STORIES OF CHANGE

Aapo bija – bhuta jagata: The Dhikoli Story

Village Dhikoli in Bundelkhand was regularly ravaged by droughts, and the farmers were living a hand to mouth existence. In despair, about 40 per cent of the people were forced to migrate in search of work for several months every year. Then in 2011, they heard about farmers' successful agricultural seasons in the nearby villages because of check dams constructed with the help of Development Alternatives. Dhikoli, too, sought out DA for deriving these benefits. And then there was no looking back.

A watershed management plan was jointly designed and implemented, largely through Shramdaan (voluntary labour), where the community contributed substantially by digging the earth, carrying large rocks, and even small amounts of money in some cases. The fortunes changed immediately and dramatically. And the communities demonstrated a new respect for water as the source of their lives –

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"Aapo bija – bhuta jagata", as they call it in the Vedic language. To ensure Dhikoli remains water secure, water budgeting exercises were undertaken, and the village collectively agreed to adopt water efficient practices and avoid water intensive crops. But it did not stop there. A low-cost technology for natural treatment and recycling of domestic wastewater was introduced. A watershed committee maintains the infrastructure and monitors consumption. An assured supply for both major farming seasons, and sometimes even a third one, is now guaranteed. INR 2 million was invested, leading to 20% enhancement in production and 15% increase in incomes of farmers (INR 11,000 additional annual income per family).

Dhikoli, today, is a climate resilient water positive village, and is recognised as a model of integrated water resource management and what is possible when people are determined to work together to bring about change.

Development Alternatives