

DIVERSION BASED IRRIGATION

PHASE I : 2016 - 2018

PHASE II : 2023- 2026

WHY DIVERSION BASED IRRIGATION?

For small and marginal farmers living in the remote tribal and upland areas of Kamrup and Goalpara, agriculture was largely shaped by the availability of rain. With no reliable irrigation, much of the cultivable land remained unused beyond the monsoon season, limiting both food production and household incomes. Women also spent several hours travelling to distant water sources for everyday household needs. Grameen Sahara viewed this as an opportunity to turn locally available water resources into a foundation for stronger, more secure livelihoods.

TATA TRUSTS



WHAT WE DID

With support from Tata Trusts, Grameen Sahara implemented a Diversion Based Irrigation (DBI) initiative across **39 projects in 39 villages of Kamrup and Goalpara, directly reaching 1,441 households**. The project was designed not simply to bring water to farms, but to enable communities to make better use of their land, diversify agriculture and build collective ownership of the resources they depended on.

Through the project, Grameen Sahara worked with communities to:

- Develop community-managed irrigation systems that channelled water from local sources to agricultural land.
- Organise farmers into Water User Groups, Farmers' Groups and SHGs to collectively manage water distribution and maintain the infrastructure.
- Build community ownership through labour and financial contributions towards the construction and maintenance of irrigation systems.
- Introduce multiple cropping, allowing farmers to cultivate beyond the traditional monsoon season.
- Promote improved agricultural practices such as SRI/SCI and the cultivation of vegetables, maize, turmeric, black pepper and other remunerative crops.
- Strengthen farmers' knowledge through training on cultivation practices, composting, crop planning and market linkages.
- Establish remunerative demonstration models that showed how diversified, year-round cultivation could generate additional income.
- Improve access to water for domestic needs and reduce the time and physical burden on women who previously travelled long distances to fetch water.



The experience of the DBI initiative created a foundation for Grameen Sahara's continuing engagement with rural communities. Since 2023, with Azim Premji Foundation, **9 projects have been implemented, reaching 1,237 direct and indirect households**. The focus has continued to evolve; from improving access to productive resources to strengthening resilient livelihoods, sustainable agriculture, community institutions and income opportunities.

The underlying approach remains the same: *start with what communities have, strengthen what already exists, and build systems that communities can sustain themselves.*

WHAT CHANGED

The availability of water transformed how communities could use their land. Farmers moved from predominantly single-season, rain-fed cultivation towards multiple cropping and diversified production. Kitchen gardening became possible across seasons, while surplus vegetables, maize and spices could be sold for additional household income. The project also strengthened community institutions and created a greater sense of ownership over the irrigation systems. Water User Groups took responsibility for water distribution, maintenance and collective funds, helping build systems that communities could manage themselves. For women, the impact extended beyond agriculture. With water available closer to their homes, the time spent fetching water was significantly reduced, creating greater scope for kitchen gardening and other income-generating activities.

