

# CHECK DAMS HAVE CHANGED THE DESTINY OF VILLAGES

## CREATING ABUNDANCE THROUGH WATER



The work of Aakar Charitable Trust has impacted 540 villages, transforming the lives of approximately 6.68 lakhs people by providing the life-saving, life-sustaining ingredient – Water.

When I began this work, little did I know that it would become so big. I was not aware of my own potential. Even today, I feel that it is not me but Water itself that has wrought the miracle. We truly wanted to alleviate the miseries of the poor, impoverished farmers. From day one, we made them part of every decision making. While working with us, they always felt that they were moving towards realizing their own dreams.

Each one of the check dams has been the outcome of the unstinting efforts of our dedicated field workers who become one with the villagers. Our workers took on the mantle of the villagers' burdens, helping them to resolve their myriad problems. They motivated the villagers to contribute their part of the funds required for the construction.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Smt Amla Ruia has brought life-giving water to parched villagers through her water harvesting projects. She believes that the two foremost issues for our country are water and education. Aakar Charitable Trust has taken up both these sectors seriously, and Smt Ruia has made these missions her passion.

### Our modus operandi

We enter into a 70/30 partnership with the beneficiary society. We provide the expertise, the skill required for the construction along with all the cement, JCB, the entire cost of the masonry construction and two-third the cost of the earthen embankments. This comes to approximately 70% of the total cost. The villagers collect the stone and gravel required for the masonry structure and bear one-third of the labour charges for the earthen embankment.

This arrangement has made our work long-lasting. When people know that their hard-earned money has gone into the construction, they are ready to maintain it for generations to come. It

is a one-time expense which provides income for decades.

Thanks to the check dams, the farmers now have ample water in their wells. They can sow two to three crops every year and practice animal husbandry on a large scale. Dairy provides higher returns to farmers as compared to the income generated from crops. Today, the 387 check dams that we have built are giving the farmers a net income of Rs 1300 crore year after year.

From 2000 to 2005, Aakar Charitable Trust built 200 drinking water kund (ancestral type). In these kund, approximately one crore litre of pure natural drinking water from the rains is



collected year after year in the remotest areas where no municipal water is available. Here the villagers contributed 25% of the total cost. These kund have proved to be sustainable.

To encourage mass scale water harvesting by the villagers, the Trust organized the Aakar Jal Puraskar of Rs. 1,00,000. It was given annually in Maharashtra from 2003 to 2006 to the village that performed best in water harvesting.

### Check dams provide water, create joys

From 2006 up to February 2020, Aakar Charitable Trust spent Rs 17 crore in the check dam project, to which the farmers have added their own hard earned Rs 6.5 crore. Together, these 23.5 crores are giving these afore mentioned returns! Which stock market anywhere in the world can boast of such returns?

In order to ensure that this hard-earned prosperity does not get frittered away in addictions such as alcohol and tobacco, we make the farmers take an oath to give up the addictions and malpractices such as dowry, child marriage and mrityu bhoj. Thus prosperity reigns supreme. Joy returns to the villages wherever check dams have been built.



I always wanted to do an in-depth study of our Shastras. In order to spend long hours with each Shastra, I have translated Ashtavakra Geeta, Narad Bhakti Sutra, Shiv Sutra, Patanjali Yoga Sutra and Isha Vasya Upanishad into Hindi Poetry and set it to music. This has given me immense satisfaction and has enriched my life manifold. In the early years I pursued the hobby of painting vigorously and had my solo show at Taj Art Gallery, which was completely sold out

Aakar Charitable Trust owes its success and scale to the large-heartedness of our sponsors who generously donate for the noble cause of Water. Apart from our own CSR funds, there are several corporates such as Times Foundation, Shapoorji Palonji and my daughters' families that are always ready to lend us a helping hand with the funds. Several NRI groups of USA are collecting funds to help the needy farmers of India. The

farmers have tremendous faith in our organization, which they find corruption free. Therefore they come to us with requests to make check dams on their land. Seeing the phenomenal benefits that accrue to the farmers, we had decided to set a seemingly impossible target for ourselves – 150 check dams in one year starting from Oct 2019 to Oct 2020. Now with the pandemic, I do not know if we could still complete it. In March, work was in progress at 50 sites.

I appeal to everyone to be conscious and aware of the grave danger we are facing, given the levels of our surface and ground water. Let us all save, conserve and harvest the maximum amount of rain water that we possibly can. Let us learn a few lessons from Water itself, which sets no limits and knows no boundaries. By the natural capillary action of the soil, water travels to distant areas and recharges hundreds of wells without prejudice of caste and creed. Let us break all communal walls that are tearing apart the country and causing immense discord among people. Let us give ourselves at least a global identity if not a cosmic identity of Aham Brahmasmi, which means I belong to the cosmos and the cosmos belongs to me. Jai Hind, Vande Matram.