

STORIES OF CHANGE



Unleashing Her Potential

Yashoda Devi, like many others in Gidhiya Parashiya village in Sonbhadra, Uttar Pradesh has lived a life of small means. Working from dawn to dusk in her own few acres of land, she also provided labour for maintaining the crops of others. Not much had changed since she started working as a little girl. Now at 33, she had lived more than three decades of her life in poverty.

Sonbhadra, a hilly region in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, is predominantly dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Though major crops grown here are maize, pigeon pea, and black gram, farmers also cultivate paddy in the low-lying areas. The crops fulfilled the food requirements for two-three months for some families but were never enough to sustain a living. Other livelihood options have been goat rearing and poultry which are carried out on a small scale. However, these too do not provide decent livelihoods. Even though the region has always been rich in natural resources, poor management and unsustainable practices over the years had left communities with insufficient incomes and stunted socio-economic growth.

"EVEN THOUGH THE REGION HAS ALWAYS BEEN RICH IN NATURAL RESOURCES, POOR MANAGEMENT AND UNSUSTAINABLE PRACTICES OVER THE YEARS HAD LEFT COMMUNITIES WITH INSUFFICIENT INCOMES AND STUNTED SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROWTH."

Things started to slowly change in 2017 when *wadis*- small orchard of one or two acres with multiple crops, were set up. Development Alternatives embarked upon an ambitious programme of working with the community for replicating '*wadi*' model across the area under the project "Tribal Development Fund *Wadi* Chopan Sonbhadra", in collaboration with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). One such *wadi* was planted by Yashoda Devi. As part of this programme, she was made aware of the benefits of *wadi* plantation and how it can be implemented for improving her livelihood - fetching greater profits and ensuring decent life for her and her family of five.



She joined Development Alternatives' training course on intercropping systems, and also received high quality seeds for cultivation – climate-resilient crops, vegetables, pulses, tree species such as sagaun, and fruits such as mango, lemon and guava – on her one acre land. There was a strong focus on soil conservation practices through cattle protection trench (CPT) bunding and deep boring. Additionally, a submersible pump was installed for better irrigation. This enabled her to grow vegetables in the *wadi* and soon her agricultural endeavour became a reliable source of income for her family.

By the next growing season, improved nitrogen levels and enhanced soil moisture resulted in a 20% increase in productivity, with reduced input costs. Soon after, she set up a rainwater harvesting system in her field, which assures water for irrigation and ensures that the productivity will be sustained for years to come. Today, she earns a seasonal income of INR 30,000 by selling vegetables and about INR 45,000 with fruits, a whopping 30% increase from before the intervention, just within two years. Gradually, Yashoda Devi took up other sources of livelihood such as fish farming, goat rearing, vermi-compost production, poultry farming, and cow rearing to supplement her earning. She had witnessed unparalleled growth due to the *wadi* initiative and was enthusiastic to learn more with training and exposure visits.

Yashoda also became a shareholder of the Vindhya Vasini Farmers' Producer Company in 2016. Having invested a mere INR 1,000 as share capital, today, she earns a monthly dividend of INR 1,200. With the collective's support, she now sells vermi-compost to other farmers in the nearby villages, and earns, on an average, INR 24,000 annually. Today, she has a diverse source of income and is financially secure. She is also an advocate for other women to join in to become independent and transform their lives.

