



PROJECT SHAKTI

Annual Report F20

Submitted by Cohesion Foundation Trust

Content

Sl no	Topic	Page no.
1	Why Project Shakti?	3
2	Project Shakti +SDGs	4-5
3	Goals, Objectives and Interventions	6-27
4	Covid Relief Activities	28
5	Employee Engagement	29
6	Way Forward	30
7	About Cohesion Foundation Trust	31

Why Project Shakti?



Mehsana is an important district in the state of Gujarat, situated close to Gandhinagar, the state capital. According to Census 2011, the district has a population of about 2 million and a literacy rate of 84%. However, the district has been classified as a Gender critical district by the Women and Child Development Ministry. The child sex ratio of Mehsana is amongst one of the poorest in the state of Gujarat.

Many clusters of industries have developed in various parts of the District and one of the cluster falls in Baliyasan area. The plant of McCain Foods India is situated in the Baliyasan cluster. The villages are situated on both sides of Ahmedabad- Patan Highway #41 and typically wear a rural-urban outlook. There are around 40 persons employed with McCain on a regular basis from these 3 villages and about 180 people are on non-permanent roles.

Being situated in a gender critical area, McCain Foods being a socially responsibly company, decided to work on the upliftment and empowerment of rural women in 3 villages nearby the plant. These villages are Baliyasan, Ambaliyasan and Bhasariya. McCain has predominantly been working on women's empowerment issues in these villages in partnership with various non-profits and has addressed the livelihoods of women in a systematic way.



In these three villages the total number of household is 1870 and the population is 11122 people.

The various communities residing in these villages are Desai which is a pastoralist community, agriculture and small scale business; the Parmar community is engaged in industrial jobs and labour work; Thakors are engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, labour work and small scale jobs. Raval and Prajapati community are engaged in agriculture, small businesses and industrial jobs. *Datani* community are engaged in goat rearing and labour work. Banjara community is mainly nomadic tribes and are engaged in labour work. *Suthar* community is mainly engaged in carpentry work whereas *Darji* community is engaged in tailoring and industry jobs. There are very few households of Muslims community which are engaged in Agriculture and animal husbandry.

Project Shakti + SDGs



All activities of Project Shakti are geared towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UNDP.

SDG 1 talks about eradicating poverty in all its forms. It also says that women are more likely to be poorer than men because they have less paid work, education, and own less property. New threats brought on by climate change, conflict and food insecurity, mean even more work is needed to bring people out of poverty. Towards this end, the CSR initiatives of McCain are designed to provide skill based trainings to women and men so that they become capable of earning or augmenting their incomes.

SDG 2 talks about ending all forms of hunger and malnutrition. McCain has started taking steps towards combating malnutrition amongst women in its project villages. As a first step, health camps have been organized where all beneficiaries were given a free health check-up and many have been diagnosed with anaemia and malnutrition. The next steps would involve working closely with these women to improve their eating habits to combat malnutrition.

SDG 3 talks about good health and well-being. Good health is essential to sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda reflects the complexity and interconnectedness of the two. We talk about the importance of good health with our beneficiaries on a regular basis, educate them about accessible health care through our awareness programs, in an effort to build a healthy community. Achieving inclusive and quality education for all reaffirms the belief that education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development.

SDG 4 ensures that all girls and boys complete free primary and secondary schooling by 2030. It also aims to provide equal access to affordable vocational training, to eliminate gender and wealth disparities, and achieve universal access to a quality higher education. McCain works towards providing free vocational training to men and women in its project villages and also encourages all girls to complete their education and avoid dropping out of school through regular social behaviour change communication efforts. Ending all discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, it's crucial for sustainable future; it's proven Our CSR Initiatives and SDGs that empowering women and girls helps economic growth and development. Gender equality is the cornerstone of the CSR strategy of McCain India and all efforts are made towards empowering women so that they get the same rights as men. Sexual violence and exploitation, the unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work, and discrimination all remain huge barriers still. It is vital to give women equal rights land and property, sexual and reproductive health, and to technology. McCain India works towards encouraging more women leaders which will help achieve greater gender equality.



Project Shakti + SDGs



SDG 5 talks about ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. The cornerstone of Project Shakti is empowering women and sensitizing the society about the evils of discriminating on the basis of gender. We also consciously strive towards an inclusive society where women contribute equally and are treated equal to all other members of the community.

SDG 6 talks about Safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030 requires we invest in adequate infrastructure, provide sanitation facilities, and encourage hygiene. Protecting and restoring water related ecosystems is essential. McCain is committed towards providing clean potable water to its communities and time and again invests in community water projects.

SDG 8 The SDGs promote sustained economic growth, higher levels of productivity and technological innovation. Encouraging entrepreneurship and job creation are key to this and our CSR initiatives are designed to encourage women to take up non-farm activities to supplement their household incomes.

SDG 10 This goal talks about empowering lower income earners, and promote economic inclusion of all regardless of sex, race or ethnicity. Our CSR efforts are targeted towards reducing income disparity between men and women through self-employment/entrepreneurship. Women are encouraged to be more mobile in order to gain access to resources which were normally denied to them or were beyond their reach due to traditional societal practices.

SDG 16 Without peace, stability, human rights, and effective governance based on the rule of law we cannot hope for sustainable development. McCain consistently works towards educating the community about domestic violence, female foeticide and inclusive governance, where women are given their rightful place in village level institutions. In a world that is getting increasingly divided, no one can deny the role of women in building an inclusive society. Our CSR initiatives focus on building the capacities of women of all castes to find lasting solutions to inequality and insecurity.

PROJECT SHAKTI- Goal, Objectives & Interventions



Goal : To bring about social change and improved livelihood through empowerment, capacity building and gender sensitization of both men and women.

Objectives	Interventions
1: Enhance soft skills of women and girls to take up vocational skills in the future so that they are employable or can be confident of being entrepreneurs	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Vocational skills training2. Forward and backward linkages
2: Improve livelihoods and income of women and adolescent girls; formation of SHGs to strengthen women's empowerment and skill development.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Farm-based livelihood activities2. Off-farm based livelihood activities3. SHG promotion (formation, meetings, skill trainings)4. Entrepreneur development and promotion
3: Improve quality of lives of women and girls by creating interventions to improve gender sensitization	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gender sensitization programs for adults2. Gender sensitization for children and young adults3. Kitchen garden
4: Natural resource initiatives to enhance livelihoods and to end gender discrimination	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Tree plantation

Objective 1: Enhance soft skills of women and girls to take up vocational skills in the future so that they are employable or can be confident of being entrepreneurs

Intervention 1: Vocational skills training for women and exposure visits



- **Rationale:** Girls and young women in economically backward societies are often deprived of various learning and income-earning opportunities that could improve their social status and living conditions. Vocational skills training is considered to be an effective way to help empower such marginalized populations.
- **Target:** We had a target of providing skill based training 20 persons this year.
- **Achievement:** 27 women participated tailoring courses, and 9 women participated in a beauty parlour course.
- **Expected Outcome:** Demonstrating how formal and non-formal education can be integrated to equip women from poor marginalized families with practical, occupation-oriented, technology-based vocational skills training
- **Actual Outcome:** All 27 women successfully completed the tailoring training course. 10 women out of 18 have purchased stitching machines (from their SHG savings and their family's support) for doing their business. They are earning about Rs. 50 on daily basis after learning the work. One master trainer has also been selected – Sonalben Patel who will impart training to other beneficiaries in the future. Today, she is able to earn about Rs. 100/day on her own. Rs. 4500/- per month income generated for 25 women who were involved in mask making during the pandemic.

Sonalben Vimal Bhai Patel

39 year-old Sonalben has been living a better life with her earnings through stitching. She has two children who are studying and Sonalben does everything to keep them engaged in studies. For last one year she was facing financial crisis as her stitching work was not giving her enough earning. The reason behind this was that many women of her village were engaged in stitching already. For last two years she is engage with Project Shakti. She teaches stitching under Project Shakti for last two years.

Project Shakti has given her master training and trained her as a master trainer. She started teaching to women in Ambliyanan. She gets Rs10000/- as salary. She has given very good training to women, they have learnt to stitch many women clothing items.

Project Shakti has also given her an order to make masks to fight the corona pandemic. Through this she was able to earn a substantial amount and support her family. All women in her group took responsibility and created masks earning about Rs4500 on average. People like Sonalben who are experienced have earned way more than other. It has benefitted many women to get their basic needs during the time of Covid when they had no other livelihood options. Sonalben has got work as well as other women and it has benefitted them.

Sonalben regularly attends all SHG meetings and trainings and she gives trainings to women. She encourages other women to join SHG groups. It is seen that the economic condition of women has improved after joining the Project Shakti.



Exposure visits



CFT works on issues of women empowerment with donor agencies like CSR donors, International donors, Government etc. To understand the impact of work of Women empowerment, exposure visits were made to CFT Pune, Navsari and Dang. Participants of Project Shakti visited these places to broaden their outlook on women's livelihoods and empowerment. The team learnt about learned different initiatives of farm based and non farm based activities and how women can take leadership in village development.

In all 79 beneficiaries have participated in exposure visits.

Women also visited a state-level agriculture and food exhibition on Ahmedabad, *Satvik*. Through this visit ,women got motivated and they put up different stalls of food on the function of Republic Day celebration in the village school. Total 15 women did business by making different snacks and selling small stationery items at this program.

Exposure to SEWA in Ganeshpura helped to understand how women cooperatives can work together.

This has encouraged the women to take up enterprises on their own, be it farm based or non-farm based. They are now more open to working in groups and are less wary of becoming entrepreneurs. These visits have helped further the discourse of women's empowerment in these villages. They learned and replicated new business initiatives.



Sr. No	Place	Date	No. of members
1	Pune – Cohesion Foundation Trust project area	9-10-19 to 12-10-19	4
2	Navsari, Dang - Cohesion Foundation Trust project area	12-12-19 to 14-12-19	5
3	Ganeshpura, Modipura - SEWA	9-12-19	8
4	Ahmedabad (Satvik Food Festival)	24-12-19	18
5	Sri Ram Trust-Kukma	30-1-20 to 1-2-20	44
Total			79

Objective 1: Enhance soft skills of women and girls to take up vocational skills in the future so that they are employable or can be confident of being entrepreneurs

Intervention 2: Forward and backward linkages



- Rationale:** In the context of skill building, one of the key duties is the forging of linkages between vocational training and social demand. Just equipping the trainees with the right skills wont be sufficient to develop financially independent women. It is important to provide the necessary linkages
- Target:** This year we planned 9 trainings to beneficiaries who have already received skill based trainings in the past. These trainings are aimed at honing their soft skills and business management skills. These trainings are planned for the last two quarters.
- Achievement:** In the first two quarters 9 women participated in a Beauty Parlour course, run at Baliyasan. Project Shakti supported them in creating forward linkages through marketing and sales channels and backward linkages through procurement channels and book-keeping and record keeping support. 19 women joined different government schemes trainings in Ambaliyasan. Total 206 women from SHGs joined online training on different Government schemes conducted during Covid 19 pandemic.
- Expected Outcome:** Women would be equipped with the skills and market linkages.
- Actual Outcome:** Exposure visit was conducted to Samaj Suraksha, Mamlatdar Court, DRDA. 2 girls were taken for the exposure of Maitri Group. Beauty parlour – skill enhancement, marketing of parlour visiting cards were printed. The girls running the beauty parlour in Vil. Baliyasan were given orientations on marketing and book keeping. In all the villages awareness of the beauty parlour was made.

Prajapati Geetaben Natubhai

Geetaben, 36, is a native of Vil. Baliyasan and lives in Prajapati vaas. She is a single mother and has two children. Her daughter studies in the first year of college whereas her son studies in school. She does not own any land. After her husband's death there was nobody to earn. Hence, her economic condition was not strong. Her childrens' education was also suffering due to her poor financial condition

Geeta ben and her daughter Nikita got involved in the SHG group Ekta, supported by Project Shakti. They started coming to the meetings and trainings. Geetaben wanted to do something to support her home and took training of home based business so that she could take care of family and children. She started cooking different varieties of food at home supplies meals for some employees of McCain. This is how her tiffin business started and her income improved gradually. With the support of Project Shakti and the employees of McCain, she has started earning about Rs 5000-7000 per month.

Geetaben had one extra room in her house. With the support of Project Shakti, she rented out this room to some girls of the village, who run a beauty parlour. This rent adds to her monthly income.

Nikita, her daughter has also started taking beauty parlour course/ training. She is now in college and hopes to start her own parlour some day, to support her family's income.



Objective 2: Improve livelihoods and income of women and adolescent girls; formation of SHGs to strengthen women's empowerment and skill development.

Intervention 1: Farm-based livelihood activities



- ▶ **Rationale:** Most of the target beneficiaries own small plots of land and spend most of their working hours on agriculture and allied activities. Hence, farming activities emerged as the most important area to intervene if we wanted to bring about meaningful and sustainable value addition to their lives and livelihoods.
- ▶ Activities under this intervention include:
 - ▶ Promotion of farm based micro-enterprise model for SHG women
 - ▶ Vegetable *Mandap* model
 - ▶ Vermin bed, Organic pesticides and Compost Pit
- ▶ **Expected Outcome:** The long-term vision of this intervention is to strengthen farming activities, bring women to the forefront of all farming activities, increase income of the family from farm activities and enhance overall security and lifestyle of a family. Income generated from these activities should help beneficiaries to meet their day-to-day needs and also create a financial safety net.
- ▶ **Actual Outcome:** 13 women have taken up horticulture and have planted marigold, brinjal, organic wheat etc. Project Shakti supported 7 women with drip irrigation facilities to improve their productivity. As an agri allied livelihood support, one family was supported in purchasing a cow which is now giving them a steady income of Rs 3500-4000 a month from the sale of milk.

Promotion of farm based micro-enterprise model for SHGs



Income & Savings from Farm & Allied activities



Income from farm & allied activities	Rs 33620
Savings generated from farm & allied activities	Rs 19100
Savings from kitchen gardens	Rs.57000



In the beginning of this phase of Project Shakti, a study was conducted to understand the scope and feasibility of initiating farm based livelihood programs in the project area. We spoke to a number of farmers-men and women- individually and in groups, to get an understanding of the cropping patterns, marketing and supply chain of various produce. What stood out was the fact that beneficiaries of Project Shakti were keen to learn more about innovative agriculture practices since they were already spending most of their time in farmlands- either their own or of others.

We explored the willingness of people to take up crops that were not traditionally grown in the area, especially vegetables, fruits and flowers. We brought in experts to understand the soil specifications and crops suited such soil and climatic conditions.

Based on our findings, we have initiated work on demo farms on the following- Papaya, Lemon, Drumsticks, *Amla*, Lemon and Marigold flowers.

Saraswati Ben Thakor Kantiji

Sarashwatiben, 24, lives in Ambliyan village and is a single woman. She had separated from her alcoholic husband due domestic violence issues. Alcoholism and domestic violence is rampant in this part of the state and is a sad truth that many families have to deal with. Post her separation, she has been living with her parents in Ambliyan. Her father has a small parcel of land for farming with poor irrigation facilities and was debt-ridden. They had taken loans from local money lenders to buy inputs for their land. Moreover, there was no one to educate them about good agriculture practices to improve production or even about the importance of regular savings in building wealth.

Saraswatiben came in contact with Project Shakti through our village field workers. They inspired her to join a self help group and start saving regularly, from whatever little income she had from tilling her family's land. She agreed and now saves Rs 100/month. She started participating in group meetings and showed a keen interest in learning about better farming practices. With support from Project Shakti, she and her family have started making their own organic fertilizers and pesticides, which has led to substantial savings in terms of input costs. She is also learning about organic farming and the growing demand of organic produce in urban markets. She hopes to tap into that market with her organic produce, in the coming years.

Project Shakti has similarly contributed to improving the agricultural practices of many farmers in the area with the hope that these practices become the norm and more and more farmers are self reliant and get out of the clutches of money-lenders,



Vegetable Cultivation- *Mandap Model*



An innovation in Agriculture by the means of *Mandap* model was introduced by Project Shakti. In this method, a creeper vegetable is grown with the help of physical support, onto a platform like structure, called *mandap*. Beneath the platform, other vegetables can be grown, so that optimum utilization of the land can be achieved.

We set-up a demo farm in a plot of land of size 1 bigha owned by a beneficiary of Project Shakti. Rameshbhai and his wife Sushilaben, contributed partially to the cost of the project. The crop selected was Ivy Gourd locally known as *Tindola*. It is a vegetable that is widely consumed in Gujarat and is not grown in our project area. It is the first time that Ivy Gourd has been grown here. In addition to Ivy Gourd, Marigold and Broccoli were planted in the same plot (inter-cropping). Broccoli as a crop is also new to this area. The Marigold flowers were planned to be sold in the nearby *mandi* along with the vegetables.

This method of farming is sustainable in that one can cultivate 2-3 crops in a small plot of land. This plant had a lifespan of three years and the structure itself can stand for 10 years if properly maintained. Alongside multi-cropping, we have ensured that chemical fertilizers and pesticides were not used. Instead, organic fertilizers were used in this demo plot.

Target: We had a target of creating 6 such demo farms in the three project villages.

Achievement: Till now we have been able to set up four such farms, three of which were set up in the month of April, and have not started producing yet. The one farm that was set up earlier, has generated a net income of Rs 16870/- till the time of writing this report.



Vermin Bed and Compost Pit



One aspect to sustainability in farming is the use of organic fertilizers and pesticides instead of chemicals. In order to promote the use of organic fertilizers, we demonstrated the preparation of the same in the three villages. This included demonstrations of a compost pit for organic home-made fertilizers and liquid pesticides that can be sprayed using the same equipment farmers normally use in their fields for application of pesticides.

For organic fertilizer preparation, we created a bed of about 6'X2.5' size. Cow/buffalo manure, cow urine, Gram flour, jaggery were mixed along with some culture of bacteria, which was then covered with a piece of plastic and left to decompose for about 2 months. When it completely decomposed, it gave compost manure, which was used in the farms.

For the organic pesticide, similar materials were mixed in plastic tubs and left to decompose for a few weeks. This is now being used in farms of beneficiaries of Project Shakti.

The benefit of these organic inputs is that in addition to being good for the crops, they help reduce the input cost for small farmers. Moreover, they help keep a pollution free environment since the manure that would have otherwise littered the village streets, can now be put to good use.

No of organic pesticide set-up: 9

No of vermin beds: 8

No of compost pits: 2



Objective 2: Improve livelihoods and income of women and adolescent girls; formation of SHGs to strengthen women's empowerment and skill development.



Intervention 2: Off-farm based livelihoods



- **Rationale:** Mehsana being a water stressed area, many families cannot afford to irrigate their farmlands and hence, look for additional modes of income. Add to that the small landholdings, getting even smaller every generation, the economics of farming in the conventional sense doesn't seem viable or attractive to many. Hence, non-farm activities like setting up enterprises from their homes or small shops etc seem like a safe choice for many families. There are many women within the project villages who have been affected by land fragmentation and decreasing farm productivity who showed the interest and skills to have their own enterprises to contribute to the family income. Hence, Project Shakti supports such women in the form of seed money, handholding, business planning and awareness to succeed in such endeavors.

- Some activities within this intervention are:

- Embellishment production
- Tailoring
- Mobile Stationery shops

- **Expected Outcome:** Families are less dependent on only farming activities for their income. They have other options for livelihood generation as a safety net, or even as their major source of income.

- **Actual Outcome:** Beneficiaries of Project Shakti took training on some non-farm skills and have started earning a steady income out of it.



Off-farm based livelihoods



- 49 women have earned Rs 3.5 lakhs from various off-farm activities like sewing, selling stationery items door-to-door, grocery shops, stationery shops, beauty parlour etc.
- Project Shakti has supported 10 women with loans worth Rs 1.9 lakhs to start their own businesses like bakery, grocery shops, sewing centres etc.
- Embellishment Production -Three women from a SHG are involved in it and earn Rs. 2000 to 2500 per month.
- Tailoring-27 women of different SHGs are involved and earn amount varied from Rs. 500 to Rs. 3000.
- Two shops are opened by women and they earn amount varied from Rs. 1000 to 3000. These shops are for basic home based necessary things.
- One woman doing door to door marketing of women's cosmetics and hygiene products. She has earned profit of Rs. 13000 in last 6 months.
- Two women are involved in cloth selling they are earning Rs. 1000 to 3000 per month.
- General stores are started by 2 women and they earn Rs. 1000 to 3000 in a month.



Embellishment production



In Vil. Bhasariya, 3 women have started doing stone-work embellishment work. These women belong to the same extended family and do not own any farmland. They mostly work as farm labour. They are all part of the same Self Help Group.

Embellishments for clothes like sarees and other traditional wear are being produced in villages of Gujarat by women who do it in their spare time. These are then bought by dealers who sell them to garment manufacturing units.

These three women were initially taken to Palanpur in Banaskatha district to see the work in a factory for themselves. We then put them in touch with a dealer who gave them the assignment of producing these embellishments at home. He also trained them in the art of producing these embellishments. The women took a small loan from their SHG and invested that amount in buying the raw materials. They have started producing these embellishments and are steadily supplying to the dealer in Palanpur.

These women and now earning about Rs 50/- per day from this work. As it is a skill based job and is time consuming, they are hoping that with time their speed would increase and they can increase their productivity, leading to better returns, However, there are major achievement one can notice from these activities.



Objective 2: Improve livelihoods and income of women and adolescent girls; formation of SHGs to strengthen women's empowerment and skill development.

Intervention 2: Self Help Group (SHG) Promotion



Rationale: A SHG is an informal association to enhance the member's financial security as primary focus and other common interest of members such as area development, awareness, motivation, leadership, training and associating in other social intermediation programs for the benefit of the entire community. SHG is a group formed by the community women, which has specific number of members like 15 or 20. SHGs have been able to mobilize small savings either on weekly or monthly basis from persons who were not expected to have any savings. Women from financially weaker sections come voluntarily come together to save whatever amount they can save conveniently out of their earnings, to mutually agree to contribute to a common fund and to lend to the members for meeting their productive and emergent needs.

Target no of SHGs: 30

Actual Numbers-30

Total Savings since project inception –Rs 4.04 lakhs

Number of trainings: 30

Total number of participants: 536

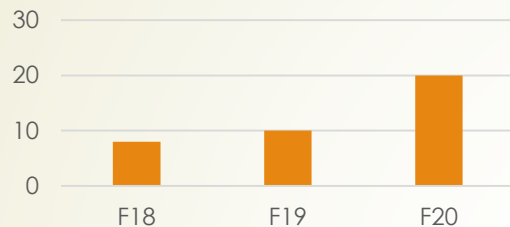
Adolescent Girls Group: 3 (72 girls), Bal Panchayat:1 (36 children)



Expected Outcome: To inculcate the savings and banking habits among members. To gain from collective wisdom in organizing and managing their own finance and distributing the benefits among themselves. To gain from collective wisdom in organizing and managing their own finance and distributing the benefits among themselves. To encourage habit of saving among women and facilitate the accumulation of their own capital resource base.

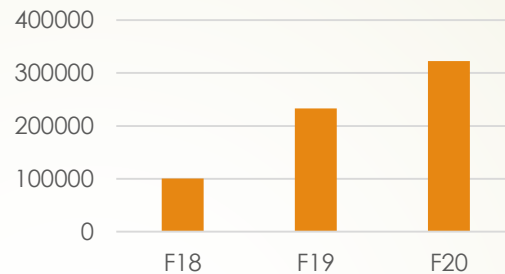
Actual Outcome: SHGs were strengthened and they have now understood the importance of saving and internal lending. Women and coming forward to create more and more SHGs and we shall promote the creation of these SHGs.

No of new SHGs formed



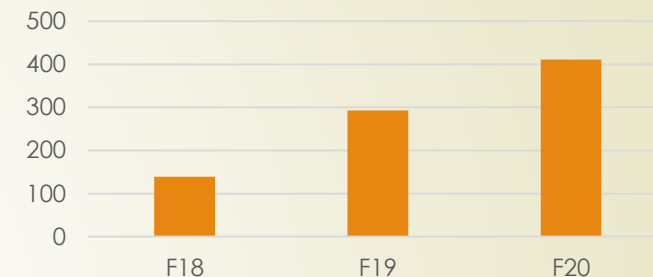
Cumulative no of SHGs at the close of F20: 30

Year-wise SHG Savings



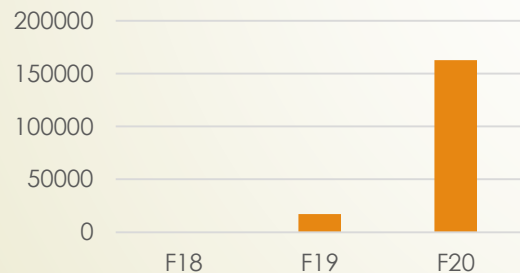
Cumulative savings at the close of F20: Rs4.04 lakhs

No of SHG members



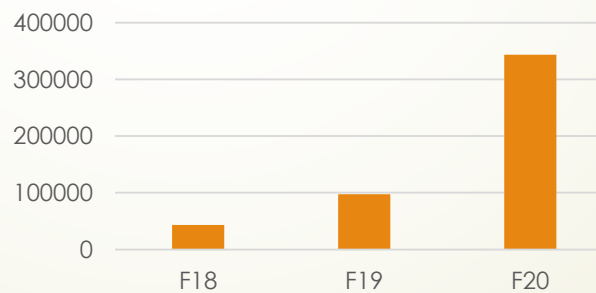
411 members by close of F20

SHG Interloan



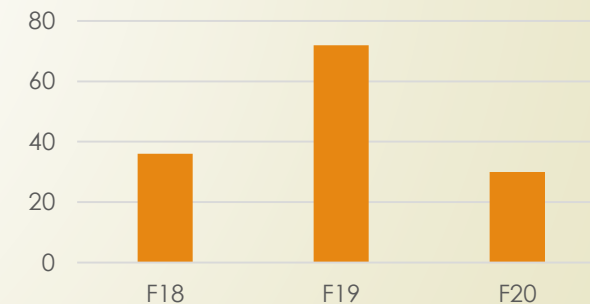
Cumulative inter-loans at the close of F20: Rs 1.8 lakhs

Income from non-farm activities



Cumulative income from non-farm activities at the close of F20: Rs4.84 lakhs

No of Trainings



138 trainings
1200 hours since project inception

Shobhaben Naresh Bhai

Shobhaben Naresh Bhai, 38, lives in Vil. Ambaliyasan with her husband and two young daughters. She has a small parcel of land. Her husband has a medical condition due to which he is unable to do any sort of physical labour. However, he tries his best to support his wife in agricultural activities, even with his limited capabilities. However, they struggled to keep their family afloat.

Shobhaben has been a member of a Self Help group promoted through Project Shakti and has been earning Rs. 100-150 Per day regularly.

Seeing her struggle, other members of the SHG, decided to support her. With a small loan from her SHG and some contribution from the project, Shobhaben purchased a cow. The cow gives 3 litre milk every day which her family consumes. She earns Rs. 150 per day from selling of milk to the local dairy. She also prepares Ghee and curd at home, to supplement their meals.

Shobhaben and her sister, who got inspired by her, have gone through many trainings on the upkeep of livestock, so as to increase production of milk. They have also learnt about organic fertilizers and pesticides preparation. Shobhaben has been able to accumulate substantial savings from using home-made fertilizers as she does not have to buy expensive chemical fertilizers from the market, without hampering production.

Her economic condition has improved by owning a cow. She has also inspired other women to form SHGs and get benefitted. She has become an example for many other women of her village.



Objective 3: Improve quality of lives of women and girls by creating interventions to improve gender sensitization

Intervention 1: Gender sensitization for adults



Rationale: Since the mid 1980s there has been a growing consensus that sustainable development requires an understanding of both women's and men's roles and responsibilities within the community and their relations to each other. Gender equality refers to equal opportunities and outcomes for women and men. This involves the removal of discrimination and structural inequalities in access to resources, opportunities and services, and the promotion of equal rights. Equality does not mean that women should be the same as men. Promoting equality recognizes that men and women have different roles and needs, and takes these into account in development planning and programme. Mehsana being a gender critical district, there are glaring discrepancies between the resources and opportunities available for men and women. Hence, gender equality is a major pillar for the structure of Project Shakti.

Target: We had targeted two large meetings with men and women of the community along with our regular discourse on gender parity in the project villages.

Achievement: 8 trainings

No. of hours: 19

No of participants: 131



Expected Outcome: Reduced disparities between resources and opportunities for women as compared to men; women having more say in their household decision.

Actual Outcome: Gender Sensitization trainings were helpful for women as the male members were sensitized where they discussed the significances women's multiple role in a family. Some men actually accept the fact that women contribute more to the development of a family and the society, but have over generations been denied their due. Men in the project area are now more open to the women in their families being part of Project Shakti.

Objective 3: Improve quality of lives of women and girls by creating interventions to improve gender sensitization

Intervention 2: Gender sensitization for children and young adults



Rationale: We believe that gender awareness starts at home and the best time to introduce the concept of gender equality is during childhood and youth.

Achievement: We have created one group of children in Vil. Baliyasan consisting of 36 children (girls and boys) in the age group of 12-15. This group is called a *Bal Panchayat*. This is a voluntary group which meets up once a month to discuss gender related issues. Project Shakti field team members moderates these discussions so that the children can have a meaningful discussion around the issues plaguing our society today. We intend to make these children aware of how easy it is to discriminate against a weaker member of the society, without even realizing that we are doing so. Gender based discrimination is so ingrained in our culture that it is imperative that children are made aware of its perils and ways to avoid/overcome them.

Similarly, 3 groups for adolescent girls have been created with a total membership of 72. These girls are too young to be a part of SHGs. So they meet up once a month to discuss issues within their surroundings; situations where they feel vulnerable and Project Shakti tries to equip them with the knowledge and strength to deal with such situations. They are made aware of their rights and laws surrounding their safety. Once these girls attain the age of 18, they can then form SHGs and starting saving money regularly and initiate economic activities to be self sustainable.

Expected Outcome: Reduced disparities between resources and opportunities for women as compared to men; women having more say in their household decision. Equally sensitisation with males is important and during the year gender training to men have made them sensitized towards women. It was difficult for women to leave houses and come in meeting but now men have started helping them on the household front.

Objective 3: Improve quality of lives of women and girls by creating interventions to improve gender sensitization

Intervention 2: Kitchen gardens



Rationale: It has generally been seen that in a rural household, the women eat after the men and children have eaten. Usually this means that the women do not get enough nutritious food which leads to common issues like anemia and weakness. Kitchen gardens can be established and maintained on a small patch of land with minimum technical inputs; hence, these gardens provide the rural resource to poor communities with a platform for innovations in supplemental food production as well as an opportunity to improve their livelihoods. Family labour, especially efforts of women, becomes particularly important in the management of these gardens. Empowered with reasonably minimum amount of skills and knowledge, these women members of rural families can easily fight crop losses and other negative implications, thereby making kitchen gardening a profitable initiative in addition to ensuring that they themselves eat well. Besides, the major use of organic farming practices makes these gardens environment friendly as well.

Target: We had set out to create 30 kitchen gardens this year which would include all seasonal vegetables and some fruits as well.

Achievement: Owing to the minimal cost involved in setting up a kitchen garden ,200 kitchen gardens were set up in the project area. Savings accrued due to kitchen gardens @Rs300/- per family comes to approx. Rs 55000/-.

Expected Outcome: Maximum adoption of kitchen gardens; women eating better and family saving increasing due to reduced buying of vegetables from the market.

Actual Outcome: Introducing Kitchen Garden was very beneficial as the women have now started getting nutritional vegetables from their own garden and also purchasing of vegetables is reduced which has saved the family's expenditure. All these gardens are chemical fertilizer free. Only home grown compost and manure has been used. Kitchen Gardens helped women on increasing their vegetable intake and they do not have to purchase vegetables from market. Maximum adoption of kitchen gardens; women eating better and family saving increasing due to reduced buying of vegetables from the market. Maximum adoption of kitchen gardens; women eating better and family saving increasing due to reduced buying of vegetables from the market.

Geetaben Kanuji Thakor

Geetaben Kanuji Thakor is a native of Bhasariya village. She is 19 yrs old and studying in 5th semester of her graduation. There are total six family members. She lives with her parents, grand- parents and her two siblings.

Since her parents do not have farming land, they work as labourers on somebody else's farming land. In spite of toiling hard, they struggle to make ends meet.

Through Project Shakti, she joined a SHG, *Happy SHG*. In spite of being so young, she is the leader of the group. She herself attended many trainings and also given trainings to others. Geetaben has learned to make embellishments for clothes at home. She also volunteers with Project Shakti whenever we need incentive-based work. She earns 800 rupees every month from the embellishment work and supports her family.

The cornerstone of the project is to empower such spirited women like Geetaben who want to stand on their own feet and progress in life.



Objective 4: Natural resource initiatives to enhance livelihoods and to end gender discrimination



Intervention : Tree Plantation



- **Rationale:** Mehsana being a water deficit district, it was recommended by the district authorities that McCain Foods plants trees around its plant. Historically, McCain Foods has contributed to developing ponds and other water projects for the community. This year, we planted some varieties of fruit bearing trees so that going forward, they also add to the income of the family in addition to being good for the environment and preventing soil erosion.
- **Target:** Planting of 200 saplings
- **Achievement:** More than 200 saplings were planted in three villages. Maximum adoption of kitchen gardens; women eating better and family saving increasing due to reduced buying of vegetables from the market.
- **Expected Outcome:** Increased greenery, decreased soil erosion, dust in the atmosphere, increased biodiversity, fruits available for family consumption.
- **Actual Outcome:** Saplings were planted by SHG members in their gardens and farms. Each woman was given Lemon, Pomegranate, Tulsi, Guava, Amla, Alovera – this was undertaken in all the three villages. These plants were procured from the Govt. Forest Dept. nursery. Some plants were also planted in common areas of the villages.
- Increased greenery, decreased soil erosion, dust in the atmosphere, increased biodiversity, fruits available for family consumption.

Covid Relief Activities



- During the peak of the pandemic, Project Shakti supported the communities in many ways. As many were day wagger earners, they lost their livelihoods with the lockdown. Groceries were distributed to those who were vulnerable and had no food security. Masks were made and distributed free of cost. The team invested a lot of energy into educating the communities about the prevention of the disease. With the support of the administration, we were also able to support migrant labourers in their return journey to their home states.
- No of groceries kits distributed: 263
- No of masks distributed: 11000
- More than 5000kg potatoes distributed



Employee Engagement



All through the year, employees of McCain Foods India have consistently taken part in various community activities. Senior leadership has kept the field team motivated by making regular visits and interacting with the community.

Be it distributing and planting saplings in the villages to distributing stationery to school students, McCain employees have come forward with their support and time.

Employees make regular visits to the project area facilitated by the field team so that they are aware of the progress of the project and at the same time, share their knowledge and expertise with the community.



Way Forward...



The next year shall see renewed efforts to strengthen farm and off-farm livelihoods for women. We shall continue our dialogue with the community for gender equity.

Efforts shall be made for strengthening of change leaders for bringing about sustainable impact for women empowerment. .

Focus will be given on adolescent girls group and Bal Panchayat so that they can become responsible citizens of the society.

More and more employees of McCain Foods India would be involved in the project so that they can contribute their knowledge and expertise in educating the community.

This year was filled with challenges for the project. The project partners were changed and Cohesion Foundation Trust replaced Arupa Mission. The new team took a few weeks to build a rapport with the community, but after that it was smooth sailing. The pandemic brought a halt to our rapidly escalating activities. Many planned activities could not take place and funds had to be diverted for relief activities. The unspent amount would be spent in the coming year. We are, however, hopeful that we shall be able to achieve our set targets for the project.

About Cohesion Foundation Trust



Cohesion Foundation Trust are the implementation partners for Project Shakti. CFT was set up in 1996 by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals. While focusing on the economic development of the marginalised community of the rural areas it has taken committed in developing various livelihood options. Among them are:

Farm based livelihoods:

Cohesion has undertaken a series of measures for Livelihood Restoration in rural areas, in view of the dependence of the local populace on Nature, for sustenance. The Village Institutions, facilitated by Cohesion, procures agricultural inputs such as quality seeds, tools and gypsum, and channels them to the poorest, hardest-hit farmers. The better quality of these inputs leads to better crop yields, and these positive experiences have ushered in positive changes in the conventional practices of farming in the respective regions.

Non-farm based livelihoods:

Cohesion has realized the importance of insuring lives and properties of people in areas such as Kutch, which are visited by natural disasters such as droughts and cyclones with macabre periodicity, and earthquake being added to its list of woes in the recent past. The Foundation has taken initiatives to extend insurance cover to womenfolk in the area, through five-header policies that cover Health, Life, Accidents, Assets and Home.

Micro-finance and micro-credit:

Cohesion has organized socially or economically vulnerable women into Self Help Groups, or *Mahila Vikas Mandals*, who hold periodic discussions on issues related to the socio-economic development of group members and the village in general. Cohesion has facilitated 264 such women self- help groups covering 4109 women. It helps members of these Self Help Groups to undertake various income-generating activities, market their outputs and attain Sustainable Livelihoods. The profit thus earned is shared by the members, and a part of it is re-invested as capital to increase the production. Apart from profit, which is a varying factor, the members earn steady labour wages from these activities and commit themselves to saving a pre-determined amount of money every month, which is later on used for extending credit among group members.