

STORIES OF CHANGE



The Rebirth: a Gaushala Story in Village Gundrai

The year is 2004. 400 women of the Sankalp Swashakti Mahila Mandal are trying to find a solution for stray cattle ravaging the fields and whatever little is grown on them. A severe drought has taken its toll and farmers cannot afford to feed non-milch cows, letting them loose. The solution by consensus is to set up a community Gaushala (cow shelter).

20 acres of barren land, upon request to the district authorities, is allotted to the Federation. But it is encroached upon by powerful farmers. A siege by the 400 for over a month leads to a reluctant stepback by the encroachers. The women now make the land ready for the cattle shed. Registered as the Ramraja Gaushala, it receives a small support for fodder from the Gaushala Aayog. This, however, is not adequate. Discussions between Development Alternatives and the women's federation yields a plan for generating value from the barren land and the 20 non-milch cows.

“REGISTERED AS THE RAMRAJA GAUSHALA, IT RECEIVES A SMALL SUPPORT FOR FODDER FROM THE GAUSHALA AAYOG. THIS, HOWEVER, IS NOT ADEQUATE. DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES AND THE WOMEN'S FEDERATION YIELDS A PLAN FOR GENERATING VALUE FROM THE BARREN LAND AND THE 20 NON-MILCH COWS.”

Dung from the cows provides fuel for a bio-gas engine that generates electricity. The potential of processing local farm produce is realised. And ground-nut sorters, oil-mills and spice grinders are set up, with the 40 women in-charge providing services to farmers around. A milk chilling plant is set up too, while slurry from the bio-gas plant and the farm waste is directed to produce and sell vermi-compost. Investment of INR 3 million (INR 1.8 through the federation and FPOs, and INR 1.2 in green energy, fodder cultivation and manure production), has led to a turnover of INR 16.5 million, as of 2019.

Today, with a 108 stray non-milch cows, the Ramraja Gaushala of the women's group is a local business hub that saves carbon, generates profits and builds economic resilience.