

Axis Bank Foundation's Sustainable Livelihood Programme Strikes Gold at FICCI's Sustainable Agriculture Summit and Awards 2024

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- *The programme was recognized for its transformative efforts in restoring livelihoods, boosting incomes, and fostering self-reliance in rural Jharkhand, Telangana, and Maharashtra in partnership with Watershed Organisation Trust*

Axis Bank Foundation (ABF) has been awarded the prestigious gold award at **FICCI's 4th Sustainable Agriculture Summit and Awards 2024**. The Sustainable Livelihood Programme was recognized under the Natural Resource Management and Climate Resilient Agriculture category, for best practices and innovations in climate-resilient, smart agriculture, and sustainable management of natural resources. Under the programme, ABF supported Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR) which has capacitated rural communities across Khunti district in Jharkhand, Narayanpet district in Telangana, and Ahmednagar and Beed districts in Maharashtra to participate in watershed development work to improve water availability, adopt low-risk sustainable agricultural practices for improvement in crop yield, and strengthen local community institutions to take the development agenda forward.

The multiple key initiatives implemented under this project have led to its scalable impact in the region:

- **Enhanced Irrigation Access:** Improved irrigation access for farmers in Telangana and Jharkhand.
- **Increased Income:** Material increase in annual income due to improved irrigation and agriculture practices.
- **Diversified Agriculture:** Cultivation of fruit and agro-forestry trees, development of kitchen gardening, and multi-layer farming.
- **Institutional Strengthening:** Establishment of local institutions such as VDCs, FIGs, FPOs, and SHGs, leveraging resources from MGNREGS for infrastructure.
- **Climate-Resilient Practices:** Adoption of climate-resilient practices by over 8,920 farmers, enhancing productivity and soil health, while reducing costs and inorganic fertilizer use.
- **Non-Farm Livelihood Development:** Supporting households in constructing and repairing animal sheds, purchasing livestock, and providing marketing support for pig rearing in convergence with government schemes and programmes.

India's diverse landscape, varied agro-climatic zones, and rich natural resources present significant challenges for community sustenance, natural resource management (NRM), and rural livelihoods. The target communities in Telangana, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra face severe issues such as water scarcity and natural resource depletion, critically impacting agriculture and allied livelihoods. These regions are home to economically disadvantaged rural populations, including tribal groups and landless families, who are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. They face increased production losses, higher input costs, and reduced incomes. The programme addresses these challenges through targeted interventions across the impacted areas.

Dhruvi Shah, Executive Trustee and Chief Executive Officer of Axis Bank Foundation, commented on the award, "Our Sustainable Livelihood Programme delves into a nuanced approach to livelihood challenges while focused on the local context. FICCI's 4th Sustainable Agriculture Summit and Awards 2024 is a recognition to our efforts and a great motivator. It reinforces our commitment towards the need for self-reliance among rural communities. This recognition strengthens determination to drive with our approach and inspires us to build a legacy of positive change for years to come."

Training and capacity-building of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and 'Jalsevaks', stakeholder engagement workshops, and watershed development have been key to the programme's success. These efforts have strengthened Village Watershed and Water Management Committees, facilitated exposure visits to successful projects, and promoted collaborative workshops with government departments. Land treatment measures, afforestation, water resource development, and water-saving technologies have been implemented to enhance resilience. Training sessions for VDCs, SHGs, and farmer groups focus on planning, management, monitoring, and sustainable livelihoods. 'Jalsevak' and para-agronomist training enhances project implementation at the village level.

Prakash Keskar, Executive Director, WOTR, shared his thoughts on the recognition, "This recognition from FICCI validates the core idea that when communities are equipped to manage their resources, development follows naturally. Through the Sustainable Livelihood Programme, we are not just addressing immediate challenges; we are laying the foundation for sustainable futures. This acknowledgment inspires us to amplify our efforts and drive even greater impact in the lives of vulnerable communities."

The programme has significantly impacted rural communities by enhancing water availability, promoting climate-resilient strategies, and increasing income through sustainable agriculture practices. Key outcomes include improved market linkages, increased access to irrigation, crop diversification, enhanced food and nutritional security, and strengthened institutions. The FarmPrecise mobile app has further supported farmers by providing weather and agro-advisories, helping plan activities and

manage pests, thus increasing productivity and reducing climate-related risks. Moving forward, the programme aims to empower people and institutions for sustained impact.