

Wadi Farming: Transforming the Lives of Marginalised Farmers

Doomar, a tiny village lying at the heart of Uttar Pradesh, is a predominantly agrarian community situated in the Robertsganj Tahsil of Sonbhadra District. With a population of mere 690 people (as reported by 2009, statistics which would have since then multiplied) Doomar constitutes a relatively miniscule proportion of India's agricultural sphere. Vinod Ram is one such farmer residing in the Tedhwaten Tola area of Doomar, who makes a living through cultivation- the sole mode of income for him and his family. Located in a remote region of the state, the village is often neglected by the effects of development schemes and is in dire need of improved sanitation, infrastructure, education, and health facilities. The agricultural capacity of the village is further limited due to the scarce and irregular supply of water. As a result, a significant fraction of the land remains unirrigated. It is farmers like Vinod Ram and their families who bear the brunt of poor land and water conditions with crop cultivation restricted to certain



months of the year- leaving them without a source of income for the rest of the year. These farmers belong to various Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and are socio-economically marginalised.

The Wadi farming model is a sustainable tribal development initiative of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). Two or more crops are selected for intercropping to minimise climatic and biological risks and are planted along with fruit trees like cashews, mangoes, or litchis. This not only improves the water retention capacity of the soil but also provides the farmer with an alternate means of revenue during the months when there is no crop harvest. Development Alternatives reached out to farmers like Vinod Ram and organised a training seminar where these farmers were educated about the Wadi model and how they can incorporate it into their farming techniques. The model uses methods like stone bunding, and construction of trenches, platforms, ring wells, and check dams to bridge the gap created due to the dwindling water supply and deplorable soil quality. An agricultural expert from Development Alternatives guided Vinod Ram through the process of understanding and including the Wadi model in his farming routine. Vinod Ram availed LIC Housing Finance Limited's Holistic Rural Initiative for Development Action and Yield (HRIDAY) Scheme and received 100 plants of mango and guava that he could sow in his field besides other crops. A farmer having 100 fruit trees can on average earn ₹10,000 per month during the active season. This, in addition to conventional farming system radically upgrades the economic situation by providing the farmer with income in the months when there is no crop yield. The expert from Development Alternatives counselled Vinod Ram on the plantation, protection, and maintenance of plants under the Wadi model along with the use of sustainable farming techniques like organic fertilisers and multilayer farming. Thus, by obtaining technical and financial support Vinod Ram was able to access a better livelihood that could support the dreams of his children and open the doors to prosperity.

The Wadi model originated to socially and economically uplift farmers and women from tribal-dominated regions. It aimed to impart a new and enhanced ways of farming that not only brought economic wellness to disadvantaged groups but also started a sustainable legacy protecting the environment. Therefore, training initiatives by Development Alternatives and schemes like HRIDAY can significantly bolster the opportunities and the standard of living of poor farmers. These schemes can prove to be a breakthrough for the agrarian realm of the nation where millions rely on cultivation for their survival, providing the nation with food while they struggle to make ends meet. Training sessions similar to the ones held by Development Alternatives should be supported and popularised to spread awareness and enable affordable integration of the Wadi model by farmers. Hence, sustainable farming is the need of the hour and a metamorphic step in the upliftment of marginalised farmers like Vinod Ram.