

# Final Evaluation Report for “Community led water resources and land development to enhance livelihoods” project

## 1. Introduction/ Background

The “Community led water resources and land development project was implemented in 10 villages of Malpura Block of the Tonk district by Gram Vikas Navyuvak Mandal Laporiya (GVNML). The project duration was December 2017 to December 2020. The project aimed to increase productivity of the village commons (pastureland) through innovative community led approach of the “chauka system” to secure and scale up rural livelihoods in the context of increasing climate risks.

The key objectives of the project are:

1. To promote and strengthen vibrant village Development Committee and Women Group in 10 villages of Malpura block, Tonk district Rajasthan to effectively and efficiently manage their natural resources by end of December 2020.
2. To establish application of Chauka Technique and Community Management to improve fodder production in 135 hectare pastureland of 3-5 villages out of 10 villages.
3. To access Govt. support to improve decentralised water harvesting capacity of project villages at least by 20% by end of December 2020.
4. To initiate multi-stakeholder engagement process for scaling up convergence efforts to secure rural livelihood of 40 villages of Malpura block of Tonk district.

For each these objectives listed above, key measurable indicators were developed at the beginning of the project in consultation between the GVNML and WaterHarvest.

The objective and scope of this evaluation study is to review the achievements of the project. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development- Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability has been used to evaluate the project and provide recommendations to be adopted by WaterHarvest in similar projects in the future.

The evaluation methodology comprised of desk review of project documents, in-depth interaction with both WaterHarvest and GVNML project team, field visit to four villages (Antoli, Bapruna, Dethani, Parli) to interact with community, beneficiaries and observe the infrastructure developed under the project.

## 2. Project Achievements

	OBJECTIVES	OUTPUTS	MEASURABLE INDICATORS	FIELD OBSERVATIONS
1	To promote and strengthen vibrant Village Development Committee (VDC) and Women Group in 10 villages of Malpura block, Tonk district Rajasthan to effectively and efficiently manage their natural resources by end of March 2022.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Village level institutions enabled to maintain the assets created on common property resources</li> <li>VDCs formed in all the 10 villages and trained on vision building, water conservation, government schemes and other functional aspects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular VDC meetings</li> <li>Attendance of VDC members</li> <li>Number of decisions taken at VDC level and follow up action</li> </ul> <p>Rules, regulations, norms in place to better manage the commons</p>	VDCs have been developed in all the 10 implementation villages. The members of all the VDCs have undergone the trainings and have established their acceptance within the community. They maintain records of their regular meeting detailing decisions and activities undertaken. The capacities of VDCs vary with some more empowered and active than others. One major gap is the development and strengthening of the women group across the 10 implementation villages. It was observed in the field visit that Mahila mandals were not established across all the 10 implementation villages, and not all VDCs had women representation.
2	To establish application of Chauka Technique and Community Management to improve fodder production in 135 hectare pastureland of 3-5 villages out of 10 villages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Location specific structures are in place</li> <li>Presence of water bodies as watering hole for livestock in the commons</li> <li>Regeneration of biomass on common land</li> <li>Increased fodder availability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Application of the land and water management systems on the ground (Total number of chaukas; Total land covered under chauka systems)</li> <li>Fodder productivity and availability increased</li> <li>Increase in livestock numbers</li> <li>No. of fodder species mapped and density of grasses</li> <li>Increase in number of grass spp. and trees</li> </ul>	The Chauka system has been implemented across 141 hectares of pasturelands in the selected implementation villages. The villages that have no identified or disputed pasture land chauka system has not been developed. This is as per the records of the VDCs and GVNML. A kund has been constructed in Antoli village pastureland for livestock. The community members have reported an increased fodder availability in the pastureland post chauka development and an increase in the overall grazing period from 3 months to about 7-8 months. Review of the project reports also shows that the density and variety of the grasses and trees

	OBJECTIVES	OUTPUTS	MEASURABLE INDICATORS	FIELD OBSERVATIONS
				species has also increased in pasture land post application of the chauka technique. This increase has further increased the organic matter in the soil leading to an increased capture of moisture by the root zone leading to a further regeneration of flora and fauna in the area.
3	To access government support to improve decentralised water harvesting capacity of project villages at least by 20% by end of March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linkages with government programmes/schemes established</li> <li>• Diversion and feeder channels in place</li> <li>• Number of tank-bunds repaired</li> <li>• Open wells revitalised</li> <li>• Uptake of the concepts into government policies and programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessing and leveraging govt. funds</li> <li>• Revitalised open wells contributing to stable crop production</li> <li>• Number of regenerated <i>naadis</i></li> <li>• Increase in ground water level</li> <li>• Change in crop rotation and cropping pattern</li> <li>• Increase in irrigated cropped area</li> <li>• Increase overall green cover</li> <li>• Changes in biodiversity (flora-fauna)</li> </ul>	Overall 39 structures (pond rejuvenation, feeder channels repair, farm pond construction and <i>naadi</i> development/renovations) were constructed under the project with government engagement and leveraging of schemes. Additionally the villages where VDCc have been formed, the MNREGA funds are being utilised for development of water conservation infrastructure. These structures have increased the total storage capacity of water in the villages and additional land is being irrigated by farm ponds and feeder channels thereby increasing the cropped area in the villages leading to an additional income.

	OBJECTIVES	OUTPUTS	MEASURABLE INDICATORS	FIELD OBSERVATIONS
4	To initiate multi-stakeholder engagement process for scaling up convergence efforts to secure rural livelihood of 40 villages of Malpura block of Tonk district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest and demand from adjacent villages to adopt the new practices/system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of consultation meetings; Workshops;</li> <li>• Number of different agencies that participated in the workshops</li> <li>• Number of NRM based works imparted by Panchayat/government to make the positive effect on the livelihood of village community</li> </ul>	<p>Consultation workshop was conducted for the Sarpanchs of the 40 non-implementation villages along with the VDC members of the 10 implementation villages in Malpura Block. This workshop was attended by Block level officials. The awareness generation as a result of this meeting has resulted in VDC development in about 12 non-implementation villages. One of these village where VDC has been developed has successfully freed the encroached pastureland and further leveraged MNREGA scheme to construct a wall around the pasture land along with construction of chauka system in about 20 <i>bigha</i> of the village pasture land in FY 2020-21. They want to extend this application on the remaining 500 <i>bigha</i> of the pasture land as well.</p>

### 3. Evaluation Findings and Recommendations

#### RELEVANCE-is/did the project doing the right things?

Evaluation Questions	Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations
How was the program/project design conceptualised? Were contextual factors (specific to Rajasthan, district) considered in the design/implementation of interventions across the district/10 villages?	The program design and its objectives has been conceptualised based on the specific factors associated with the Tonk district and Malpura Block. The region is characterised by semi-arid ecosystem, coarse soil texture, exploitation of groundwater and land resources by the community of small and marginal farms who are highly dependent on village commons for their livestock. The project was thus designed to have a pastoralist integrated approach with a focus on fodder, ground water levels and livestock.
Did the project (as designed and implemented) meet the needs and priorities of all the targeted groups, including those who were most vulnerable?	The project which has been implemented in the Malpura Block of Tonk district primarily comprises of households whose livelihood is highly dependent on livestock population. Tonk district also rank high for its high population of sheep. The Central sheep and Wool Research institute is located in Malpura Block. The semi-arid ecosystem of the area combined with over exploitation of groundwater and land has resulted in lowering of groundwater table and encroachment of village commons (pastureland). Fodder scarcity thus being the main constraint of the target group. The project specifically addresses these needs and priorities of the community through development of Chauka system to do in-situ water and soil conservation and to redevelop pasture lands. Additionally, the project design called for the development of a Village Development Committee (VDC) comprising of select individuals from the community to manage the rejuvenated natural resources through participatory management. It has been observed that the VDCs have been successful in effectively managing the water/land issues and further raising concerns of the community at both village level and with relevant government stakeholders
How relevant was the approach/strategy "Chauka system" adopted?	The project approach was to implement participatory in-situ water and land conservation through development of the Chauka system by an empowered and a trained community, establishment of VDC (village level institutions) and the engagement with PRIs. This approach is highly relevant as it brings together convergence of community participation, development to village commons and government infrastructure/schemes that enable

Evaluation Questions	Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations
<p>Do the objectives contribute to the fulfilment of national and state priorities on water conservation and watershed development?</p>	<p>The four project objectives contribute effectively towards the fulfilment of the Rajasthan State priorities on water conservation.</p> <p>The state water policy of Rajasthan lists water allocation for livestock as its second water use priority in the state only after human drinking water allocation. The project focusses on land and water conservation activities to improve pastureland and for provision of drinking water for livestock. The Water Vision 2045 that is a prerequisite for successful implementation of the state water policy and plan talks about optimum use of every drop of the “scarce and precious utilisable water resource”. Additionally, one of the project objective was to access government schemes and support to improve the decentralised water harvesting capacities within the village. Thus contributing to improve water availability in the set as per their priorities. As part of the project, MNREGA scheme was accessed and activities related to water conservation, rain-water harvesting, rejuvenation of traditional water bodies, etc were undertaken.</p>
<p>How was it ensured that current implementing partners (GVNML) are best suited to implement the projects?</p>	<p>GVNML has been working in the district for several years on the issues of water and land conservation. They have an expertise on pastureland development and the development of the chauka system. They also have decades of experience of working with community and village level institutions. The community also have an acceptance and faith in the organisation. Moreover, many other local NGOs in the district and even in the adjoining districts have trained under GVNML on issues of in-situ water and soil conservations methods, development of pasture lands and the chuakha system. Additionally, GVNML has well-established relationships with the local government institutions, government officials and elected representatives in the area which were essential to the project implementation. Lastly, WH did specific capacity building and handholding support for GVNML to built their knowledge and understanding on development on data collection and monitoring formats, finalisation of measurable indicators to effectively capture the objectives achieved. Thus, with its experience and expertise, GVNML was best suited to implement the project.</p>
<p>To what extent does the project complement and add value to Water Harvest’s priorities and mission?</p>	<p>WH main work areas are on Water for Drinking and Sanitation, Water for Livelihoods and Water for Environment and Ecosystems. The project’s objectives of enhancing livelihood of the community through water and land conservation and pastureland reintegration thus synchronised with the priorities and mission of WH.</p>

## EFFECTIVENESS-did the project achieve its objectives?

Evaluation Questions	Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations
To what extent has the project achieved its Goal, and Objectives?	<p>As per the project documents, the overall goals of the project was to increase the productivity of the village commons and secure livelihoods by intimating scalable community led innovative models of water and land conservation. Based on field interactions with the project beneficiaries, field observations and discussion of project staff, this goals has been achieved substantially. The four objectives targeting establishing and strengthening of VDCs and women groups in 10 villages; restoration of pastureland through development of chauka system; accessing government scheme to improve decentralised water harvesting capacity in the project villages; and initiation of a multi-stakeholder process in 40 villages for scaling up and enhancing rural livelihoods have been mostly achieved as per the project implementation plan. One major gap is the development and strengthening of the women group across the 10 implementation villages. It was observed in the field visit that Mahila mandals were not established across all the 10 implementation villages, and not all VDCs had women representation. The long term sustainability of these achievements will need to be monitored and observed.</p>
Have the capacities of relevant stakeholders associated with the program been enhanced to discharge their duties more effectively?	<p>Based on field interactions with various stakeholders involved in the project, it was observed that the capacities of the relevant stakeholders- implementation agency GVNML project staff, VDC members and village community, and representatives from the non-implementation villages-has been enhanced to discharge their duties more effectively. However, these levels may vary across the stakeholders.</p> <p>The VDC members underwent 3-4 months of training on vision building, water conservation, environmental issues, government schemes. At the same time, the GVNML staff, which is an expert in development of chauka system for water and land conservation, underwent a training on the various schemes and policies available for the community that can be accessed for water conservation and watershed development.</p>
What are the key indicators, processes and variables used to track and measure progress?	<p>Based on the desk review and interaction with implementation staff, it can be observed that the key measurable indicators and means of verification to assess the completion of activities and outcomes were identified at the project inception stage itself. This was done as a part of an orientation workshop that included both GVNML and WH staff members. The key objectives, outputs, activities and indicators are listed in the previous section in the table format. The orientation workshop resulted in fine-tuning of indicators to finalise which data needs to be captured against which activity, outcome and impact. The monitoring and reporting formats were also finalised as a part of this workshop. This helped in finalising processes to measure/track progress impacts.</p>

Evaluation Questions	Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations
<p>What were the factors that facilitated/inhibited the achievement of results?</p>	<p>The field interactions revealed that several factors existed that facilitated achievement of results.</p> <p>GVNML is an established organisation in the district which has been involved in water conservation activities. It has a well established relationship with the local government officials and elected representatives in the area which facilitated certain activities. The staff within the organisation is local and their retention is high. Thus, there was no discontinuity in implementations of the project activities. In many cases infact, several ex-members of GVNML were now the members of the VDCs established or even Sarpanch in the project area villages. This further facilitation project implementation.</p> <p>One of the key inhibitors in term of project implementation was the effect of COVID pandemic. As a result of the ensuing lockdown movement of restricted which restricted meeting and field work in the last year of implementation.</p> <p>Another inhibitor, not specifically in terms of achievement of project results but for scaling up and replication of work, is the lack of technical knowledge transfer from the GVNML staff to the community for chauka system development. In the current project plan, the community and VDC members contribute only through <i>shramdaan</i> under the guidance of GVNML staff. They do not receive technical training on actual designing and construction of the chauka. Also, lack of financial literacy training to the VDCs to generate and manage funds for the repair, maintenance and development of water conservation structures, is another inhibitor for sustaining the results achieved.</p>
<p>To what extent has the project developed and promoted intended and unintended partnerships that are relevant and strategic for achieving the objectives of the program?</p>	<p>The project design and implementation required development of partnerships and networking especially with the community to leverage acceptance and ownership of in-situ water and soil conservation structures and activities; and with government departments and institutions in order to leverage funds for development and/or renovation of water conservation structure such as ponds, <i>naadis</i>, feeder channels.</p> <p>Partnership with the community was realised through the development of the village level institutions, the VDCs. These institutions were representative of the collage community and constituted of members of the various caste and class of the village. Additionally, efforts were also made to include women representative to achieve a holistic representation. These steps developed, strengthened and promoted positive relationship and ensured acceptance of the project across the local community.</p> <p>GVNML developed informal unintended partnership with “poora karma poora daam Abhiyaan” being led by Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan (MKS) which was rallying for full payment for the work done under the MNREGA scheme. The latter scheme has been leveraged under the program effectively for construction of water conservation structures (such as digging of chauka pits, ponds, and construction of facewalls and embankments).</p>

## EFFICIENCY-how well are the resources being used?

Evaluation Questions	Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations
How efficiently has the project been managed given the current level of human and financial resources?	Overall the projects seems to have been managed efficiently given the human and financial resources allocated. In discussion with the GVNML team, it was expressed that an analyst or a documentation resource might have further improved their project reporting. also, a greater presence of women staff could have strengthened their work on promoting women groups (Mahila mandals)
Was the deployment of funds for achieving outcome adequate? What is the financial review mechanism of the project?	As per discussion with the project staff, adequate funds were deployed for the outcomes as outlined by the project plan. The financial review mechanism for the project comprised of two sets of activities-review of accounts and review of the activities in terms of both quantity and quality (of training activities and physical works constructed).
Were the funds disbursed in a timely manner, and utilised as per the project plan?	<p>As per the interactions with GVNML and WH project staff, the funds were disbursed in a timely manner during the duration of the project. Only in a couple of instances, where activities could not be undertaken due either COVID pandemic situation, elections or model code of conduct in pace that the budget was not utilised as per plan. In those instance either alternate activities were undertaken or the activity was pushed to the subsequent quarter.</p> <p>In terms of planned allocation and utilisation of funds for the project, the planned CSR contribution was much below than planned. This was due to certain unexpected external events. However, the community contribution was more as per the budget plan. Also, substantial government co-financing was achieved to undertake some the watershed development works.</p>
Was flexibility given to implementing partners to make changes in the budget?	<p>During interactions with both the WH project staff and GVNML implementation team, it was realised that there was sufficient flexibility for the GVNML in terms of both planning and implementation of the project. The GVNML staff intimated that minor changes in the project did happen in the initial three months of the project.</p> <p>In the instances (elections and model code of conduct) when activities could not be completed as per stipulated timelines the budget was allocated for an alternate activity.</p> <p>It was also mentioned that although the initial project timelines was till March 2022, the project was wrapped up in December 2020. This was due to changes in the total amount of pastureland to be developed. There were instance in villages (Nagar) where pastureland development was done with government funds or in case of Baprunda where the pastureland had been allocated as a rehabilitation area of villagers displaced due to development of a dam. Thus, the village did not want to construct the Chauka system in this disputed land. In Lari village, there was lack of availability of appropriate pastureland for development. Thus project's target was modified from 150 hectares to 135 hectares of pastureland to be developed and budget re-adjusted accordingly. Lastly, the new FCRA regulations towards the end of 2020 also influenced the early closure of the project.</p>
Was there enough deployment of Human	As per discussion with both GVNML and WH staff, overall deployment of sufficient human resources was there by the implementation team for in-field operations and capacity building activities. However, in-terms of Mahila

<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations</b>
Resources in order to undertake the activities?	<p>mandal development, there was a lack of sufficient and appropriate staff. It was observed that the field and project implementation staff was predominantly men. Consequently the activity was not effectively implemented.</p> <p>Also, the project design did not account for a data analyst or a documentation expert as part of the team structure. Presence of such a resource could have improved the reporting and documentation of the project.</p>
<p>How successful has the project been in terms of achieving its objectives under stipulated timelines?</p> <p>Were the activities of the program conducted in the given time frame?</p>	<p>Overall the project has been on track in terms on achievements against the project objectives. As mentioned earlier, the project completed its objectives before time. The original timeline of the project was till March 2022, however the project completed the activities by December 2020. It was observed during the field interactions with the VDC members that some of the committees developed are more independent and empowered than others. Thus, further strengthening of some VDCs (Objective 1) and scaling up of multi-stadholder engagement process across 40 villages (Objective 4) could have been expanded further to ensure sustainability of the project after the exit of WH and GVNML</p> <p>Discussion with the WH project team and review of the project reports revealed that the project achievements have been on track year wise, in-fact even quarter-wise. It was mentioned that in the first year of implementation there were some implementation issues especially in the case of training activities, however, the bio-physical interventions (infrastructure development) was on track even then.</p>
What changes could the GVNML team have made to the execution strategy to ensure a higher degree of execution efficiency?	<p>As per field interactions, the overall the execution strategy for GVNML team is on track for the project. One change recommended is in the VDC training strategy where it is proposed to bring together all the VDCs together on a common platform for knowledge exchange and peer learning purposes. Additionally, it is also recommended that financial literacy be part of the training curriculum for the VDCs.</p>

## **IMPACT-what difference did the project make?**

<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations</b>
Has the project led to change in community knowledge on water conservation?	<p>There is definite improvement amongst the community in their understanding of land and water conservation. Interactions with the community and VDC members revealed that they have knowledge of the concepts of slope, drainage, ground water rejuvenation and GW table, evaporation-transpiration cycle, etc. The farmers clearly expressed an understanding that presence of a greater green cover in the village due to plantation of trees and rejuvenation of the pasturelands lead to an increased presence of moisture in the environment which reduces their irrigation burden.</p> <p>The community has also gained knowledge on the various government schemes they have access to and the departments that need to be approached for these schemes.</p>
Has it strengthened the capacities of the village level institutions to	<p>One of key component of the VDC training is to inform them on the various government schemes available on water and land</p>

Evaluation Questions	Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations
effectively and efficiently manage their natural resources? Towards government policies and programmes on water conservation and watershed development?	<p>conservation along with how to access these schemes. VDC members are also trained which departments, institutions and officials they need to approach for water conservations and watershed development. Based on the interactions with VDC members during the field work, it was clearly observed that capacities of these members have been developed and strengthened for the same. The Sarpanch and GP members now interact with VDC members and take their advice on water conservation development works in the village.</p> <p>In one of the village (Dethani) interaction, it was informed that the VDC has utilised some revenue (INR 5000) generated from the pastureland to apply for a government scheme that would allow them access of funds worth One lakh rupees for the development of village. During the field interaction, the members attributed this linkage with the government scheme totally to the project.</p>
Have the project interventions resulted in enhanced livelihoods and increased household incomes?	<p>Interaction with the community, VDC members and the project implementation staff clearly attributed an increased household income to the project area beneficiaries due to increased population of livestock and small ruminants per household resulting in an increased milk production per household, and reduced fodder expenses due to improved village pasture lands.</p> <p>The VDC and community members stated that earlier their livestock could forage only three months in the village common pastureland, however now with the project interventions, this forage period has now increased to nearly seven to eight months. Also earlier they were forced to travel with their herds to either the states of Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh for grazing. This not only posed burden on the household members but also resulted in conflicts with farmers in those states or forest officials when their herds entered these private or government properties. However, due to in-situ water and soil conservation interventions as part of the project, ground water levels has increased, pastureland has been rejuvenated with a greater grass and tree density. The increased availability of fodder in the village itself has also reduced the expenditure of the farmer to buy fodder. One of the farmer in Dhetani village stated during the interaction that every household on an average saves about INR 50,000 on fodder and nutritional supplements. He also mentioned that on an average there is about 10% increase in household income in the village, while the livestock population in the village has increased by about 300-350 in number.</p> <p>One of the farmer during interaction in Antoli village had mentioned that he has now started a dairy business which has further increased his household income. He attributed it to the project intervention.</p>
Has the project impacted the local level engagement in the maintenance of village pastures and waterbodies?	Based on the field interactions, it is clear that project has impacted local level engagement of the community in the maintenance of village pasturelands and waterbodies. Many of the key activities such as development of Chauka system including ploughing of land and sowing of tree/grass seeds has been done by villagers contribution or their " <i>shramdaan</i> ".

Evaluation Questions	Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations
	<p>In many instances, encroachment of village commons by few influential people in the community was overcome by the members of the VDCs. The VDC members are volunteers members from the village and represent the each caste and class comprising the village community. Thus VDC acts as a representative of the village community.</p> <p>During interactions with the VDC members across the villages, many instances were shared where some of the VDCs has successfully collected funds from community for development, repair and maintenance of water bodies and ponds in the villages. It was also expressed that there is a feeling of community ownership of the assets developed under the project and thus enhanced local engagement in their maintenance. However, it was also observed during the interactions that the VDC members lack proper training financial management and technical aspects of development of Chuaka system. This could hamper long-term sustainable operation, repair and maintenance of the structures.</p>
<p>What are the positive/negative changes, intended/unintended results demonstrated by the project?</p> <p>What are the documented tangible and intangible changes at community level that have occurred since the inception of the project?</p>	<p>Besides the above mentioned positive and intended changes from the project namely- improved pasturelands, increased fodder availability, enhance livelihood and increased household incomes, increased community knowledge on water conservation issues, increased knowledge and access to government schemes; several other unintended changes (tangible and intangible) have also been observed since the inception of the project. These have been identified based on interactions with community members, VDC members, GVNML and WH project staff.</p> <p>The VDC developed is representative of the village community with each member representing the various castes in the village. With all social castes being represented, a greater sense of community belonging, unity and cooperation has resulted amongst the villagers. Earlier many divisions existed based on religion, caste, class and political affiliations. Now the villagers have faith on VDC as they feel it focusses on “<i>vikas</i>” or development of the whole village through water conservations and rejuvenation of water bodies and village pasture lands.</p> <p>This has also resulted in a good working relationship and networking between the VDC and the PRI members, which has further enhance the development of village development. VDCs are also working in some village with the School Management Committees (SMC) to do additional development work in the villages. For example in Dhetani village, VDC along with the SMC and Sarpanch have contributed to the construction of boundary wall for the school and plantation of trees/plants on the campus. The idea was to improve the environment and safety at school premises which would encourage children to attend schools regularly.</p> <p>Another important unintended result of the project is allocation of activities related to water conservation under MNREGA. It has been</p>

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	<p>observed that wherever VDCs have been formed, those villages are focussing on activities such as digging for ponds, chauka, construction of facewall, etc instead of construction work like building of gravel road in their villages. Thus, the focus is now on community works benefitting the whole village community. VDCs are acting as guardians of village community.</p> <p>Another snowball effect of the project was formulation of the VDCs in about 12 non-implementation villages out of the 40 where multi-stadholder engagement process was initiated. During interactions with VDC members in Parli village (a non-implementation village) it was found that the village constituted a VDC after their Sarpanch attended GVNML meeting at the Block level. Inspired by the work done in the ten implementation villages, VDC was formed in Parli village. The VDC has successfully taken up initiatives like removal of encroachment from the village pastureland, construction of wall around the pasture land through MNREGA funds and construction of chaukha system in about 20 bigha of the pasture land using MNREGA funds under the guidance of GVNML.</p>

## SUSTAINABILITY-will the benefits last?

Evaluation Questions	Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations
<p>Are the program interventions likely to continue beyond the program period?</p>	<p>Most of the village level institutions, VDCs, set up are empowered and representative of the village community. It is very likely that project interventions will continue beyond the project period but not in all the implementation villages. It was observed during the field visit that not all the VDCs established under the project have same level of maturity as institutions. The same was also acknowledged by the GVNML staff. Some of the VDCs interacted with during the field visit showed both initiative and capacity to take independent decision making including the capacity to develop a plan of action for future and also financial planning. However, it was also observed that some VDCs were still dependent on the GVNML project staff for planning. This observations are based on the field interactions with the community and VDC members, GVNML implementation staff and WH project staff.</p> <p>It is highly likely that the interventions may continue in those villages where VDCs have developed into mature institutions that can operate in a self-sustaining manner. In the remaining villages, continuous support (mainly handholding in technical issues) from GVNML will be needed. The GVNML staff assured that this will be provided since they operate in the region and also because in some cases their ex-staff members have become Sarpanchs in these project villages. Most of the VDCs established are not financially sustainable, and lack a regular mechanism for generating funds for O&amp;M of the bio-physical infrastructure works developed under the project. In one instance while interacting with a VDC, it was found out that they had collected INR 65 lakhs due to the sale of the Babool tree growing on the pastureland. However, the VDC members had no idea on how to effectively and efficiently use and/or invest this money for further development works in the village.</p>

Evaluation Questions	Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations
	<p>Also, the VDCs lack the technical expertise in developing these structures such as chauka system on their own. During the project implementation, the community primarily provided “<i>shramdan</i>” under the technical guidance of the GVNML project team. The project did not build the capacities of the VDC members and community on either technical aspects of chauka system or on financial aspects on setting up a self-sustaining village level institution. This will be a key bottleneck in the longterm sustainability of the institutions and infrastructure developed during the project period.</p>
<p>How have possible risks been identified and alternative measures proposed during implementation period?</p>	<p>Although risks were identified under the project, based on the staff interactions/field visit, there appears to be a lack of a comprehensive risk mitigation plan developed. Alternative measures were not identified for all the risks identified by the implementation partner.</p> <p>One key risk identified was encroachment of the pastureland by a few village members. This is a highly political and social issue. A two-step mitigation plan was developed to address this. First was to have the representatives of all communities and caste as part of the VDC. Second was to develop and strengthen relationships between the VDC and the PRI institutions within the village so that any appropriate action could be undertaken through the Sarpanch.</p> <p>Another key risk identified was attribution of the water harvesting structures constructed in the project area to the efforts/activities of GVNML. Based on their previous experiences, WH asked GVNML to maintain detailed records of meetings, discussions, proposals submitted at various platforms to prove the causal relationship.</p> <p>Allocation of funds for construction of the infrastructure such as naadis, ponds, feeder channels, etc was not part of the project budget (which only allowed funds for the chauka and kund construction). These structures were to be constructed through leveraging of government funds and CSR contribution. No alternate measure or course of action was identified for the scenario where government funds were not successfully leveraged. Infact in case of CSR contribution planned in the project budget, a substantial contribution did not materialise due to unforced events. However, community contribution exceeded as per the plan along with successful leveraging of government schemes such as MNREGA. In the absence of these, successful completion of Objective 3 of the project won't have been possible. Thus the need for a comprehensive risk mitigation plan clearly identifying alternative measures and course of action for the risk identified is necessary</p>
<p>What measures have been incorporated to ensure community ownership of the assets (waterbodies) /infrastructure during and beyond the project period?</p>	<p>The ownership of the assets developed under the project is with the Sarpanch and Gram panchayat. Based on the field interactions it was realised that they are consulting with the VDC to take any decisions on their maintenance and further development now that the project period is over. The VDC, it was observed, is a representation of various communities and castes (and also gender in some instances) of the village community as a whole and comprises of volunteers who are willing to work for the development of village and the society at large. The extensive vision building training of the VDC members ensures that they are groomed to work for the village, its development and upliftment and not just for the project. Additionally, all the infrastructure constructed under the project be it the Chauka system, <i>naadi</i> construction, pond renovation or farm pond</p>

Evaluation Questions	Evaluator observations/Analysis / Findings / Recommendations
	construction has been developed through community <i>shramdaan</i> . This has ensured a sense of community ownership of the assets developed.
Have additional resources been identified and allocated in order to ensure continued services post withdrawal of GVNML and WaterHarvest support?	<p>As mentioned above, the VDCs have been developed and capacitated to be functional for the village development and not just for the project implementation. The members have been empowered and have been given knowledge of various government schemes that they can access and the departments they need to approach for the same. Thus VDCs will help in ensuring continued services beyond withdrawal of project support. Additionally, as per interactions with the GNML staff, they have assured continued handholding support and guidance in the future to the villagers and VDCs.</p> <p>Another informal system- “Dharti jatan Yatra” exists that occurs once a year and is used to monitor the work that has been done in the village in the last year for water and soil conservation, pastureland development, and for overall improvement of the environment in the village. This is however a GVNML activity which they conduct annually in the district across the villages. It is also used as a platform to pledge for new activities to be undertaken by people and to felicitate people who have done exceptional work in the last year for water, environment and societal betterment in the village.</p> <p>However, beyond this no additional resource has been identified and allocated under the project to ensure continued services beyond the project. This can act as a serious bottleneck in the long term sustainability of the project and to the question if the benefits will continue beyond the actual support of the project.</p>
Has any mechanism for collaboration with government departments been developed to ensure sustainability of the project?	<p>Based on the field interactions with community/VDC and discussions with implementation staff, it is clear that the community, especially the VDC members have gained knowledge and understanding of government schemes available to them for land and water conservation. The VDC members have been extensively trained on how to develop proposals/submissions and approach the relevant government departments/officials to demand the required support for implementing of the development initiatives (for managing village waterbodies, pastureland and other common resources) of their villages.</p> <p>It was observed during interactions with several VDC members, although all VDCs have undergone this training the capacity level of different VDCs might vary. This in turn might effect the sustainability of the project.</p>
Is there a ‘phase-out’ plan or exit strategy developed for the project?	Yes, an exit strategy for the project was developed for the last six months of the project. The VDCs members were extensively trained and linked with the government departments and officials to lead discussions and submission of proposals, with the GVNML staff taking a handholding support only. The idea was to further empower and build confidence of these VDC members.

#### 4. Final Recommendations for WaterHarvest and GVNML to take up similar work

Following are a list of recommendations that can be considered by WaterHarvest and GVNML to be integrated as part of the project design and implementations strategy for taking up similar work:

1. **Financial literacy needs to be a part of the VDC training curriculum.** In the current project design, there is no process or mechanism by which the VDCs are being trained on financial management. They do not have a knowledge or understanding of how to collect funds for regular repair, maintenance of the existing assets or expansion/scaling up of efforts. For example in one of the VDC interaction it was revealed that although the VDC members has generated a revenue of INR 65 lakhs by the sale of the Babool tree growing on the pastureland, they had no idea on how to effectively and efficiently use and/or invest this money for further development works in the village.
2. **Transfer of technical knowledge to VDC members and creation of Master Trainers.** The future project design needs account for the training of at least two members per VDC on the design and engineering aspects of the Chauka system if replication and scaling-up of the technology is needed. These master trainers created can then help to create a cadre of barefoot engineers proficient in the Chauka system technology and can help in regular repair, maintenance and construction of new assets as per the needs of the community.
3. **Clear identification of risks and development of a risk mitigation plan for effective implementation of the project.** Such a plan will help to identify alternative measures and course of actions too ensure project implementation and activities remains on track.
4. **Common platform for cross-learning and peer-to-peer handholding for the VDCs developed as part of the project.** In the current project, it was noted that no common meeting was scheduled where all the VDCs interacted with each other as a group to share their experiences and challenges. This is a huge gap since as an individual institution each VDC reflects it's maturity level; with some more advanced than others in its people, processes and practices. Thus, each VDC can learn from the other VDC instituted as part of the project. Additionally, this peer-to-peer learning amongst the VDCs can also function as an additional mechanism for collaboration and ensure sustainability of the benefits beyond the implementation period.
5. **Gender balance in project implementation team.** The achievement of the project in terms of promotion and straightening of women groups was lacking due to lack of female participation. It was observed during the field interactions that not all the VDC had female representation. To address this issue, the team structure should necessarily have women team members. The societal norms in the region restrict participation of girls and women in decision-making roles. However, the presence of women in the implementation team will booster the confidence of women to come forward and participate. At the same time, **mandatory orientation of the implementation team on issue of gender equality and mainstreaming needs to be part of the project design.** This will ensure all the team members have necessary skills to interact with and ensure women participation in various activities under the project.