



Annual Report

Period : FY 2023 - 2024

Project Title: Satyamev Jayate Farmer Cup 2023



Submitted by

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1. Background on Paani Foundation

In Maharashtra, the crises of water scarcity and drought have ravaged thousands of villages, leading to thirst, hunger, debt, forced migration and withered crops. Scientific solutions to address and eradicate these crises exist, and have been well-known for decades. However, the primary barrier to implementing these on scale lies in deep-rooted social fractures. Divides of caste, religion, political affiliations and gender have prevented communities from owning this issue and finding purpose in solving it together.

Paani Foundation addresses these issues by the transformative power of collection action. Our mission is to create a drought-free Maharashtra, which is ecologically as well as economically prosperous. We achieve this by mobilising and training citizens in Maharashtra with the requisite social and technical skills, fostering social unity among villages, and providing scale to proven solutions and technologies.

From 2016, our year of inception, to 2019, we hosted the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup, a competition for excellence in soil and water conservation. This never-seen-before competition created a platform for village communities to work together in a positive and joyful way to solve the problem of drought. The competition had two major pillars: (i) Shramadaan or voluntary labour and (ii) Training. The rules of the competition required villages to do substantial amounts of shramadaan, compelling all factions in the village to work together.

Across these years, over 6,000 villages participated in the movement to make their villages water-abundant. Their efforts led to the creation of over 550 billion litres of water storage capacity!



2. The Journey from Water Cup to Farmer Cup

The Water Cup tackled one side of fighting drought. It addressed the supply side of the issue. It gave villages the path towards conserving water each year and maintaining water supply. However, to address the crisis of drought in a comprehensive manner, it was necessary to work on demand management of water as well as environmental restoration. From 2020-2022, we launched the Satyamev Jayate Samruddha Gaon Spardha, and worked on these aspects in a smaller set of villages (~1000 villages across 39 talukas), while battling the challenges posed by COVID.

Starting 2022, we responded to an urgent need on ground post COVID - that of working on improving farmer livelihoods. This meant shifting our focus towards agriculture. This side of the work was critical in terms of demand management of water as well, since 95% of water in rural areas is used in agriculture. In 2020-2021, we had also successfully carried out farming experiments on 4 major crops: soyabean, cotton, chana (gram) and vegetables. The hypothesis in these experiments was that the adoption of standard operating practices (SOPs) could lead to dramatic improvement in productivity and income in agriculture. The experiments completely validated this hypothesis.

Therefore in early 2022, we conceptualised the Satyamev Jayate Farmer Cup competition to work on farmer livelihoods, and thereby incentivise farmers and villages to work on water and natural resource management.

2. About the Farmer Cup

The Satyamev Jayate Farmer Cup is a competition between farmer groups in Maharashtra to do the best work in sustainable agriculture. Farmers are required to form crop-specific collectives which then compete against each other to lower costs, improve productivity, increase profitability and move towards sustainable farming.

With this competition, our aim is to empower farmers to fight the myriad challenges posed by agriculture, which the lone farmer cannot tackle himself / herself - such as market uncertainties, unscrupulous middlemen, labour and input shortage, etc. Paani Foundation's role is to provide scientific knowledge, train farmers on agricultural best practices, and create a framework for the

competition. Through regular on-ground interventions and communication, we also ensure that a joyous competition atmosphere is created where farmers feel inspired to give their best.

Apart from our residential and one-day field trainings, we have also created a free and accessible digital knowledge sharing platform. In partnership with Maharashtra’s top agriculture universities, we host regular ‘Digital Sheti Shalas’ or ‘Digital Farming Schools’ for over 25 major crops. Farmers learn about best practices to cultivate their crop and ask questions to experts in real time.

The first edition of the Farmer Cup was held from May 2022 till January 2023, and it was open to farmers in around 1,000 villages across 39 talukas of Maharashtra. The prize distribution for this competition took place in March 2023 and witnessed 2500+ people in attendance. Shri Devendra Fadnavis, Hon’ble Deputy CM of Maharashtra, was the Chief Guest, with several luminaries from the fields of business, arts and the social sector in attendance. Parivartan Shetkari Gat from Warud taluka, Amravati district, bagged the first prize of Rs. 25 lakhs! The complete list of winners can be seen [here](#).



The second edition of the Farmer Cup (May 2023-January 2024) is ongoing. This time, the competition is open to all the villages across the 39 talukas of Maharashtra where Paani Foundation is active. This competition will end on January 31, 2024. The prize structure is as below:

Prizes in Farmer Cup 2023	
State-Level Winners	First prize: Rs. 15 lakh Second prize: Rs. 10 lakh Third prize: Rs. 5 lakh
Gram Panchayat Prize (Two prizes, based on population size)	Medium Population Size: Rs. 5 lakhs Large Population Size: Rs. 5 lakhs
Best Women Collective	First prize: Rs. 5 lakhs Second prize: Rs. 3 lakhs Third prize: Rs. 2 lakhs
Best Collective at the Taluka Level	Rs. 1 lakh per taluka

3. Farmer Cup 2023 Participation

There are a total of 3,027 farmer groups participating in Farmer Cup 2023 - double the number compared to last year! Of these groups, 780 groups are comprised only of women - which is an 18x jump compared to the number of women-only groups last year.

4. Brief Summary of Activities

Jan – March 2023 was spent in outreach, mobilization, and preparing for the most important residential training of Farmer Cup 2023. To scale up the competition, presentations and meetings were conducted in new villages and a formal invitation was extended to attend the residential training. Over 2,000 Gram Panchayats have registered. New trainers and coordinators were added to Paani’s team after a rigorous screening process and training. Along with the training module, films and other assets, 13 training centers were set up for the training that began in the month of March.

Post the residential training, we conducted field schools and conducted digital sheti shalas, ensuring that participating farmer groups had entered the data of all work done on the Farmer Cup app. Over 18,000 farmers were trained in our first field training called ‘Majha Gat, Majha Kutumb’. These farmers learned about the power of collectivisation in farming via games, activities, films and enriching discussions. For most participants, it was their first introduction to group farming, SOPisation in farming and moving towards sustainable agriculture. In this period, we also successfully completed over 100 digital sheti shala or digital farming school sessions for all major Kharif crops!

5. Activity Highlights

Residential Training

A total of 8200 farmers were trained in a 3-day residential training as the first step to the competition. Led by games, films, case studies and engaging activities, this training introduced farmers to the concept of group farming and introduced them to SOP-based scientific farming. After this training, trainees returned to their villages and formed groups.

A total of 3027 farmer groups were formed to participate in the competition.

a. Field Training #1 - ‘Majha Gat, Majha Kutumb’

Activity Overview: In June, our team conceptualised and created a 3-hour field training module. Called ‘Majha Gat, Majha Kutumb’ or ‘My Farmer Group is my Family’, the aim of the training was to sensitise maximum members of participating farmer groups towards the advantages of group farming and gains of sustainable agriculture practices. This training became the key instrument in directly reaching maximum farmers participating in the competition, since only 1-3 members from every farmer group had attended the residential training earlier. Our entire field team of 90 members was trained to conduct this training.

Activity Impact: Across June, July and a few days in August, a total of 18,127 farmers from 1895 groups participated in this training. They learned about the power of collectivisation and SOPisation in farming, via films and activities. Several farmers who weren't actively working in the gat started participating with renewed vigor as they learnt the importance of collectivisation. They implemented their learnings and lowered cultivation costs via collective input purchase and collective labour. They also implemented natural pest management practices and started their journey towards sustainable farming.



b. Conducting Digital Sheti Shalas (Digital Farming Schools)

Activity Overview: Starting May 31, we launched ‘Digital Sheti Shalas’ or ‘Digital Farming Schools’ for all major Kharif crops. Crop-specific sessions are conducted every evening and hundreds of farmers participate. They join via Zoom and directly speak with the top agricultural experts and get various queries answered. This is the first time that such a platform has been

created and is available to farmers at absolutely no cost. Our mission with this activity is to make knowledge on farming best practices freely accessible and easy to implement.

We are currently hosting individual sheti shalas for major crops such as soybean, cotton, major millets such as bajra and jowar, maize, etc. We are hosting a combined sheti shala for 21 vegetables and one for 7 minor millets. In all, farmers are getting expert-led knowledge on almost 40 crops! Soon, we are going to launch sheti shalas for animal husbandry and poultry as well. In September, we also crossed the landmark of conducting over 100 sheti shalas in this edition of the Farmer Cup.

- C.** The tremendous success of the sheti shalas has been possible primarily due to our strong partnerships with the top agricultural universities in Maharashtra. We have MoUs with 5 universities for support with the Digital Sheti Shalas. Therefore, experts from these universities attend relevant sessions and guide farmers with best practices:

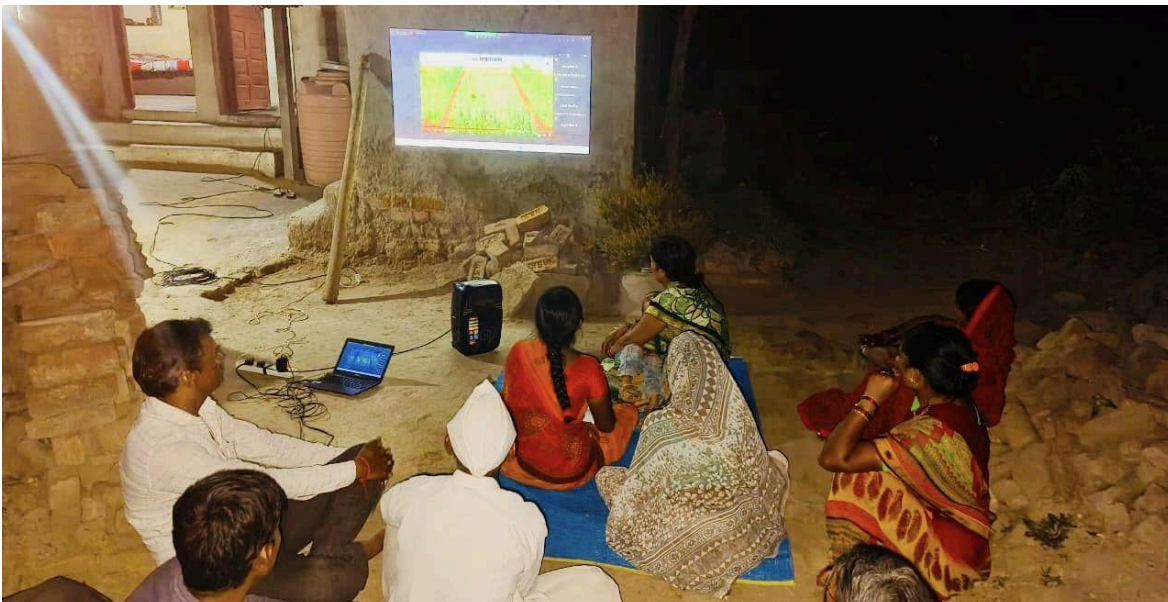
- Dr Panjabrao Deshmukh Krishi Vidyapeeth, Akola
- Vasantnao Naik Marathwada Krushi Vidyapeeth, Parbhani
- Balasaheb Sawant Kokan Krushi Vidyapeeth, Dapoli
- Mahatma Phule Krushi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri
- Maharashtra Animal And Fisheries Science University, Nagpur



Impact: For the first time ever, farmers are getting access to scientific knowledge on farming, at their very own doorstep, without spending a single rupee. Because of the sheti shalas, farmers are able to grow crops using minimum chemicals and follow several sustainable farming practices. Many farmers have been able to revive or save crops from disease and pest attacks via timely expert advice. Many scientists have also visited farms in neighbouring areas and met farmers one-on-one. They have spent hours in the farms interacting with the farmers. Such visits have empowered farmers even further. Most notably, women are being directly empowered with knowledge. Hundreds of women participate in the sheti shala every evening and learn directly from experts. Even while doing household chores, they participate in the sheti shalas and ask several questions. In fact, farmers organize their day in a way that they don't miss the sheti shala. They join the Zoom link well in advance and for the entire duration of the sheti shala, hands are raised to get a chance to speak directly with the scientists. This shows how well loved and sought after these 3 hours in the evening are. This knowledge and participation has led to increased self-confidence and self-reliance among thousands of women farmers.

Knowledge is at the heart of the Farmer Cup and the sheti shalas are empowering farmers across age, gender, class and caste to improve their livelihoods and move in the direction of sustainable farming.

Farmers in remote areas joining the sheti shala



d. Measuring Well Water Levels for Water Management

Activity Overview: Water usage is at the centre of agriculture. For farmers to take informed decisions on which crops to take, it is imperative that they are aware of the water availability in their village. Since 2020, Paani Foundation has been training farmers and villagers to measure wells and keep a record of the water levels. This year too, farmers groups participating in the Farmer Cup took this initiative. With training and support given by team Paani, they measured several wells. The data gathered after this exercise helped farmer groups budget their water usage and prepare for a scenario with scanty rainfall.

Impact: A total of 4777 wells across 465 villages were measured. This initiative was led entirely by the farmers themselves, making it one of the largest decentralised water management initiatives to happen year-on-year in Maharashtra.

e. Implementation of SOPs in Farming

Activity Overview: As the Kharif season has progressed, farmers have implemented several SOPs or Standard Operating Practices, as per the Farmer Cup training and learnings from the Sheti Shalas. A list of some of the SOPs is below:

- Seed germination testing and seed treatment
- Ploughing in the afternoon sun, perpendicular to the slope
- Using a token machine or BBF machine for sowing
- Making and spraying natural pesticides
- Deweeding without chemical weedicides
- Using sticky traps, pheromone traps and light traps for pest management
- Using protective gear and implementing protective measures in the event of spraying chemical pesticides

Impact: There is large-scale awareness among farmers on the power of SOPisation in farming and non-pesticide management. Hundreds of farmers have mentioned that this is the first time they are using alternatives to chemical pesticides and farming in a scientific way, despite being in this profession for years. SOPisation in farming has enabled farmers to feel empowered, confident, and largely protect their crops in times of pest attacks, disease and unforeseen weather events. The scale and extent to which farmers are implementing these practices is nothing short of an on-ground movement for change.





e. Toofan Aalaya - Fortnightly TV Show

Activity Overview: On July 23, we launched our yearly TV show which chronicles inspiring stories of the work happening on ground. Called 'Toofan Aalaya' or 'A Storm Has Arrived', this 18-minute TV show airs fortnightly on Maharashtra's leading news channel, ABP Majha. Paani Foundation's team of creative directors, writers, editors and camera persons create this unique show. So far, 6 episodes have been telecast. Each episode can also be found on our YouTube channel, with English subtitles.

Impact: Toofan Aalaya has proven to be a source of pride and encouragement for farmers whose stories have been featured. They feel determined to continue their work. Their village, families and others around them also feel inspired to try out sustainable farming practices. The show is also aspirational for several farmers - they are determined to work harder in order to receive such a platform of acknowledgement. The show has also enabled the work of Paani Foundation and the Farmer Cup to reach urban populations in Maharashtra via social media and ABP Majha. On social media, viewers from several countries like Russia and Turkey also watch the show as it has English subtitles.



f. Data Entry for Verification

Activity Overview: This year, there is a significant change in the verification process for the Farmer Cup. Instead of physically verifying the records and work done by all farmer groups only in January, most of the process is digital-first. The first deadline for recording all the work done until now was September 5. Farmer groups updated their app profiles with this information and also uploaded supporting documents. This was a massive digital data entry exercise which was spearheaded by the Paani Foundation field team.

Impact: Data monitoring and a seamless and fair verification process are key to the success of the competition model. This phase-wise process will ensure that the final verification happens smoothly. Moreover, the core of Paani Foundation's model is that it is demand-driven. Only those farmers who display the willingness and motivation to do the work, stay on as the final contenders. This data entry process helps us gauge the level of attrition and give us a clear picture of how many farmer groups are seriously working in the competition. Every phase is also an opportunity for our team to evaluate the work on ground and make necessary changes.

g. Team Offsite, Reflection and Farmerpreneur Training

Activity Overview: There are almost 120 members in the Paani team. In September, we hosted an offsite at Aryan Eco Resort in Jalgaon for the entire team to meet, reflect on the work done so far and plan next steps. Crucial sessions from the 'Farmerpreneur' training module were also conducted with the team, so that everyone is equipped with a solid understanding of how to guide farmer groups in terms of value addition and possible business opportunities.

Impact: The Paani field team especially works at an incredibly fast pace, travels long distances and works as per the schedules of farmers. Therefore, this time in Jalgaon was important for the team to regroup, rejuvenate and learn from each other. It had a huge impact on team morale and motivated the team to continue the work on ground. It also gave the team a platform to express their honest thoughts and feedback on the Farmer Cup so far, along with an opportunity to present their suggestions for strengthening this work in months to come. It was also an excellent team building opportunity. The team participated in team building activities and in a cultural evening, and some even got a chance to properly interact with each other in person for the first time.



h. Initiatives to Combat Climate Change and Improve Farmer Incomes

We are currently in the process of researching and piloting a few initiatives that can improve farmer incomes and savings, while contributing positively to the fight against climate change.

1. Agroforestry

We have co-created a 1-acre model of agroforestry plantation with the organisation SayTrees. This model will enable farmers to grow 2 or 3 varieties of fruit trees on the boundary of their farms or in the main plot itself. Farmers will thus receive the gains of high-value agriculture as well as get consistent income once the fruiting begins. Over time, the trees will help improve the carbon absorption capacity of the soil as well as help sequester more carbon from the atmosphere. They will also act as a barrier against strong winds and extreme rainfall, thus act as a protective measure for crops. We are piloting such a model with 27 farmers in Khultabad taluka of Aurangabad, across 28.5 acres.

2. Sweet Sorghum Processing

Sweet sorghum is a drought-resilient and multipurpose crop, suited for the climate of Maharashtra. It is now widely recognised as a biofuel crop. It can be used for 3 varied purposes - the grain can be used as Food, the stalks can be crushed to make Fuel, and the bagasse derived from the processed stalks can be used as nutritious livestock Feed. It is a 4-month crop, which means it can be taken at least twice a year. Also, compared to another stalk-heavy crop such as sugarcane, it requires 50% less water.

Farmers growing sweet sorghum have the potential to earn consistent income as the juice obtained by crushing sweet sorghum can be fermented and used for ethanol production. We're currently running a pilot with Sahyadri Farms to process sweet sorghum at an industrial level. Its results could prove to be a pivotal point for the journey of the Farmer Cup.

3. Setting up Biogas Units

The production of household-level biogas can prove to be extremely useful for rural families. Farmers can cut out costs on LPG and other fossil fuels for cooking and also use the produced gas for purposes such as heating water. It is a cleaner alternative for cooking gas and the bio-slurry which is produced as a byproduct, is a rich fertilizer. In Baramati taluka, 140 farmers associated with Paani Foundation have received small biogas units from the organisation Sistema.Bio at heavily subsidized rates.

i. Himmatgram: Learning, Demo, Experiment

Activity Overview: The NGO Snehalaya, a longtime partner of Paani Foundation, has made 4 acres of their farmland available to us in the plot of Himmatgram in Ahmednagar district. The purpose of farming on this land is for Paani's own team to be able to get hands-on experience in farming, learn and implement the SOPs which are a part of the Farmer Cup, and experience the uncertainties and challenges which a farmer faces. There is a full-time two-member team situated in Himmatgram. Every month, in batches, members from the Paani team visit Himmatgram and offer shramadaan (voluntary labour) for farmwork. So far, we have grown 20 crops on the land. We have also harvested okra, bitter gourd, cluster beans, green gram, coriander and bajra. Urad and jowar will be harvested soon. As an experiment, we have also planted a variety of soybean specifically to harvest it for edamame.

Impact: Working and learning at Himmatgram has proven to be an enriching experience for team Paani. It has cultivated in us deeper empathy and understanding of the challenges and efforts of a farmer group. Moreover, it has given us more confidence in terms of our farming knowledge and proven to be a great team building initiative.

Summary of Achievements

PERIOD	PLANNED ACTIVITIES	PLANNED	ACHIEVED
Jan - Mar 2023	Recruitment and training of new trainers to expand the reach in more villages of 39 talukas.	25	27
	Field team (TCs and RCs) meets representatives of new villages to discuss Farmer Cup 2023 and widen participation	4000	4000
	Development of Farmer Cup residential training module, the most critical training that shifts the mindset from individual farming to group farming	1	1
	Registrations for Farmer Cup 2023 residential training	2000	10000
	Fine tuning the marking system for Farmer Cup 2023 on the basis of the learnings from Farmer Cup 2022	1	1
	Training of entire Paani team (RCs + TCs+ trainers) for Farmer Cup 2023	106	110
	Setting up of training centres for residential training	10	14
	3-day residential training of villager – module wise training (March-May)	10000	8,209
April - June 2023	Revised version of Farmer Cup android app is launched	1	1
	May 15 Farmer Cup 2023 begins	4,000 gats to be formed	3,027
	Sheti Shala for all major Kharif crops begins to impart best practices and to solve farmer queries in real time	Adoption of best practices	Sheti shalas conducted for 34 Kharif and 5 Rabi crops. SOPs adopted at scale as mentioned in Objective 2.
	Pre monsoon well water level measurement	5000	4777
	Fine tuning the Field School #1 module on the basis of learnings from 2022	1	1
	Training of trainers for Field School #1	52	45
	Field School #1 is conducted across 39 talukas	10000	19,299
	Setting up of Demonstration and Training Farm at Himmatgram, Ahmednagar	Curation of best farm practices for major crops	Done
July - Sep 2023	Developing a module for training of team Paani at Himmatgram	1	1
	Broadcast/social media Show chronicling field stories	3	6
	Supply chain management for implementation of the best farming practices.	Reduction of costs in input purchase	Farmers from top-performing groups 330 groups have cumulatively experienced a 11% reduction in per-acre cost of input purchase
	Campaign for NPM implementation	Implementation of various traps and bird perches	Data from the top-performing 330 groups shows that 74.71% of these farmers have used sticky traps and 60.67% have used bird perches
	Developing the module for Field School #2	1	1
	Training of trainers for Field School #2	52	45
	Field School #2 is conducted across 39 talukas	10000	12,156
	Chala Gavi - corporate employees travel to a village and participate in a farm activity (August-November)	300	300
	Sheti Shala for Kharif crops continues	Adoption of best practices	Yes, farmers continue implementing best practices
Oct - Dec 2023	Work on setting up of Demonstration and Training Farm continues	Curation of best farm practices for major crops	Yes, done
	Harvest begins for some crops	N/A	N/A
	Post monsoon well water level measurement	5000	This wasn't done due to stretched team bandwidth and several other ongoing activities.
	% Change in water level		N/A
	Developing the module for Field School #3	1	1
	Training of trainers for Field School #3	52	35
	Field School #3 is conducted across 39 talukas	10000	1923 (This is a reduced number as Field School #3 was hosted as an

ANNEXURE: List of 39 Talukas

Region	District	Taluka
Marathwada	Aurangabad	Khultabad
	Aurangabad	Phumlambri
	Aurangabad	Waijapur
	Beed	Ashti
	Beed	Kaij
	Beed	Dharur
	Beed	Beed
	Beed	Ambejogai
	Nanded	Loha
	Hingoli	Kalamnuri
North Maharashtra	Jalgaon	Amalner
	Jalgaon	Jamner
	Nandurbar	Nandurbar
	Nandurbar	Shahada
	Ahmadnagar	Nagar

	Ahmadnagar	Parner
	Ahmadnagar	Sangamner
	Nashik	Sinnar
Vidarbha	Akola	Akot
	Akola	Barshitakli
	Amravati	Chikhaldara

Vidarbha	Amravati	Warud
	Nagpur	Narkhed
	Buldhana	Motala
	Wardha	Arvi
	Washim	Karanja Lad
	Washim	Mangrulpir
Western Maharashtra	Pune	Purandar
	Pune	Baramati
	Satara	Koregaon
	Satara	Khatav
	Satara	Maan
	Sangli	Atpadi
	Sangli	Jat
	Sangli	Tasgaon
	Solapur	North Solapur
	Solapur	Karmala
	Solapur	Barshi
	Solapur	Madha