

**AN ASSESSMENT OF
MAHARASHTRA VSTF
STRUCTURE AND
FUNCTIONING WITH
FOCUS ON WASH AND
REQUIRED CAPACITY
BUILDING**



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Submitted to

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Submitted by

SIGMA Foundation



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List of Abbreviations

ADM	Additional District Magistrate
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
AWC	Anganwadi Centre
BDO	Block Development Officer
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMRDF	Chief Minister's Rural Development Fellow
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DE	District Executive
DPLO	District Planning Section
Dy.CEO	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FHTC	Functional House Tap Connection
FPO	Farmer's Producers Organizations
GoI	Government of India
GoM	Government of Maharashtra
GP	Gram Panchayat
GPDP	Gram Panchayat Development Plan
HDI	Human Development Index
HH	Household
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IDI	In-depth Interview
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IHHL	Individual Household Latrine
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
JFMC	Joint Forest Management Committee
JJM	Jal Jeevan Mission
KVK	Krishi Vigyan Kendra
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
MSRLM	Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission
MVSTF	Maharashtra Village Social Transformation Foundation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NOFN	National Optical Fibre Network
O&M	Operations & Maintenance
OD	Open Defecation
ODF	Open Defecation Free
PDS	Public distribution system
PMAY	Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana
PWS	Piped Water Supply

SBC	Social Behaviour Change Communication
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SHG	Self Help Group
SLWM	Solid and Liquid Waste Management
TADP	Transformation of Aspirational Districts Programme
TOC	Theory of Change
VDP	Village Development Plan
VHND	Village Health and Nutrition Day
VO	Village Organization
WASH	Water Sanitation & Hygiene

Executive Summary

Chapter I: Background

- In August 2016, VSTF was established to create a unique platform wherein the GoM, the leading philanthropic organizations and the private sector entities through their CSR initiatives could work together resulting in a holistic and impactful convergence of government schemes after the successful implementation of the water conservation scheme known as the Jalyukt Shivar Abhiyan, as well as the soil conservation scheme named as Gaalmukt Dharan/Gaayukt Shivar.
- It was launched with the mission and vision to transform 1000 villages in Maharashtra having low HDI and facing social challenges into model villages by enhancing development indicators across sixteen focus areas derived from the United Nation's: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. Its strategy was to bring about wide-scale behavioural change to empower villages towards self-sustainable development, and establish a model that will be scalable across the state by 2019.

Objectives of the MVSTF

- The objective of MVSTF is to attain convergence of various schemes of the Government of India (GoI), the GoM and efforts of the corporates for transforming villages of Maharashtra. The villages affected by natural calamities like drought as well as those facing other social, economic, livelihood and infrastructural challenges are covered under this initiative.

Targets to be achieved in the villages covered under VSTF

- To move towards the mission, the following targets¹ were set: (i) Every household to have access to clean drinking water. (ii) Reducing infant mortality rate to the lowest level achieved in India i.e. 12 per thousand live birth, (iii) Doubling income of agricultural households, (iv) Doubling per hectare productivity, (v) Increase in Education index² to be the best in India, (vi) Reducing the share of population below poverty line to 7%, (vii) Every Gram Panchayat (GP) to have digital connectivity and access to internet, (viii) 100% pucca housing, (ix) Every household has a sanitary toilet with availability of water, (x) affordable and clean energy and (xi) Increasing tree cover.

Purpose of the present Study

- The programme is going to complete three years soon and a need for an assessment of the initiative was felt. UNICEF Maharashtra Field Office came forward to support the assessment of the programme. SIGMA Foundation, a not-for-profit organization, was engaged as the partner for taking up a study to assess the approach for development adopted and the implementation mechanism.

Chapter II: Methodology

- The approach of the study was to carry out a desk review of the WASH-related progress including cross-cutting factors like Nutrition, Health, Education and Behavioural Change

¹ ibid

²The Education Index is a component of the Human Development Index and is measured by combining average adult years of schooling with expected years of schooling for children, each receiving 50% weight.

for the selected 8 districts from the available data and information to identify the parameters on which the assessment will be carried out to identify the relevant issues associated with the stated objectives of the study.

Sources of Data and Method of Data Collection

- Both qualitative as well as quantitative data were collected. In-depth Interviews (IDI) have been conducted with key functionaries of Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti, GP as well as the Fellow. Also, VSTF annual report, Monthly Report, GP documents have been collected and consulted to capture evidence on the issues mentioned above. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) at community level were conducted to assess community participation in planning and implementation. Case Study method has been applied to record good practices and their replicability.

Developing the discussion points

- Considering desk review and all the secondary sources of data, discussion points have been developed for IDI as well as for FGDs. With IDI and FGD, qualitative data has been collected.

Analysis of Data and Report writing

- The data have been analysed to find out the effectiveness of the implementation arrangement, ongoing interventions for expediting the improvement of the selected indicators, the gaps and how those can be bridged. For data analysis, simple statistical tools have been used.

Chapter III: Implementation Approach and Theory of Change

Theory of Change

- Based on the processes to be followed, as mentioned in various documents and the practices observed, the study team has conceptualized a TOC for VSTF. Theory of Change have been presented as a causal pathway of for connecting the programme to the outcome.

Chapter IV: Implementation Arrangement and Targets to be Achieved

Implementation arrangement

- **Involvement of Lead Partner and NGOs:** VSTF has collaborated with reputed NGO's and Corporates who not only brought funds but also domain knowledge on related fields.
- **Districts covered:** 25 districts have been covered under the programme till 2019. These are namely, Ahmednagar, Amravati, Akola, Aurangabad, Beed, Buldhana, Chandrapur, Dhule, Gadchiroli, Hingoli, Jalna, Latur, Nagpur, Nanded, Nandurbar, Nashik, Osmanabad, Palghar, Parbhani, Pune, Raigad, Solapur, Wardha, Wasim and Yavatmal.
- **District Mission Council:** Every district covered under VSTF has one District Mission Council as mentioned in the GR dated the 29th December 2016. The District Magistrate is the Chairperson and other members include the CEO, ADM, Dy.CEO etc. The key responsibilities of the Council are to review progress and guide the planning and implementation.
- **Field Team:** In each district, there is one District Executive (DE) except in Amravati, Chandrapur and Yavatmal there are two District Executives. The DE has to monitor and guide the Fellows, to liaison with Collector Office, Lead Development Partners and is the

link between the Fellows and the VSTF head quarter. At the village level, there is one Chief Minister's Rural Development Fellow (CMRDF) in each GP which are covered under the programme. The Fellows have to stay in the village and work in close association with the GP. They work from the GP office.

- **Village Development Plan:** The core interventions in the villages are to be achieved through preparation and implementation of the Village Development Plan (VDP). The Fellow is responsible for preparation of the VDP with participation of the villagers and has to work closely with the Gram Panchayat (GP) in that process.
- **Funds:** Every VSTF village is assisted with Rs 10 lakh over a period of three years. This is the seed money to leverage funds from other sources to create a bigger impact, which worked well.

Focus of VDP and Indicators of progress

- VDP is focusing on various areas of development. The study has identified 47 major indicators of progress under various thematic areas like promotion of sustainable Agriculture, Healthy lives and well-being, Education Gender equality, Water and Sanitation for All, Affordable and clean energy, Decent Work for All: Skill Development, Build resilient infrastructure: Rural Housing and Climate Action.

Weakness in the implementation arrangement

- The targets to be achieved and the various dimensions to be covered appears to be very high compared to the rather weak implementation arrangement that has been put in place. Better institutional arrangement could have led to more coordination and convergence.
- There was similar institutional weakness at the district level and though the Collector and the CEO extended support to the DE but coordination with so many district level officials was difficult due to (i) weak administrative position of the Fellow and (ii) there was no other supporting hand to help the DE.
- **Critical role of GP:** The Fellow had to work from the GP office and that is the only institution at the village level which can intervene in both improving supply side arrangement as well as mobilizing the people to demand services and to ensure quality. The GPs of Maharashtra, like many other States are weak and their strengthening is one of the critical steps for sustainable rural development.
- Transformation of the society has to be owned and driven by the community. But there is inadequate IEC (Information, Education and Communication) and SBCC (Social Behaviour Change Communication).

Capacity of the implementation machinery

- The success of VSTF is critically dependent on the competence of the Fellows to facilitate the process of development by working with the community. VSTF Fellows and the DEs were trained in YASHADA at the initial stage and a few other trainings later. However, there is much scope to improve their capacity. Also, sensitization of the line departmental staffs is needed. Their orientation was mostly through attending the review meetings. The study found that there were substantial gaps in capacity and all the Fellows wanted to have more orientations on a regular basis.

Monitoring of progress and supervision

- There are monitoring at multiple levels starting from the Fellows through a process of self-assessment using an online system. Fellow reports his/her daily work in an online format where there is a scoring system. BDO monitors the progress in the monthly meeting as well as pre-planned visit. There is also district level monitoring by making a district self-assessment every month and to discuss the gaps and drawbacks. The District Executive sends the consolidated report to VSTF headquarter at Mumbai. The District Collector as the head of the District Council reviews the progress of every month in the presence of CEO, District heads of different departments, Block (Taluka) level heads of different departments, BDOs, Sarpanch, Gram Sevaks, District Executive of VSTF and CMRDFs. There is also a system of Half-yearly and Yearly reviews of VSTF Fellows.
- There was no scope to compare the performances of the GPs and to create competition for more proactive actions by the GPs.

Chapter V: Village Development Plan and Its Implementation

Village Development Plan Formulation and its Implementation

- VDP is a 3-year plan and includes the targets of GPDP which is based on a 5-year perspective plan. Both the plans are passed in the Gram Sabha year-wise and the activities are prioritised at the Gram Sabha. Both the GPDP and VDP are to be integrated plan considering all the potential funds or support available to the GPs.

Convergence with district plan and line departmental activities

- Maharashtra spends substantial fund under District Plan. However, there was little integration between the VDP and the District Plans.
- Since many of the activities were dependent on the support and timely release of funds by various departments, there has been often delay in implementation.

Chapter VI: WASH Status in VSTF Villages

Progress of WASH made in the VSTF villages

- To understand the progress and effectiveness of the VSTF programme, the data of two randomly selected villages supported by VSTF have been compared with two randomly selected GPs which are not supported by VSTF across eight selected districts of Maharashtra. The data have been downloaded on 11th February 2020 from the 2nd phase of ODF verification website. A team of SIGMA Foundation visited the VSTF villages across these selected eight districts every quarter and a total of 20 villages have been visited from July to December 2019 and collected primary data through field observations as well as interaction with 226 households, selected at random. These data have also been analysed and a glimpse of the status have been reflected here.

WASH status of the HHs

- **Status of 2nd phase of ODF verification:** Overall, the coverage in VSTF GPs is much higher indicating better response of the VSTF villages in assessing their ODF status.
- **Sanitation status in the selected villages**

The status of sanitation in VSTF villages was comparatively better. The data of the primary survey of SIGMA Foundation shows that 85.8% of the HHs had access to Individual

Household Latrines (IHHLs) while 10.6% of the households did not have any access to toilets.

- **Functionality of the toilets:** Out of all the HHs having IHHLs, 99.3% and 98.5% toilets are functional in the selected VSTF and non-VSTF villages, indicating a marginal better status for VSTF villages.
- **Reasons of toilets being defunct:** From the survey it has been found that the main reasons of the toilets being defunct are lack of maintenance (69.2% in VSTF villages and 24% in non-VSTF villages) and absence of water (30.8% in VSTF villages and 70% in non-VSTF villages). In 6% non-VSTF, gaps in mindsets is the reason for not using the toilet. It may be noted that preference for open defecation (OD) (52%) and lack of maintenance (28%) were the major reasons for not using the toilets as analysed from the data collected by SIGMA Foundation.
- **Usage of toilets:** 99.7% of the functional toilets were in use in the selected VSTF and non-VSTF villages.
- **Availability of water:** In 95.8% and 95.0% of the HHs, water is available in the selected VSTF and non-VSTF villages respectively. In this case also, the status of VSTF villages is very marginally better than that of the non-VSTF villages.
- **Piped Water Supply (PWS) coverage:** In the selected districts, only 58.0% and 55.4% of the HHs of the VSTF and non-VSTF villages were covered under piped water supply at an aggregated level respectively.

WASH status of the Anganwadi Centres

- The status of WASH in the ICDS centre was another parameter which has been assessed. 23 AWCs were surveyed across both VSTF and non-VSTF villages. VSTF villages of Washim and Gadchiroli have not been covered.
 - Sanitation status in the selected AWCs:** Out of the total 23 AWCs surveyed in the selected VSTF villages, 18 AWCs had toilets i.e., the sanitation coverage was 78.3%. On the other hand, 13 out of 23 AWCs (56.5%) of non-VSTF villages have toilet facility.
 - Functionality of the toilets:** Out of all the AWCs having toilets, 83.3% and 92.3% of the toilets in the selected VSTF villages and non-VSTF villages were functional respectively. This calls for more sensitization of the Fellows on WASH in institutions.
 - Usage of toilets:** It may be noted that all the functional toilets of the AWCs were in use in the selected VSTF and non-VSTF villages and thus, there was no difference.

Chapter VII: Capacity Needs of the Fellows and Related Issues

Capacity of the Fellows and the District Executive as critical needs

- Capacity of the Fellow as well as DE is a critical factor in achieving success. They have to have enough domain knowledge to interact with the departments concerned. At the same time, they need general understanding of the situations in the village. Further, the Fellows need to develop expertise and attitude in working with the community, should have

proficiency in using rapid participatory assessment tools and should also have good skill for communication.

- Transformation of the villages and its sustainability cannot be ensured without the GPs. Therefore, capacity of the GP is also critical in attaining the desired changes.

Assessment of the capacity building needs

- There were intensive interactions with the Fellows in different districts as well as there was a brain-storming session with a group of seven Fellows of Gadchiroli district in which the District Executive and one former CMRDF who is now working as the Aspirational District Fellow of the TADP for Gadchiroli were present.
- **Improving service delivery at the village level:** The Fellows were generally making interventions to improve delivery of existing services available within the GPs. There is need for more capacity in understanding and improving the governance processes and how community can be engaged for deriving full benefit, which also covers issues of equity and inclusiveness.
- **Strengthening delivery of WASH services:** Although there was orientation of the Fellows on WASH but the main focus was on sanitation and hygiene but the guidelines of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) was not issued. There is gap in capacity of the GPs and the Fellow, if properly oriented can help the VSTF GPs to utilize the 15th FC funds effectively.
- **Facilitating women empowerment through MSRLM:** The capacity of the Fellows needs to be enhanced to aware them on how the MSRLM can be used as an instrument for transforming the villages and how functioning of the VOs can be improved’
- **Promoting livelihood development:** Initiatives for sustainable economic development through strengthening livelihood opportunities is another area where the Fellows need orientation.

Capacity related to functioning of the GPs and convergence

- The Fellows may be trained to understand the issues of local governance, strengthening functioning of the GPs within the existing devolution and organising convergence meetings. The process will be made easier if the GP functionaries (Sarpanch and the Sachiv) and the Fellows are trained together at the beginning of the programme and their mutual responsibilities are clarified.

Strengthening skill for communication

- Another category of need for capacity building of the Fellows is improving their capacity on effective communication with the community for generating demand on the services.

Capacity related to monitoring

- **Monitoring and analysis of data for evidence-based interventions:** That will require special orientation of the Fellows.

Need for continuous training and learning

- The VSTF authorities may consider roping in suitable knowledge partners to meet the capacity gaps in both formal institution-based training as well as providing lessons on distant mode based on need.

- However, to meet the immediate need it is proposed to provide one round of training to meet the more critical needs of general nature.

Chapter VIII: Key Recommendations for Strengthening VSTF

- Transformation of the villages not only need development of infrastructure to support better quality life but also the human resources and how they remain engaged in their own development.
- Strengthening the GP as an institution for local governance could facilitate and sustain the process of transformation better.
- The prior orientation of the Sarpanch and the Sachiv about VSTF before any Fellow is sent to a village, through a joint orientation of the Sarpanch, the Sachiv and the Fellow will help easier and faster acceptance of the Fellow and in extending necessary cooperation by the GP.
- The Fellows should be associated with improvement in institutional functioning of the GPs for leaving a more empowered and capable local government to take care of future needs of development.
- There is a need for improvement in strengthening the competency of the Fellows and the quality of support they need from the line departments to perform effectively.
- Apart from enhancing expenditure through schemes, improving processes for achieving better quality and efficiency in service delivery with inclusiveness and equity at the village level needs to be given due importance.
- Improvement in the system of functioning should be attempted in respect of (i) the service delivery institutions such as the schools, the health centres and ICDS Centres and the Public Distribution System (PDS) and (ii) functioning of the Community Based Organizations like the Village Organizations (VOs) and (iii) the Clusters of the SHGs and the Farmer's Producers Organizations (FPOs).
- There is a need for more convergence between the MSRLM and the VSTF.
- The Fellows are to be trained on how they can strengthen the VOs as well as how the VOs can be used to mobilize their members/community for self-development.
- The FPOs should be strengthened to work towards realizing the goal for enhancing agricultural income and the Fellow can mediate to resolve the barriers with support of the officials of the departments concerned.
- Augmenting irrigation facility by digging farm ponds, which can be done under MGNREGS can not only ensure proper Kharif production (mostly paddy) but the residual moisture can help to grow another winter crop
- A need for strong IEC for letting people know how agricultural production and income can be enhanced.
- It may be considered if an annual development fair can be conducted in each GP where representatives of all the relevant departments will attend, display their plans and programmes using easily understandable means and inform people how their services can be accessed to bring administration to the door step of the people.
- There is a need to develop a system of a monthly review of the progress of the schemes at the GP level. The meeting may be held on a fixed date, say first Saturday of the month so

that it becomes easier for everyone to attend without waiting for any notice. All the department concerned should instruct their field functionaries to attend the meetings to be convened by the GP.

- There should be a similar fixed day meeting, on another day of the month, with the extension officials of the Agriculture and allied department in which the FPOs and the VOs should also be invited. The GP will facilitate how agriculture in the GP area can be strengthened and the problems faced by the FPOs can be addressed.
- There is need to explore which types of economic activities in the secondary sector or even some of the primary sectors which the educated youths will be willing to take up (e.g., poultry, dairy, horticulture etc.) of any particular district/region and to extend skill development support followed by credit linkage. The State Level Bankers Committee and institutes developing skill training may be partnered to strengthen this sector.
- Priority should be given to impart skill related to primary sector of the economy for which one need not have to migrate in an adverse condition.
- It is advisable to check if the products being promoted as a means for expansion of livelihood have adequate marketing facilities. The Fellows may be appropriately guided about potential/likely problem/sustainability etc. of their interventions, where relevant.
- There has to be a proper HR development policy so that the Fellows keep on improving their capability on some general aspects of development as well as relevant thematic areas based on the need of the area/ priority of the Fellow.
- There is need for training every year on common issues and themes specific trainings based on need every year. There should be a partnership with organizations like Agricultural Universities/ KVKs which not only will train them up but will also provide support through distance mode/mentoring by supplying relevant literature, explaining various context-specific issues and clarifying doubts.
- In order to strengthen the capacity of the Fellows as well as to create a learning environment and keeping them motivated, the Fellows may be given the opportunity to follow an appropriately designed course on development through distant mode.
- The Fellows also expressed that the GRs relevant to various development programmes need to be shared with them and it would be better if the operational part of the same could be explained to them for taking appropriate actions.
- There should be a clearly identified process of preparation of the Village Development Plan for which an appropriate order may be issued, in line with the GPDP guidelines of the state but extended to all the sectors of development looked after by the line departments. The output of the plan should also be measurable in terms of progress to be achieved in respect of the SDGs. Ideally, there should be only one plan for the village covering all the said aspects
- There is little linkage between VDP and the District Plan. The District Plan should try to address the issues which cannot be resolved at the local level and have been communicated to be taken up from higher level.
- It will be easier to address the larger issues from the district level if the villages selected are in cluster rather than being in isolation.

- There is need to develop a database to be maintained for every village to assess their development objectively, to make score-based ranking. The scores should be worked out and the same should be shared in the Gram Sabha to develop an inter-GP competitive environment.
- The process of receiving support from the line departmental functionaries of the block needs to be institutionalized and its effectiveness should be followed up in the District Council meetings.
- In some sectors like housing, priority is being given to bridge the gap in respect of the VSTF villages within a short time period. However, the same is being done by diverting the allocation for other GPs, it may be considered if such an approach is desirable, particularly when it is not known whether the VSTF villages rank the lowest in the state/district in terms of shortage of housing.
- There should be at least a quarterly camp in each block where all the line departmental officers and the BDO together review the constraints being faced by the Fellows and how things may be improved. The DE should be present there to facilitate the process and take follow up measures.
- A block level official may be earmarked to be the Nodal Officer for the VSTF and all of them may be oriented for discharging their responsibilities.
- There is a need for strengthening coordination with the line departmental officials at the district level.
- All of the district level and block level officials should visit at least one VSTF village every month with prior intimation to the Fellow and the GP. The visit will help them to be exposed to the problems being faced at the grass root level and how those can be sorted out.
- The exit plan for a Fellow to be withdrawn from a village needs to be worked out. It may be wise to continue the association of the Fellow with the village through periodic visits for at least one more year.

Chapter I

Background

Introduction

1.1 The Government of Maharashtra (GoM), with support from corporates through their CSR initiatives, had begun pooling their financial and technical resources to support the flagship water conservation scheme of the state known as the Jalyukt Shivar Abhiyan, as well as the soil conservation scheme named as Gaalmukt Dharan/Gaayukt Shivar since 2015. Those are aimed at providing complete water security in drought-prone areas of the state. Successful implementation of those schemes led to a wider possibility of a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) between the GoM and India's leading corporates and philanthropic organizations to plug the gaps in development in rural Maharashtra and to achieve sustainable socio-economic development.

1.2 It was in this backdrop that in August of 2016, GoM decided to create a unique platform wherein the GoM, the leading philanthropic organizations and the private sector entities through their CSR initiatives could work together resulting in a holistic and impactful convergence for sustainable development of the villages of Maharashtra. The mission was to be accomplished through the establishment of the Maharashtra Village Social Transformation Foundation (MVSTF), which was registered as a Section 8 Company under the Company's Act 2013. MVSTF is a first of its kind non-profit organization, launched for the social upliftment and transformation of the villages in Maharashtra. 1000 low HDI (Human Development Index) villages across Maharashtra were to be transformed through this initiative in phases. Funding support from the corporate sector helped to make focused interventions in the selected villages and that provided the seed money to leverage other available scheme funds.

Vision of the MVSTF

1.3 The vision of MVSTF is 'To transform 1000 villages in Maharashtra, by enhancing development indicators across sixteen focus areas, and bring about wide-scale behavioural change to empower villages towards self-sustainable development, and establish a model that will be scalable across the state by 2019³'.

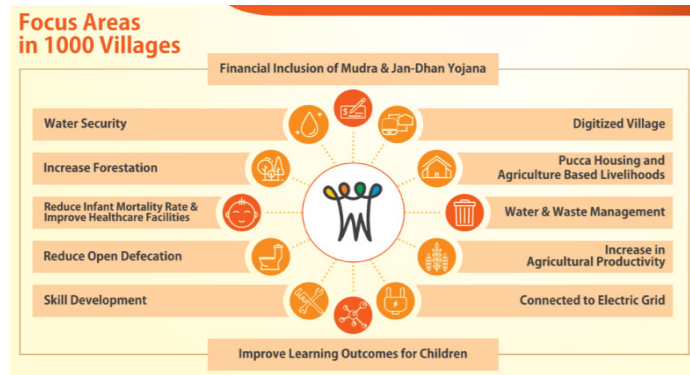
1.4 There are sixteen focus areas under MVSTF. These are derived from the United Nation's: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030⁴. These provide the framework of activities, measurable indicators and transformation targets under MVSTF. The thrust is on localizing the SDG for the villages and to give intense focus on 12 thematic areas as shown in Figure 1.1 next page.

³ Village Social Transformation Foundation: Annual Report 2017-18

⁴ <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

Mission of the MVSTF

1.5 The mission of MVSTF is to transform 1000 villages in Maharashtra having low HDI and facing social challenges into model villages by providing on-ground support and strengthening the last-mile delivery of government schemes in a more convergent and participatory manner.



Objectives of the MVSTF

1.6 The objectives of MVSTF are to support the Government of India (GoI), the GoM and efforts of the corporates for transforming villages of Maharashtra. The goal is to attain development in the selected villages at par with the highest-ranking village of the state based on identified indicators. The villages affected by natural calamities like drought as well as those facing other social, economic, livelihood and infrastructural challenges are covered under this initiative. The development in the selected villages will be guided by localizing the SDGs and the thrust area has been mentioned in the diagram above. The key components of the SDG like No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Wellbeing, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Clean Water and Sanitation, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reduced inequalities etc. are the focus area under the VSTF. Augmenting agricultural production has been one of the key areas for eliminating poverty and hunger.

Figure 1.1: Focus Areas of VSTF

1.7 The objectives are proposed to be achieved through a collaborative and focused effort to provide last-mile service delivery as well as to build infrastructure to empower the villages and to undertake development. The actual interventions will be as per need of the villagers and the local context. The success in achieving the targets for the transformation of the villages will be assessed through measurable indicators related to the said sectors. Also, there has to be self-sustaining development with the empowerment of the villagers and to establish a development model that will be scalable across the state.

Targets to be achieved in the villages covered under VSTF

1.8 To accomplish the mission, the following targets⁵ were set: (i) Every household to have access to clean drinking water. (ii) Infant mortality rate to be reduced to the lowest level achieved in India i.e. 12 per thousand live birth, (iii) Income of agricultural households is to be doubled, (iv) Doubling per hectare productivity, (v) Increase in Education index⁶ to be the best in India, (vi) Reducing the share of population below poverty line to 7%, (vii) To have digital connectivity and access to internet in every Gram Panchayat (GP), (viii) To achieve 100% pucca

⁵ ibid

⁶ The Education Index is a component of the Human Development Index and is measured by combining average adult years of schooling with expected years of schooling for children, each receiving 50% weight.

housing, (viii) Every household to have a sanitary toilet with availability of water, (ix) Affordable and clean energy for every household (HH) and (xi) Increasing tree cover.

Core Strategy: Convergence

1.9 A guideline was issued vide G.R No.: RDD - 2017/Circular. No. 56/UD-3 dated the 25th of September 2017 on how to leverage various government schemes for convergence. The policy to be adopted by the respective department was also briefly mentioned for ensuring convergence. The activities recommended to be taken up for leveraging and convergence include (i) Drought free village with complete water security, (ii) Development of human resource for ensuring water security (iii) Skill training and placement of all willing candidates in the formal sector, (iv) GP to have wildlife and biodiversity conservation mechanism in place with complete community participation, (v) Waste and Waste water recycling and treatment facilities, (vi) Introduction of organic farming methods, (vii) Complete afforestation of all degraded land (viii) protected farms through JFMC's, (ix) GP to be digitally connected through NOFN (National Optical Fibre Network) project, (x) Significant improvement in the learning outcomes compared to the baseline of all the children in the primary schools, (xi) GP to be Open Defecation Free (ODF), (xii) Significant reduction in IMR towards the state average, (xiii) Every household equipped with drinking water facility, (xiv) All eligible beneficiaries to have a pucca houses through Rural Housing Programme, (xv) All households either have LPG connection of clean cook stove, (xvi) Start-up India Mudra bank initiatives to be implemented resulting in a significant increase in number of rural entrepreneurs, (xvii) Every adult in the GP has a bank account, (xviii) All willing farmers to be provided with crop loan, (xix) All farmers in the GP are enrolled for agriculture insurance, (xx) All PDS services are ADHAAR linked, (xxi) Focused advocacy for convergence of all relevant initiatives, (xxii) Increased average monthly household incomes significantly, (xxii) Increased per hectare agricultural productivity and (xxiii) Road connectivity.

1.10 The programme is going to complete three years soon and a need for an assessment of the initiative was felt. UNICEF Maharashtra Field Office came forward to support the assessment. SIGMA Foundation, a not-for-profit organization, was engaged as the partner for taking up a study to assess the approach for development adopted, the implementation mechanism and achievement. SIGMA Foundation has done an assessment of the interventions towards the desired transformation of the villages. The process of identification of the interventions and convergence with different sectors like health, nutrition, education has also been studied. Besides these, coordination and all issues of governance including how the local governments are owning the task of transforming their villages have been studied. A theory of change of VSTF has been framed and in light of the same, the implementation structure, the challenges and suggested ways for improving structures as well as the functioning including interventions for improvement in the delivery of desired services have been assessed. There has been also an assessment of the progress of WASH in these villages.

Plan of the Report

1.11 The background of the study is the Chapter I of the report. Chapter II describes the methodology of the study. Chapter III presents the theory of change in the VSTF

implementation structure. Chapter IV discusses the implementation arrangement and Chapter V depicts the findings from the fields. Chapter VI makes an assessment of the status of WASH in the VSTF villages. Chapter VII reports the need for capacity building for strengthening the ongoing village transformation initiatives, particularly with more focus on WASH. Conclusion and recommendations are included in Chapter VII.

Chapter II

Methodology

Introduction

2.1 The study requires an in-depth understanding of the processes followed for transforming the villages in 8 selected districts – Nandurbar, Washim, Gadchiroli, Osmanabad, Jalna, Chandrapur, Pune, and Raigad, where VSTF is working. The study also needed to inquire into the associated institutional issues. The approach was to carry out a desk review of the WASH-related progress including cross-cutting factors like Nutrition, Health, Education and Behavioural Change for the 4 districts from the available data and information to identify the parameters on which the assessment will be carried out to identify the relevant issues associated with the stated objectives of the study. The objectives of the study call for a good understanding of the processes followed in Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and the outputs across the entire state. That requires an assessment of the processes followed in the preparation of the GPDP and its implementation⁷. The study also needs to inquire into associated institutional issues like a priority for planning, data management, monitoring, capacity building, community participation, etc. The approach was to review the secondary literature to identify the relevant issues associated with the stated objectives of the study and to design the study to collect primary data followed by the analysis of the same for getting insights on the issues. Further, planning and implementation are quite process-intensive, it was decided to capture both qualitative and quantitative data following an appropriate methodology.

Sources of Data and Method of Data Collection

2.2 The assessment has been done with respect to (i) the desired transformation of the villages, (ii) the process of identification of the interventions, (iii) convergence with other sectors like health, nutrition and education, women and children including linkage with SRLM, (iv) generation of employment under MGNREGS, (iv) issues of governance including how the local governments are owning the task of transforming their villages, (v) institutional strengthening, (vi) accountability mechanism to improve the delivery of services. Data was to be captured for the said assessments.

2.3 For the said assessments, both qualitative, as well as quantitative data, were collected. In-depth Interviews (IDI) have been conducted with key functionaries of Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti, GP as well as of the Fellow. Also, VSTF annual report, Monthly Report, GP documents have been collected and consulted to capture evidence on the issues mentioned above. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) at the community level were conducted to assess community participation in planning and implementation.

2.4 Case Study method has been applied to record good practices and their replicability. The gaps in capacity, ways of required capacity building and lessons learned from the good

⁷ For the guideline issued by Government of Maharashtra see GR No: GPDP-2015/Sr No.38/P.R.-6

practices have been appropriately worked out. Also, failure, as well as the steps taken to minimise it in the future, have also been studied. Further, the system of monitoring and course correction was reviewed with the help of secondary data by applying simple statistical tools for possible improvement.

Developing the discussion points

2.5 Considering desk review and all the secondary sources of data, discussion points have been developed for IDI as well as for FGDs. With IDI and FGD, qualitative data has been collected.

Analysis of Data and Report writing

2.6 The data have been analysed to find out the effectiveness of the implementation arrangement, ongoing interventions for expediting the improvement of the selected indicators, the gaps and how those can be bridged. For data analysis, simple statistical tools have been used.



Picture 1: Interaction with Service Providers, GP Functionaries and Community Members at Nagari GP of Gadchiroli District

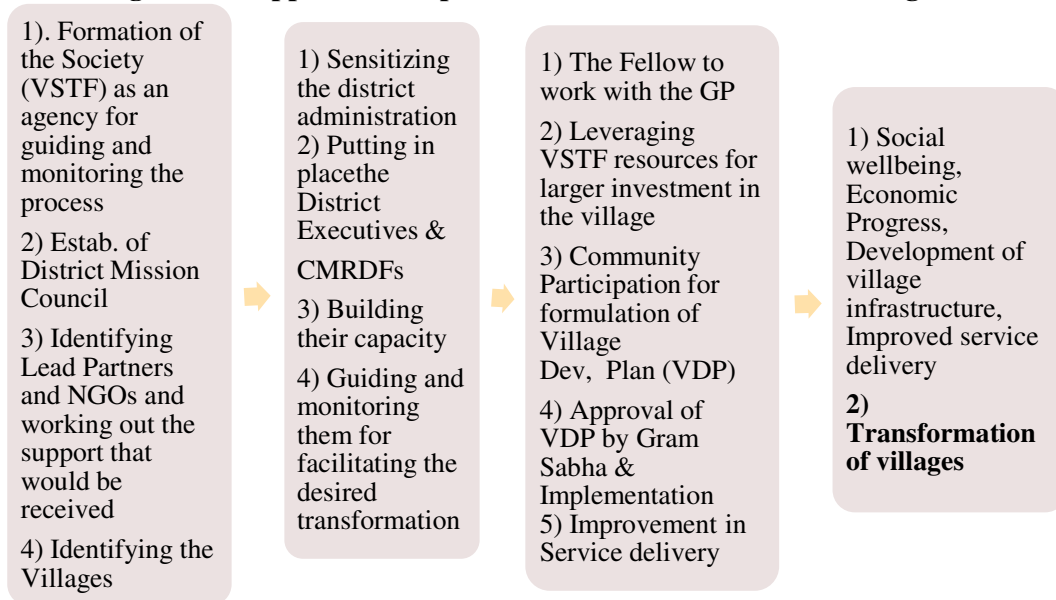
Chapter III

Approach for Transforming the Villages and Theory of Change

Approach for the transformation of the villages

3.1 The Government of Maharashtra has put in place an institutional arrangement for carrying out the task of the desired transformation of the villages in a planned manner through different interventions in the selected villages. The approach adopted is presented in Figure 3.1

Figure 3.1: Approach Adopted for Transformation of the Villages

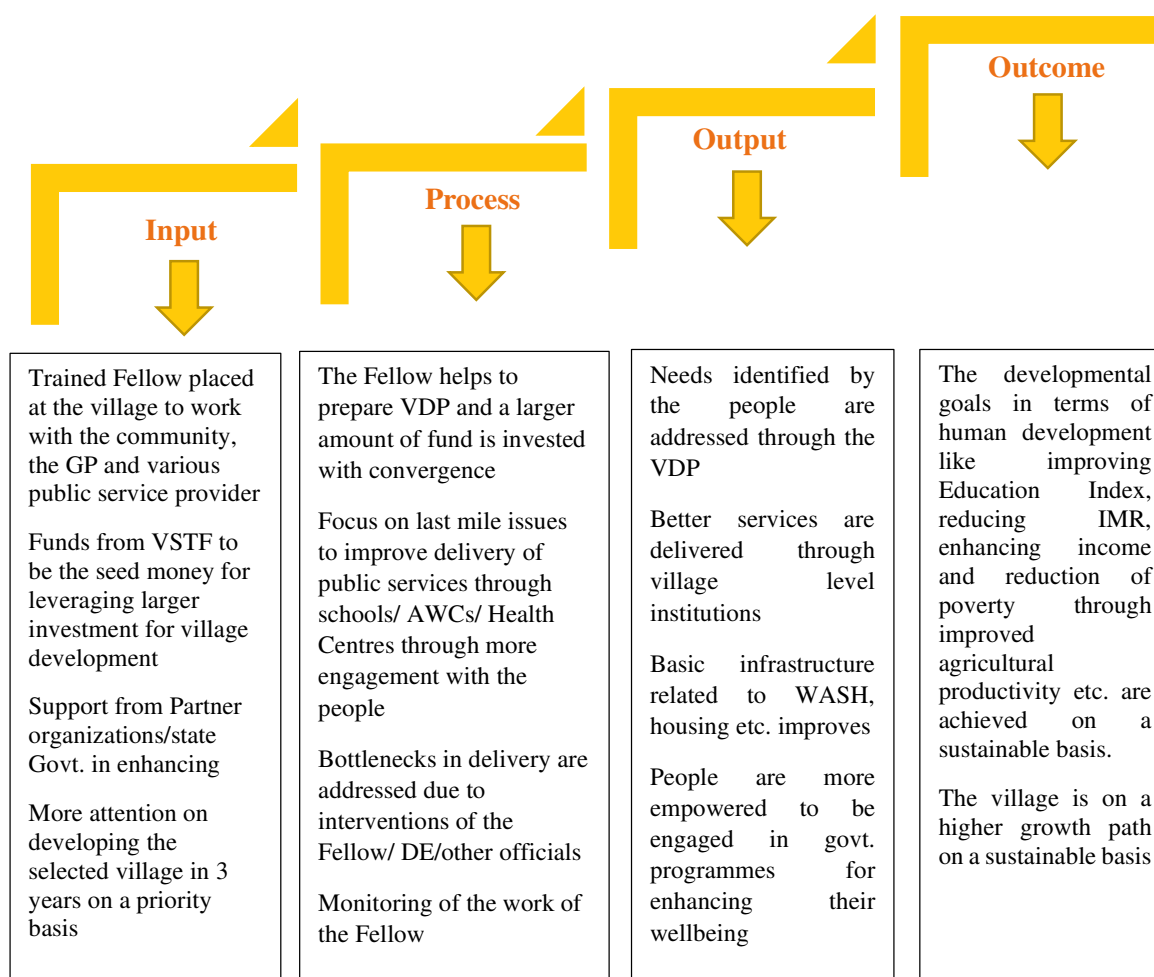


3.2 **Process adopted:** The key processes adopted for village transformation have been: (i) to place a young professional, known as the CMRDF (Chief Minister’s Rural Development Fellow or simply Fellow) to assist the GP and the community in their development, (ii) to prepare a Village Development Plan (VDP) to be implemented over three years in a participatory mode in consultation with the community and the GP, (iii) leveraging funds available from VSTF for village development by dovetailing funds from different sources including the CSR funds and scheme funds to ensure bigger impact in development of the village and (iv) to sensitize the community to participate in delivery of various public services and to also coordinate with the officials concerned for overcoming the last mile problems in reaching services to the people. The thematic areas on which priority was to be given have been mentioned in Chapter I and the progress was to be achieved measured by development indicators across sixteen focus areas. The Fellow was to also work to empower the community and the cutting-edge level workers delivering public services to make development self-sustainable and establish a model that will be scalable across the state.

Theory of Change

3.3 A ‘Theory of Change’ (TOC) explains how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts⁸. It can be developed for any level of intervention – an event, a project, a programme, a policy, a strategy or an organization. Based on the processes to be followed, as mentioned in various documents and the practices observed, the study team has conceptualized a TOC for VSTF to see the causal relationship between the interventions and the desired transformation for understanding whether the processes adopted by VSTF is well-tuned to achieve the desired goal. The conceptualized TOC is shown in Figure 3.2 below.

Figure 3.2: A Conceptualized Theory of Change for Village Social Transformation



⁸ Rogers, P. (2014). Theory of Change, Methodological Briefs: Impact Evaluation 2, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/brief_2_theoryofchange_eng.pdf visited 6th Jan,2020

3.4 The TOC presented above, though simplistic, brings out certain core issues. The programme presumes that facilitation at the village level by the presence of a Fellow and proactive support by the service delivery providers of different departments will result in the desired changes. It also presumes that there will be convergence of all interventions by various departments and people will participate in their development. This requires that all the government departments across various layers of administration work in synergy ensure the desired transformation through external facilitation. The epicentre of making all of them work in unison by a young Fellow, who is administratively ranked well below and located in a village may be problematic. With the limited ability of one individual, it may be possible to pursue only a few things and only with a limited number of providers. The extent of coverage will really depend on the support that would be received from various line departments and they come closer to the village as their commitment rather than one individual approaching all of them to deliver their services. The other aspect is that sustainable social transformation, as envisaged under the VSTF, has to be a process of empowering the community so that they become the drivers of change and can utilize all the public services and the opportunities to be on the desired growth path. The inputs planned have been more programmatic and not so much has been planned to induce change from within the community.

3.5 There are many structural factors both social and economic which result in vested interests to resist changes and to continue with inequity. Schematic interventions have limitations to address the structural changes and those issues remained unaddressed. For example, there have been little interventions to change the gender disparity, which is a barrier to social transformation. However, with the improvement of service delivery and more investment in the villages, there is likely to be a substantial improvement in the wellbeing of all the people, even if the issues of social inequity are not fully addressed.

3.6 The subsequent chapters critically examine the implementation arrangement put in place, which goes as input to result in changes, what processes could be actually followed to result in desirable outputs.

Chapter IV

Implementation Arrangement and Targets to be Achieved

Implementation arrangement

4.1 **Formation of Village Social Transformation Foundation (VSTF):** The VSTF has been established with the vision of transforming the 1000 villages of the state. Principal Secretary, Rural Development and Water Conservation Department, GoM are the Chairman of the VSTF Board and there are four other members from the corporate bodies outside the government. There are five Mentors and one Senior Advisor to guide the team. There is one Executive Officer with several experts from various disciplines to support the activities of the VSTF.

4.2 **Involvement of Lead Partner and NGOs:** As per the Annual Report VSTF, 2017-18⁹, 24 corporates and NGOs were involved in this endeavour of the GoM. VSTF has collaborated with reputed NGO's and Corporates who not only brought funds but also domain knowledge on related fields. VSTF has collaborated with several Lead Development Partner to converge their development activities in different sectors and in districts where they have experience and expertise.

4.3 **Districts Covered:** 25 districts have been covered under the programme till 2019. These are namely, Ahmednagar, Amravati, Akola, Aurangabad, Beed, Buldhana, Chandrapur, Dhule, Gadchiroli, Hingoli, Jalna, Latur, Nagpur, Nanded, Nandurbar, Nashik, Osmanabad, Palghar, Parbhani, Pune, Raigad, Solapur, Wardha, Wasim and Yavatmal.

4.4 **District Mission Council:** Every district covered under VSTF has one District Mission Council as mentioned in the GR dated the 29th December 2016. The District Magistrate is the Chairperson and other members like include the CEO, ADM, Dy. CEO etc. The key responsibilities of the Council are to review progress and guide the planning and implementation.

4.5 **Field Team:** In each district, there is one District Executive (DE) except in Amravati and Chandrapur there are two DEs. The DE has to monitor and guide the Fellows, to liaison with Collector Office, Lead Development Partners and is the link between the Fellows and the VSTF headquarter. At the village level, there is one Chief Minister's Rural Development Fellows (CMRDFs or simply called Fellows) in each GP which are covered under the programme. The Fellows have to stay in the village and work in close association with the GP. They work from the GP office. Thus, socially they are close to the villager and administrative they have to leverage the good office of the GP to strengthen last-mile delivery of all the

⁹ Accessed on 14st November from the website www.mvstf.org

programmes and enhancing the participation of the people for sustaining the development. The Fellows serve as on-ground eye and arm of the foundation.

4.6 Village Development Plan: The core interventions in the villages are to be achieved through the preparation and implementation of the VDP. The Fellow is responsible for the preparation of the VDP with the participation of the villagers and has to work closely with the GP in that process. Implementation of the VDP is another key responsibility of the Fellow. The VDP covers activities of many departments and uses their existing schemes for focused interventions in the villages towards attaining the objectives of VSTF. The core funding under VSTF is used to leverage funds from existing schemes of various departments. The Fellow has to liaison with the departmental officials, mostly at the block level and sometimes even at the district level through the DE or even directly.

4.7 Funds: Every VSTF village is assisted with Rs 10 lakh over a period of three years. This is the seed money to leverage funds from other sources to create a bigger impact, which worked well. Total schemes planned through the VDPs, as reflected in the Annual Report of the VSTF during 2017-18 amount to Rs. 756 crores across 11 districts taken in Phase - 1. In terms of convergence impact, VSTF's contribution was Rs. 27 crores across the villages of those districts which has resulted in net on-ground convergence impact of Rs. 253 crores, thereby implying a net impact of nearly 10 times for every rupee contributed by partners of VSTF through appropriate leveraging. The actual convergence amount is measured by taking into account only those works and interventions whose implementation is complete for a given outlay of funds. The remaining works worth Rs. 503 crores of planned convergence funds were being fast-tracked for implementation.

4.8 It may be mentioned that a recent study on GPDG it was found that the average annual plan size of the GPs of Maharashtra was Rs. 30.8 lakh in 2017-18¹⁰. Therefore, planned investment over three years is of the order of Rs. 92 crore. VDP is supposed to cover many more sectors of development and therefore requires much bigger investment than the allocated Rs 10 lakh per village. The amount which is being leveraged is also not real addition to the overall investment in the district from government sources. That raises a question as to whether the focus on the selected villages is at the cost of other villages. A similar concern has been expressed in a recent study by Pethe and Venkiteswaran¹¹. Therefore, it is more critical to be able to ensure convergence and improving the implementation of all the activities for better output and outcome.

Focus of VDP and Indicators of progress

4.9 Major thematic areas for being promoted under the VSTF are the following:

For the promotion of sustainable Agriculture:

- i. Improving productivity and total production of the farm sector

¹⁰ Strengthening Gram Panchayat Development Plan for Maharashtra: Study conducted by SIGMA Foundation for Govt. of Maharashtra with support from UNICEF.

¹¹ Pethe A and Venkiteswaran (2019): Impact Assessment Report: A Study of Village Transformation Mission.

- ii. Incomes of small-scale food producers (in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers),
- iii. Access to land and other productive resources and inputs,
- iv. Access to knowledge and financial services,
- v. Access to markets,
- vi. Opportunities for value addition
- vii. Opportunities for non-farm employment.
- viii. Sustainability of food production system: sustainable agricultural practices (whether it is maintaining ecosystems, strengthening capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme drought, flooding, and other disasters; improving land and soil quality)
- ix. Investment in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development, plant, and livestock gene banks

Healthy lives and well-being

- i. Reduction of MMR
- ii. Reduction of CMR (for 0-5 years)

Education

- i. Measures taken to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education
- ii. Measures taken to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- iii. Measures taken to provide free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education to all girls and boys
- iv. Improving learning outcomes
- v. Measures taken to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education
- vi. Access to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education for all women and men
- vii. Skill training (vocational as well as technical) of youths and adults
- viii. Measures taken to eliminate gender disparity in education
- ix. Measures taken to ensure equal access to all level of education as well as vocational training for the vulnerable including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
- x. Measures taken to ensure literacy and numeracy of a substantial proportion adults
- xi. Measures taken to acquire the knowledge and skills needed by learners to promote sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence and global citizenship, to appreciate cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Gender equality

- i. Effective participation of women and their equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.
- ii. Use of information and communications technology (for women empowerment)

Water and Sanitation for All

- i. Access to safe and affordable drinking water
- ii. Access to Sanitation and hygiene paying special attention to the needs of women and adolescent girls
- iii. Sustainance of ODF status
- iv. Participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management
- v. Measures taken for improving water quality
- vi. Augmentation of supply of freshwater to address water scarcity

Affordable and clean energy

- i. To ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- ii. Measures taken to expand infrastructure, upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all

Decent Work for All: Skill Development

- i. Increasing the proportion of youth having productive employment and decent work
- ii. The support given for productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation
- iii. Growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services
- iv. Measures taken for productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young with disabilities,
- v. Initiative for encouragement and implementation of policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products
- vi. Indications for the encouragement of financial institutions to expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all.

Build resilient infrastructure: Rural Housing

- i. Implement PMAY and other housing schemes to ensure Houses for all

Climate change-related action

- i. Awareness generation on climate change and its mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.
- ii. Capacity building both human and institutional on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction, and early warning.
- iii. Measures taken for climate change-related planning and management with involvement of women, youth and local marginalized communities

Convergence and Coordination

4.10 As the indicators above show, the successful transformation of the villages requires progress in many dimensions, which may be difficult to be addressed through the mere implementation of the VDP and that too within a period of 3 years. There is a need for strong convergence of activities of various departments and appropriate coordination. There has been no extra input at the block level to ensure and monitor the required convergence.

Weakness in the Implementation Arrangement

4.11 The targets to be achieved and the various dimensions to be covered appears to be very high compared to the rather weak implementation arrangement that has been put in place. The only extra human resources for achieving all the said goals are the Fellow at the village and the DE at the district. As the TOC present in Chapter III, there was a need to have appropriate inputs as well as processes by which the goals in multiple dimensions were to be achieved. The Fellow could not acquire adequate domain knowledge in all the dimensions of development and his/her success depends on the support that would flow from higher tiers, mostly the blocks administration. However, there was no institutional mechanism to facilitate and closely monitor the desired convergence at the block level. The BDO only reviewed the programmes once a month. However, some of the sectors came under the supervision of the Tehsildar, where the gap was more. The Fellow, being new to administration and outside the strongly hierarchical bureaucracy was not in a position to maintain coordination so strongly with all the block officials. There was, however, some achievements in this regard mostly due to the commitment and passion of the Fellows. Also, the effort was mainly from below (GP level) to coordinate matters at higher (Block) level but there was little reciprocation of block-level officials coming down to the VSTF villages for providing due support. A better institutional arrangement could have led to more coordination and convergence.

4.12 There was a similar institutional weakness at the district level and though the Collector and the CEO extended support to the DE, coordination with so many district-level officials were difficult due to (i) weak administrative position of the Fellow and (ii) there was no other supporting hand to help the DE.

4.13 VDP was to organize new developmental activities. However, the society is served by the existing public facilities and in many cases, failure of service deliveries is due to poor governance like weak accountability mechanism, poor O&M of facilities and poor monitoring, which is based on reports of implementing officials. There were little interventions for improving governance and delivery of services to the selected villages and to monitor the same.

4.14 The backwardness of certain areas has often externalities that cannot be addressed through village level planning. There are certain factors that require higher-level interventions and those were to be identified for appropriate interventions. The vacancy of workers at the cutting-edge level is one such factor, which was to be addressed.

4.15 **The critical role of GP:** The Fellow had to work from the GP office and that is the only institution at the village level which can intervene in both improving supply-side arrangement as well as mobilizing the people to demand services and to ensure quality. The GPs of Maharashtra, like many other States, are weak and their strengthening is one of the critical steps for sustainable rural development. There was little effort to strengthen the institutional functioning of the GP as the local government on a sustainable basis. Support of GP was sought for preparation and implementation of VDP and enabling the Fellow to work with other village-level organization. However, the GP functionaries were not properly oriented as to how the

Fellows can be of help. The Fellows generally got good support from the GPs but only after they were explained in-depth about the programme by the Fellows which took time.

4.16 Role of frontline workers: There has not been enough focus on improving the functioning of the frontline workers, such as ANMs/ Anganwadi Workers/ Teachers/ ASHA etc. There was no special drive by their respective departments to take up the challenge of transforming the village and to cooperate with the Fellow. Training of such workers were also not organized to build their capacity.

4.17 Community ownership: Transformation of the society has to be owned and driven by the community. The VSTF document also mentions of people's participation. However, there has not been a systemic arrangement of an intensive campaign towards educating the community about their backwardness and the role they could play in coming out of the backwardness of the area. Inadequate IEC (Information, Education and Communication) and SBCC (Social Behaviour Change Communication) to communicate to everyone as to the efforts the government has launched and how they can make the same successful.

The capacity of the implementation machinery

4.18 The success of VSTF is critically dependent on the competence of the Fellows to facilitate the process of development by working with the community. VSTF Fellows and the DEs were trained in YASHADA at the initial stage and that was followed by a few other pieces of training. However, there is much scope to improve their capacity. Also, sensitization of the line departmental staffs as to why they should pay more attention to the selected villages and how they could be more responsive to the issues brought to their notices by the Fellow/DE was limited. Their orientation was mostly through attending the review meetings. As the study found there is a need for a much deeper understanding of the developmental interventions by the Fellows and the GP and block functionaries. Also, the successful implementation of the programme requires good knowledge of all the programmes/schemes cutting across different sectors of development. The other critical requirement is to understand the functioning of the GPs so that the GPs could be strengthened to carry out the activities after the Fellow leaves the village. The study found that there were substantial gaps in capacity and all the Fellows wanted to have more orientations on a regular basis. Chapter VII describes the capacity building need of the Fellows in more detail.

Monitoring of progress and supervision

4.19 There are monitoring at multiple levels starting from the Fellows themselves through a process of self-assessment using an online system. Fellow reports his/her daily work in an online format where there is a scoring system. BDO monitors the progress in the monthly meeting as well as pre-planned visit. There is also district-level monitoring by making a district self-assessment every month and to discuss the gaps and drawbacks. The District Executive sends the consolidated report to VSTF headquarter at Mumbai. The District Collector as the head of the District Council reviews the progress of every month in the presence of CEO, District heads of different departments, Block (Taluka) level heads of different departments,

BDOs, Sarpanch, Gram Sevak, District Executive of VSTF and CMRDFs. There is also a system of Half-yearly and Yearly reviews of VSTF Fellows

4.20 The actual progress of the villages is to be known from the data on service delivery and infrastructures. There is no GP database to reflect the progress of any GP. There is a need to develop a GP database to know the progress of each GP based on certain indicators and to monitor progress regularly. The monitoring was centred around activities of the Fellow and progress of VDP. Due to the said limitation, there was no scope to compare the performances of the GPs and to create competition for more proactive actions by the GPs.

Chapter V

Village Development Plan and Its Implementation

Village Development Plan Formulation and its Implementation

5.1 The study found that VDPs were prepared in consultation with the people and the GP. VDP is a 3-year plan and includes the targets of GPDP which is based on a 5-year perspective plan. Both the plans are passed in the Gram Sabha year-wise and the activities are prioritised at the Gram Sabha. Both the GPDP and VDP are to be integrated plan considering all the potential funds or support available to the GPs. The GPDP is based on funds that is under control of the GP and the VDP includes in most cases activities to be supported by funds from line departments and other agencies.

5.2 The VDP lists the activities in different sectors along with the budget. The areas of focus of VDP were Women and Child development, Education, WASH, Agriculture, skill development and Environment. The document does not cover any visioning based on situation analysis and identification of the critical gaps and the reasons behind the backwardness of the village. The activities proposed under VDP, in many cases were identified intuitively as the Fellow or the GP functionaries thought or the external support that was available.

5.3 It has been reported that in some cases where the Fellow was not that proactive or assertive, the priorities for investing the village development fund of Rs 10 lakh were actually decided by the Sarpanch and the Sachiv and that was approved by the GP. There is need for more scrutiny of the VDPs and there could be some broad guidelines to decide on the priority and how to scrutinize the plans.

5.4 Share of public expenditure made through village-level plans like GPDP and VDP is still a very small percentage of total public expenditure controlled by higher tiers of the government. There has been very little linkage between the VDP and the District Plan, which were prepared to address the larger issues of the district. However, some extra efforts have been given for the development of the VSTF villages from the district level, as discussed later.

Areas of focus

5.5 The major areas of focus as found from the study were:

- **Housing for all:** CMRDF as part of data collection has gathered data on housing recruitments in their GP's. The administration has prioritized and approved the construction of housed in different villages.
- **Education:** Both infrastructures for educational institutions as well as the quality of Education was being improved in different districts. Teachers are being trained for activity-based Education in both AWCs and schools.
- **Improving infrastructures of the schools and AWCs:** This was a very common activity under which the schools and AWC buildings were painted and the community

also participated in such activities. These activities have made the learning joyful to the children.

- **Digitalization of classrooms:** Digitization of classrooms were being done with the VSTF gap funds and was a common activity.
- **Kitchen garden:** Kitchen gardens were being promoted in *Anganwadis* and schools to promote nutrition of the children.

- **Sanitation:** Awareness was being generated for sanitation and hygiene. Toilets were being constructed through SBM and MGNREGS to bridge the gaps in access to toilet and improving the quality of the toilet. Also, soak pits were being constructed. Good morning Clubs were formed to discourage villagers from open defecation.



- **WASH in schools/AWCs:** Access to water and sanitary facilities were improved and cooking gas connections were also provided.
- **Promotion of skill development:** Under Pramod Mahajan Kaushalya Vikas Yojana, youth were taking skill development training.
- **Supporting Agriculture:** Number of Farmers' Producer Groups (FPO) formed is one of the monitoring indicators of the activities of CMRDFs. FPOs were being promoted by some of the Fellows. Also, farmers were getting guidance on topics of vegetable cultivation, seed selection, insurance and method of drip irrigation.
- **Floriculture, sericulture, horticulture and organic farming:** The majority of the farmers were growing traditional crops and they were being motivated to use diversified crops.
- **A supplementary source of income:** Farmers were being supported in other activities such as Goat rearing, Mushroom farming and poultry farming etc. for augmenting their income.

5.6 No cost activities and other types of facilitation were found to have been carried out which did not involve any fund. A few examples are:

- **Maharajaswa Abhiyan (Revenue Department):** It was being implemented in GPs for submission of caste certificate forms, Aadhar, Ration forms, Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar forms in the camp. The villagers were benefitted by these documents in availing different government schemes.
- **Internet connectivity:** It was being facilitated in some villages to have more digital connectivity by facilitating the construction of communication towers by service providers.

5.7 However, the emphasis on no-cost and low-cost activities was sporadic. As mentioned earlier, improving the quality of existing services is critical to the development of the villages and many of the interventions for improvement of services are low or no-cost activities like mobilizing the people, informing them about the programmes and empowering them to demand the services. Such activities could be carried out more widely to improve the delivery of services, improve the quality of the existing services and ensuring inclusiveness and equity.

Convergence with district plan and line departmental activities

5.8 In Maharashtra substantial amount is spent on development every year under District Plan. However, there was little integration between the VDP and the District Plans and there is no systematic feedback for paying more attention to the VSTF villages to solve issues that are beyond the capacity of the GP and need external interventions. VDP attempts to take care of the very localized issues while District Plans focus on bigger issues having wider implications. Focusing on the issues of a few villages, that too located in a scattered manner, is perhaps difficult to be given priority from the district level. A cluster approach could make the desired support from the district easier. The extra effort was mostly programmatic in more focused implementation of the routine schemes in the VSTF villages.

5.9 In some sectors, the extra drive in VSTF villages was at the cost of other villages. For example, the VSTF villages have received a higher share of the houses to be built under PMAY for achieving the goal of housing. In many cases, these have been done by diverting quota of other GPs and the faster progress in VSTF villages have been achieved at the cost of delaying the delivery in other villages. In such cases, there was hardly any gain for the district as a whole. This has been observed also by the study done by Pethe and Venkiteswaran “in order for the mission to be effective since presently, most of the focus is on government scheme convergence, which puts pressure on the district administration to selectively disburse funds to these select villages and side-line the (perhaps needed) other villages”. However, this approach will reduce the inter-village disparity of development presuming that the selected villages were the most deprived.

5.10 The Fellows were pursuing with the GPs as well as the officials of the line departments in the Panchayat Samitis to successfully implement the VDP. They were focusing on their targeted indicators that were supposed to be helpful to transform the villages. However, there were cases of lack of cooperation from the officials of the line departments and the Fellows or the DEs had to make the extra effort in the implementation of their programmes. In fact, as observed on the TOC, convergence and proactive actions by the line departments are the two critical inputs required to make the desired changes but there was no strong system to facilitate the same at the block level. The Fellows, with whom the study team interacted, mentioned this as an important gap in the system.

5.11 Since many of the activities were dependent on the support and timely release of funds by various departments, there has been often delaying in implementation. The progress of expenditure and completion of activities generally lagged behind the time schedule for which the plan was prepared. Sometimes, this delay was putting the Fellows into difficulty because

people thought that the Fellow was accountable for timely implementation. A similar observation has been made in the study conducted by Pethe and Venkiteswaran. They have also observed in their study that the villagers were asking the Fellows, the reasons for delay in execution of Government-works¹².

Participation of the community and the community-based organizations

5.12 The Fellows were found to be relentless in their efforts to reach the villagers, which was possible since they were living in the villages. GP representatives, as well as functionaries, were mostly supportive to the CMRDFs in their activities. However, community participation was not institutionalized by having more convergence with the Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

5.13 **Convergence with SRLM:** There are Village Organizations (VOs) of the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of the women and SHG Federations of the VOs formed under the State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM). These are CBOs and their functioning is targeted towards empowering women through their economic and social development. There has been hardly any linkage between the Fellows and the GP and the VOs. More synergy in their functioning could facilitate the desired village transformation and the benefit would have been sustainable since the VOs are constituted by the village women. There were, of course, some cases in which the SHG members were trained for taking up economic activities.

5.14 **Promotion of agriculture through strengthening FPOs:** Similarly, there has been little systematic efforts in strengthening the FPOs with the support of the Fellows and bringing them closer to the GPs. There are, however, exception and some of the Fellows associated themselves with functioning of the FPOs. Since doubling agricultural productivity was one key target and is closely associated with increasing family income and alleviation of poverty, appropriate institutional linkage was generally missing. There was also very little association between the GP/Fellow and the agricultural extension workers.

5.15 **Convergence with MGNREGS:** MGNREGS is an important instrument for alleviating poverty through wage employment as well as creating individual and community infrastructure like irrigation, horticulture, livestock rearing, etc. for promotion of livelihood opportunity. These aspects did not receive adequate attention. The GPs have apathy in the implementation of the MGNREGS because of the procedural complications and delay in receiving funds (the huge amount is receivable by the GPs as material costs, which has prevented them in taking up more schemes under MGNREGS). As an example, farm ponds can be excavated out of MGNREGS as well as a scheme of the Agriculture Department. The former does not allow the use of machines for excavation while that is allowed in the latter scheme. The quality of excavation is also better through the use of a machine. However, the budget is limited, and hence only a limited number of farm ponds were excavated and MGNREGS was used less for that purpose. Osmanabad has reported some progress in this regard. 600 water bodies were planned under MGNREGS out of which only 150 were completed till 2019.

¹² *Ibid*

Initiatives of the Fellows and innovations

5.16 The Fellows were found to have taken initiatives for the development of respective villages in spite of facing several constraints. They are encouraged to share good practices and they have also shared many such cases. A couple of innovations made by the Fellows are mentioned below for the purpose of illustration.

Farmers grow more crops with solar energy

Singanpeth village is located within Kothari GP of Gadchiroli district. The village was mostly mono-cropped though groundwater was available. The target for doubling farm output could be achieved only through irrigation of the land for multi-cropping. The farmers, who were willing to do collective farming were organized in groups, as an intervention under



VSTF. A special project called '**Solar energy based collective subsidy irrigation scheme**' was prepared to lift the river water using a solar pump to irrigate 12 Hectare of land. The farmers are growing crops like mugs, gram, sorghum, cotton, paddy and wheat during Rabi season, which was not the case earlier. With irrigation, the Kharif crop is also assured and irrigation improved yield of

paddy cultivated during Khariff season. Due to this project, a few farmers have also started a fishery business. They have also established orchard with drip irrigation. The villagers were motivated and they have built three forest dams on the river to keep the river water safe. Farmers are extremely happy and have expressed their gratitude towards MVSTF.

Courtesy: Gajanan Ambore and Dilip Shikhar, CMRDFs

5.17 There were many other initiatives such as:

- i. Installation of water ATM in many villages.
- ii. In several villages, the Fellows were successful in overcoming the social barriers by the adolescent girls and women to discuss the issues of MHM and to adopt hygienic measures.
- iii. In Gadchiroli, there were efforts in forest fringe villages to improve the collection and sale of forest products like Honey, Charoli and Ambadi for augmenting livelihood and income.
- iv. In Deogaon Khavane GP in Mantha Block of Jalna district, difficulty due to erratic power supply in the promotion of e-learning was solved by arranging solar power.
- v. In Vadgaon Kandali GP of Junnar block of Pune District, following a workshop conducted on handwashing by UNICEF, the Fellow effectively promoted handwashing with water and soap even in absence of permanent handwashing station.

5.18 The above list is illustrative only and covers both the development of physical infrastructures and taking up more process-intensive activities such as a change in attitude and behaviour related to MHM and handwashing. However, the general focus is on infrastructure development and the Fellows need to be sensitized to have more innovation on processes and intangible aspects of development, which have less demand, are more difficult but lead to sustainable development.

5.19 The Fellows need better guidance to take up more innovative schemes. Sometimes, they were found carried away with the demand of taking up new things without in-depth study of the feasibility. For example, the RO plant has been established in a village where water was tested to be of an acceptable standard.

Bottlenecks and barriers

5.20 There were several bottlenecks in carrying out the activities related to VSTF. Those are briefly mentioned below:

- i. Convergence at the GP level can be more effective if the GPs are assigned more authority on the village level delivery institutions. The GP has little power over any line department officials and GP has to try for convergence by using its good offices and persuasion.
- ii. Convergence and coordination at the block level are more necessary but there is no specific arrangement at that level for the same.
- iii. The fellow has responsibilities but with little authority and they need to put in extra effort for getting things done which puts a constraint on their time and other resources.
- iv. It has also mentioned across the districts regarding the vacancies of posts. Maybe the remoter districts had more vacancies for which data was not available.
- v. There is little support for the VSTF District Executive. He/She is the only person, handling all the departments and works. They receive Rs. 5000/- for travel and other office expenses, which restricts their movement.
- vi. The Fellows have to facilitate activities covering many sectors of development on which they did not have the capacity.
- vii. Some of the observed barriers have been intra-village rivalry among different groups, political rivalry and dispute over the selection of beneficiaries/sites have been reported from a few villages.

Chapter VI

WASH Status in VSTF Villages

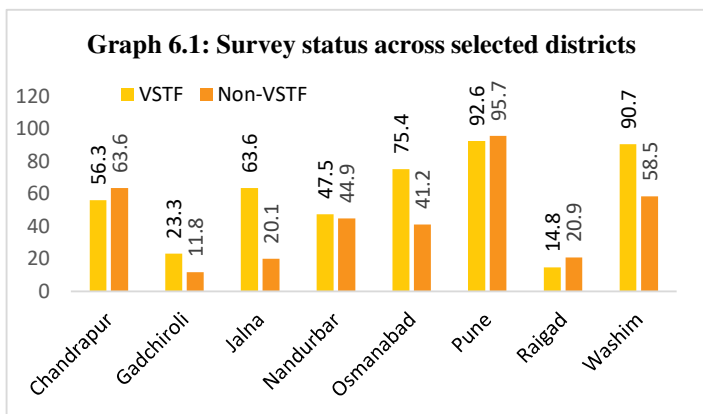
Progress of WASH made in the VSTF villages

6.1 To understand the progress and effectiveness of the VSTF programme, the data of two randomly selected villages supported by VSTF have been compared with two randomly selected GPs which are not supported by VSTF across eight selected districts of Maharashtra. The data have been downloaded on 11th February 2020 from the 2nd phase of the ODF verification website. A team of SIGMA Foundation visited the VSTF villages across these selected eight districts every quarter and a total of 20 villages have been visited from July to December 2019 and collected primary data through field observations as well as interaction with 226 households, selected at random. These data have also been analysed and a glimpse of the status has been reflected here.

WASH status of the HHs

6.2 The various aspects of WASH status in the HHs are presented below. The number of HHs being small, the findings may be illustrative but accurate.

- **Status of 2nd phase of ODF verification:** All the districts have been surveying the HHs to know their ODF status. 3,826 HHs in the selected VSTF villages have been surveyed out of 6,321 HHs i.e., 60.5% of the HHs have been covered. On the other hand, 4,027 HHs have been surveyed in the selected non-VSTF villages out of 10,252 HHs i.e., 39.3% have been covered. Thus, overall, the coverage in VSTF GPs is much higher

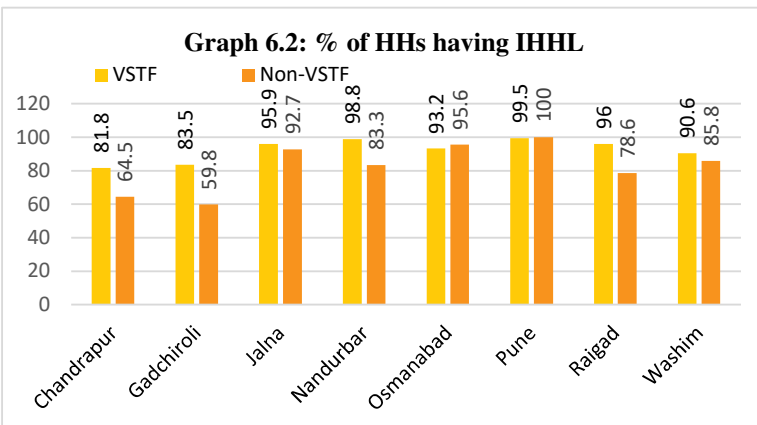


indicating better response of the VSTF villages in assessing their ODF status. A comparison of the survey status of VSTF and non-VSTF villages across the districts have been shown in Graph 6.1. A maximum number of HHs have been covered under the survey in both the selected VSTF and non-VSTF villages of Pune while the least is in Raigad (for VSTF) and Gadchiroli (non-VSTF).

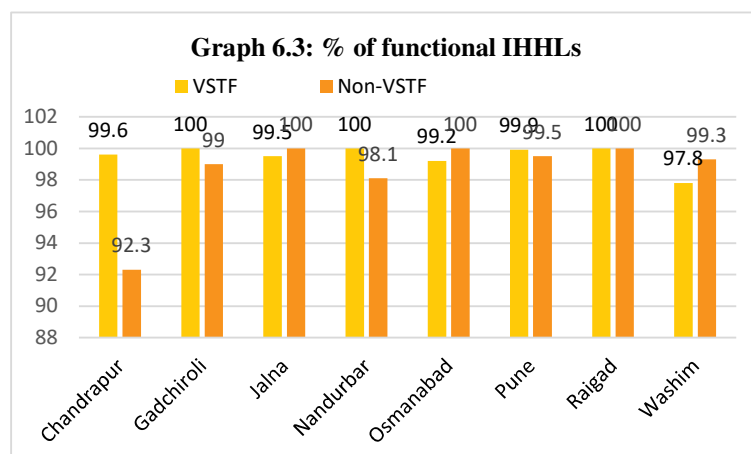
- **Sanitation status in the selected villages**

Out of the total HHs surveyed in the selected villages mentioned before, 3,591 and 3,409 HHs of VSTF and non-VSTF villages were found to have Individual Household Latrines (IHHLs) i.e., the sanitation coverage was 93.9% and 84.7% respectively, which indicates that status of sanitation in VSTF villages was comparatively better. The status across the districts has been shown in Graph 6.2. The VSTF villages of Pune have 99.5% HHs with IHHLs while the non-VSTF villages have 100% coverage. On the other hand, in Chandrapur the share is 81.8% in VSTF villages and 59.8% in non-VSTF villages. Except in Pune and Osmanabad, there have

been significant progress in sanitation coverage in the VSTF villages as compared to its non-VSTF counterparts. The data of the primary survey of SIGMA Foundation shows that 85.8% of the HHs had access to IHHLs while 10.6% of the households did not have any access to toilets.



- Functionality of the toilets:** Out of all the HHs having IHHLs, 3,565 and 3,359 toilets are functional in the selected VSTF and non-VSTF villages respectively i.e., 99.3% and 98.5% of the toilets were functional, indicating a marginal better status for VSTF villages. The status across the districts has been shown in Graph 6.3. The selected VSTF villages of Gadchiroli, Nandurbar and Raigad had 100% functional

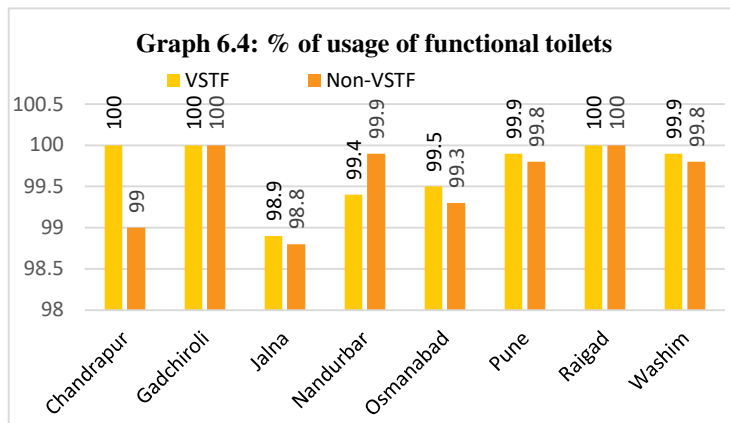


toilets while Washim had 97.8% functional toilets. On the other hand, the non-VSTF villages of Jalna, Osmanabad and Raigad have 100% functional toilets while the same of Chandrapur has 92.3%. The data of SIGMA Foundation shows that 87.1% of toilets were functional and in use while 6.7% were not being used although those were functional. 6.2% of the toilets were defunct.

- Reasons of toilets being defunct:** From the survey, it has been found that the main reasons of the toilets being defunct are lack of maintenance (69.2% in VSTF villages and 24% in non-VSTF villages) and absence of water (30.8% in VSTF villages and 70% in non-VSTF villages). In 6% non-VSTF, gaps in mindsets is the reason for not using the toilet. It may be noted that preference for open defecation (OD) (52%) and lack of maintenance (28%) were the major reasons for not using the toilets as analysed from the data collected by SIGMA Foundation. In 16% cases, the toilet was not fit for use while 4% households did not use the toilet due to non-availability of water. In case where the toilets were defunct or not in use, the household members either shared toilet with relatives/neighbours (8%) or practiced open defecation (92%). The data indicate that although the overall status of use of toilets in VSTF villages was marginally better, however, given the extra initiative that went for the VSTF villages there should have been 100% functionality of the toilets. Maybe these issues did not receive due priority as the Fellows had to work on many other dimensions.

- **Usage of toilets:** 99.7% of the functional toilets were in use in the selected VSTF and non-VSTF villages. The variation across the districts has been shown in Graph 6.4.

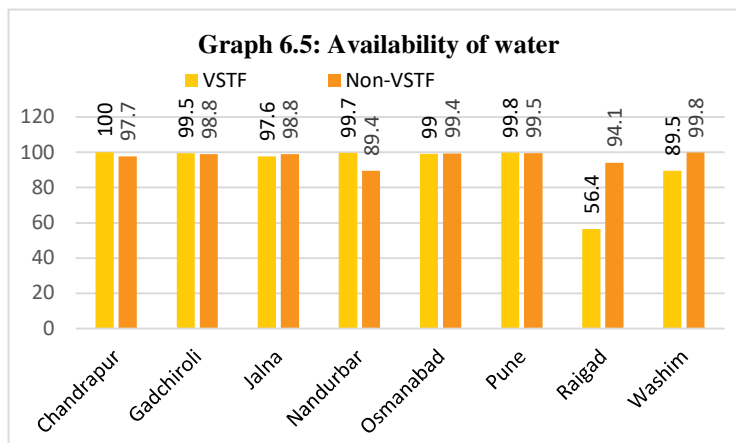
In the selected VSTF villages of Chandrapur, Gadchiroli and Raigad districts, 100% of the functional toilets were being used while in Jalna, 98.4% of such toilets were in use. In the non-VSTF villages, 100% of the functional toilets were in use in Gadchiroli and Raigad while 98.8% of the functional toilets were in use in Jalna. This implies that there has been hardly any difference and usage of toilets was near 100% in both the types of villages. However, the achievement should have been 100% in VSTF villages.



In the non-VSTF villages, 100% of the functional toilets were in use in Gadchiroli and Raigad while 98.8% of the functional toilets were in use in Jalna. This implies that there has been hardly any difference and usage of toilets was near 100% in both the types of villages. However, the achievement should have been 100% in VSTF villages.

- **Availability of water:** In 95.8% and 95.0% of the HHs, water was available in the selected VSTF and non-VSTF villages respectively. The variation across the districts has been shown in Graph 6.5.

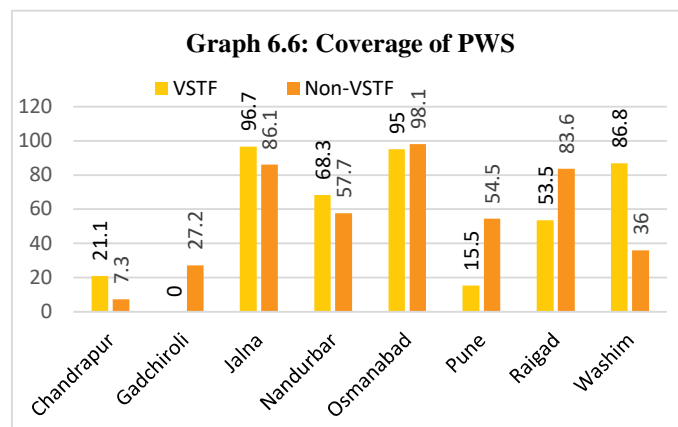
In the VSTF villages of Chandrapur, 100% of the surveyed HHs have water availability while the share of HHs in Raigad is only 56.4%. In the non-VSTF villages of Pune 99.5% of the HHs have water facility while 89.4% HHs of Nandurbar have that facility. In this case, also, the status of VSTF villages is very marginally better than that of the non-VSTF villages.



HHs of Nandurbar have that facility. In this case, also, the status of VSTF villages is very marginally better than that of the non-VSTF villages.

- **Piped Water Supply (PWS) coverage:** In the selected districts, only 58.0% and 55.4% of the HHs of the VSTF and non-VSTF villages had individual piped water supply at an aggregated level respectively. The variation across the districts has been shown in Graph 6.6.

It may be noted that although the PWS coverage in Gadchiroli was nil in the VSTF villages, it may be the case that the surveyed HHs of selected villages do not have PWS while other VSTF villages were covered under PWS and the selected sample does not represent the universe. In



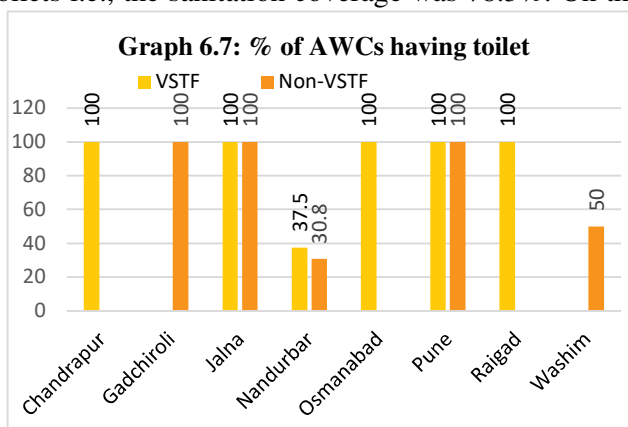
In

the VSTF villages of Pune only 15.5% of the HHs were covered under PWS while the share in Jalna was 96.7%. In the non-VSTF villages of Osmanabad, 98.1% have PWS connection while only 7.3% HHs of Chandrapur has the same. In the case of access to piped water supply also, the status of VSTF villages was marginally better than that of the non-VSTF villages. May be with the launching of the Jal Jeevan Mission and the focus being universal access to Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) by the year 2024, the Fellows need fresh orientation on this subject. The data of SIGMA Foundation shows that 21.2% of HHs had PWS connection within the premises while 17.3% HHs used collected water from stand posts. However, this being based on a small number of HHs the result may be viewed as indicative only.

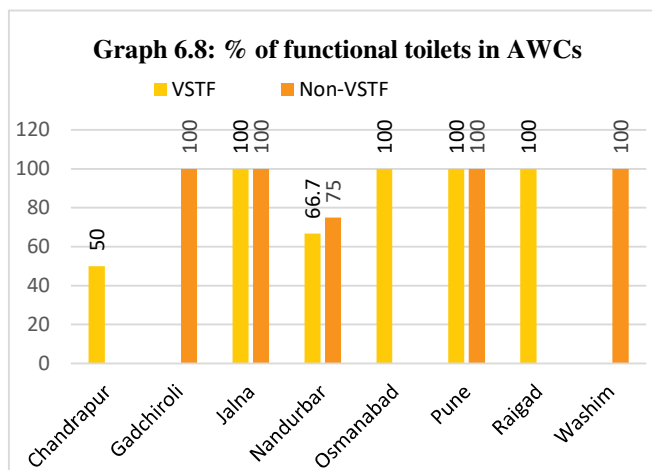
WASH status of the Anganwadi Centres

6.3 The status of WASH in the ICDS centre was another parameter which has been assessed and presented here. 23 AWCs were surveyed across both VSTF and non-VSTF villages. VSTF villages of Washim and Gadchiroli have not been covered.

- Sanitation status in the selected AWCs:** Out of the total 23 AWCs surveyed in the selected VSTF villages, 18 AWCs had toilets i.e., the sanitation coverage was 78.3%. On the other hand, 13 out of 23 AWCs (56.5%) of non-VSTF villages have toilet facilities. The status across the districts has been shown in Graph 6.7. Except for Nandurbar all the other AWCs of the VSTF villages had 100% toilet coverage. The AWCs of non-VSTF villages of Nandurbar have 30.8% toilet coverage while Gadchiroli, Jalna and Pune have 100% toilet coverage. As has been observed, there was more focus on improving the infrastructure of the AWCs in VSTF villages and the data presented here confirms the positive outcome of the same.



- Functionality of the toilets:** Out of all the AWCs having toilets, 15 toilets were functional in the selected VSTF villages and 12 toilets were functional in the non-VSTF villages i.e., 83.3% and 92.3% of the toilets were functional respectively. The status across the districts are shown in Graph 6.8. The AWCs of the VSTF villages of Jalna, Osmanabad, Pune, and Raigad had 100% functional toilets while in Chandrapur the share was 50%. On the other hand, the AWCs of non-VSTF villages of Gadchiroli, Jalna, Pune and Washim had 100% functional toilets while in Nandurbar 75% of the AWC toilets were functional. The data shows that, in spite of having better access, there



was a higher incidence of non-functional toilets in VSTF villages. This calls for more sensitization of the Fellows on WASH in institutions.

- **Usage of toilets:** It may be noted that all the functional toilets of the AWCs were in use in all the selected VSTF and non-VSTF villages and thus, there was no difference.

Chapter VII

Capacity Needs of the Fellows and Related Issues

The capacity of the Fellows and the District Executive as critical needs

7.1 As the TOC presented in Figure 3.2 shows, the Fellow at the village level has to initiate all actions with due support of the GP, BDO and the officials of the line department at the block level with due guidance from the district headquarter. Therefore, the capacity of the Fellow is a critical factor in achieving success. Similarly, the DE at the district headquarter has to perform a similar role at the district level and needs capacity for the same. Further, interventions cover many sectors of development and they have to have enough domain knowledge to interact with the departments concerned. At the same time, they need a general understanding of the situations in the village, the causes of backwardness, the issues related to social transformation and sustainable development and the nuances of local governance as to how the GP functions. Further, the Fellows need to develop expertise and attitude in working with the community, should have proficiency in using rapid participatory assessment tools and should also have good skills for communication.

7.2 The GP is the local government and is responsible for the coordination of all activities within the GP. Therefore, the transformation of the villages and its sustainability cannot be ensured without the GPs being a part of the process and without having required institutional capacity of the GPs. The GP also needs to provide enough opportunity to the Fellow and facilitate his/her work in the interest of their development. Therefore, the capacity of the GP is also critical in attaining the desired changes.

7.3 In the context of the above, it was found that there was a substantial gap in the capacity of the Fellows as well as the GPs. The Fellows and the DEs were trained at the beginning of the programme at YASHADA and there was also some occasional training including one on WASH by UNICEF. However, there is a need for continuous capacity building of the Fellows to discharge their responsibilities. The capacity of the GPs also needs to be developed to facilitate and sustain the process of village transformation. Pethe and Venkiteswaran in their study, mentioned before, have mentioned the need for training of the Fellows, Gram Sevak, Influential member, Farmer leader, Youth leader and Women leaders.

7.4 In the Prime Ministers' Rural Development Programme (PMRDF), the Fellows were given an institutional training at TISS followed by a village immersion to know the ground reality. The Fellows should be trained for at least a month followed by a village immersion under the guidance of an existing Fellow for a fortnight to develop required competence.

Assessment of the capacity building needs

7.5 The capacity building need of the Fellows has been worked out based on an understanding of which thematic areas there have been interventions and those thematic areas they can be more instrumental in transforming the villages. There were intensive interactions

with the Fellows with whom the study team could interact in different districts as well as there was a brain-storming session with a group of seven Fellows of Gadchiroli district in which the District Executive of the district and one former CMRDF who is now working as the Aspirational District Fellow of the TADP for Gadchiroli were present.

7.6 Improving service delivery at the village level: The analysis started with what are thematic areas in which there was a lack of capacity of the Fellows. The Fellows were generally making interventions to improve the delivery of existing services available within the GPs like those delivered through AWCs, Health Centres and the schools and developing capacity in those respect is important. The interventions being made were mostly on improving supply-side infrastructures which are usually tangible. There have not been so many interventions on the demand side of the service delivery, which requires community mobilization and strong communication. Further, the community mobilization has been taken up only to organize events like conducting VHND or taking up Rallies etc. on certain occasions or Shramdan etc. There is a need for more capacity in understanding and improving the governance processes and how the community can be engaged for deriving full benefit, which also covers issues of equity and inclusiveness.

7.7 Strengthening delivery of WASH services: Although there was an orientation of the Fellows on WASH but the main focus was on sanitation and hygiene since the guidelines of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) was not issued. The JJM views water supply not as an engineering project but more a mission to deliver 55 lpcd of potable water to every HH through at least one Functional House Tap Connection (FHTC), which calls for community ownership and engagement covering source sustainability, management and protection of the pipelines and other assets, prevention of contamination in water and sustainable service delivery. This is more important in the context of Maharashtra because of two reasons: (i) the state has a huge area with water scarcity and (ii) most GPs own piped water supply schemes, the management of which needs to be improved to meet the JJM guidelines. The other aspects are ODF sustainability as well as taking up ODF plus activities, particularly SLWM and MHM. Further, the 15th Finance Commission has submitted an interim report as per which Rs 60,750 crore will be allocated for the year 2020-21 to all the three tiers of Panchayats but 50% of the grants are tied to be spent on ODF sustainability and improving water supply in nearly equal ratio. There is a gap in the capacity of the GPs and the Fellow, if properly oriented can help the VSTF GPs to utilize the funds effectively.

7.8 Facilitating women empowerment through MSRLM: Social transformation cannot be achieved without empowering the women. In order that the Fellow can trigger the process in their village, he/she has to understand both gender aspects of development, the barriers faced by the women in participating in social, economic and political activities and the existing programmes for the same. Apart from programmes related to human development that is being delivered through village level institutions, the most critical is proper implementation of the SRLM, which aims at the collective empowerment of the women by forming SHGs. The SHGs have been formed into Village Organization (VO) by bringing all the SHGs of the village under one umbrella. In single village GP there is only one VO and the GP can reach the community through the VOs since in many of the villages visited by the study team, more than 50% HHs had representation in the SHGs Further, those are the poorer households who needed more support. The Fellows are not so much aware of how the MSRLM can be used as an instrument

for transforming the villages and how functioning of the VOs can be improved and they can be made a partner for transformation of the villages as well. That is another area where the capacity of the Fellows needs to be enhanced.

7.9 Promoting livelihood development: Initiatives for sustainable economic development through strengthening livelihood opportunities is another area where the Fellows need orientation. Also, development of the women being most critical in transforming the society, augmenting their livelihood is a major need that the Fellows have tried to improve in many villages. However, the Fellows expressed that more training is required on how the support of MSRLM and the GP can be obtained for strengthening the livelihood opportunities of the women. The need for convergence between MGNREGS and MSRLM is also an area that will be facilitated for augmenting economic benefit to the people by expanding livelihood opportunities in the farm sector.

Capacity related to the functioning of the GPs and convergence

7.10 As mentioned before, the sustainability of the village transformation can be ensured by an empowered GP. The empowerment of the GP for improved functioning is dependent on the policy of the state government in devolving power to them. However, the Fellows may be trained to understand the issues of local governance and strengthening the functioning of the GPs within the existing devolution for (i) owning more responsibilities in the transformation of their villages by using the services of the Fellow and (ii) carrying out the process after the Fellow leaves.

7.11 The convergence of all GP level activities: Also, there is much scope on strengthening convergence of the existing programmes being delivered at the village level. The GP is the most appropriate institution for ensuring convergence as well as strengthening community mobilization. The GPs can review the functioning of the three critical service delivery institutions namely the schools, the AWCs and the health sub-centers so that the demand side issues can be discussed and the issues can be brought to knowledge of the GP members for necessary follow up. The Fellows need to be oriented on how such convergence meetings can be organized and how the same could be more effective.

7.12 Joint training for role clarity: Some of the Fellows have mentioned that there is a need for more training on their role clarity so that they may make the best use of their time. Also, many of them had to struggle in an initial couple of months to establish their credential. The process will be made easier if the GP functionaries (Sarpanch and the Sachiv) and the Fellows are trained together at the beginning of the programme and their mutual responsibilities are clarified.

Strengthening skill for communication:

7.13 Another category of need for capacity building of the Fellows is on how they can communicate with the community more effectively for generating demand on the services. That will require an understanding of various IEC/SBCC tools and how those can be used effectively for strengthening communication with the community and generating demand for participation in various activities. They also need to be oriented on how the GPs can prepare localized low-cost IEC/SBCC plans involving the community and appropriate for their target group and focus area for interventions.

Capacity related to monitoring

7.14 **Monitoring and analysis of data for evidence-based interventions:** Some others have expressed a need for orientation on data management, understanding the MIS and analysis of data to make the interventions evidence-based. That will require special orientation for the Fellows.

Need for continuous training and learning

7.15 It is difficult to impart training in all the above aspects in one training event. There is a need for continuous training and learning in a mixed-mode. That will include some common training for all the Fellows at least once a year and some theme-specific orientation based on the need of the Fellow at least twice a year. Those apart, there has to be an arrangement for meeting the queries and knowledge gap of the Fellows on a daily basis through some distance learning method. The queries normally cover issues on GR and programme related clarification, which any government organization or the VSTF headquarter can take care and the other category of needs are related to enhancing domain knowledge in a specific field. That component can be handled by expert organizations. The critical need is to find organizations like Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs)/ Agricultural Universities who can guide the Fellows in this regard. The VSTF authorities may consider roping in suitable knowledge partners to meet the capacity gaps in both formal institution-based training as well as providing lessons on distant mode based on need.

7.16 However, to meet the immediate need it is proposed to provide one round of training to meet the more critical needs of general nature. The proposed training will be for 5 days covering the following subjects:

- i. Institutional functioning of the GP and how that can be strengthened
- ii. GPDP as a tool for socio-economic transformation and strengthening local service delivery, improving participation of the people, particularly women and children and making the GPs child-friendly
- iii. Understanding issues of women empowerment, how the same is being addressed through MSRLM, functioning of SHG VOs and SHG Clusters and convergence of their functioning with that of the GP.
- iv. In-depth understanding of monitoring system, collection of data with objectivity and analysis of the data to give feedback to the implementing agencies and policymakers for evidence-based interventions for improvement/course correction
- v. Understanding of basics of communications for development, strategy for communication, a different mode of communication, preparation of communication plan and how to monitor the effectiveness of communication.

7.16 **Exposure visits of the Fellows:** There have been many good practices which needs to be replicated. There should be regular exposure visit so that the Fellows have the opportunity to see actual implementation of good practices. That will also incentivise those whose best practices are picked up for visits. The visits may be followed by a district level workshop so that there is dissemination and more chances of replication.

Chapter VIII

Key Recommendations for Strengthening VSTF

Key observations and recommendations

- 8.1 The earlier chapters narrate the objective of the VSTF programme, the implementation arrangements, the achievements made etc. The initiative has been pathbreaking in organizing rapid development of the low HDI villages taken up under the VSTF. The key findings of the Study by SIGMA Foundation are mentioned below, which may be useful in strengthening/reshaping the interventions, which is under process now.
- 8.2 The transformation of the villages not only needs the development of infrastructure to support better quality life but also human resources and how they remain engaged in their own development. While external support in the form of implementation of the VDP has been organized well but the empowerment of the society to get organized for their own development in a sustainable manner has not been paid enough attention.
- 8.3 The development initiative is through the Fellow who has been the successful prime mover of the changes and the GP has been used as the platform for organizing development. However, building the capacity of the GP to give sustenance of the movement for sustainable and transformative development has remained weak. Also, the programme has a limitation in attempting to change the social and economic structure of the village society and that was not attempted either. But, ***strengthening the GP as an institution for local governance could facilitate and sustain the process of transformation better.***
- 8.4 The study found that it took a couple of months or even more for the Fellow to build rapport with the GP. ***The prior orientation of the Sarpanch and the Sachiv about VSTF before any Fellow is sent to a village, through a joint orientation of the Sarpanch, the Sachiv and the Fellow will help easier and faster acceptance of the Fellow and in extending necessary cooperation by the GP.***
- 8.5 The Fellows do not have adequate knowledge of the institutional functioning of the GPs and how the functioning of the GPs can be improved. Also, they have not been empowered and briefed to take up those activities. ***The Fellows should be associated with improvement in the institutional functioning of the GPs for leaving a more empowered and capable local government to take care of future needs of development. The desired interventions by the Fellow will also require support from the Department of Rural Development and Panchayats. It may be considered how the GPs may be empowered through improvement in their system of functioning and developing their human resources through handholding by the Fellows.***
- 8.6 The Fellows being from outside the administrative system and not holding any official position have little authority to make the GP, the line departmental functionaries at the village level and the community to work in a coordinated manner. Their ability to do so will require (i) high level of competency along with knowledge about all the development programmes and ability to coordinate with all the stakeholders in working out appropriate

interventions and (ii) support of the GP and the line department functionaries. ***There is a need for improvement in both the dimensions, i.e., strengthening the competency of the Fellows and the quality of support they need from the line departments to perform effectively.***

- 8.7 The Fellows have been able to leverage the available fund under VSTF by dovetailing with the departmental schemes for a higher level of investments in the villages. However, the total fund spent in any village by various government departments through the existing public services is many times more than what has been leveraged under the VSTF. ***Systemic improvement in the functioning of all the village level delivery institutions will have much more impact on enhancing the development of the villages.*** There has been neither any orientation nor any effort in addressing the systemic issues of improving governance and delivery of public services. Improving the delivery of services and the related processes and the system of governance of the village level institutions should be one of the missions for ensuring permanent benefit to those villages. ***So, apart from enhancing expenditure through schemes, improving processes for achieving better quality and efficiency in service delivery with inclusiveness and equity at the village level needs to be given due importance. The Fellows should be oriented in being able to facilitate that process.***
- 8.8 Improving delivery of various services will require an understanding of the supply side bottlenecks as well as the barriers being faced by particularly the marginalized section of the community and taking up appropriate interventions in improving the delivery of various services. ***Improvement in the system of functioning should be attempted in respect of (i) the service delivery institutions such as the schools, the health centres and ICDS Centres and the Public Distribution System (PDS) and (ii) functioning of the Community Based Organizations like the Village Organizations (VOs) and the Clusters of the SHGs and the Farmer's Producers Organizations (FPOs). If those organizations are empowered, they can work for the development of their villages on a sustained basis. The said systemic improvement and empowerment of the local institutions should also be carried out by the VSTF.***
- 8.9 The interventions through VSTF have been more on the supply side. The Fellow also meets the community members and communicates with them for their active participation and raising demand for services. The process needs to be strengthened. ***There is a need to have a communication strategy for the VSTF for making an organized effort in taking up IEC activities if required through professional agencies.*** The objective will be to help the transformation of the society for making the people aware of the various programmes and the rights and responsibilities of the citizen. The community should be empowered for actively participating in all the developmental programmes including taking up local development of their own. There should be a special campaign among the members of the SHGs and the FPOs so that they become strong institutions for local development.
- 8.10 The social transformation will imply moving towards structural changes that have a lasting impact on the wellbeing of the people and not confined to receiving onetime scheme-based benefit or development of some village infrastructure. ***A strong and empowered SHG VO/Cluster can work for changing the social status of their members***

and enhancing their livelihood opportunities. There is a need for more convergence between the MSRLM and the VSTF.

- 8.11 *The Fellows are to be trained on how they can strengthen the VOs as well as how the VOs can be used to mobilize their members/community for self-development. VSTF may set certain goals to promote the said changes.* For example, the SHG, VO and the GP together may set the target of helping every SHG member of the village to have income through the suitable economic activity as per her capability and opportunity. If the Fellow is associated with such a task of working out a viable plan with a goal to empower every member of the SHG to earn through some economic activity within a given period, that will be a real social transformation.
- 8.12 Similarly, the goals related to enhancing agricultural production and doubling agricultural income will be better achieved with the active participation of the FPOs, which is currently missing. There are other barriers to having convergence in the agricultural sector. *The FPOs should be strengthened to work towards realizing the goal for enhancing agricultural income and the Fellow can mediate to resolve the barriers with support of the officials of the departments concerned. This will require overcoming barriers like (i) inadequate extension support from the field officials of the department, (ii) little linkage of the GP with the Agriculture extension system and (iii) lack of domain knowledge of the Fellows on how the agricultural productivity could be increased very fast.*
- 8.13 Convergence with MGNREGS for strengthening the agriculture and allied sector and enhancing the livelihood opportunities in the primary sector has been found to be yet another missing link. MGNREGS may be used to develop the land and other assets for strengthening the primary sector of the economy and individual benefiting schemes are allowed under the same. *Augmenting irrigation facility by digging farm pond, which can be done under MGNREGS can not only ensure proper Kharif production (mostly paddy) but the residual moisture can help to grow another winter crop. Some of the farmers were apprehensive that there will be a reduction of crop area without realizing that the gross cropped area will increase and the water bodies have generally higher productivity and earning through pisciculture.* However, the coverage under the scheme is very limited. It may be worth exploring how a much larger number of farm ponds can be dug through MGNREGS and the state budget may be used to provide mini-kit of seeds and fertilizers to promote a second crop for augmenting agricultural income.
- 8.14 Most of the districts have low cropping intensity and districts like Gadchiroli is mostly single cropped. There is a need for a mechanism for the promotion of irrigation and improving agronomic practices for augmenting agricultural income or taking up horticulture, which has not been attempted on a large scale. It may be mentioned that success for expansion of these activities depends mostly on being able to attain a critical volume of land and the number of farmers associated with the initiative because a lone farmer or even a small group of farmers will not be able to take the risk of going for the second crop if most of the adjoining lands remain uncultivated. *Convergence with the FPOs and strengthening the extension mechanism will be critical in realizing the goals related to agriculture. There is also a need for strong IEC for letting people know how agricultural production and income can be enhanced.*

- 8.15 IEC/SBCC needs to be strengthened not only for agriculture but for all the sectors of development. There should be an appropriate communication strategy for making people aware of all the transformation that the VSTF has been attempting. ***Innovative communication strategy to trigger development and helping people to reflect on how they can contribute in their own development is a critical need. It may be considered if an annual development fair can be conducted in each GP where representatives of all the relevant departments will attend, display their plans and programmes using easily understandable means and inform people how their services can be accessed to bring the administration to the doorstep of the people.***
- 8.16 In order to ensure that the Fellows become instrumental in improving the delivery of services by the village level institutions, there is a need to develop a system of a monthly review of the progress of the schemes at the GP level. ***The progress made/ services delivered and the problems faced by the schools, AWCs and the health centres need to be discussed in a meeting to be taken by the GP. The meeting may be held on a fixed date, say the first Saturday of the month so that it becomes easier for everyone to attend without waiting for any notice. All the department concerned should instruct their field functionaries to attend the meetings to be convened by the GP.*** In order that the meeting becomes effective, the monthly progress for each institution in respect of the village (where such data is available) needs to be shared with the GP at least two days prior to the meeting and the Fellow can analyse those and at the same time build capacity of the Sachiv to do so. This will help the discuss specific issues and the actionable points should be noted for follow up. The Sachiv should gradually become competent to know the issues in-depth and how the quality and coverage of the services can be improved. There should also be a mechanism to address issues, which could not be resolved at the village level, by the respective block/district level authorities.
- 8.17 ***There should be a similar fixed day meeting, on another day of the month, with the extension officials of the Agriculture and allied department in which the FPOs and the VOs should also be invited.*** The GP will facilitate how agriculture in the GP area can be strengthened and the problems faced by the FPOs can be addressed. Further, there should be departmental support so that the SHG members can take up economic activities in the primary sector, which has the maximum potential in the villages. Individual farmers who have problems to be discussed with the extension workers should also be encouraged to participate. The Fellows need to be specially oriented on the expansion of livelihood in the primary sector and how that can be adopted in their villages.
- 8.18 ***Apart from the augmentation of primary sector activities, there is a need for strengthening the secondary sector of the rural economy, which will be more suitable for the unemployed educated rural youths. Some of the skill training which can lead to employment within the villages were found to be more preferred by the youths that those in which they have to be located in big cities.*** There is need to explore which types of economic activities in the secondary sector or even some of the primary sectors which the educated youths will be willing to take up (e.g., poultry, dairy, horticulture etc.) of any particular district/region and to extend skill development support followed by credit linkage. The State Level Bankers Committee and institutes developing skill training may be partnered to strengthen this sector.

- 8.19 In some cases, the developmental activities have been guided without going into the depth of the issues involved. There is some belief that the installation of RO plant will be good for solving the drinking water problem. There are villages where there is no shortage of water supply and the water quality was found good in all the water quality tests conducted in the laboratories, yet RO plant has been installed and there has been a plan for installing more such plants. At the same time, it has not been possible to provide house connection to all the villagers from the village water supply plant, which certainly deserves more priority. It may be mentioned that it is not recommended to install the RO plant where the TDS (Total Dissolved Solids) is less than 1000 mg/ litre. ***There is a need for central level scrutiny if all the interventions/innovations are sound in the long run and do not have any environmental or other problems associated with the same.***
- 8.20 Youths/SHG members have been trained as a part of the skill training programme. Some of the youths have been trained in cities to acquire skills for which employment is available only in cities. Many of such youths did not accept employment in distant cities or had come back because of adverse situations. ***Priority should be given to impart skill related to the primary sector of the economy for which one needs not have to migrate in an adverse condition.***
- 8.21 In a few cases, manufacturing of products that are sold in urban and distant markets have been promoted which have faced problem of marketing. ***It will be advisable to check if the products being promoted as a means for the expansion of livelihood have adequate marketing facilities. The Fellows may be appropriately guided about potential/likely problems/sustainability etc. of their interventions, where relevant.***
- 8.22 It appeared that there is no proper HR development policy for transforming the Fellows to become more resourceful. ***There has to be a proper HR development policy so that the Fellows keep on improving their capability on some general aspects of development as well as relevant thematic areas based on the need of the area/ priority of the Fellow.***
- 8.23 All the Fellows, the study team met, mentioned their need for further training and the requirement has been narrated in Chapter VII. ***The Fellows need to be trained at YASHDA/ suitable institute like TISS for at least a month followed by a village immersion under the guidance of one existing Fellow for at least a fortnight before they are assigned any village to work. There is a need for training every year on common issues and theme specific training based on need every year. There should be a partnership with organizations like Agricultural Universities/ KVKs which not only will train them up but will also provide support through distance mode/mentoring by supplying relevant literature, explaining various context-specific issues and clarifying doubts. There should also be a schedule of mandatory training, both general and thematic so that they get the opportunity to be trained at least once on general issues and twice on thematic issues (as per their need) every year. A one-week course may be organized early to bridge some of the critical gaps urgently.***
- 8.24 ***In order to strengthen the capacity of the Fellows as well as to create a learning environment and keeping them motivated, the Fellows may be given the opportunity to follow an appropriately designed course on development through distant mode.*** They may be circulated appropriate reading materials electronically in general as well as on-demand.

- 8.25 *There may also be regular exposure visits followed by dissemination workshop once in a year so that each Fellow gets an opportunity to learn from the best practices.*
- 8.26 *The Fellows also expressed that the GRs relevant to various development programmes need to be shared with them and it would be better if the operational part of the same could be explained to them for taking appropriate actions.*
- 8.27 Village Plan is prepared as per demand expressed in the Gram Sabha. However, there is a limitation in that process and demand for many non-tangible things does not get reflected as the demand of the people. The process of preparation of the village plan does not include assessment of ground reality by analysing available primary and secondary data and envisioning the process of development which will be most appropriate for the area leading to sustainable development. *There should be a clearly identified process of preparation of the Village Development Plan for which an appropriate order may be issued, in line with the GPDP guidelines of the state but extended to all the sectors of development looked after by the line departments. The output of the plan should also be measurable in terms of progress to be achieved in respect of the SDGs. Ideally, there should be only one plan for the village covering all the said aspects.* The state is now preparing five year's plan under the GPDP (to be effective from the 1st April 2020). For the next round of Village Plans to be prepared for the new VSTF villages, the plans should be prepared in a more intense participatory mode with proper envisioning based on collected data and in convergence with the five years plan to be taken up under the GPDP. *It may be considered if a more participatory and evidence-based methodology could be evolved for preparing the next round of Village Plan by leveraging the entire tied and untied fund available with the GPs along with the fund that would be available from VSTF and the departmental scheme funds.*
- 8.28 There is little linkage between VDP and the District Plan. *The problems which cannot be handled through village level planning should be communicated to the block and the district. The District Plan should try to address the issues which cannot be resolved at the local level and have been communicated to be taken up from a higher level.*
- 8.29 It will be easier to address the larger issues from the district level if the villages selected are in a cluster. *It may be considered if the new villages are selected in a cluster rather than being in isolation.*
- 8.30 There is no objective way of measuring the progress being made in any village. *There is a need to develop a database to be maintained for every village to assess their development objectively, to make a score-based ranking. The scores should be worked out and the same should be shared in the Gram Sabha to develop an inter-GP competitive environment. Maintaining a dashboard to show village wise progress will make things more transparent and that will also help in guiding the local interventions and monitoring progress.*
- 8.31 Support of all the frontline workers and CBOs is critical for the success of the VSTF. *All the frontline workers such as the ANMs/Anganwadi workers/ ASHA/ Teachers/ members of School Management Committee/ Village Water Sanitation Nutrition Committee, Water and Forest Conservation Committee etc. need to be oriented together for their active participation.*

- 8.32 Many of the activities require appropriate support from the officials of the line departments. Such supports were not being received and there is hardly any forum where the matter can be sorted out. Though BDOs generally meet the Fellows every month he/she cannot pay enough attention to the problems of the Fellows and pursue those with the line departments because of his/her other preoccupation. Also, some of the matters are looked after by the Tehsildar. ***The process of receiving support from the line departmental functionaries of the block needs to be institutionalized and its effectiveness should be followed up in the District Council meetings.***
- 8.33 In some sectors like housing, priority is being given to bridge the gap in respect of the VSTF villages within a short time period. However, the same is being done by diverting the allocation for other GPs, i.e., at the cost of reducing the target of non-VSTF villages. It may be considered if such an approach is desirable, particularly when it is not known whether the VSTF villages rank the lowest in the state/district in terms of shortage of housing.
- 8.34 There has been a delay in the implementation of the village plans because of a lack of adequate priority from the line departmental officials. The reporting system does not provide insights on the reasons behind delay and is unable to generate information for taking those up with the departmental officials concerned at the block level. ***There should be at least a quarterly camp in each block where all the line departmental officers and the BDO together review the constraints being faced by the Fellows and how things may be improved. The DE should be present there to facilitate the process and take follow up measures.***
- 8.35 At present, the Fellows face the problem in receiving support from the block level officers of the line departments individually and pursue those in isolation. It is likely that the same problem is being faced by other Fellows of the block as well. It will be easier to pursue those together by an officer of the block office with the support of the BDO. ***It is necessary to earmark an officer of the block office to be the Nodal Officer for the VSTF and all of them may be oriented for discharging their responsibilities. Fellows should report all problems of coordination and supports which are needed from block-level officials of different departments to the Nodal Officer for being pursued. He/she will assist the BDO for resolving block level issues for faster implementation of the plans and will also help to monitor the progress in each block.***
- 8.36 ***There is a need for strengthening coordination with the line departmental officials at the district level also. The DE needs to compile all the department-specific issues, as reported by the Fellows/Block Nodal Officer and pursue those with the district level officials. The DPLO is well placed to help the DE to coordinate with the departmental officer It may be considered if the DPLO can also be inducted with the VSTF as the Nodal Officer of the district under the Collector.*** There is a need to strengthen the system of identifying the department wise barriers and those are to be discussed in the meeting of the District Council for resolving the issues related to support of the line department in preparation and implementation of the village plans. The meeting should come out with department-wise actionable points which are to be followed up till those are resolved.

- 8.37 The district-level departmental officers need to have more ownership of the programme. Instead of expecting them to extend suitable assistance to the Fellow as and when needed, they should be responsible to strengthen activities of the department in the VSTF villages by utilizing the services of the Fellows. ***All the district level officials need to be oriented and one of the objectives should be to make them appreciate how the implementation of their programmes can be improved with the support of the Fellow. In order they can appreciate the issues, all of them should be made to visit at least one VSTF village every month with prior intimation to the Fellow and the GP. The block-level official of the department needs to also accompany the district level officer.*** The visit will help them to be exposed to the problems being faced at the grassroots level and how those can be sorted out.
- 8.38 ***The exit plan for a Fellow to be withdrawn from a village needs to be worked out. It may be wise to continue the association of the Fellow with the village through periodic visits for at least one more year.*** It may be considered if the Fellow is given charge of one or more GPs within the same block and the GPs are supported in two modes. A couple of adjoining GPs may be supported through intensive mode for which the Fellow has to visit those GPs at least once a week and he/she may also keep on mentoring the GP from where he/she will be withdrawn for which only occasional visits will be necessary.

