train the Kendra workers to create awareness about organic farming and its benefits.

Induben first met Swabhoomi workers through awareness meetings on organic farming and field day training programmes organised by the Kendra. At these workshops, women like Induben were explained techniques such as mulching and drip irrigation.

They taught women farmers how to avoid the use of expensive pesticides and chemical fertilizers to reduce the input costs.

One of the main problems in organic farming is that the yield is low in the first year and then it slowly increases. It also ensures that farmers do not have to invest money in buying seeds, pesticides, and fertilizer. However, farmers must be ready for a low yield in the first year.

Having seen other women farmers in the area adopt the practice and reap the rewards, Induben too decided to walk the organic path. For the last three years she has seen a steady rise in income with crops like Maize, wheat, Chickpeas, and all kinds of vegetables.

She earns an average income of 4000 rupees a month and the ground water level in her farm have already started improving. Improving water levels is a huge boon in these arid parts of the state and organic farming has helped her cut labour costs by almost 75 percent.

Seeing the success of Induben, ten other women in the area have also taken up organic farming. These efforts not just empower women farmers but also enriches the soil and the environment!