

## Friends of VSSM & Dharampur

C/o. Rashmin C. Sanghvi

220, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Arun Chambers, Tardeo Road, Mumbai - 400 034, India.

Tel. : (+91 22) 2351 1878, 2352 5694 • Fax: 2351 5275

Website: [www.rashminsanghvi.com](http://www.rashminsanghvi.com) • E-mail: [rashminsanghvi@gmail.com](mailto:rashminsanghvi@gmail.com)

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To,  
Friends of VSSM & Dharampur,

Dear friends,

### Re: Report of visit to Dharampur

23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2020

### Water Management (WM)

I am regularly visiting Dharampur and looking after different projects. My main attention is of course on water management. Even when I am in Mumbai, I spend on an average about two hours everyday on VSSM & Dharampur. However, for the last few months, my visit reports to you have been irregular. In this report, I am giving details of the work going on.

1. I and CA Shri Abhay Bhagat went from Mumbai On 23<sup>rd</sup> Morning. Naresh joined from Charoti. Naresh is a farmer from village Golvad, **Dahanu**. He is interested in learning water management. He will canvass the idea amongst farmers in Dahanu. Santu & Ladak will teach him details of water management and Abhaybhai will finance the expenditure. Let the concept of water management spread as much as possible.
2. **Shift from Vanpath to Avalkhandi:**

As informed earlier, Shri Bhikhubhai Vyas and Smt. Kokibahen Vyas had been conducting water management programmes for last more than 20 years. Now because of their health and age they are reducing their work. They are not inclined to continue with water management work. Even on education front, they have reduced the work. **Mr. Santu Dodka** and **Mr. Ladak Valvi** were the chief karyakars of Vanpath Trust looking after the water management work for all this period. Now both have been employed with **Avalkhandi Kelvani Trust (AKT)** and the water management projects are conducted under AKT.

Under Vanpath Trust, the annual budget for water management (WM) was approximately Rs. 11,00,000. AKT had its own independent programme of WM hence, we had targeted for a budget of Rs. 20,00,000 under AKT. Friends of Dharampur have already donated Rs. 20,00,000 for this project. On

23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> March, I visited Dharampur and had a detailed look at several different projects; and potential for more work. After my visit the budget has been increased to Rs. 50,00,000.

### 3. New areas within Dharampur:

Some time back, we had a meeting at Dharampur amongst - Miss. Sujata of Sarvodaya Parivar Trust, Santu & Ladak, Mr Girish Saive and myself. A theme was discussed: Vanpath and Sarvodaya Parivar have done water management in certain areas of Dharampur and Kaparada. (Both together are known as Dharampur.) Villagers living in these areas have benefited in terms of two crops per year. Now we should start a new phase. Dharampur is very large area and still a lot of areas have not benefited from water management. Hence, Santu and Ladak have now started water management work in new areas.

Dharampur consists of several lines of mountains. These lines have been covered by different roads and it is convenient to work on one particular road for water management at a time. New areas started by Santu & Ladak under AKT are hamlets of Shingarmal, area from Avalkhandi to Khoba and other areas.

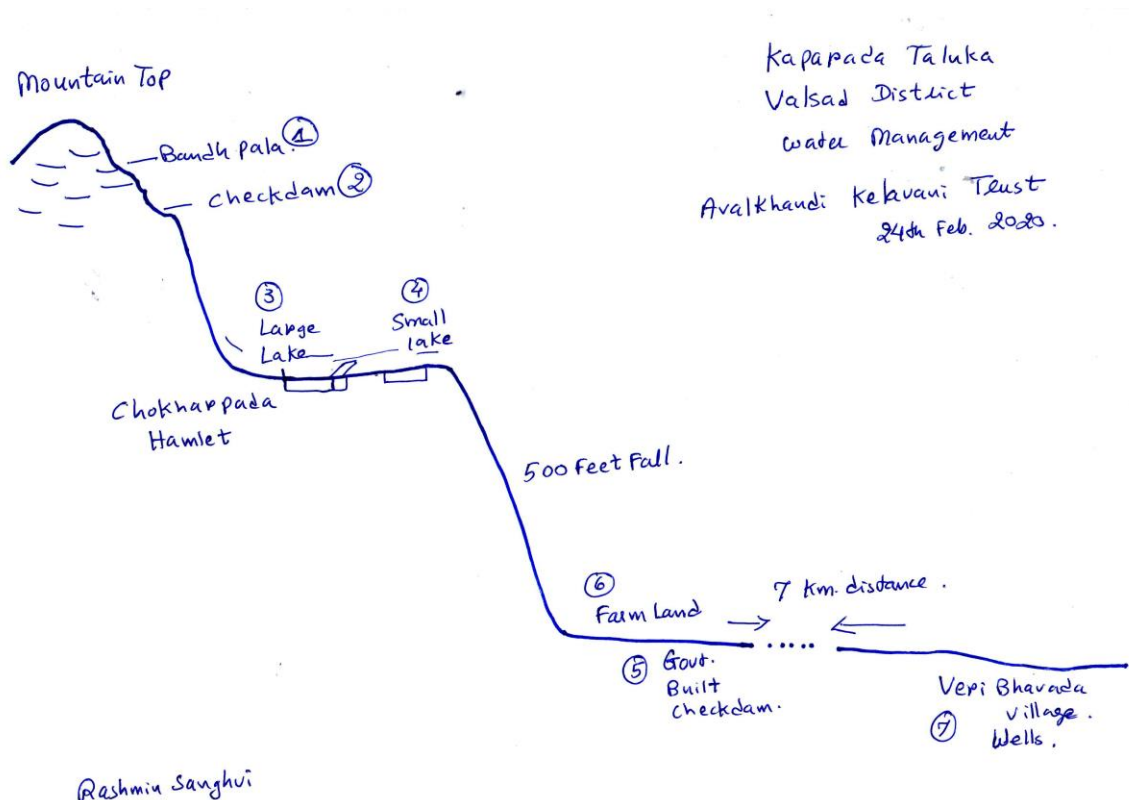
### 4. Chokharpada & Veri Bhavada Water Management:

At around 2.00 p.m. on Sunday, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, we reached hamlet **Chokharpada**. Santu & Ladak (S & L) explained the water management that goes on in village Chokharpada. **Veri Bhavanda** (VB) is a village with some Hamlets in Kaparada. Chokharpada (CP) is a Hamlet of Veri Bhavada situated in the middle of a mountain. Veri Bhavanda main Hamlet (मूलगाँव) is situated in the valley.

At the top of the mountain, Bandhpala work has been carried on. At a little lower level, a check dam has been made. At the Chokharpada level, there is a place where rain water from three different sides comes in and forms one stream. At this place, Vanpath Trust had built a relatively **large check dam**. This made a large lake. In the year 2019 monsoon, there was excessive rain fall and the **dam broke down** at overflow point. The same dam was also used as the bridge connecting two sides of the stream. When the bridge broke down, people suffered hardships in travelling from one side to another. Hence, Santu requested that we should finance the reconstruction of dam. Now, instead of an earthen over flow point, S & L will build a reinforced cement concrete dam-cum-bridge at the over flow point. Chokarpada Hamlet people will contribute in terms of labour, and partial cost contribution. AKT will contribute steel, cement & other construction material.

### 5. Water Management Diagram & Explanation:

S & L have planned and executed an elaborate water management plan at Chokharpada. Please see the diagram below:



At the top of the mountain several **bandhpalas** (No. 1 in diagram) have been built. These help in preventing soil erosion and water percolation to the underground. One small check dam has been built on the mountain (2).

Then at Chokharpada level a large lake has been built (3). This lake gets water from (i) rainfall; and (ii) continuous streams from the mountain which have emerged due to bandhpala & check dam. It is reserved throughout the year for animals. No farmer takes water from this lake for irrigation.

Two hundred feet after the overflow point of this main lake is built another check dam by Gujrat Government (4). This dam has created a third lake in the system. Good quantity of water remains available in this lake for winter crop irrigation. Different farmers tap this water by water pipes and carry the water to long distances by the principle of Buck Tube, and by gravity.

S & L showed us the farms growing vegetables in February - winter crops.



Santu, his wife Siti & their son



Vegetable (ચોળી) at Santu's farm

With the elaborate water management systems tremendous amount of rain water percolates into the ground & recharges the water table. This underground water moves and recharges more than ten wells in the Chokharpada to Veri Bhavada Valley. S & L showed us a well at a distance of seven Km. from Chokharpada lake – which is getting water supply even in February. (No. 7 in the diagram.)

#### 6. **Past Difficulties at Chokharpada:**

During my earlier visit, the villagers at Chokharpada hamlet had told me, as under:

Before this water management system, the villagers were very poor. After November, the lake & wells in the hamlet would go dry. Village cattle had to be taken down the mountain valley – without any roads – and a few Km into the Veri Bhavaada village – just for drinking water. The shepherds managing the cattle could not afford slippers. They would use vines / strings to tie leaves under the feet to walk through the mountains.

All that has changed. Now monsoon crop as well as winter crop are guaranteed for the farmers who have their farm lands which can irrigate their lands with this Water Management system.

I asked – “ What about the village farmers who have their farm lands on top of the mountain & cannot access WM system for irrigation ?” Santu said that the mountain top is made of hard rock. It is very difficult to have a WM system on the top. I have requested him to think about a way for helping these farmers on top of the mountain.

**Two happy developments: Paragraphs 7 & 8 below.**

## 7. A New Motorable Road

S & L work in very difficult mountain terrain. Many places are such that only villagers can go by foot. No vehicle can go there. A few years back S & L requested us for contributing Rs. 10,000 for making a new jeepable road in Chokharpada mountain. With this money, they contracted earth-moving machinery (JCB) and carved out a new road in the mountain.

On 23<sup>rd</sup>, they took us through this road by a village jeep. Our Innova would simply not go on such a road. At the end of the road S & L showed us **full green farms & horticulture plantations** – all made possible by irrigation from lake (4 in the diagram).

Once the road was available, they requested appropriate department in Government for a **check dam**. Government approved a budget of Rs. 6 lakhs for construction of check dam in the valley of Chokharpada. And one more lake has been created. Contractor was worried about risks to his equipments in going to such difficult places. Santu spent his one month's salary to make things easier for the contractor. One more well has been built by panchayat costing Rs. 10,000.

Against on expenditure of Rs. 10,000; the area got benefit of a good check dam costing Rs, 6,00,000. and a well costing Rs. 10,000. The water management system got strengthened.

## 8. Pandu:

In the year 2006, I had received a request from Dharampur for help. One tribal was travelling by rickshaw. There was an accident & the tribal broke his leg. Under 108 system, Government ambulance admits a patient in the nearby hospital. Then Government duty stops. The patient has to pay for many different kinds of expenses. The tribal had no money. On his behalf Ladak requested for donation.

Friends of Dharampur helped. His total cost of medical treatment was paid. After the surgery and medical treatment, the tribal had to stay at home for a few months. He could not go for work. His home expenses were financed while he was recovering.



On 24<sup>th</sup> February we went to village Khoba in Dharampur. Mr. Nilam runs Lok Mangalam Vidhyapeeth in Khoba. This is a small hostel with thirty three students. The tribal cured in the year 2006 is now a teacher (**see photo**) at Lok Mangalam. His name is Pandu. He is perfectly healthy. Pandu said – his own weight is 52 kg. He can lift a load of 50 kg and transfer from one place to another.



Small contributions in time of need go a long way.

9. From Chokharpada we went to Shingarmal village, Pathar Pada hamlet. This is a new area within Dharampur. So far no water management work had been done here. Now S & L have held several meetings with the villagers and trained them into building bandhpalas. They showed us a few bandhpalas already built in the year 2020.
10. On 23<sup>rd</sup> night we stayed at **Avalkhandi guest house**. We had some meetings lasting late into night.
11. **Remembering Bad Old Days:**  
We may repeat here the old information about Dharampur.

We, in Mumbai get 24 hour water supply within our homes. There is no such water supply mechanism in these mountains. It is simply not practical for government to have any such system.

Only source of water from October to May is – streams, lakes & wells. Streams go dry by October / November. Lakes go dry in December and wells go dry by February. In absence of a village WM system, from March to May, the villagers suffer from absence of food & water. They have to migrate to cities as daily, road side labourers.

Cities get good water supply through the rivers which are fed by rains that fall on these mountains. With the elaborate water management system introduced in Dharampur, now many villagers get drinking water throughout the year and irrigation water for monsoon & winter.

**12. 24<sup>th</sup> morning: Avalkhandi – New lake & Well.**



New lake under construction at Avalkhandi under NAREGA scheme.

We went up the Avalkhandi mountain and saw both the lakes. Shri Abhay Bhagat saw the lakes for the first time. We explained how the lakes on the mountain have helped raising the underground water table. Several wells and borewells in different Hamlets of Avalkhandi have directly benefited from the lakes.





CA Shri Abhay Bhagat & Naresh inside dry lake on top of Avalkhandi mountain

AKT has developed a road of a length of about 1 k.m. **on the mountain.** This makes it easier to visit the mountain top, to maintain the lakes and support the water management system. However, every year due to heavy rains, the road was getting damaged. Hence, this year, AKT has carried out necessary improvements in the road. We hope that now it will not break down due to rains.

While improving the road, S&L spotted underground water in a small pit. Hence, they got it dug out. It was clear that in this new spot, underground water from Santu lake was coming. The people living in the nearby Hamlet – Rasta Falia were very happy and enthusiastic. In a mountain where ladies carry water on their head and travel long distances up and down the mountain, getting water near homes becomes very helpful.

AKT has agreed with the villagers and has started the work on the well on the following understanding: The villagers will do the labour free of charge. Bricks, cement and other material necessary for construction of well as well as the cost of JCB for digging the well will be paid by AKT. People happily agreed. The well is almost complete. By the time, you get this report, people would be using the water for their portable home uses.



New well under construction at Rashta Faliya, Avalkhandi



### 13. Khoba Village:

From Avalkhandi we went to Khoba village. Mr. Nilam Patel is running a small hostel with 33 students at Khoba. He was away from the place but his teacher Mr. Pandu Armatha was present. (See paragraph 8 above) We met him.

Then, Santu and Ladak took us to different places where bandhpalas were being built. In one place, there were almost 40 people – men and women working on a large and long bandhpala. The system in the villages is such that one farmer starts his work on his farm land. Other farmers of the village help in completing his bandhpala. Then the second farmers starts, again all the villagers help him. Like that most of the villagers who can benefit by bandhpala are covered. As discussed earlier, bandhpalas help in prevention of soil erosion, reclaiming land, converting slopes in to flat land, so that good crop can be taken and percolation of rain water into the ground. There is a direct increase in the income of the farmers because of bandhpalas. AKT calculates the number of days' labour put in by the villagers. Current NAREGA rate for labour charges is Rs. 200 per day. Villagers working on bandhpala are paid half the wages because they are the direct beneficiaries. This payment is made in kind – in terms of rice or tur dal or moong depending upon the choice of the villagers. This is a direct – **“Food for Work” programme.**

In this place, the farm land is on the banks of the river. This year, because of the excessive rain, there was flood in the river and a large portion of the land was washed out. Last year where there was a farm land, this year, we can see the river. Getting a flat land in Dharampur Mountain is very difficult. When they lose valuable land because of the flood, it really hurts them. With this bandhapala and some work in the river, we hope to prevent the land erosion due to flood.



How heavy stones are moved for Bandhpala

This work was never done through an NGO in Khoba. Hence, the villagers were very happy that we had started the work there. All the 40 villagers working on the bandhpala came to meet us and requested me and

Santu to talk with them about the benefits of water management system. They were all very positive and enthusiastic about the work.



Khoba villagers building Bandhpala

Santu and Ladak had taken us to a place where there are motorable or atleast Jeepeable roads. Hence, we have seen a limited number of bandhpalas. However, Ladak showed us **surrounding hills** on which a lot of bandhpala work was already completed. Both of them go to places where only tribal men can walk and then carry out water management work.

One thing that can be noticed in Dharampur is that here **men as well as women talk freely**. There is no gender bias. All are equal. In these remote places, the foreign invaders never reached. Hence, the women are not afraid of talking with outsiders. Equality in income and in decision taking at homes is quite appealing.

14. Santu and Ladak have held several meetings with villagers in this area. They have registered the names of **1,000 villagers** who will do bandhpalas in their own farm lands. On an average every villager will get **Rs. 2,400**. The total cost for these bandhpalas to AKT will be Rs. 24,00,000. Considering several other water management projects, this year, AKT's **total budget for water management will be about Rs. 50,00,000**.

We sincerely request for an additional donation of Rs. 30,00,000 to Avalkhandi Kelvani Trust.

With Best Regards,

For Friends of VSSM & Dharampur,  
Convenor

Rashmin Sanghvi