

# Sustainable Development Goals 4&5

Empowerment of Women and Children a precondition for concrete realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals



Lool

Looking at a fish scale to understanding the conditions in the growth and life of a fish

## Facilitating partnerships between Local Communities and Schools



## Action Research: Participatory Research, Evaluation and Monitoring

Ashankur 7<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> June 2023

**Goal:** Vision 2030 for Ashankur, IELA and the local community: A collective journey in four blocks of Ahmednagar District namely: Srirampur, Rahuri, Rahata and Nevasa



Showing impact of heat on expansion of air with bottle and balloon : Presentations by the women on the ecological issue and biodiversity in their villages

**Overall Objective:** Establishing the Centrality of Women and Children in participatory planning and visioning so as to concretely relate to Sustainable development Goals.

**Objective 1:** Field Testing the Capacity of Ashankur to mobilise women and children on Agenda 2030

**Objective 2:** Field Testing potential for participatory replication of Mandve baseline survey in other villages where Ashankur is engaged with rural women.

**Objective 3:** Development of appropriate tools and techniques to engage children on questions related to scientific appraisal of Nature and ecology.

**Objective 4:** Participatory appraisal of the lesson learnt over the last year and evolution of the way forward.

This quarter marked a qualitative shift in the approach as it was focussed on testing the understanding acquired by Ashankur over the last three training sessions in terms of engaging with women and children along different lines and in tune with the realisation of Agenda 2030. The intention being to consolidate the learning over the last year so as to assess the capacity of Ashankur to deal with the issues related to women and children with the broader perspective acquired over the last year,

## Report of the five day proceedings

### Day one (7<sup>th</sup> June )

This day was devoted to understanding the nature of the preparations so that the agenda for the next day's programme with women could be properly designed. From the discussions it became clear that around 200 women from 10 villages had been called for the meeting so as to create critical mass in the village when discussions had to take place there. As part of the programme for commemoration of women's day posters on invasive species and useful species had been prepared along with a detailed slide programme to explain their harmful effects or useful properties as the case may be. Given this it was decided that the groups from each village would be given an exercise to articulate the nature of issues in their village related to the biodiversity, ecology and health concerns.

### Day two (8<sup>th</sup> June)



Registration in progress

The meeting was attended by over 230 women from 7 villages. The meeting began with a prayer and inspirational songs sung by the women. Before breaking into groups, the content of the posters relating to invasive species and useful species were read out by the women as a few of the women were illiterate. The exercise was undertaken to understand how literate women could help the groups to prepare the documentation needed to report on the understanding developed by them.





Rekha of Ashankur singing some inspirational songs while waiting for participants to arrive

In the initial presentation made it was explained that while historically women are likened to Sakti and Prakruti, these characteristics of women have been undermined over the centuries. Without understanding this historical relationship with the universe, nature and creation and how its undermining has led to the degradation of the environment as well, it will not be possible to understand the road to true empowerment of women. On the question of value, it was made clear that money is only a means of exchange, not value itself. If nature is properly protected and understood it is possible to survive without money as was the case before money was invented.



Explaining the purpose of the meeting to the participants

Since there were large number of women from Bhokar village they were asked to discuss in their respective Self Help Group. The discussions revealed a variety of dynamics with the more articulate women facilitating the discussion while the more educated ones helped in minute taking. It was clear that the level of appreciation of the issues was high and very much related to the nature of the land use and economic patterns prevalent in the village. The individual reports prepared and presentations made by each village has been recorded separately and is available for reference.



Shobha Salve explaining the usefulness of Turmeric

Outlining the way forward, it was shown how these concerns and reports on the land use pattern of the village could be mapped by the village community themselves with help from Ashankur staff who would assist them in proper articulation of their issues into a report. The preliminary work done on mapping at Mandve and of Ashankur campus was explained to them. On being questioned about the character of the discussions, the women were clear that this articulation would not have been possible in the same manner if men were present. The myth that men know more about the issues was debunked rather it was shown that women had a distinct perspective to development which would help enrich the discussions in the gram sabha once the women could gain clarity about their own concerns, needs and potential resources that could be tapped. The women were also encouraged to send their children for the programme the next day.





Anita Choudhary Explaining the Ecological and Biodiversity issues in her village



Slide presentation by Sunil Dubey, Rekha and Ashwini

The meeting concluded with the detailed slide presentation on the invasive and useful species in the region. The presentation made clear that what looks beautiful may not necessarily be good. We do not change our mother, father, relatives because they are short, thin, fat or of a particular colour. What is important to understand is the usefulness or harmful effects of a particular species. In addition to the invasive plant species, the harmful effect of the giant african snail and Tilapia fish was also explained. Lesser known usefulness of species like shivling in relation to fertility was also explained.



Group discussion in progress

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### Day three (9<sup>th</sup> June)



Participants at the Children's programme on relevance of science for Environmental conservation

A total of 125 children from two schools and children from nearby participated. Introducing the programme it was likened to the Mahabharat in modern times a struggle for sustainable development and a clan environment for children is the new need of the hour. The children were told not to go to sleep like Subadhra did when Arjun was explaining the Chakravayuh. They would know how to get into the subject of environment and ecology but would not know the way to make science a tool for problem solving. Children were then divided into eight groups to express their views on different topics

While the children from Standard 5-8 were put together, children from Std. 9 were placed in one group while children from Std. 10 were divided into two separate groups for boys and girls. The elder girls from the hostel in Ashankur who were learning nursing and tailoring were put into a separate group.

Given the segregation of the older children, it was possible to get an analytical perspective from the older children while the nursing and tailoring students were encouraged to engage in a visioning exercise as well. The individual presentations and video recording of the same are available with Ashankur and will be used for further planning as well. The range of discussion asked for helped to give a broad overview of the existing knowledge of children on different aspects touching their lives. Specifically in relation to education, children from a



private school pointed out how good their school was while children from a government school pointed to the lack of facilities in the school.

Group A: My Village



Group B: My School



The photographs shown indicate the difficulty in getting uniform participation from boys and girls in the same group. In one group they segregated automatically as they were talking about different schools. In other groups special efforts were made by the facilitators to get the feedback of the boys.

Group C; Grain, fruits, vegetables and local foods



Group D: Water





Group E: My Dream for a better Ahmednagar



Class 10 boys: Biodiversity





Class 10 girls: Water



Class 9 Mixed: Energy





## Science practicals (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> June)



Experiment in Colour Chromatography



Preparing plaster cast of a dog pug mark



Hunter - Animal game: Showing the impact of cutting of the forests



Examining a fish scale



Explaining the laws of gravity



Questioning whether this experiment with big and small candles explains the fact that oxygen constitutes about 20% part in air



Impact of heat on air pressure



#### **Day Four ( 10<sup>th</sup> June: Monitoring and Evaluation with Ashankur Staff and Way Forward)**

Since a year had started since the initiation of the Action Research programme, it was decided to review the programme in the light of the Provincial Apostolic Plan (PAP) of which Ashankur is a partner and the larger commitments made by Ashankur in the light of this partnership. The details of this programme and commitments are available separately.

The initial exercise done by Ashankur revealed that they had answers to most of the commitments made under the PAP evidently the work done by Ashankur had gone far beyond the articulated mandate and deliverables spelt out in the PAP. The details have been of the deliverables achieved have been spelt out in the Marathi document done as part of this exercise and is available with Ashankur.

The next exercise was to understand the actual achievements of Ashankur on questions related to the empowerment of women and children in the light of their own concerns articulated at the time of the first workshop undertaken in August 2022. In response to this, the baseline survey and progress on the ecological assessment at Mandve was highlighted. These are reported in the Marathi document done as part of this exercise and is available with Ashankur.

The following agenda for the next three months was spelt out

- a. Follow up with the women on the basis of the presentations made by them so that the ecological assessment of their villages done by them at the time of the workshop on 8<sup>th</sup> June could be translated into an ecological land use map of their villages on the lines of the map prepared for Mandve.
- b. Two booklets to be prepared. One on the invasive harmful species of the region and their impact and the other on the useful species and ways to promote their usefulness. How the distribution can be mapped with the help of Note Cam and photographs was also discussed. Preliminary work has already been done by Ashankur. The work planned for the next quarter will build on this. These two booklets provides a concrete agenda for the women of each village to relate their understanding to a concrete programme for eradication/control of harmful species and promotion/ value addition of the useful ones.
- c. A start has also been made in relation to development of a seed bank and value addition of a few useful products. This will be further developed over the next quarter and will be part of the display in meetings and promotion of use and marketing of useful species.
- d. In relation to children, since this is not a regular programme of Ashankur, more discussion is needed internally as to how this will be useful to schools and whether a WhatsApp group of teachers can be facilitated and coordinated. The initial task would be to provide relevant literature to the teachers and facilitate presentations from the children at the upcoming programme for Children's Day/ Christmas to be organised by Ashankur in November/ December. A more regular programme is envisaged with the help of the women SHG groups as an outcome of the village mapping exercise to be done by them. A number of tools to enhance awareness of the animators has already been provided to Ashankur. The environmental snake and ladder game for instance was translated into Marathi and some women's groups played the game.



Environmental Snakes and Ladder Game

e. There has been a delay in the analysis of the soil and water samples of Mandve due to lack of clarity on the purpose of the exercise. The following was shared.

- The need for the soil and water samples emerged from the issues observed in Mandve namely the impact of mono cropping of sugarcane, cotton and gini gavati (a kind of grass grown as fodder). In addition water quality issues were observed in Mandve having possible impact on Health of people, animals and soil.
- Soil and water samples taken to quantify the issues observed with precise locations and relation to other issues.
- Once the sample reports are available and field tested on the ground (verifying results with situation observed on the ground), concrete action plan to deal with the issues can also emerge.

There may be a need to examine the health issues in the village once we get a better idea about the impact of mono-cropping, invasive species, soil and water issues.

This was followed up by a game on the food web with the staff of Ashankur, nursing and tailoring students at Ashankur. Following the game it was explained that larger numbers (of participants) and better understanding of the interrelationships of the different species in the food web would make the game more interesting and enjoyable as well.





Food Web Game

## Day Five (Field visit)

### Field visit:

The idea behind the field visit was to get an understanding about the magnitude of the Tilapia invasion and impact on the local fish species available. The visit involved meeting fish workers, having an idea about the water sources which were infested by Tilapia, Discussions that took place at the Takli Bhan Fish market with fish vendors tried to understand the questions stemming from marketing and economics and create awareness among the fishing community and consumers about the extent of the issue. The preliminary discussions revealed that Tilapia now constituted 90% of the fish catch. Discussions with fishers on its eradication revealed that it was a challenging task given the market demand for the fish which at Rs 100/ per kilo was comparatively cheaper than other fish like Rahu Rs 200/ Kg, Katla Rs 300 per Kg, Pomfret Rs 600/, Bam Rs 400/ per Kg, Crab Rs 600/ per Kg, Prawns Rs 600/ per Kg . If an individual tried to increase the number of fish fingerlings of Rahu, Katla or Bam others would not let them survive till maturity. It would take a long time to deal with Government apathy which is the best way to ensure collective action, so cage would be the only method to increase other fish in the short run, keeping in mind individual concerns and limitations.

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Sunil Dubey explaining condition of fish from the scales: With Ravindra Ranaware at Takli Bhan Fish Market



At Village Jenpur near Godavari River with Krishna and Pradip Uhale





At Godavari River