

## Case study — Mitra

Driving through the dusty and undulating landscape across Nandurbar district in north Maharashtra, we come across what could be mistaken for an oasis. With a broad smile, and clutching her year-old toddler, Latabai escorts us through her orchard (called Wadi in local parlance), replete with several fruit trees, and plots of garlic, onion, ginger, and a variety of other vegetables.

Over a steaming cup of *chai*, Latabai recounts her troubled past. Born into a poor tribal family in Mundalwad village, Nandurbar district, Latabai studied up to the fourth standard, after which penury constrained her into helping her parents eke out a living by working in the fields. Married at 14 and a widow at 15, Latabai was slowly coming to terms with her cruel fate, working as a labourer in the fields, amidst the roughnecks of her village.



In 2003, Latabai was singled out by the **Maharashtra Institute of Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (MITTRA)**, Nasik, a sister organisation of BAIF Development Research Foundation, for the Wadi development project, under its comprehensive Jan Utkarsha Programme. However, Latabai possessed no land. She therefore chose to take on a small area that was rocky with not a speck of soil.

Toiling tirelessly, she carried soil from a distant place, and prepared the land for cultivation. Water was elusive, and Latabai had to fetch it from a cascade, a good mile away. She dug 60 pits, planted trees in them and made *bunds* in and around the Wadi. Soon enough, her land started yielding 8 – 9 quintals of maize and gram annually, prompting other villagers' attention.

The Wadi concept caught on among the other villagers too. Latabai subsequently invested in a plastic pipe, which she then had laid, to transport water from the source, thereby ensuring free flow of water. Latabai's Wadi is now capable of ensuring year round food security, besides fetching her around Rs50 a day through sale of produce.

Latabai has not looked back since and has, with the help of the villagers and unstinting support from MITTRA, planted saplings of teak, bamboo, mangoes, mahua, neem, custard apple and eucalyptus, all of which are gradually metamorphosing the barren landscape and turning the area green.

"If trees abound in our village, then people can find employment within the fields of medicine, furniture, timber, fuel, fodder, fruits and oil," she reasons philosophically, as we thank her for her hospitality and leave.

With its flagship **Central India Initiative (CInI)** focusing on enhancing the livelihoods of tribal people in the central Indian states through land and water based livelihood interventions, the Trust has been supplementing the Rs1.4 billion Jan Utkarsha Programme, sanctioned by the **Government of Maharashtra (GoM)** to **MITTRA** to upscale the Wadi model over a five-year period, beginning 2005.



The programme reaches out to over 52,500 tribal families in 15 districts in Maharashtra, with the aims of:

- Food security and poverty alleviation
- Improving the status of health of the community
- Increasing the asset base of the tribals
- Empowerment of women

The programme follows a multi-pronged approach consisting of:

- Wadi development and improved agriculture
- Dairy cattle development
- Development of landless families
- Community health
- Women's development programme
- Micro watershed development
- Support to ashram schools

Along with **MITTRA**, the Trust has collaborated with over 20 organisations under the **CInI**, with the goal of supporting meaningful livelihood programmes within the central India region.