



# From barren land to rose fields, a success story

Check dams and better farming practices turn around the fortunes of Wahegaon farmers

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**WAHEGAON VILLAGE (AURANGABAD DISTRICT, MAHARASHTRA):** Forty-eight-year-old Rameshwar Prahlad Bobade's agricultural land was barren. With poor groundwater levels, the borewell on his land turned defunct and this forced him to work as a labourer to eke out a living.

But that is past. Rameshwar Bobade has now planted rose plants on his 10 'kuntas' of land. Even before he could sell the garlic that was produced simultaneously on the same land, Mr. Bobade is gearing up for a good yield of roses.

This transformation was possible with the intervention of Pepsico and Alternative Development Initiatives (ADI), a civil society organisation here. Mr. Bobade is one of the many farmers in the village, 40 km from Aurangabad, not only repaying loans promptly but also reaping profits.

There are over 1,000 acres of agricultural land in the vil-



**REAPING DIVIDENDS:** Farmer Rameshwar Prahlad Bobade displaying the garlic that was harvested from his field at Wahegaon village near Aurangabad district in Maharashtra. He had planted garlic as an intercrop in his rose field. (Right) Village sarpanch Heerabai Bobade at one of the check-dams constructed in the village. — PHOTOS: S. SANDEEP KUMAR



lage and it is mostly rain-fed. With poor access to water, farmers had to be content with a single crop during kharif season. Annual average rainfall here is about 700 mm and during a good monsoon, the excess rainwater used to drain away without serving any purpose.

Pepsico, under its corporate social responsibility activity, in association with the ADI conducted a water resource assessment study in 2009. Check-dams were constructed on three rivulets that pass through the village and over 100 water recharge structures in the locality, to

facilitate better water access to the farming community, says Vaishakh Palsodkar of ADI.

With check-dams, the groundwater levels have improved over the last two years. Most 30-40 feet deep wells in the vicinity are now filled to the brim. With ade-

quate water, farmers are now also cultivating sweet lime and other crops in the Rabi season, which was once a rarity, points out the former sarpanch, Laxman Bobade.

Awareness programmes were also conducted for farmers to help them adopt better farming practices. "I

was unaware of the drip irrigation technique. With sufficient water supply, I planted rose plants on the field and simultaneously planted garlic seeds between them. The garlic yield was good and many roses too have blossomed in my field," beams Mr. Bobade.

Fellow farmers too have taken to different crops in their fields apart from cotton. "My average income per acre has increased from Rs. 1.5 lakh to Rs. 2.5 lakh per acre. I am also cultivating vegetables and other crops along with cotton. It is reaping good yields," says Narayan Bobade, another farmer.

"We extend our support for three years by when the farmers are on their own," explains Annie Kishen, Head, CSR, Pepsi Foods. The corporate and civil society intervention has also brought change in the thought-process of the villagers. The panchayat this year announced Rs. 500 cash award to women who give birth to a girl child in the village, says sarpanch Heerabai Bobade.