

# PROJECT SHAKTI

Annual Report

July 2020-2021



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# PROJECT BACKGROUND

Project Shakti is the flagship community development project of McCain Foods (India) Private Limited. The overarching objective of this project is improving the livelihoods of women through farm and off-farm activities in four villages of Mehsana district of Gujarat. It is implemented by Cohesion Foundation Trust.

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 clusters 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 more than 200 persons employed with McCain on a regular basis from the four project villages.

Being situated in a gender critical area, and McCain Foods being a socially responsible company, it decided to work on the upliftment and empowerment of rural women in four villages nearby the plant. These villages are Baliyasan, Ambaliyasn, Bhasariya and Jagudan.

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 four villages the total number of households are 2791 and the population is 16602 persons.**



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 Muslim community which are engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry.

# 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.

1. Vocational skills training  
2. 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.

1. Farm-based livelihood activities  
2. Off-farm based livelihood activities  
3. 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

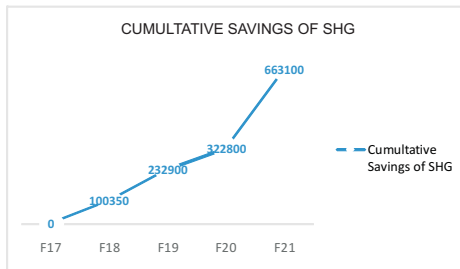
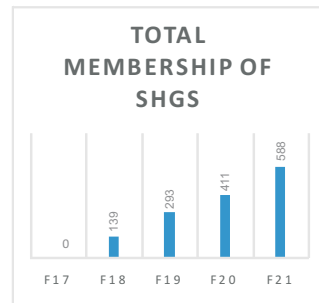
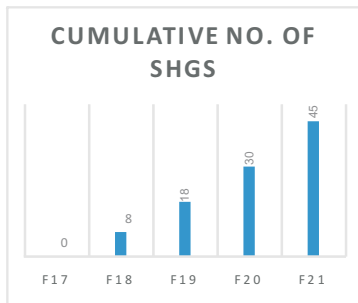
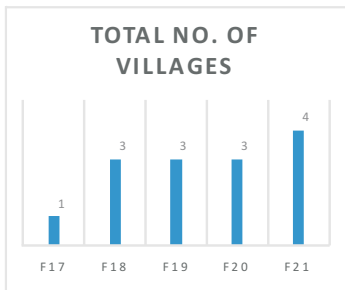
1. Gender sensitization programs for adults  
2. Gender sensitization for children & young adults  
3. Kitchen garden

4. Natural resource initiative to enhance livelihoods and to end gender discrimination.

1. Tree plantation



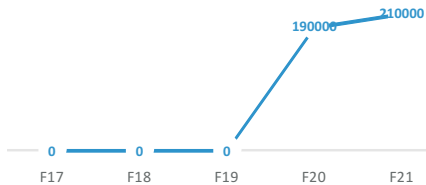
# Project Trajectory



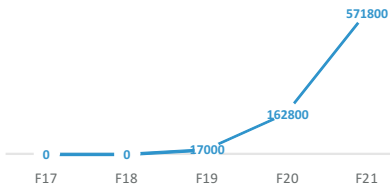
SHG : Self Help Group

# Project Trajectory

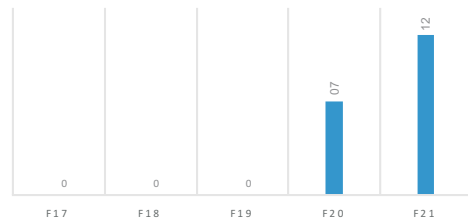
TOTAL AMOUNT OF LOANS FROM PROJECT SHAKTI



TOTAL AMOUNT OF INTERNAL LENDING



TOTAL NO. OF MEETINGS WITH EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS



CUMULATIVE NO. OF SHGs LINKED TO BANK



# ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

## OBJECTIVE 1: Vocational Skills and Training for Increasing Employability

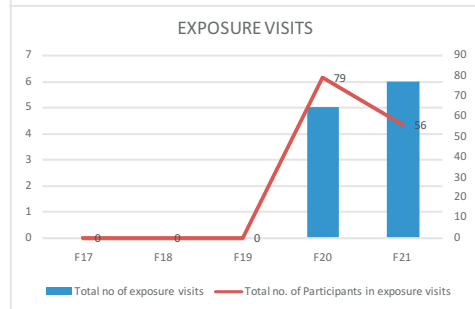
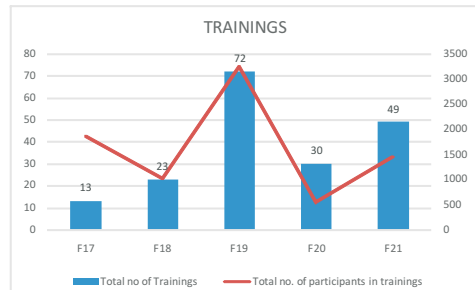
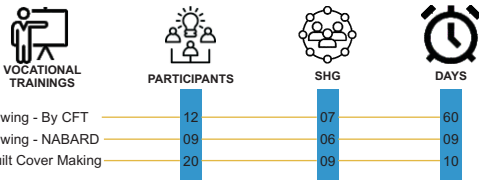
### Intervention 1: Vocational Skills Training

The project has a key objective of empowering women and adolescent girls by improving their skills to be gainfully employed. These vocational skills are helping in increasing their employability and have made women more confident.

Regular monthly meetings of women have resulted in lot of sharing and often women discuss their experiences and many entrepreneurial ideas come up during these meetings. Based on the interest and existing skills of the women, **a 60-day training on sewing was provided to 12 women.** Further **9 women have received basic sewing training for 9 days** which will help them in developing forward and backward linkages with government institutions (such as NABARD). These linkages have helped them in getting government certificates and support for buying sewing machines.

Linkages with financial institutions was done for **9 SHGs by opening bank accounts** for them. **20 women from 9 SHG from all four villages were provided training to make Quilt Covers** and they were later engaged in making quilts on order.

**Two adolescent girls got employed in cold storage at McCain.**



## Intervention 2: *Backward Forward Linkages*

**39 women from 12 SHG groups** received one day orientation training with Bank of Baroda's Rural Self-Employment Training Institute (RSETI). This helped women in getting orientation towards various vocational skills RSETI offers such as sewing, making Incense Sticks, Beauty Parlor etc.

**5 SHGs linked with I Commit Enterprise** for sanitary pad business. **5 women took up the business and have sold 600 pads generating an income of Rs. 3100 for five women.**

Sewing and quilt cover training has been very successful as these women are now **earning between Rs. 500 to Rs. 2000 a month** from tailoring. Besides **20 women who have learnt quilt making received income from selling 222 quilts**. For each quilt women received between **Rs. 275 to Rs. 265**.





## OBJECTIVE 2: Improve Livelihoods and Income of Women

### Intervention 1: SHG Promotion (formation, meetings and trainings)

Over the years women's participation in the project has improved, after seeing the developmental gains of being associated with SHGs and the benefit of regular monthly meetings.

The leadership trainings have made women more confident, and they have realised that village level issues can be solved if women take active role in decision making processes. In Ambaliyasan village all SHG leaders approached Gram Panchayat office and submitted application for improving village cleanliness.

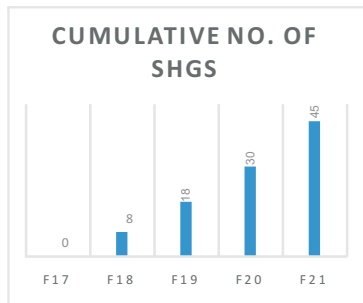
The GP carried out a cleanliness drive utilising village development funds. Women have resolved to take lead role in the development of their villages and also help vulnerable households through their leadership.

Various trainings provided throughout the year have made them aware of various financial institutions and transactions that are relevant to them such as Loans and Inter loans. They are now aware of the basics of insurance, RBI, Long-Term loan and Short-Term loan etc.

One of the responsibilities of being a member of a SHG is motivating other women to join Self Help Groups. One such visit was planned for new members of Jagudan village to Ambaliyasan and Baliyasan where they got an opportunity to see farm & off-farm based livelihood activities that the existing members of these two villages are doing as part of the project. This motivated them to form SHGs in their own village.

We also celebrate events to signify the importance of key issues at global level such as HIV Day, Women's Day etc. Celebrated on 15th March, **Women's Day saw footfall of 290 women.**

These events were organised following all the COVID protocols laid by the local authorities including sanitisers at the entrance, physical distancing while seating and compulsory masks for every participant.



#### Key Highlights of this year

- 55 Trainings with 557 participants on concept of Leadership, Finance and Property Mapping where many participants especially the SHG leaders attended more than one training.
- 6 Exposure Visits attended by 18 SHG members
- Leadership Meetings attended by 70 women of 34 SHGs.

## Intervention 2: *Entrepreneur Development and Promotion*

Many women showed interest during monthly meetings to start up their own businesses. **10 entrepreneurial women were supported** through loans to set up small scale businesses like tailoring, grocery, bakery, stationary and general provision store items.

These women are successfully managing their businesses and Project Shakti has been actively providing them with hand holding support. They have been trained to register their monthly accounts to

**10 Women Entrepreneurs developed in 2019 - 2020 generated income of Rs.3,41,575 in the year 2020 - 2021**

### **CASE STUDY: Heera Ben, Heera Provision Store**

**30 year old Heeraben** is physically challenged and cannot walk. She lives in her paternal home with her family including father and brother who is married and has a son. They have a small piece of land which they cultivate for food crops for their own consumption. With very little income and more mouths to feed she wanted to contribute to the income of the family.

Heeraben had always dreamt of owning a shop and she expressed the same during our interactions with her. Her dream came true when Project Shakti supported her to open a small kiosk for grocery items next to her house where she can reach easily. She sells packed food items such as wafers, namkeens etc., food grains besides daily use items such as combs, hairpins, toothbrush etc. many from the kiosk. This kiosk gives her an income of **Rs. 2000-3000 every month**. In the reported year she had an **Annual income of Rs. 36069/- from this shop**.

She herself maintains the record of the sale and income and proudly shows it to any visitor who appreciates her independence. Besides, her father has also joined the project and has benefitted in terms of better farm production through the sustainable methods that are promoted in the Project Shakti.



**CASE STUDY: Heera Ben, Heera Provision Store**



## Intervention 3: *Farm based livelihoods*

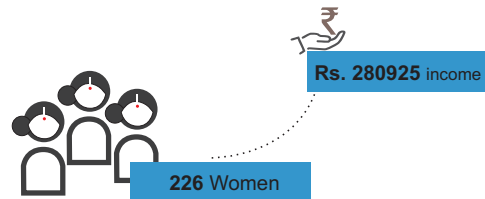
Most of the women of villages under Project Shakti are involved in farming activities as one of the main sources of livelihoods for their households.

Through the meetings women keep discussing the issues of quality inputs, lower productivity and use of chemicals in the way they are farming. These discussions helped us to identify the kind of support they need to improve their farm production and also receive training on desired aspects.

Training was provided on **Biotik NPK to 19 members**. Distribution of **Organic NPK of 2 litres** has been done for **9 SHG women and 26 SHG women** acts using organic NPK Biotik liquid in their wheat fields. NPK Biotik act as a growth stimulator, increases the soil nutrition and the fruiting.

**30 women were trained on seasonal vegetable plantation** as a result of which **9 members have undertaken farming of exotic vegetables** and **5 have done seasonal vegetable farming**. Women farmers who cultivated exotic vegetables such as Broccoli, Cherry Tomatoes and Lettuce are very motivated as the returns on their investment have been very good.

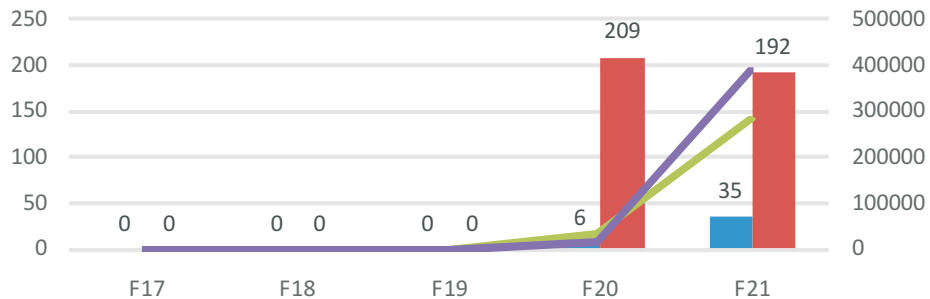
**7 women sold 188.5kg lettuce and earned Rs.15,068 with a profit of Rs.12,730.** Similarly, **4 women sold 40 kg cherry tomatoes and earned Rs. 4000 and with a profit Rs. 3545.**



### *Some of the other activities to promote farm based Livelihoods were:*

- **47 women** trained on basic farming practices.
- **19 farmers** visited Swami Narayan Trust and Zero Budget Farmers in Poicha and Bavariya in Gujarat
- **348 members** received Kharif seeds kit including 50kg fertilizer to support farmers in COVID second wave and also to promote better practices on sustainable farming.
- **One woman** from Baliyasan village received cow for livelihood support. The cow is of Kankrej breed which is well known for its quality and quantity of milk.
- Under Livelihood support, one of the SHG members was provided support in starting a Cabin/Kiosk for selling snacks and daily consumption items in Baliyasan village.
- Horticulture Plantation with **five members by giving 50kg fertilizer to each member along with 1060 saplings** of papaya, drumstick and lemon.

## INCOME & SAVINGS FROM FARM ACTIVITIES



- Total no of women who have generated income through farm activities
- Total no of women who have generated savings through farm activities
- Total income from Farm based livelihoods
- Total savings from farm based livelihoods



**80% of the crop of horticulture lemon** and drumstick has sustained. Regular visits and follow up of horticulture fields are done by the team so that the growth of the plants can be monitored timely and with the support of agriculture expert guidance can be provided to ensure good crop.

Kitchen Gardens promoted by the project are helping women to understand the importance of balanced nutrition and their intake of more varieties of vegetables has also increased. In 2019-20 we **supported 200 women to set up Kitchen Gardens** in their homes and they **save around Rs. 57,000** by using vegetable from their own garden. This year **27 SHG beneficiaries** have made kitchen gardens on their own without project support and they are **saving Rs.500 to Rs.1000 per month** for themselves.

As women have seen the benefits of sustainable farming practices and horticulture models, more women are motivated to join farm-based livelihoods.

### ***Thakor TarabenMaheshji, the Vermi Compost maker***

Instead of grieving about her financial situation she took the situation in her own hands and started making vermin compost after receiving training from the project.

Today she not only uses it in her own farm for better productivity and chemical free farming but also **sells it making around Rs. 1200 per month.**



**CASE STUDY: Thakor TarabenMaheshji,  
the Vermi Compost maker**

### CASE STUDY: Ajmeri Lalbhai Rahmanbhai – “A change in practice leads to economic benefit”

Ajmeri Rahman (62 years) and his wife Shamsad, are residents of Ambaliyasan village. They are farmers and stay on their farms to look after the crops. Their son passed away in a road accident and two of their daughters are married. Farming is the only source of income for them.

One day on her way to collect fodder Shamsad met Project Shakti team and came to know about the work with women. She joined a SHG and later became the Leader of the group. The project provided drumstick plants to Shamsad for demonstration. Through various trainings she came to know about use of vermi compost fertilizer and *jivamrutam* (organic pesticide that can be produced at home from farm manure and other local ingredients) under sustainable farming practices. She convinced her husband to use these inputs.

They started using vermin compost and *jivamrutam* for drumstick plant. The yield was much better compared to when he was using other products. This motivated the couple to make vermin compost in their farm. **She earned Rs. 1910** from the first yield of the plant. She also cultivated Jowar for livestock fodder which was provided by Project Shakti. This resulted into **savings of Rs. 2300** as earlier she was buying from outside.

Inspired by their success other farmers come and visit their farm and learn from them. Ajmeri and Shamsad are acting as role models for the community.



CASE STUDY: Ajmeri Lalbhai Rahmanbhai,  
“A change in practice leads to economic benefit”

## Intervention 4: Off Farm Livelihoods

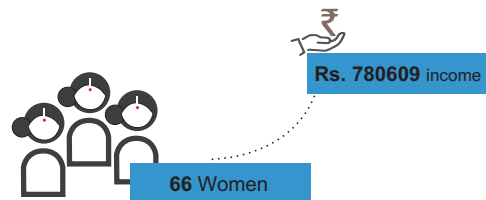
Off-farm activities that were introduced were mainly micro businesses identified based on the demand of the **four project villages**. Different ongoing business in the women groups are tailoring, dress material, bakery, ready made sarees, cosmetic products and groceries. To develop better understanding of existing markets six women also went for an exposure visit to the markets in Ahmedabad.

**Focused Group Discussions with 268 women** were carried out to understand role of women in various activities, assumptions regarding the economic role of women's occupation, employment prospects, available support from their families and their expectations.

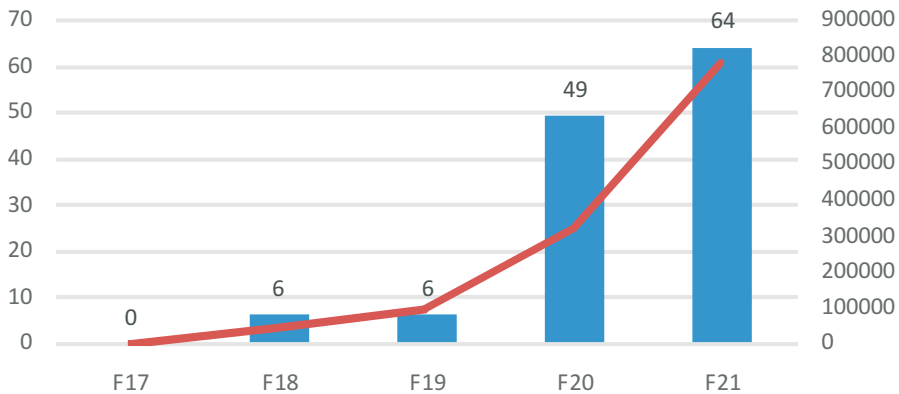
**A baseline survey was carried out with 117 SHG members in all four villages.** The findings of the survey are being used to understand the potential of various micro enterprises and the skill set of women so that future activities can be planned.

Last year women learnt how to make masks and this year **17 women made 3000 elastic masks and generated an income of Rs.9000.**

Through the project a concept of *Sakhi Mitra* is introduced wherein women from the villages volunteer to spend their time in helping to conduct meetings and maintain documentation and taking proactive role in village development issues. **There are four Sakhi Mitra in four project villages.**



## INCOME GENERATED FROM OFF-ACTIVITIES



■ Total no of women who have earned through off-farm activities

— Total income of Non Farm Livelihoods





## OBJECTIVE 3: Improve the quality of lives of women & girls by creating interventions to improve gender sensitization

We have been making conscious efforts to bring about gender sensitisation amongst the villagers and this has been possible through the platform of SHGs where women come together and discuss their issues. They are made aware of the gender imbalances and how they can improve the situation at home by treating their sons and daughters equally. The adolescent girl groups and Bal Panchayat are other two platforms where gender equality is taught to the young minds. Project Shakti has facilitated **four Adolescent Groups and two Bal Panchayats**.

Through gender sensitisation trainings reduced disparities between resources and opportunities for women as compared to men; women having more say in their household decision is being highlighted. This year we carried out one such training where **39 women participated**. After the trainings women try to sensitise their counterparts through dialogue and examples.

As a result of regular dialogue with men, FGDs and their involvement in farming activities, they have become sensitive. Earlier it was difficult for women to leave their houses and attend the group meetings but now gradually men have started helping them in the household chores so that they can attend the meetings.



TRAININGS

1



PARTICIPANTS

38



DURATION

4<sup>hrs</sup>

## CASE STUDY: Sakhi Mitra

**Varshaben** is from Vil. Ambaliyasan and comes from an economically weak background. With four daughters and not enough income from her husband's job, she had to struggle to make sure that the family gets enough to meet the basic requirements. In 2019 when she came in contact with the project Shakti team, she decided to start a SHG in her area. **She created the group Udaan with 12 members.** With her strong determination she ensured that everybody attends the meeting regularly and savings is also done every month.

She took sewing training through the project and soon became well known for her good quality work when she made masks. Appreciating her entrepreneurial skills, **she was provided with financial support of Rs. 20,000/-by the project** to establish her Saree business. Earlier she wouldn't go out of the village but now she has become confident to go to nearby markets to get the stock to sell. She sells saree from door to door and also from her home.

She actively participates in all the trainings and meetings of Project Shakti and recently she applied for the **position of Sakhi Mitra in the project and got selected.**

**Sakhi Mitra** is a position created in Project Shakti to encourage development of leadership within women. Women who can spare 2-3 hours a day for the Project, are paid an incentive to help the team members conduct SHG meetings and maintain documentation.

We have built a cadre of 4 such volunteers, who support Project Shakti and also receive an income for their time and efforts. In her role she has to conduct regular monthly meetings, maintain the books of the groups, sharing of ongoing work in the project with all the group members and giving information related to internal group loan in detail. She has been playing her role very sincerely and motivates other women also to become active in the groups.

**Her income from Project Shakti through involvement in various activities during this year was Rs. 20725.**



CASE STUDY : Sakhi Mitra

## Adolescent Girls Groups

Gender awareness starts at home and the best time to introduce the concept of gender equality is during childhood and youth.

The project has formed **groups of girls below 18** as they are too young to be a part of SHGs. These groups are known as Adolescent Girls Groups (Kishori Juth) and there are **4 groups with 104 members**.

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 start saving money regularly and initiate economic activities to be self-sustainable.

The members of adolescent groups are encouraged to understand self, roles they play in life, self-esteem through stories and confidence through expression and above all do away with stereotyping.



4 Groups

104 Adolescent girls



Various benefits of these interventions have been observed:

- *Girls beginning to realize their potential.*
- *Many girls have started displaying leadership qualities within their groups.*
- *Girls are becoming aware of the importance of higher education.*
- *Young boys and girls realizing the evils of gender based discrimination in society*



## Bal Panchayats

The **Bal Panchayats** have become a place where children share their interests. This is a voluntary group of children which meets up once a month to discuss gender related issues. Project Shakti team members moderate these discussions so that the children can have a meaningful discussion around the issues plaguing our society today.

Children are made 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.

COVID 19 training was also given to **20 children of Bal Panchayat** of Baliyasan village. There is an increased awareness regarding health and hygiene and COVID appropriate behavior amongst the children.



38 Members

2 Groups



## OBJECTIVE 4: Natural Resource initiative to enhance Livelihoods & to end gender discrimination

Tree plantation was carried out by distributing **2500 plants** to the SHG members and Gram Panchayat office.

The benefits of planting trees to save the environment, check soil erosion, reduce pollution and improvement in the bio-diversity are not unknown to the villagers.

Distributing plants for plantation helps in strengthening their belief in the same and also re-inforces the commitment of the project to conserve natural resources.

### **CASE STUDY:** **Vishnu adopting sustainable farming practices**

Vishnu Patel (52 years) is a resident of Vil. Bhasariya, and his primary occupation is Agriculture and Animal Husbandry. His wife, Leela is an active member, a leader in Project Shakti facilitated SHG in Bhasariya. Leela joined Project Shakti 3 years ago and received various trainings such as SHG formation, leadership, bookkeeping, register maintenance etc. Apart from this she also motivated other women of villages to participate in Project Shakti.

As the project carries out gender sensitisation activities, a joint exposure visit for women and men was planned in 2019-20 to Kukma village in Kutchh for getting exposure to sustainable farming practices. During the exposure Vishnu and Leela got to know about the importance of cow's urine and dung in making organic fertilizers and pesticides. The learning from the visit motivated the couple to adopt these practices in his farm. Vishnu used the method he learnt to make manure for wheat cultivation and got good yield. He feels particularly good that his family is eating chemical free wheat. He gladly shares his experience and knowledge with other men in the village. He also received training on horticulture plantation and planted lemon saplings in his farm.

Although Project Shakti is primarily working with women but through gender sensitisation, we have been able to integrate men also in achieving the overall objectives. Vishnu supports his wife when she has to go for meetings and takes care of the household chores and children in her absence. **Men like Vishnu are role models in Project Shakti** as they motivate other men to become sensitive towards improving the gender balance in their households.



**CASE STUDY : Vishnu adopting sustainable farming Practices**



## COVID RELIEF

- **90 Food Kits** distributed by Project Shakti to needy women from the villages and the SHG members
- **471 Safety Kit** (Mask, sanitizer and hand wash) distributed to SHG members and Gram Panchayat offices
- **600 food kits distributed** to vulnerable households supported by **Reliance Foundation**.
- **Oximeter distributed** to all **4 Sakhi Mitra** and **3 Asha workers** from the project villages
- COVID Awareness outreach to **211 families**.

## OTHER VILLAGE INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

Various activities were undertaken in the year F20 to support the village infrastructure of four villages under Project Shakti:

Village	Support Given
Jagudan Primary school for boys	Bookshelf for Library
Jagudan Primary school for girls	Bookshelf for Library
Gram Panchayat office, Jagudan	1 table and 2 chairs
Aanganwadi, Ambaliyasan	Training and Learning Material for children specially designed for their better learning by Jodogyan Shikshan (Delhi)
3 Aanganwadis, Baliyasan	Training and Learning Material for children specially designed for their better learning by Jodogyan Shikshan (Delhi)
2 Aanganwadis, Bhasariya	Training and Learning Material for children specially designed for their better learning by Jodogyan Shikshan (Delhi)

## WAY FORWARD - PLAN FOR FY 2021-2022

In the next year we plan to take up 2 more villages, making it a total of 6 villages under Project Shakti. Some broad actionables for the upcoming year, in addition to our ongoing activities are:

- Create atleast 20 new SHGs
- Improve income of our beneficiaries by 15%
- Start a scholarship scheme for meritorious female students from economically weak background.
- Explore Insurance covers for beneficiaries not covered under government schemes

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTING AGENCY

Founded in 1996, Cohesion Foundation Trust is a renowned NGO registered in 2001 under Bombay Public Trust Act, 1950. Cohesion works across PAN India through its regional offices in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

Cohesion is based in Ahmedabad and started its partnership with McCain Foods India Pvt Ltd. CSR in July 2019 for women empowerment through farm and off farm activities in the district of Mehsana.

The project is located in the vicinity of McCain Foods factory in Mehsana and their interest is to work in the surrounding villages for the upliftment and empowerment of women through livelihoods.



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