

THE YOUTH VENTURERS IN SONGADH are staging a silent revolution. They are working with local governments to fulfill the basic needs of their villages. They are creating employment opportunities where there are none. They are standing up in ways that few before them have.

This May, a group comprising Ashoka's Youth Venture Mumbai, MAM Movies, Dreamcatchers, and Dasra traveled to Songadh to meet with the Venturers. What we saw bolstered our belief that, when given the opportunity and resources to do so, young people will transform this country.

DANCING WITH A FELLOW

Sohini Chakraborty is an Ashoka Fellow from West Bengal who pioneered the field of dance therapy in India. Her organization, Kolkatta Sanved, uses dance as a platform to empower young victims of sexual abuse. In addition to leading a dance workshop for the Venturers – enabling them to step out of their comfort zones and focus on their own self-belief – she engaged them with the compelling story of her life. For the Venturers, this was a rare opportunity to connect to someone who has generated positive change in a completely different social and geographic context. Sohini provided them tailored guidance based on her own experience as a changemaker.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Himanshu Vyas of Dasra and Veeranka Shah of Dreamcatchers facilitated a session to help Venturers explore options for scaling their projects into their second year. Himanshu and Veeranka, both experts in social sector sustainability, guided each Venturer in reflecting on challenges, successes, visions, and dreams for the future. As the participants fleshed out ideas for running and growing their Ventures, Himanshu and Veeranka provided customized input on how to create scalable and sustainable impact.

CAPTURING IMPACT IN THE VILLAGES

The Songadh Venturers come from different villages, some as far as 120 kilometers away. To capture their direct impact, the group from Mumbai split into four teams, each equipped with video cameras, and traveled to the Venturers' village. With Shakti facilitators as guides, the filming teams spent almost two days exploring the tribal areas. They interviewed Venturers, their Team Members, families, stakeholders, community leaders and local government officials about the changes they have seen. The transformation the Venturers have brought to their villages – and themselves – served as a profound backdrop for the filming. The footage will be used to make a documentary spotlighting these incredible young changemakers.



RAJAT, 22 YEARS OLD

VENTURE NAME: **BEKARI SAMASYA**

Rajat comes from Vyara, a district comprising many small agricultural villages. Though the young men of Vyara are capable and eager to work, few are gainfully employed. Most farming work is seasonal and the supply of labor is in excess.

Concerned about the spreading effects of unemployment, Rajat launched Bekari Samasya. He organized a cricket team of about twenty young men from his village; most were unemployed. They began to practice and play regularly. After every game, they would bring plastic chairs onto the pitch and have discussions on life, sports, and ideas for creating jobs. Rajat further developed a sense of unity by organizing several inter-village cricket tournaments. Cricket became a platform for the teammates to voice personal concerns, thoughts, and dreams.

The conversations have yielded real results. Rajat discovered a program through which the government subsidizes local mushroom farmers. He and his teammates approached the sarpanch and worked through the application process. The local government was supportive; the village elders allocated land. Soon, Rajat's team had filled a small field with the bales of mulch on which to grow mushrooms. Each member contributed time and energy and the team just taken in its first successful harvest. They will divide the profits equally amongst themselves and continue to farm.

The team's success has proven – to themselves and to the village – that ordinary people have the power to create jobs. Rajat is energized and ready to implement the next great idea that comes up over cricket.



Above - Rajat at a village meeting

Below - Rajat and a Teammate on the mushroom farm

HOW HAVE VENTURERS CHANGED THEIR VILLAGES?



A few highlights:

- * Pinakin - 22 new electricity meters installed
- * Atparam - dam and borewell built
- * Ukesh - 12 new homes built
- * Malika - 1 new road built