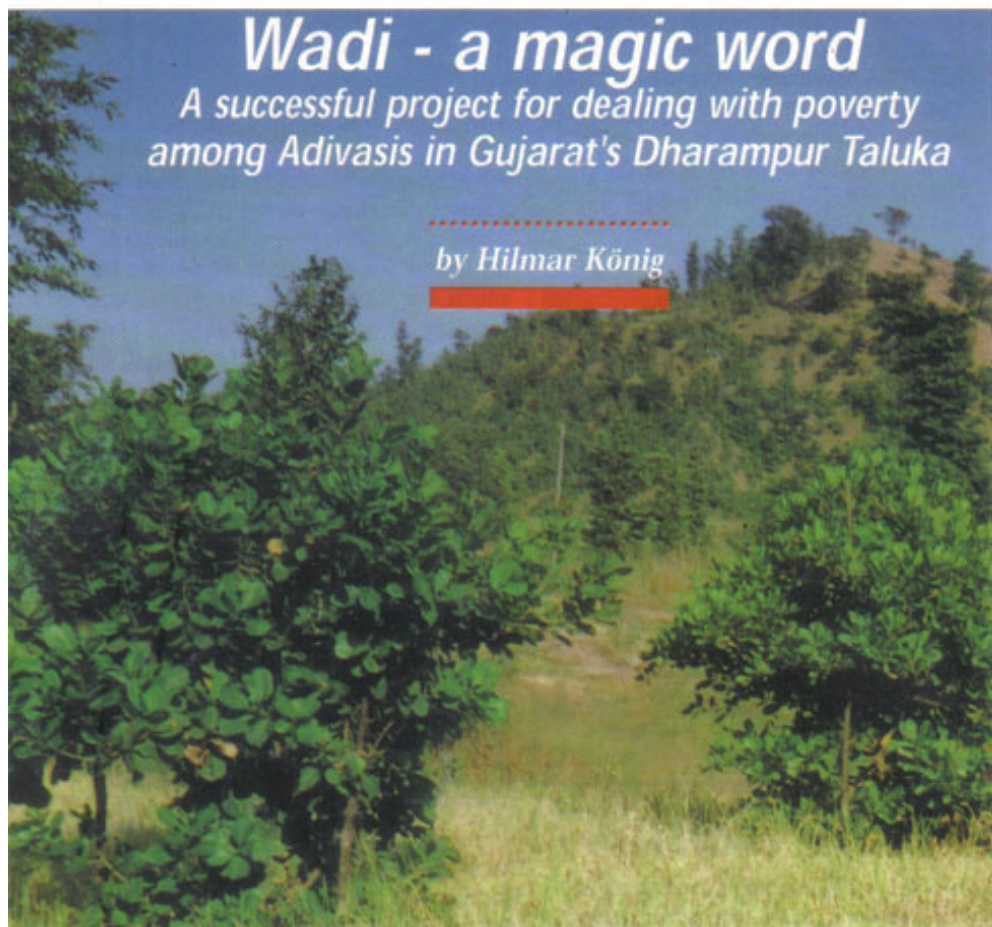


## Wadi - a magic word

A successful project for dealing with poverty among Adivasis in Gujarat's Dharampur Taluka

by Hilmar König



Almost affectionately, Anandiben takes a fresh leaf of the two-year old mango tree in her fingers, turns it about carefully, and smiles, satisfied: the tree, which she cherishes and nurses almost as one of her children, is free of parasites, and is thriving, thanks to Anandiben's care. Three or four years more, and she will harvest the mangoes. With their sale, she will be able to considerably improve the living conditions of her family of six.

We are in Dixal, a tribal village in southern Gujarat. In 1995, the Comprehensive Tribal Rehabilitation Program took off here, as in 114 other villages in Dharampur Taluka (district Valsad). Germany provides support to this project through the German Development Bank with 26 million DM (approximately Rs. 52 crores). The non-governmental organisations BAIF (Bharatiya Agro Industries Development Research Foundation) and DHRUVA (Dharampur Utthan Vahini) have taken responsibility for the implementation of this project. Mr.

Prakash D. Naik, DHRUVA Executive Officer, and Mr. Sharad Mahajan, BAIF Programme Co-ordinator, steer the activities of their team of experts from their headquarters in Kaprada.

Walking through Dixal, Mr. Mahajan explains the objectives of the project, generally known by the name of Wadi (orchard). Wadi has in this area become something of a magic word for the Adivasis, because for them it is closely connected with development. About 10,000 acres of wasteland, which belongs to 8,000 Adivasi families, is being transformed into profitable orchards in the course of the next 11 years. Since 1995, the families have planted 70,000 mango trees, 140,000 cashew trees, as well as 1.7 million trees (eucalyptus, teak, subabul and bamboo) that as a rule surround one-acre parcels of land as "protecting walls" and provide firewood and fodder.

From this project, the families of small farmers as well as landless women stand to gain. The Wadis, for which the families bear complete responsibility,

are the foundation for a new life. They not only assure long-term security for the livelihood of the families, they also make possible an improvement in living standards when they are intensively made use of. Already, families are sowing rice, vegetables and spices between the trees, reducing the scarcity of nourishment. In addition, the families can sell their surplus produce. Two other programmes complete the Wadi project - the aid provided to the extremely burdened women, whose working day is between 16 and 17 hours long, and an improved system of health counselling.

In Dixal, 85 of the 129 Kukna tribal families that live here are taking part in the Wadi project. In the early phases they were sceptical of the experts from



Champaben Manilal weeds her yams field.

BAIF and DHRUVA, and also distrustful and withdrawn, as they had had bad experiences with money-lenders, middlemen and "outsiders" in the past. Their resistance gradually gave way, and they were finally convinced by their visit to the neighbouring Taluka Valsad, where the Wadi project that began in 1985, had by now borne fruit. Forty-year old Anandiben says: "My land on the slope here was just wasteland. Nothing apart from some pulses and millet grew here. That was not enough to live on. I had to go with my husband to Valsad many times a year, to find work on construction sites. Then we established the Wadi. We worked the land with the tools provided by BAIF. We built mud-walls to keep the water longer in the fields. We planted mangoes and cashew trees which we had received free of cost. We fertilised the soil with biomass, and we planted bananas, papaya and rice between the



The BAIF-DHRUVA team at the project headquarters in Kaprada.

trees. We carried in water for irrigation, and this year we harvested 80 kg of rice. All this was new for us. We had to learn it first. Now we guard the Wadi round the clock to prevent animals from doing any damage." Anandiben is sure that she and her family have chosen the right way, though her husband even now has to go to work in the city for some months of the year. She sends three of her children to school. "They should at least know enough not to get deceived", she says, and adds, "the most intelligent of my children should learn a proper profession". The example of Anandiben shows how life gradually changes.

Among the improved living conditions in Dixal is regular health-counselling. Shivrambhai Kissan Gangoda, 27 years old, took part in a BAIF course, and is now village health guide, though he naturally still has to take care of his Wadi. Shivrambhai oversees the chlorine purification of the drinking water, collects statistics about the births and deaths in the village, takes care of vaccinations, measures blood-pressure and urine sugar, makes swabs which are examined for malaria in the laboratory, and when necessary, starts medical treatment of the sick. In serious cases, he writes out the transfers to the doctor

Farmer Velajabhai checks the turmeric tubers.



or hospital. He explains details of hygiene, vaccination and proper nutrition to the women of the village. The "Dais", the traditional midwives, play a very important role in the health programme. They have been trained in health theory, taught about hygiene, and postnatal counselling of the mother and child, and trained to deal with the effects of malnutrition.

In the village of Karjun, 85 of the 265 tribal families take part in the Wadi project. Meanwhile, many active women's groups have been established here. Paruben Chaudhary, DHRUVA Development Animator, introduces one of the young women: Zipariben Jaisingbhai Gamit is a village health guide, apart from which she also leads a savings group of five women formed in June 1995. They have already deposited 3,500 Rupees at the Bank of Baroda in Dharampur. The savings are a reserve for weddings, for building their own houses or for illness. So far, the quintet of Zipariben has managed to earn 15,000 Rupees through income generating activities. Among these are the sale of mango plants grown from their seeds, composting, vegetable plantations, and produce from kitchen gardens which also first came into being with the Wadi project. With this

money they bought oxen, grain and bricks to build their houses. Most of the women are landless. With the income generating activities, they now have at their disposal sums of money that would earlier have been completely inconceivable. "This is enormous progress for us, as is our taking part in a literacy course. It takes place once a week, and is run by Paruben. All the families send their children to primary school. Even our men folk no longer drink," recounts Zipariben proudly.

The method of dealing with poverty at the grassroots level as it is practised in the Talukas of Vansda and Dharampur seems to be very promising. The Adivasi families are involved in the project right from the start. They take on more and more responsibility. They build co-operative self-help groups. In the next phase, they devote themselves to the processing and marketing of their produce, and after the end of the counselling provided by BAIF and DHRUVA, the project, which would then have become a part of their daily lives, will be directed by the Adivasis themselves. □

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## First books on EXPO 2000 published

Although EXPO 2000 has not yet begun, the first books on the first World Exposition in Germany are already being written. The focus of the recently launched book series is the Thematic Area of the World Exposition - the central world-of-adventure at EXPO 2000, embodying the key theme "Humankind - Nature - Technology". The best ideas and solutions for the challenges facing us in the 21st century will be presented in Hannover in an exhibition covering 100,000 square metres. □



The flags of countries which are participating in EXPO 2000, are flying in front of the New Town hall in Hannover.