The year 2020-21 was another landmark year in the life of Under The Mango Tree Society - when for the first time in response to the pandemic, our team took up the responsibility of raising funds, procuring health equipment and reaching it on time - all in a few weeks time. This included critical, life saving oxygen concentrators for rural Primary Health Centres (PHCs), safety kits for ASHA workers in 1458 villages in three states. The team was galvanised into action when they saw communities we work with reel under the second wave of COVID with very little information or equipment reaching the interior villages. Our moment of truth came when we struggled to get an ambulance for Manilalbhai Vaghera (40), one of our oldest and senior most staff members, whose oxygen levels were dipping alarmingly, to Valsad just 65 kms away. Getting him a bed in a hospital with oxygen concentrator support was another Herculean task. The team decided they could not stand by and watch.

After discussions with district health officials, we embarked on a mission to augment rural health infrastructure in the blocks where we work in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Appreciation and thanks are due to our donors - Kalpataru Trust, Fluid Controls Private Limited, HCL Foundation, Sodexo/Stop Hunger Trust, who responded almost as soon as our request for help went out. The subsequent pages tell us more about the efforts we undertook during the COVID intervention.

We also had to reinvent the way our programmes were run - given the mobility constraints due to lockdown, with different blocks having different guidelines. Simultaneously, with the return of migrants to their homes, the need for creating additional streams was also much needed. It is to the credit of the team that the programme was reinvented in ways that we would not have imagined a few years ago, with intensive phone based audio and video support stepping in. Our local cadre of Master Trainers spread across the villages were again extremely valuable in keeping the programme going.

I would like to express our deep gratitude to our Managing Committee, especially our Founder Vijaya Pastala, Treasurer Sophie Moochhala and Secretary Naheed Carrimjee who were in touch with us throughout this phase and actively fund-raised and encouraged us to deliver on the COVID mission. Our team, led by the Leadership Team, after their initial apprehensions about this foray into a new area in which we did not have much expertise, went completely out to ensure that immediate block level health requirements were met. This earned us the goodwill of the district administration.

This year’s Annual Report contains a small feature on our Monitoring and Evaluation Team - who work very efficiently behind the scenes to capture the impact of our programmes. They have innovated and set up a unique system of reporting in an extremely challenging space - measuring agricultural yields in open field conditions.

The coming year poses new challenges as we expand geographically and the team grows in size. But I am confident that our Leadership Team and the team will face this in the spirit that this organization stands for - dedication to work, commitment and a positive attitude.

- Sujana Krishnamoorthy
Executive Director

UTMT Society Annual Report 2019-20
How Covid changed everything we knew and practiced: India and UTMT Society Scenario

None of us had ever thought that the world could come to a literal standstill and so when the country went into complete lockdown on March 24, 2020 none of us were prepared.

“After the first lockdown, initially we were not so worried as we thought this would last for maximum three months and so we will be able to begin our field trips and trainings as usual around September”, shared Sachin Dhavle, Maharashtra Team.

The weeks turned into months and the situation went from bad to worse. Like everyone else, we at UTMT Society were unsure how the crisis pan out.

As the weeks progressed, the initial shock of the Covid-19 pandemic subsided. Each week came a mix bag of some positive and some negative and as a team we decided to focus on the positive keep the spirits up and handle the negatives to make sure help would reach those most in need.

In a country like India, where 65-68% of the population lives in rural areas and which has only 40% of total healthcare workforce- doctors, nurses and other paramedical workers spread sparsely in these areas made Covid-19 a bigger threat. What was even more concerning s that these limited resources are very hard to mobilize, especially during a pandemic.

Rural Health Statistics (RHS) reveals huge gaps in health infrastructure and resources in tribal areas due to serious geographical and socio-economic challenges. Poor availability of health personnel, lack of adequate equipment, language and social barriers, waiting time at health centres and poverty also add to problems of access.

To prevent the occurrence of health catastrophes in rural areas, team UTMTS spearheaded an awareness programme aiming to educate masses through massive community outreach campaigns as the first step to fight against Covid-19.

Working in the remote villages and tribal belts of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, our teams did not need media and news to tell us how the Covid-19 pandemic would adversely impact farmers and tribal communities in these remote villages.
At one point the positivity rate in Palghar district was 20.5% according to the data of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. UTMT Society has been working closely with communities in Dahanu, Talasari, Jawhar and Mokhada blocks in Palghar district since 2010 on beekeeping interventions. The second wave of COVID highlighted the huge gaps in the health system with remote communities bearing the brunt of the pandemic. UTMT Society decided to step in at this juncture to do whatever was possible to safeguard the health of the communities.

The situation in areas of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh where we work was not any better. If not having adequate health care was not enough, myths and fear around the then novel Coronavirus made the situation worse.

To deal with the COVID-19 situation in the country, the responsibilities of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) workers were expanded, as outlined by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. ASHAs are community health workers under the National Rural Health Mission of Government of India. Along with auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs) and Anganwadi (childcare) Workers (AWWs), they are among India’s frontline health workers. However, covid made ASHAs face unsafe working conditions because of inadequate protective gear, insufficient training, and lack of proper precautionary measures.

Discussion with District Health Officials further showed that ASHA workers mostly did not have any protective gear for themselves, neither did they have oximeters and thermometers. Our teams also realized that health facilities needed to be strengthened for better delivery of healthcare services such as provision of oxygen concentrators for critical patients.

To achieve the set goal of distribution of equipment, UTMT Society’s staff worked closely for awareness and distribution at block levels, ensuring the resources reach to last-mile people. A nodal person was appointed with whom the ASHA workers can get in touch with, in case they have any issues with the kits or they need any replacement of batteries, etc.

UTMT Society on the field

UTMT intervention focused on-

Awareness programme at two levels-
- **Stage 1:**
  Bridging information gaps of Awareness about symptoms relating to COVID-19 do’s and don’ts related to COVID-19
- **Stage 2:**
  Emphasizing the need to get vaccinated

Strengthening the hands of ASHA workers-
- Distribution of IEC material related to Covid-19
- Supply essential equipments to ASHA workers in form of kits
  - A basic kit that includes N95 masks, face shield, oximeter, non-contact thermometer, replaceable batteries, disposable surgical masks and a pouch.

Infrastructure at PHCs and Covid centres-
- Distribution of batteries (to ASHA workers) for oximeters and non-contact thermometers
- Provision of Oxygen Concentrators and Oxygen Masks
- Provision of foam mattresses at Kasturba Hospital Valsad, Gujarat
- Provision of beds and pedestal fans at Quarantine centres (Jawhar and Mokhada blocks, Maharashtra)
- Provision of Fowler beds for PHCs in Talasari, Maharashtra

Networking with District Health Officials and Administration-
- Supply of oxygen concentrators at Government health facilities in Palghar district, Maharashtra.
- Bridge basic infrastructure gaps in health facilities accessed by communities in the areas we work in.
Covid Intervention reach

Maharashtra-
• Palghar district (Talasari, Dahanu, Mokhada and Jawhar blocks)

Gujarat-
• Valsad district (Dharampur and Kaprada blocks), Dangs district (Subhir and Ahwa blocks)

Silvassa-
(of Dadra and Nagar Haveli)

Madhya Pradesh-
• Chhindwara district

The campaign focused on sensitizing people on Covid-19 symptoms, precautions, testing, treatment and vaccination. To ensure reception of information by the communities all the messaging done—audio, banners and booklets was in local language. The major objective of this drive was to burst common myths regarding Covid and encourage people for testing as well as vaccination.

• Through the awareness campaigns approximately 82,208 people (75,690 in Maharashtra, 6,200 in Gujarat and 318 in Madhya Pradesh) have been reached sensitizing them about Covid.

• A total 12,272 replacement batteries have been distributed amongst 1,534 ASHA workers (8 sets of batteries each) who had received oximeters and non-contact thermometers previously, in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

• 700 oxygen masks have been distributed (300 in Talasari and Dahanu blocks in Palghar district of Maharashtra and 400 Dharampur blocks in Valsad district of Gujarat).

• 135 foam mattresses and pillows were given at Kasturba Hospital, Valsad, Gujarat for in-patients (of Covid-19).

• 56 fans and 112 beds along with cotton mattresses, bed sheets, pillow and its cover were distributed at the Quarantine centres in Mokhada block of Palghar district, Maharashtra.

• 14 Oxygen concentrators (6 in Maharashtra and 8 in Gujarat) have been distributed at health centres.

• 8 Fowler beds have been provided to the Primary Health Centre in Talasari, Maharashtra for in-patients (of Covid-19).

• 1,137 ASHA workers received IEC material pertaining to Covid-19 in in local language.

• 8 oxygen concentrators were distributed in PHCs of Dharampur and Kaprada blocks of Valsad after consulting Block Health Officials, where access to oxygen was hard.

• Each ASHA was also given a banner for putting up in villages to generate awareness amongst the masses on Covid-19.
Working in communities (closely) in times of Covid is often stressful as there is fear of contracting the infection. After receiving the Covid kit I feel confident and safe to work in communities. This recognition has charged me with positive energy to be in the field and do the assigned work diligently and without any worry.

- Saroj Deshmukh, ASHA worker, Supdahad village, PHC, Sakarpatal, Waghai block, Dangs district, Gujarat.

Each equipment/item in the Covid safety kit for ASHA workers was urgent, which we were unable to provide. Also receiving everything together has made a lot of difference. It will improve the ground-level screening and safeguard the ASHA all at the same time.

- Dr. Valvi, Medical Officer, PHC Sakharshet, Jawhar block, Palghar district, Maharashtra.

We were using cotton masks and sharing oximeters while conducting the medical surveys. We were not only risking our lives but were also putting our families in danger, all for the sake of (well-being of) communities we belong to. Now that we have the Covid kit, our worries of contracting the infection have reduced.

- Yashwanti Telode, ASHA, Kurje village, Talasari block, Palghar district, Maharashtra.

The Covid-19 kit will facilitate me to do my duty as a health worker properly. This equipment will certainly help me do a more vigilant screening of suspected patients and will also safeguard me. I am thankful to have received it.

- Shanta Dodka, ASHA worker, Dhankval village, PHC Mohnakavchali, Dharampur block, Valsad, Gujarat.
Gujarat

- Number of Beeboxes: 4255
- Number of Beekeepers: 1413
- Number of women Beekeepers: 145
- Number of farmers trained: 590
- Honey Extracted (in kgs): 2099.7
- Honey Sold (in kgs): 1328.6
Sitaben Baraf, 38 years  
Dhamanvegan, Kaprada Block, Gujarat

Sitaben feels immense pride to be identified as a Master Trainer. One can say this was her first step to feel confident to do even greater things for herself and the community at large. Having contested and won the local panchayat elections, Sitaben has come far from being a homemaker to a leader. “I did not have any independent identity before becoming a Master Trainer”. Married at an early age with no formal education, she dropped out of school in Grade 7, Sitaben lives in a joint family of eight members. The family depended on agriculture with an annual income of only INR 35,000.

In 2019-2020, when UTMT Society first conducted the awareness meeting, Sitaben registered herself for the training. Though scared of bees, she also saw it as an opportunity to learn a new skill. The fact that the batch consisted of only women farmers from her own village and the training was being conducted in the local language gave her the comfort and confidence to be part of the training. The information from the training brought a new outlook for Sitaben and many more women farmers. “The training offered completely new knowledge on bees and beekeeping. It was remarkable to see bees settle in the beebox on day-two of our practical training”.

After attending the basic two-day farmer training in beekeeping, Sitaben began looking for bee colonies to fill her beeboxes. At present she has 9 filled bee boxes (5 A. cerana and 4 Trigona) on her agricultural land. To fill the initial bee boxes, she took help from technical staff of UTMT Society but later continued the process independently. “People in the village were surprised to see me do beekeeping. I was praised for my skills, it gave me the confidence to improve my skills further”.

Sitaben’s husband Dashrat has played an important role to make all this happen. He is actively involved in the project and it was only because of his willingness to travel with her that she could attend all the training and meetings. During the difficult phase of Covid-19 pandemic when UTMT Society could not organize city level trainings, both Sitaben and Dashrat bhai made sure all meetings were held locally at their house. They are also on the forefront of any visits to their village.

In 2020, Sitaben harvested 3 kg of honey of which she sold 2.5 kg and kept 500 gm for self-consumption. She also experienced pollination impact on her chickoo and guava trees. “We observed that both chickoo and guava bore more fruits as compared to previous years. Not only were the fruits bigger but also sweeter and juicier when compared to harvests in the past.”

Today, Sitaben as a Master Trainer extends handholding support to 11 other women beekeepers in her village and manages 30 filled bee boxes. She is skilled in techniques of box filling- Natural Colony Transfer and Division (colony splitting) along with seasonal maintenance and honey harvesting. She wants to continue enhancing her skills in beekeeping and become an expert resource person. She is popularizing beekeeping amongst women in her village, so much so that there is a rise in demand for beekeeping training.

I like meeting and interacting with other beekeepers and Master Trainers. We learn through experience sharing.

I will continue beekeeping not only for benefits in agriculture but because it gave me an identity of my own. It is something I have achieved independently.
The Kindled Human Spirit

Rethinking, reorganizing, rebuilding- the Gujarat project team fought like soldiers through all the confusion, fear and uncertainty of the initial phases of Covid. But their biggest challenge came when they came close to losing one of their own.

The year of working through Covid-19 was not something anyone of us could have been prepared for looking back now makes me sad as well as grateful at the same time.

Work changed for us completely. As we were not able to visit the villages, we had to do everything via phone including the baseline. This simple activity which normally took us an hour took double the time. Even when things started opening up a little, the training had to be done in smaller batches which meant more time, more money and more resource people. There came a time when all of our master trainers were sick and everything stopped but we never gave up as a team.

Manilalbhai has been the field manager for UTMT Society, Gujarat since the beginning of our intervention in 2009. The whole UTMT Society team respects him for his hard work and dedication. In his eleven years of association he has always taken the initiatives to take the program forward. When he was diagnosed with Covid-19, as a team we called everyday to check his condition. In the next few days, his situation started deteriorating and oxygen level dropped to 85, his breathing became laboured. This was also the peak of the second wave where neither beds nor oxygen cylinders were readily available in hospitals. The situation in rural belts was worse.

In the midst of this we had to also make sure that the COVID awareness campaign did not suffer. On one hand we were doing the basics of urging the villagers to wear masks and take the vaccine while on the other hand we were doing our best to bust myths around the vaccine. In one incident, the village elders stayed awake when a child was born as they feared the child would die due to Covid-19 if left unprotected. Such heart-wrenching stories and the situation was both mentally and physically draining.

We took regular updates of Manilal Bhai. The oxygen level continued to drop, at one point reaching to as low as 38. We were prepared for the worst but as a team we could simply not give up. We used all the networks in the area and managed to get him an oxygen cylinder. With continuous follow up, we managed to find an empty bed in a nearby government hospital. But his situation still did not improve. As a last resort, the team moved Manilal Bhai to a private hospital in the city of Valsad.

At this stage his lungs were completely infected. But thanks to the team at the hospital, the Gujarat team who never gave up and the fighting spirit of Manilal bhai, he made a full recovery. It took a full month at the hospital. During this entire period, someone from the team visited him every day, they pitched in support mentally, physically as well as financially which clearly shows the bond the team shares with each other. It also shows us that in the most diverse of situations, it is the human bond and spirit which gives us the courage to fight back and stand tall in front of challenges.

Having gone through the pain of seeing one of our own struggle for oxygen and delay in understanding the need for quick steps, UTMT Society took the decision to scale up the awareness program. We work in most remote areas where the nearest hospital is 40-45 kms away, in those areas we provided oxygen concentrators. The team was aided by volunteers and NCC cadets who not only helped in procuring and packing of kits for Gujarat but also for Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

Today we are happy and immensely relieved that Manilal bhai is back on the field in the midst of famers and bees, his constant companions.
At times it takes just one person to bring positive change for many and that is the story of the young visionary entrepreneur Ajay Kokani.

Fondly called Ajaybhai, he is currently pursuing his masters in Computer Science from Surat University, but innovation in agriculture, stability and increased means of earning for the farmers particularly youth of his small village of Halmundi (Tapi district of Gujarat) is his real passion.

Hailing from a family of farmers and having seen the challenges of farming up close, Ajaybhai was always keen on learning new innovations and looked for long term solutions. Even though his family encouraged him to go to the city and get a degree for better prospects, Ajaybhai was never able to get far from his roots and passion. Even while living in a hostel, he would travel to his home town on weekends to help his family with farming.

His curiosity often led him to meet different institutes and people working on innovations in agriculture. And that is also when he came across the importance of bees in agriculture making him enquire more about their cultivation. He started enquiring about bee boxes in neighbouring areas and was directed to the UTMT team. It was more than what he had asked for; in his own words he learned much more about bees and their importance and that has changed a lot for Ajaybhai.

"I thought beekeeping is mainly practiced for honey. I was unaware of the pollination impact of bees. The training has changed my point of view not only towards bees but also towards the entire environment. Earlier I used to track down beehives by observing them hovering on flowers and extract honey. I never realized that by destroying bee hives I am also contributing to the problem of the declining population of bees. And those bees were benefitting the crop and ultimately the farmer."

The training and association with UTMT Society has further helped Ajaybhai move in the direction of conserving the environment. The family cultivates mango and watermelon one 2 acres of agricultural land, the annual income from which is INR 80,000. To this, has been added animal husbandry and a nursery. Ajaybhai finds great support in his family while pursuing his dream. His father is also involved in beekeeping and takes interest in all the training and learnings from UTMT. His sister is a professor at a nearby agriculture college who has been very helpful throughout. Ajaybhai’s wife runs a small computer centre in the village often helping youth with filling forms for further education. They have a young daughter.

Post training Ajaybhai has not only given up on unsustainable honey hunting practices but is able to do Natural Colony Transfer and seasonal maintenance with assistance of technical staff of UTMT Society.

Trained in 2020, Ajaybhai has presently 3 filled bee boxes kept on his agricultural land. He is very satisfied with the result of following this practice. ‘I am happy with the increase in harvest for Mango and Watermelon post- beekeeping’. I usually harvest 1400 kg of watermelon by sowing 1 kg seeds, but thanks to UTMT training and of course the bees I harvested 2000 kg of Watermelon this year. I plan to expand beekeeping for better agricultural produce.

Adopting beekeeping additionally helped him save INR 2000- INR 2500 that he usually spent on chemical pesticides and fertilizers despite knowing that the quality of soil deteriorates. He has observed that his Mango trees are bearing more flowers as compared to previous year and he is expecting an increased produce.

Ajaybhai is sharing his beekeeping experience with other farmers in the village, popularizing beekeeping activity which has led to rise in demand for training. He exclaims, ‘a bee-friendly farmer is a flourishing farmer’
Maharashtra

- Number of Beeboxes: 1276
- Number of Beekeepers: 777
- Number of women Beekeepers: 210
- Number of farmers trained: 585
- Honey Extracted (in kgs): 185.65
- Honey Sold (in kgs): 11

UTMT Society Annual Report 2019-20
Spotting a bee colony in the wild is usually the very first step in the beekeeping process. Though many in the tribal and rural belt are taught spotting of the bee colonies, unfortunately the importance of bees and their unmatched contribution to agriculture is still a lesser known fact for many. This was also the case for Keshav Maule. Thirty five year old Keshav belongs to Bramhangaon village in Mokhada block of Palghar district, Maharashtra. Coming from a family of farmers, Keshav has a natural talent for spotting bee colonies. Spotting bee colonies not only requires in-depth knowledge of the local forest but also understanding of honey bee behaviour. What makes Keshav excel at this job is his knowledge of the area. He knows the local jungles like the back of his hand and can easily figure out bee colony locations.

Before coming in touch with UTMT Society and attending the beekeeping training in December 2020, Keshav was wasting this talent and skill for unsustainable honey hunting. “Due to my ignorance I have destroyed a number of colonies for honey and I sincerely regret it. After learning about the relevance of bees and beekeeping in the farmer awareness meeting organized by UTMT Society in the village I have completely stopped the unethical practice of bee hunting”.

Soon after the training, Keshav filled up 2 Cerana boxes and 2 Trigona boxes of his own. His immediate conversion to a beekeeper caught the attention of UTMT Society staff, and they approached him for additional training in colony-spotting. Keshav shares, “Even though I was good at colony spotting, sometimes I ended up wasting the entire day looking for colonies. But the training by UTMT Society on colony-spotting has given me more knowledge and techniques, now I know exactly where and when to look for hives, and that saves a lot of time”.

In the last couple of months, Keshav has spotted a total of 9 colonies, of which he has shared 5 colonies with other farmers who are interested in starting beekeeping. Along with colony-spotting, he has also developed his skill of doing NCT or Natural Colony Transfer.

Keshav now divides his time wisely between farming and beekeeping. Most of the crop season, Keshav is found in his field which is on the outskirts of the village. In monsoon he grows finger millet, black gram, pigeon pea, black eyed bean, sesame, mustard and prosomillet (varai) whereas in winters the produce is of Chickpea, coriander, brinjal, chilly and ladies finger.

He is hard working and has the support of his family in taking care of their land. His family, especially his father, is also getting involved in beekeeping and takes care of the bee boxes in his absence. His wife, though not actively involved, has begun to understand the process and interacts with the UTMT team during their visits. After the October harvest, Keshav dedicates his time and energy in beekeeping and colony spotting which is also the prime season. Keshav plans to support other farmers in filling their beeboxes by helping those spot more bee colonies. “I want to extend help to all my fellow farmers. Now, I understand the importance of bees in agriculture and I want others also (who are not able to spot colonies and fill their beeboxes) to benefit out of it.”
Thakarwadi- A changed village

Smoking natural hives for honey was a long-established practice of farmers in Thakarwadi village of Aurangabad district, Maharashtra. Bees provide only honey and that they have no other significant role (in ecosystem) was a common belief before UTMT Society began its intervention in the village in 2019.

Today, we are proud of the change in the approach and the impact; unsustainable honey hunting practices in the village have gone down drastically. The people in Thakarwadi have now realized the vital role bees play in agriculture and environmental sustainability.

The two-day basic farmer training in beekeeping by UTMT Society not only trained the 25 selected and interested farmers in beekeeping but it also sensitized the community about the important role bees play in maintaining the balance of our ecosystem.

Agriculture is the primary source of income for project farmers. Few of them also migrate outside the village to work as farm labourers. The small agricultural surpluses are generally sold in nearby local markets. Post-beekeeping, the majority of the project farmers have experienced impact on- pearl millet, sorghum, corn, chick pea, pigeon pea, papaya, guava and jujube.

In the coming years, the project farmers plan to scale-up the activity by adding more beeboxes. They are now capable of box filling, seasonal maintenance, understanding bee-behaviour, dealing with bee enemies and so on independently. For continued support, 3 chosen farmers have been trained as Master Trainers to make sure the farmers continue receiving extended handholding support on completion of the project.

If we had known the importance of bees in agriculture, we would have given-up honey hunting. It’s time for every farmer to adapt to beekeeping for agriculture.

Aurangabad market is visited only when the quantities are more, which is usually not the case, but with beekeeping our hopes have been built-up.

We would want to rent/ sell our beeboxes to other farmers/ orchard owners. Pollination services are in huge demand in nearby villages. This will also add to our sources of income.
Parvati Kharpade, 42 years
Zari village, Palghar District, Maharashtra

Parvati- The Bees Advocate

Conservation is the key to preservation of the environment. Not many are aware of the important role bees play in making the food that we survive on. Seeing that the farmers we work with understand the importance and share the information with others is heartening.

One such environment advocate is beekeeper Parvati Kaharpde. Trained in 2018 by UTMT Society, she is a beekeeper with a deep understanding of the role bees play in our ecosystem.

She understands that it is important to inculcate the message of conservation in the children at a young age, even better if it is taught as a value system at home. She has made sure that her two grandchildren understand the importance of bees and the work she does and never harm any bees ever.

Parvati- The Bees Advocate

Parvati Tai was trained in two-day basic farmer training in beekeeping and within 15 days’ time filled her first bee box with the assistance of technical staff of UTMT Society. Parvati was invested in the process and preservation of bees from day one. She supported 2 other women in spotting colonies through her local networks and helped them fill bee boxes. She presently has 3 filled bee boxes (2 A. cerana and 1 Trigona).

With further training she is now able to do seasonal management independently and is also able to identify different seasons of beekeeping- growth, honey flow and dearth and do the maintenance accordingly. She is an active participant in all the farm-gate trainings, meetings and visits ever since the basic training in beekeeping. “Each visit helps me understand bees better. I get a lot of handholding support from the local Master Trainer. I am also in the process of learning Division (a method of beebox filling) and honey extraction”.

The family has experienced an impact on their lemon tree post beekeeping. Before beekeeping the lemon tree hardly produced 2-3 lemons but now it produces 15-20 kg per year. Currently, she harvests 2.5 kg of honey which she sells locally at a price of INR 500/ kg. In 2021, she also sold 2 bee colonies for INR 1000 each. Seeing her progress, UTMT Society also provided her with bee-flora seeds and saplings along with kitchen garden seeds as well as Covid kit along with equipment support.

Parvati Tai post training has sensitized many about the significance of bees in agriculture. She wants everyone to know about the positive impact (bee) pollination has on the environment which helps in maintaining biodiversity and vibrant ecosystems upon which agriculture depends.
Madhya Pradesh

958
Number of Beeboxes

425
Number of Beekeepers

21
Number of women Beekeepers

239
Number of farmers trained

77.83
Honey Extracted (in kgs)

34.5
Honey Sold
Suban Singh is a smallholder farmer with many liabilities and very limited resources. But what puts him apart from the other farmers is his belief that bees are going to change his future. He has not only understood the importance of bees but has put his firm faith in them.

‘Over the years farmers have tried everything- fertilizer, pesticides, insecticides, soil testing, modern tools and so on but the results have been so limited. It all has a cost and it is not affordable for smallholders like me. On the other hand, beekeeping is not only an economic and viable solution but it is a naturally integrated solution to impact agriculture. In a year (2020) full of stress, beekeeping training was something positive that happened to us.’

Suban Singh, 45 year belongs to Seonighat village, Junnardeo block, Chhindwara district. Madhya Pradesh. He is a traditional honey hunter and was unaware about beekeeping and its (pollination) benefits in agriculture. Suban practices subsistence farming and often faces hardships. Most times he had to borrow money which led to one issue after another. As savings are negligible for farmers like Suban, he ended up compromising on basic necessities at times.

The situation has drastically improved after he became associated with UTMT Society. He was trained in two-day basic farmer training in beekeeping in September 2020. “The training changed my perception from bees for honey to bees for plants!” Now Suban looks forward to a better future. He has studied up to grade five but he wants to educate his children up to a level that they don’t have to face miseries like him.

Post-training he has given up on honey hunting and has 2 filled bee boxes kept on his 3 acres of land. ‘Bees are my hope. Nobody ever discussed how important bees are for agriculture and the overall ecosystem. A crucial input has been overlooked all these years’. After learning about the significance of bees in agriculture and food security, he has been promoting bees and beekeeping amongst other members of his community. He says, ‘If the mere presence of bees can improve crop production I don’t see any reason to overlook the aspect of bee conservation’.
Understanding and adopting Bee Pollination

Change is the only constant but bringing change requires diligence and persistence. Results though are rewarding.

The beekeeping project was implemented with 306 farmers in 3 villages of Junnardeo block, in Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh. Most of the farmers here were traditional honey hunters, the awareness and intervention by UTMT Society has inspired them to move away from unsustainable honey hunting practices. It has also reinforced the need for the increased population of bees by showcasing the impact it can have on crop yields.

“We need to protect bees for better crop produce. We all need to nurture bees for a green future”, shares a beekeeper from Madhya Pradesh.

Honey hunting to obtain crops of honey and beeswax – it is still widely practiced where people are poor and living at subsistence level and wild honeybee colonies are still abundant. Honey hunting gives one a quick access to obtain high carbohydrate (honey) and high protein (pollen and bee larva) foods with no financial cost. When a buyer is available, honey hunting is often seen by very poor people as a quick way to raise cash. These practices not only kill bees, it leads to depletion of honeybee colonies and habitat.

Agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry and allied activities are the single largest contributors to the livelihood of tribal communities in the villages where UTMT Society started intervention. However farming is constrained by the predominance of rain-fed conditions, lack of assured or protective irrigation, declining soil fertility, untimely and inadequate availability of inputs such as seeds and fertilizers characterized by low level of technological adoption amongst small and marginal tribal farmers.

The beekeeping project intervention was designed with the aim of -

a) Maintaining pollinator abundance- by discouraging unsustainable honey hunting practices through farmer sensitization meetings,

b) Diversity and health (of colonies) by introducing sustainable beekeeping techniques that integrate local and scientific knowledge and experience- about bees and beekeeping

c) Skill and capacity building of farmers to impact their agricultural produce.

The results have been very positive. Beekeeping and understanding the importance of bee pollination has been widely accepted and adopted by the farmers of the 3 villages of Junnardeo block. A farmer shares, ‘Bees need trees and we need bees, nobody before the project intervention explained this correlation so well.’

The project indicated and affirmed that beekeeping/ apiculture play a valuable part in rural livelihoods. Bees sustain agriculture by pollinating crops and thereby increasing yields of seeds and fruits.

Background

Pollination is the highest agricultural contributor to yields worldwide, contributing far beyond any other agricultural management practice. Pollinators affect 35 percent of global agricultural land, supporting the production of 87 of the leading food crops worldwide. Plus, pollination-dependent crops are five times more valuable than those that do not need pollination.

This can also be used if the design and space on the page allows:
Case Study

From an observer of the UTMT Society work in his village, to a beekeeper followed by becoming a master trainer, to today being a Technical Assistant, Sunil Narre has had an impressive graph of first learning the importance of bees and then becoming an advocate of conserving bees.

Prior to becoming part of UTMT Society, both Sunil and his wife worked as migrant labourers which was not only very difficult in terms of continuous travel and substandard living conditions, it also resulted in their two children missing out on any regular school. A seventh grade dropout, 29 year old Sunil lives with his parents, wife, two children and two siblings. Even though the family owns 4 acre of agricultural land the annual income of the family was only INR 45,000/-. A small land required the same amount of work but yields were less, leading to them working on other people’s lands as migrant labourers.

Chhwada is a small village therefore Sunil was aware about the work of UTMT Society. During his interaction with other farmers who were already associated with UTMT Society, he learnt about the benefits of beekeeping and awareness training. He enquired more about it and decided to be part of the training in 2018.

“The activity of beekeeping had always interested me but I never knew it could be a profession and give me better earnings than being a migrant labour. The handholding support from UTMT Society and the fact that the project requires minimum cost but gives maximum benefits was the reason for me to take the decision to become a beekeeper”.

Post training he wasted no time in filling the bee-boxes and experienced first-hand benefits of beekeeping. It did not take much time for the UTMT Society team to observe his skills and potential, he was chosen to be a local resource and trained in different modules to become a Master Trainer. Sunil proved his skills and passion by promoting beekeeping and the crucial role of bees in our eco system amongst the farmers.

People in the village would extract honey after burning the comb and I did not like it because honeybees would just die. Now that I am aware of the crucial role of pollination in agriculture, I use this knowledge to the best of my ability to discourage people from destroying the colonies for honey.

Sunil is always eager to learn more about the processes and attends all trainings organised by UTMT Society. Always wanting to do more, it was a natural progression for him to the next step of becoming a Technical Assistant with UTMT Society. Earning a regular salary, coupled with beekeeping and farming on his land, Sunil has a stable income today and is content with the way his life has transformed. He and his wife no longer migrate to other towns and cities for work and he is able to look after his family.

The best of it all is that he truly enjoys his work. He feels pride in the fact that he is a Master Trainer in his own village and has been able to extend handholding support to new beekeepers, teaching them new skills. “My life has changed for the better, thanks to beekeeping and the UTMT Society”.

Sunil Narre, 29 years
Chhwada village, Jamai block, Chhindwara

Sunil- The Man with Many Hats

“People in the village would extract honey after burning the comb and I did not like it because honeybees would just die. Now that I am aware of the crucial role of pollination in agriculture, I use this knowledge to the best of my ability to discourage people from destroying the colonies for honey.”

“People in the village would extract honey after burning the comb and I did not like it because honeybees would just die. Now that I am aware of the crucial role of pollination in agriculture, I use this knowledge to the best of my ability to discourage people from destroying the colonies for honey.”

UTMT Society Annual Report 2019-20
Baseline Surveys in The Times of Covid

Baseline surveys are a special handshake with the beekeeping communities, a means to understand them better and a base for project performance measurement.

At UTMT Society, summer is synonymous with surveys. This is the time the Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) team from Mumbai gears up and heads to ground across the villages where we work. This is a crucial step where we interact with beekeepers, their neighbours, and some non-beekeepers from adjacent villages (as Control Group) for Baseline Surveys.

Prior to going to the field, sample farmers for the survey are identified from existing data and it is communicated to the field teams. The participants are briefed by the field teams about the survey and a convenient date and time is decided for the interaction. Individual interviews with the farmers generally take around 30 to 45 minutes, and, depending on the total sample size and the team-strength, a survey is completed in 4-10 days.

All this changed in March 2020 with Covid-19 and the subsequent nation-wide lockdown. The travel restrictions meant the M&E and state teams will not be able to go to the field, to guide, supervise or participate in the surveys. But like with everything else, we took up the challenge and adapted to the new normal and managed the surveys remotely.

The first step was to train the programme staff on the field along with the Master Trainers and Technical Assistants. Since many were doing surveys for the very first time, role play and mock interviews were used as tools to hone their questioning skills. The challenge was to do all this virtually.

The initial surveys were conducted entirely on the phone. As the situation improved local Master Trainers visited the farmers while the M&E and State program teams continued monitoring the whole process to ensure collection of accurate information.

What remained constant during the whole process of collecting data is to make sure that the UTMT Society’s Covid guidelines were strictly followed. The baseline surveys were conducted by redefining processes, using local resources and observing strict Covid protocol.

The guidelines followed included informing the Gram Panchayat in advance about the survey; meeting not more than two farmers at a time; ensuring that surveys were done outdoors as far as possible and at walkable distance from their homes so as to avoid travelling; always maintaining a minimum distance of 2 feet between surveyor and farmer, and most importantly ALWAYS WEARING A MASK.

- Nine baselines between April 2020 and March 2021.
- 865 respondents spread across 77 villages.
- 342 beekeepers in Gujarat; 30 beekeepers in Madhya Pradesh
- 304 control farmers from non-beekeeping villages
Financial Details

Name of the Public Trust: UNDER THE MANGO TREE SOCIETY
Income & Expenditure Account for the year ending: 31st March, 2020
Trust Registration No. F-39609

2019-20 EXPENDITURE 2020-21 2019-20 INCOME 2020-21

To Expenditure in respect of properties:-
- Rates, Taxes, Cessuses
- Repairs and maintenance
- Salaries
- Insurance
- Depreciation by way of provision of adjustments
- Other Expenses
To Establishment Expenses (Schedule 7) 36,37,380
To Remuneration to Trustees By Dividend
To Remuneration (in the case of a math) to the head of the math, including his household expenditure, if any
To Legal Fees
To Audit Fees
To Contribution and Fees
To Amount written off:
- By Transfer from Reserve
To Miscellaneous Expenses
To Depreciation
To Other Earmarked Funds
To Expenditure on Objects of the Trust
To Miscellaneous Expenditures
To Surplus carried over to Balance Sheet

2019-20 INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

Name of the Public Trust: UNDER THE MANGO TREE SOCIETY
Income & Expenditure Account for the year ending: 31st March, 2020
Trust Registration No. F-39609

2019-20 FUNDS AND LIABILITIES 2020-21 2019-20

Trusts Funds or Corpus:
- Balance as per last Balance Sheet
- Add: Corpus donation received during the year
- Less: Sales during the year
- Depreciation up to date
- Other Earmarked Funds:
- Created under the provisions of the trust
- Funder Balance
- Reference:
- Educational
- Medical Relief
- Relief of Poverty
- Other Charitable Objects.

27,99,560 To Surplus carried over to Balance Sheet
44,50,484 By Deficit carried over to Balance Sheet
1,85,563 Income and Expenditure Account:
- Balance as per last Balance Sheet
- Less: Appropriation, if any
- Add: Surplus as per Income and Expenditure Account
- Less: Deficit as per Income and Expenditure Account
- Add: Deficit as per Income and Expenditure Account

Total Rs. 56,76,075

The above Balance Sheet to the best of our belief contains a true account of the Funds and Liabilities and of the property and Asset of the Trust.

As per our report of even date for S. P. Gupta & Associates
Mem.No.031899
Place: Mumbai
Date: 02-12-2021

For Under the Mango Tree Society
Vijayalaxmi Amrit Pastala
Naheed Taher Carrimjee

Mem.No.031899
Place: Mumbai
Date: 02-12-2021

For Under the Mango Tree Society
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For Under the Mango Tree Society
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Mem.No.031899
Place: Mumbai
Date: 02-12-2021
Acknowlegement

Photo credits:
Dr. Martin Kunz: Front cover, Pg. 1, 2, 22, 28, 30, 33, 47, 48, 51 & 52
Acumen: Pg. 12, 47, 4
Going to School team: Pg. 5, 20, 47, 48 & Back cover

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Get Involved

You can do your bit by contributing and supporting:

- A bee veil and swarm bag made by local woman's Self Help Groups: 300 INR
- A bee box made by local carpenter groups: 1500 INR
- A beekeeping starter kit: 3000 INR
- A honey extraction kit: 4000 INR
- A farmer's beekeeping training and practical hand-holding for one year: 10,000 INR

We look forward to your continued support, keep buzzing!

For more information please contact:
info@utmtsociety.org

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