



# Management of the Commons: Building dialogues over water and governance

Location:  
Bhachau,  
Kutch

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Community members participating in the camel rally during the campaign  
Dushyant Mohil/WISA



The elders of the community explain the historical significance of Santosar pond in Kadol GP  
Dushyant Mohil/WISA

## Purpose and Issue

As rightly pointed out by Garrett Hardin in his essay on the “Tragedy of the Commons” (1968), the increasing individual welfare needs lead to the unregulated exploitation and degradation of these “commons”. Same is the case for the CPR (ecosystem surrounding Bachau block) of villages in Bhachau. Poor management of ecosystems and over reliance on service infrastructure is greatly affecting the ability of natural ecosystems. There is loss in agriculture yields and there is greater dependence on groundwater, pipelines for water (from dams and canals), with no alternate source if the water dries up. The impacts of climate change and extreme weather events have further degraded their condition, also with meteorological droughts on the rise.

A traditional village is known for the natural environment it is located in, governed within a Gram Panchayat (GP). Common property resources (CPR) are the land, water and forest resources within the larger ecosystem which have always been providing for the community for livelihood, health, culturally and aesthetically. Wetlands are vital for sustaining life and livelihood, they provide water for drinking, agriculture, livestock and other daily activities. The pastureland ensures that animals have enough grass to feed on and be healthy. The forests provide raw material for artisans to make products for the market, fuelwood for cooking, variety of fruits and vegetables among others. The maintenance of natural resources (ecosystem services) provide regulatory services such as drought mitigation, flood buffering and for sustaining biodiversity. They also have cultural significance according to the traditions, religious values, historical importance and natural heritage.

The decrease in the groundwater level further leads to increase in salinity; species of plants, grass, birds, animals and insects are disappearing that have played an important role in maintaining balance in the ecosystem. Especially at the times of drought, the wetlands are not able retain water and grass is unavailable for fodder. Over the years, there has been decreasing ownership, access and equitable rights over the CPR as well. Keeping this in mind, as part of the overall risk informed development initiative, a five-day awareness campaign on revival and management of the CPR was organized in 5 Gram Panchayats of Bhachau, Kutch.

*The community ownership over these common property resources has faded away and it is important to create awareness about the degraded status of the common property and the need to revive them. No development can be effective if the environmental risks are not addressed.*



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Girls of Standard 8 of the school in Baniyari GP participate in the drawing event on the theme "Birds, Animals and Plants of my village"  
Aditi Sharan/UNNATI

The community members look upon the skit that narrates their story: the tale of the pastoralist community  
Aditi Sharan/UNNATI

The main purpose of the campaign was to:

- Bring attention to the degraded present condition of the CPR.
- Mobilise the local communities towards "community led ecosystem conservation and wise use".
- Identify the issues and concerns and come up with collaborative actions for their development.

### Outreach and Impact

Through this campaign, we reached around 900 hundred people directly, including 200 women and 500 children approximately. The community participated in the various events organized which included school events for drawing and essay competitions, a rally and transect walk, community meetings, skits and a snake and ladder game especially designed to understand the cause and effects of management and degradation of natural resources. The participation of the locally elected members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) not only validated the whole process but also opened avenues for dialogue on the subject. There was participation of the forest department from the government as well.

*The future of the CPR is essential for the prosperity and survival of both the people and the environment. The responsibility of the management of these ultimately lie with the citizens and their elected representatives.*



Children participate in spreading the messages on the importance of common property resources and their maintenance  
Aditi Sharan/UNNATI



Community members play the snake and ladder game while the others watch enthusiastically  
Aditi Sharan/UNNATI

The campaign brought the communities together and helped facilitate a dialogue over the loss of ecosystems. A major impact of the campaign could be that for the first time in a very long time, the community talked on these issues. The Panchayati Raj Institution members (body of locally elected members) engaged with the community with enthusiasm and pledged to address the raised concerns together. The discussions on the historical use and significance of these resources led to grave concern of the future of these which is essential for the prosperity and survival of both the people and the environment. The local solutions were deliberated and realized that responsibilities of the management of the commons ultimately lie with the citizens and their elected representatives. It was decided that these issues and actions will be addressed as a part of the Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs) the 5 GPs and action for support from the government will be initiated.