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Stories and Insights from ASA Landscapes

Regenerative Frontiers

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A note from the Director

When we brought out the first edition of ‘Regenerative Frontiers’, we wanted to share stories that often remain within the villages where they happen. These are stories of farmers, women, field teams and communities solving everyday problems with patience and care.

This edition brings together six such stories. In Chhoti Mandli, solar lift irrigation is improving access to water and giving women some time back in their day. In Kushalpura, clean drinking water is being managed by a women’s self-help group, turning a basic need into a shared responsibility.

In Odisha, a spillway was planned around the farming season so standing crops were not disturbed. In Mandla, one farmer’s 3.5-acre field shows how soil, crops, cattle, compost and water can work together. In Bhimapura, a 2-kilometre doha is helping water stay longer, supporting cultivation after the monsoon and reducing migration.

The final story takes us to Bihar, where two Farmer Producer Organisations are helping farmers explore papaya and mushroom cultivation with training, input support and market guidance.

Together, these stories show that change is rarely sudden. It is built slowly, with communities, through many small decisions made at the right time.

They also remind us that lasting work depends on the people who stay close to the ground. Our field teams play an important role in this process, listening to communities, understanding local realities and helping each solution take shape with care. Their patience and commitment are present in every story in this edition.

With warmth and gratitude,

G. Jayanthi



When a solar irrigation system brought water by day and gave women their nights back

1

In a Nutshell

In Chhoti Mandli village, Jhabua, women once had to irrigate their fields at night due to an erratic electricity supply, risking their safety and sacrificing valuable rest. With support from Action for Social Advancement (ASA) and Inditex, a solar-powered lift irrigation system now irrigates 47 acres across 28 households, eliminating electricity costs and enabling safe daytime irrigation. Alongside improved crop productivity, the initiative has given women something equally valuable: safer working conditions, better rest and more time for their families.

For years, farming in Chhoti Mandli followed the unpredictable schedule of electricity. Power for irrigation usually arrived only after dark, forcing farmers to water their fields at night. For women, this meant walking to the fields in the cold, navigating paths with the constant fear of snakes, scorpions and wild animals, and returning home only after several hours of irrigation.

"*There was always the fear of snakes, scorpions and wild animals. During winter, working at night became even more difficult*," recall Sanu Nanasingh and Rukhma Singa, farmers from Chhoti Mandli.

The long nights also took a toll on health and family life. Women often had to spend three to four hours irrigating the fields before returning home, only to begin the next day's chores.

"*Because we stayed awake at night, we never got enough sleep. It became difficult to manage household work and care for our children the next day*," says Sharma Jalu, another resident of the village.

A solar-powered solution

To address this challenge, ASA, with support from Inditex, installed a solar-powered lift irrigation system at the village stop dam at a cost of ₹4.15 lakh.

The system now irrigates 47 acres of farmland, benefiting 28 farming households. Powered entirely by solar energy, it eliminates the need for electricity-based irrigation, reducing seasonal irrigation costs from ₹8,000-₹10,000 to zero. Most importantly, irrigation now takes place during the day.

"*After the solar-powered lift irrigation system was installed, we can irrigate during the daytime. We no longer have to visit the fields at night, saving both time and effort,*" says Kabi Balu.

Better harvests, better lives

Reliable daytime irrigation has improved both productivity and planning. Crop yields have increased from around 12 to 14 quintals per acre, and farmers are now exploring second and third cropping seasons with greater confidence.



Watered by the sun: Women farmers and children of Chhoti Mandali near the solar lift irrigation system.

Women are also playing a stronger role in managing irrigation schedules and crop planning.

"*Now we can decide in advance when to irrigate and how to take better care of our crops,*" says Susheela Kamlesh.

Beyond irrigation

The greatest transformation is not only in the fields but also in everyday life. By harnessing solar energy to lift water from the village stop dam, women no longer have to spend sleepless nights irrigating crops.

They now have more time and energy for their families, livestock, kitchen gardens, farm management and the training programmes conducted by ASA. What was once a daily struggle has become a safer, more efficient and dignified way of farming.

Prakash Jamuniya, Project Executive, Ranapur



The women who became Kushalpura's water authority

2

In a Nutshell

In Kushalpura village, unsafe drinking water had long caused illness, school absenteeism and high medical expenses. With support from Action for Social Advancement (ASA) and Water.org, an RO plant was established and is now successfully managed by the women of Sitaram Self-Help Group. Today, 50 families have access to safe drinking water, healthcare costs have declined, children attend school more regularly, and the SHG earns ₹12,000-₹15,000 per month after operating costs. While providing clean water, the initiative has empowered women to lead and sustain an essential community service.

For generations, the people of Kushalpura relied on traditional village wells for drinking water. The wells were nearby and convenient, but they carried an invisible danger. Contaminated water had become an accepted part of daily life, bringing frequent illness, medical expenses and missed opportunities.

Children often suffered from stomach infections and vomiting. Older people fell ill repeatedly. Families spent thousands of rupees every year on medicines, doctor visits and travel, only to return to the same unsafe water source because there was simply no alternative. For Nanu Mes and his family, this cycle seemed endless. "*Earlier, members of our family frequently suffered from stomach pain and vomiting. The doctor told us that contaminated drinking water was the cause,*" recalls Nanu Mes.

Before the family began using purified RO water, they spent nearly ₹10,000 every year treating waterborne illnesses. Today, that expense has been reduced to almost zero, bringing not only financial relief but also healthier days and greater peace of mind.

A new beginning for children

Unsafe drinking water was affecting more than just health; it was also disrupting education. Many children in Kushalpura regularly missed school due to recurring illness. Among them was Shivani Ramesh, a student at Shaskiya Middle School. Frequent sickness kept her away from the classroom and interrupted her learning. Today, thanks to regular access to safe RO drinking water, Shivani attends school more consistently. Instead of recovering from illness, she spends more time learning, growing and dreaming about her future.

Sometimes, the journey towards better education begins with something as simple and essential as a glass of clean water.

The RO plant: A community enterprise

The transformation began when Action for Social Advancement (ASA), with support from Water.org, established an RO water purification plant in Kushalpura. But installing infrastructure is only the first step. Its real success depends on the people who own and sustain it.

That responsibility was embraced by Sitaram Self-Help Group (SHG). Led by Kiran Singh, along with Nabi Nan Singh, Rai Kaliya and other dedicated members, the women's group took complete charge of operating the plant. From collecting user charges and maintaining records to handling repairs and ensuring an uninterrupted water supply, the SHG manages every aspect of the service with remarkable commitment.

Today, 50 families in Kushalpura use purified RO water every day. The plant also supplies drinking water to neighbouring villages. Families contribute ₹30 per pot, creating a sustainable system that benefits both the community and the SHG.



Clean water for all: Families drink RO water in Kushalpura, where the village water service is managed by women.

Clean water, healthier families, stronger women

The impact has been far-reaching. With access to safe drinking water, families report fewer waterborne illnesses and reduced medical expenses. At the same time, the RO plant has become a reliable livelihood opportunity for the women managing it. After meeting operating expenses, Sitaram SHG earns between ₹12,000 and ₹15,000 every month. This regular income has strengthened the group's financial independence while reinforcing its members' confidence as capable community leaders. They are no longer seen only as members of a savings group; they are trusted managers of an essential village service.

When responsibility builds respect

The RO plant has transformed not just health outcomes but also social perceptions. Today, whenever there is an issue related to drinking water, villagers turn to the women of Sitaram SHG. They make decisions about maintenance, oversee finances, manage operations and ensure uninterrupted service. "*Managing the village's water supply gives us immense satisfaction. It feels good to contribute to the community in such an important way,*" says Kiran Singh, Head of Sitaram SHG.

Their leadership has become a source of pride for the entire village.

Beyond clean water: A model inspiring other villages

The success of Kushalpura has begun inspiring neighbouring communities. Members from Bagai Badi village have visited to understand how the RO plant was established and how the SHG manages its operations. They are now exploring the possibility of adopting a similar model in their own village. This is how sustainable, community-led development spreads.

Ramesh Maida, Project Associate, Ranapur

A community-built spillway that protects fields and future harvests

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In a Nutshell

In Ghamatguda village, Odisha, recurring floods and soil erosion threatened farmers' fields during every monsoon. Responding to the community's demand, Action for Social Advancement (ASA), with support from Inditex, constructed a spillway that safely channels excess rainwater while protecting farmland. Planned around the cropping calendar and built with active community participation, the spillway now reduces flood risk, safeguards agricultural land and gives farmers greater confidence to plan and diversify their cultivation.

In Ghamatguda village in Odisha's Muniguda block, the demand for a spillway came from farmers who had watched heavy rains wash away their fertile soil year after year. Every monsoon, overflowing water damaged fields, eroded farmland and threatened the next season's harvest.

Responding to the community's request, ASA, with support from the Inditex project, surveyed the site and worked closely with villagers to build a spillway that would safely channel excess water away from agricultural land.

Construction was carefully planned around the farming calendar. Work was scheduled outside the Kharif and Rabi seasons to ensure that standing crops, including paddy, cotton, vegetables and pulses, remained undisturbed. The result was infrastructure built without compromising farmers' livelihoods.

The community took ownership from the very beginning. A Water Users' Group, formed on 25 March 2026 under the leadership of Mr Basudev Suna, mobilised local contributions, including labour, construction materials and financial support, accounting for nearly 30% of the project cost. Construction began on 10 April and was completed on 22 April 2026.

"*This spillway is now an asset owned by our community. We contributed our labour and time to make it possible, and we are committed to maintaining it for future generations,*" says Mr Basudev Suna, President of the Water Users' Group.



A pathway for water: An aerial view of the spillway in Ghamatguda village of Muniguda block, Odisha.

With improved water management, farmers are now planning to diversify into crops such as brinjal, sunflower, cucumber, bitter gourd, mango and cashew. They expect household agricultural incomes to increase by ₹30,000-₹50,000 annually, while reducing the risk of soil erosion and flood damage.

The spillway is much more than a water management structure for the community. It is a testament to what can be achieved when communities lead the way and development follows their priorities.

Tukhika Limma, Project Executive, Muniguda



From chemicals to a self-sustaining farm: Nilesh Jhariya's journey to greener growth

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In a Nutshell

In Anjaniya village of Mandla, Madhya Pradesh, farmer Nilesh Jhariya has transformed his 3.5-acre farm into a thriving integrated farming model with support from Action for Social Advancement (ASA) and the Walmart Foundation. By replacing chemical inputs with organic practices, vermicomposting and azolla-based livestock integration, he has nearly eliminated chemical input costs while increasing his annual income to ₹3-4 lakh. His healthier soil, diversified crops and self-sustaining farming system are now inspiring neighbouring farmers to adopt sustainable agriculture.

When Nilesh Jhariya began farming during the COVID-19 lockdown, his fields looked much like any other in Anjaniya village, Mandla. Vegetables were grown with chemical fertilisers and pesticides, input costs were rising, and the soil was steadily losing its vitality.

For just 10 decimals of land, Nilesh spent ₹6,000-₹7,000 annually on chemical inputs. The crops survived, but the soil retained little moisture, and farming depended heavily on products bought from outside.

Everything changed when he connected with ASA through the Walmart Foundation-supported project. With regular training and field guidance, Nilesh gradually shifted towards organic and integrated farming practices.

"*ASA introduced us to organic farming. Today, we practise organic farming on 10 decimals and are adopting organic methods across the rest of our farm. We now grow flowers, vegetables, paddy, wheat, chickpea and peas,*" says Nilesh.

A farm that feeds itself

Today, Nilesh's 3.5-acre farm functions as an integrated ecosystem. An azolla unit provides nutritious fodder for his cattle, cattle waste is converted into vermicompost, and the compost is returned to the fields, enriching the soil naturally.

The results are visible. Earthworms have returned, the soil retains moisture for longer, and dependence on chemical fertilisers has almost disappeared. Instead of relying on purchased inputs, the farm increasingly produces its own inputs.

Harvesting through every season

The transformation has also diversified his income. Across the year, Nilesh cultivates paddy, wheat, vegetables, pulses and flowers. His marigold cultivation alone earns nearly ₹40,000 annually, particularly during the festive season. In 2023, he also established a mango orchard, which has already begun bearing fruit and promises to be a strong source of future income.



Healthier soil, higher income

The greatest change, according to Nilesh, lies beneath the surface. "*Earlier, moisture did not stay in the soil for long. Now the soil is healthier, earthworms have returned, and crop performance has improved. With lower input costs and better production, my annual income has increased to around ₹3-4 lakh,*" he says.

Today, Nilesh is recognised as a progressive farmer in his village and FPO. Farmers from neighbouring villages regularly visit his farm to learn about organic cultivation, vermicomposting, azolla production and integrated farming practices. His journey shows that sustainable farming is not just about reducing chemical use; it is about rebuilding the soil, lowering costs and creating a resilient farming system that grows stronger with every season.

Kishan Padam, Project Associate, Bichhiya



When water stayed, families stayed: How a Doha changed life in Bhimapura

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In a Nutshell

In Bhimapura village, Dhar district, seasonal water scarcity once forced many families to migrate for work after every Kharif season. With support from Action for Social Advancement (ASA) and Inditex, a 2-km doha was constructed to recharge groundwater and extend water availability into the Rabi season. Built through technical planning and strong community participation, the intervention has enabled farmers to cultivate winter crops, reduced seasonal migration and helped keep families together in the village.

Every winter, Bhimapura village in Dhar district would begin to empty.

As the monsoon faded, wells ran dry and farming came to a halt. With no water for a winter crop, nearly half the village's families migrated to cities like Surat and Rajkot in search of work, leaving behind children, elderly parents and homes that felt noticeably quieter.

For Magan Singh Baghel and his family, this was an annual reality. Farming on 3.5-4 acres generated only ₹25,000-₹30,000 a year from the Kharif crop, forcing the family to depend on migration and loans to make ends meet.

"*Now that the doha has been built, water stays longer and we can remain in the village and continue farming,*" says Magan Singh.

A simple structure, a lasting change

To address the recurring water shortage, ASA, with support from the Inditex project, constructed a 2-km doha along the village's main nala.

Designed through technical surveys and community consultations, the doha slows the flow of monsoon water, allowing it to recharge groundwater and keep wells functional well into the Rabi season. Around 35-40 village families contributed labour during its construction, making it a truly community-owned asset.

Water that changed more than farming

With water now available during winter, farmers have begun cultivating Rabi crops once again.



Magan Singh harvested 25-30 quintals of wheat this season, increasing his annual farm income to ₹65,000-₹80,000. The family no longer migrates for work, has repaid its debt, and is able to invest in their children's education and the next cropping season.

The biggest change, however, is not measured only in income. "*Earlier, when the men migrated, the village felt empty. Managing the home, cattle and children alone was difficult. Now our families stay together, and that fear and loneliness have disappeared,*" says Ramkuwar Bai Baghel.

More than water conservation

Today, the doha has transformed the rhythm of life in Bhimapura. Fields that once lay dry through winter are green again, migration has reduced, and families who once spent months apart now remain together in the village.

Bilam Singh Baghel, Development Assistant-Cluster Coordinator, Kukshi



From traditional crops to high-value harvests: How FPOs are transforming farmers' incomes in Bihar

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In a Nutshell

In Begusarai, Bihar, ASA is helping Farmer Producer Organisations unlock higher farm incomes through high-value agriculture. While the Rani Krishi Bagwani Sahkari Samiti has enabled 35 farmers to cultivate papaya across 89 acres, the Mansoorchak Krishi Bagwani Swablambi Sahkari Samiti has promoted mushroom cultivation among its members. With technical support, quality inputs and market linkages, farmers have significantly increased their incomes, demonstrating how FPOs can turn collective action into sustainable prosperity.

For years, farmers in Begusarai, Bihar, relied on traditional crops such as paddy, wheat and maize. While these crops sustained their families, they offered limited returns and little opportunity to increase incomes.

That began to change through the Central Sector Scheme for Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), implemented by the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), with Action for Social Advancement (ASA) as the implementing agency in Bihar.

A new opportunity through papaya

The Rani Krishi Bagwani Sahkari Samiti chose papaya cultivation as a high-value crop. Today, 35 farmers cultivate papaya across 89 acres.

One of them is Prabhat Kumar Chaudhary from Rasidpur village. Earlier, his annual farm income was around ₹55,000-₹60,000. After adopting scientific papaya cultivation with training and support from ASA, his earnings have increased significantly.

"*Through ASA, I received training in scientific papaya cultivation, along with support for seeds, fertilisers and manure. Compared with traditional farming, my income has nearly doubled or tripled,*" says Prabhat.

Small space, big returns

A different path was taken by the Mansoorchak Krishi Bagwani Swablambi Sahkari Samiti, where mushroom cultivation emerged as a profitable option requiring very little land.

Today, 25 farmers are cultivating mushrooms through the FPO. A 400-bag production unit yields nearly 130 kg of mushrooms every month, supplying local markets, vegetable vendors and hotels.

For many members, annual incomes have increased from ₹70,000-₹75,000 to nearly ₹1.1-₹1.25 lakh.



Growing more, earning more: Papaya cultivation is helping farmers increase their incomes by 2–3 times.

"*Mushroom cultivation has become a profitable livelihood. With training and market support from ASA and NCDC, we are earning better while working close to home,*" says Sarita Kumari, a mushroom farmer.

Growing together

The success of both FPOs is encouraging more farmers to explore high-value agriculture. While one collective has demonstrated the potential of papaya and the other of mushrooms, the message is the same: when farmers come together, they can reduce risk, access knowledge and earn more.

By combining institutional support from NCDC with on-the-ground handholding by ASA, these FPOs are showing that increasing farm incomes through crop diversification is not only about changing crops; it is about building confidence, strengthening farmer collectives and creating pathways to sustainable prosperity.

Binit Kumar, FCO Coordinator, Shahdol





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