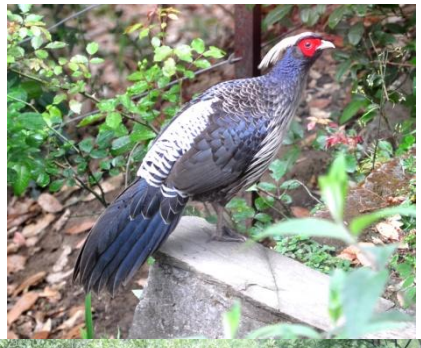
GRASSROOTS

review

2011-2012



Pan Himalayan Grassroots Development Foundation

www.grassrootsindia.com

About Us

The Pan Himalayan **Grassroots** Development Foundation is established as a non-profit voluntary organization under the Societies Registration Act (1860) at the office of the Registrar of Societies, Delhi since November 1992.

The primary aim of Grassroots is to initiate peoples action at the grassroots for restoration of ecological security in languishing river basins through holistic mountain development programs, in order to improve the quality of life.

Over the past twenty years, Grassroots has been able to evolve a holistic intervention strategy which channels resources - managerial, technical and financial - directly to people and associations of the communities, working at the village/watershed level.

The emphasis is on self-help participation and the belief that average villagers have the desire, the right and the capability to promote their own welfare and prosperity and to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Grassroots continues to be a lean and independent organization, which reaches out to far-flung micro watersheds in the central and western Himalaya through **Outreach Program Offices** located in the states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. The composite spearhead team comprises of fifteen professionals-in-development, almost all of whom are from the rural areas of the Himalaya.

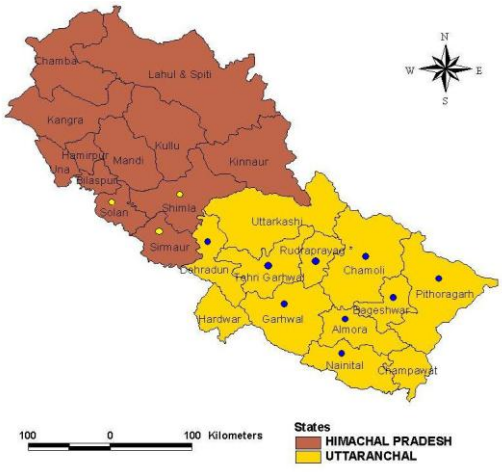
Over the years, Grassroots has been able to initiate programs on improving the quality of life of mountain communities through sustainable community development strategies, training and technology transfer, micro enterprises and marketing by strengthening the capacity of community based organisations, selected voluntary organizations and creation of new forms of organisations such as Kumaon Artisans Guild and Mahila Umang Producers Company.

Through forging such partnerships, Grassroots has been able to spread the benefits of holistic mountain development strategies to communities in almost 700 villages, spread over 27 Blocks in 12 Districts in the states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

In order to address issues related to sustainable mountain development in a comprehensive manner, Grassroots has been involved with the Restoration of Gagas River Basin in Almora district of Uttarakhand for the past seven years. The idea is to demonstrate the feasibility of a holistic river basin management plan, based upon the three pillars of ecology, economy and equity.

During the period under review, Grassroots continued to consolidate outreach programs in the following cross-cutting sectors in order to accelerate some critical Millennium Development Goals:

- Ecological Security
- Community Managed Drinking Water & Environmental Sanitation
- Renewable Energy
- Livelihoods Improvement



Outreach Districts in Himachal & Uttarakhand

Ecological Security

The Gagas river originates in the sacred forests of Pandokholi in Almora district, of the Kumaon Himalaya in the state of Uttarakhand.

The river is largely defined through the flow of over fourteen major streams or gadheras on both banks, and flows for about 50 kms prior to merging with Ramganga (West) river. Gagas river basin is spread over 500 square kms with a population of over 120,000 in 370 villages.

The loss or lack of title to environmental assets is viewed, by Grassroots, as an additional component of poverty, leading to the conclusion that environmental conservation is actually a necessary fundamental to poverty alleviation.

This approach has forged a coalition of interest between stakeholders to share lessons regarding ecological restoration which leads to fulfilling the millennium development goals in the following manner:

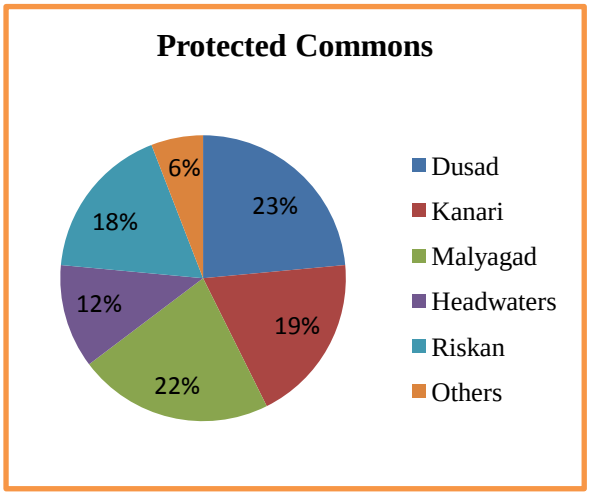
- Providing a fresh vegetal cover on degraded commons and renewal of traditional methods for soil and moisture conservation
- Swift spread of appropriate technologies in cross cutting sectors like drinking water, environmental sanitation, renewable energy and rainwater harvesting
- Improving food security and livelihoods through land-use optimisation and establishment of market linkages directly between producer-farmers and consumers

During the period under review, community-driven eco-restoration was consolidated in the following *gadheras* – Dusad, Kanari, Malyagad, Riskan and Headwaters.

Alongside, these communities have been encouraged to create *gram kosh* of more than Rs. 23.00 lakhs and even more significantly share the cost of infrastructure development to the tune of Rs. 25.00 lakhs.

Steps have also been taken to consolidate micro enterprises which provided sustainable incomes to over 1,000 households in 70 villages across the river basin to the tune of Rs.27.70 lakhs during the year under review.

The challenge ahead is for communities to comprehensively understand that economics and ecology are two sides of the same coin, balanced with equity.



Gadhera	**Villages**	**Hectares**	**Saplings**
Dusad	16	257	90,417
Kanari	13	72	21,730
Malyagad	15	189	80,382
Headwaters	8	10	4,174
Riskan	12	70	42,100
Others	4	21	4,770
Total	**68**	**619**	**2,43,573**

It is significant to mention that communities in the river basin have been enabled to raise 2.50 lakh saplings of native species of trees and shrubs in various small village-level nurseries.

Alongside, another exclusive grass-nursery provided over 10,000 slips and rootstock of *napier grass* for planting-out in the Headwaters and Dusad *gadhera*.

Planting-out saplings and protection of commons through 'social fencing' has also evolved as a feasible way-forward for conservation of biodiversity in the various *gadheras*. This is notwithstanding the annual hazard of fire on the commons due to the menace of dry pine needles.

It may be worth mentioning that the *gram panchayats* in these participating villages have also been enabled to undertake soil and moisture conservation activities by accessing funds available with the DRDA.

Through the year, communities have been able to revive the tradition of constructing 110 *khals*, dig 1,180 contour trenches, construct 210 dry check walls, plant-out 29,000 saplings and create 550 running meters of boundary wall. Approximately Rs. 21.50 lakhs has been invested in these activities by the DRDA.

So far, 620 hectares of village commons are being protected along with over 4,00,000 saplings which have been planted-out. The aim is to extend this activity to 1,000 hectares over the next two years.

Based on field experiences of over ten years, more and more farmers are being encouraged to grow fruit trees on marginal land and around their homesteads. Fruit trees planted-out four or five years ago have been able to provide sustainable incomes to farmers and considering the increasing demand for fruits, another 7,000 saplings of local fruit trees have been planted-out by farmers during the year under review.

At the end of the year, 5,500 households are engaged in the above mentioned *gadheras* within the river basin and 124 SHGs and 42 *Gadhera Bachao Samities* form the bedrock for sustainable change and development.

Chamomile fields – value added crop (left)
Typical Village Nursery (top)
Typical Conservation Work (bottom)

Community-Managed Drinking Water & Environmental Sanitation

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in 2002, India along with 147 heads of state, pledged to adopt 8 goals to be achieved by 2015 that respond to the world's main development challenges.

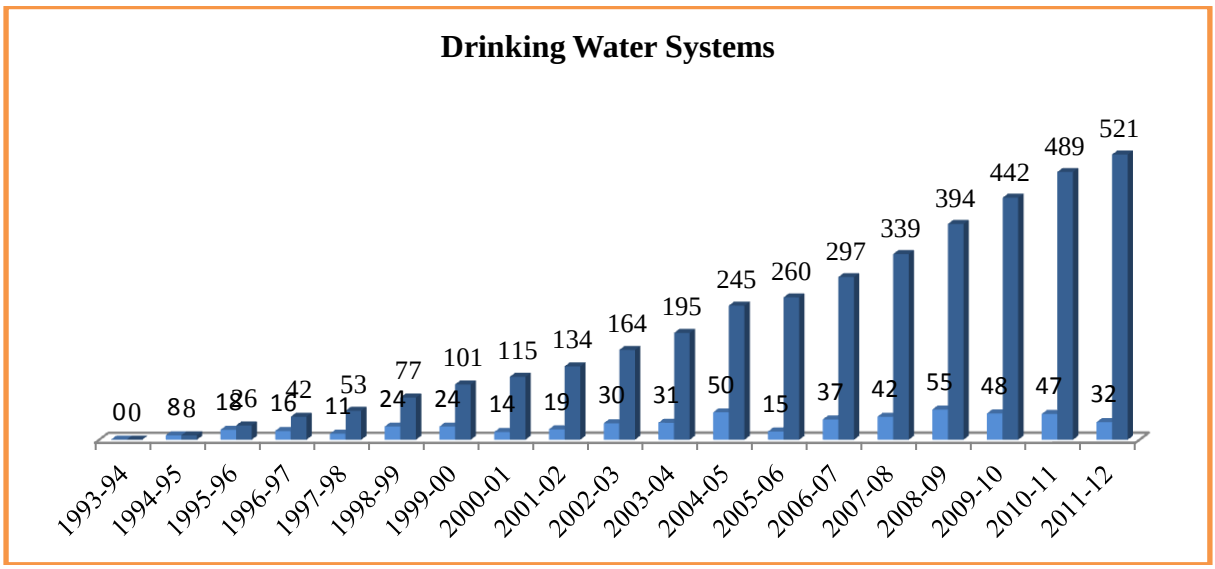
It is realised that human development is about much more than rise and fall of national incomes. It is about quality of life, the level of human well-being and the access to basic social services. The pressures on environmental and natural resources and the repercussions of their degradation on low income livelihoods have become a source of increasing concern.

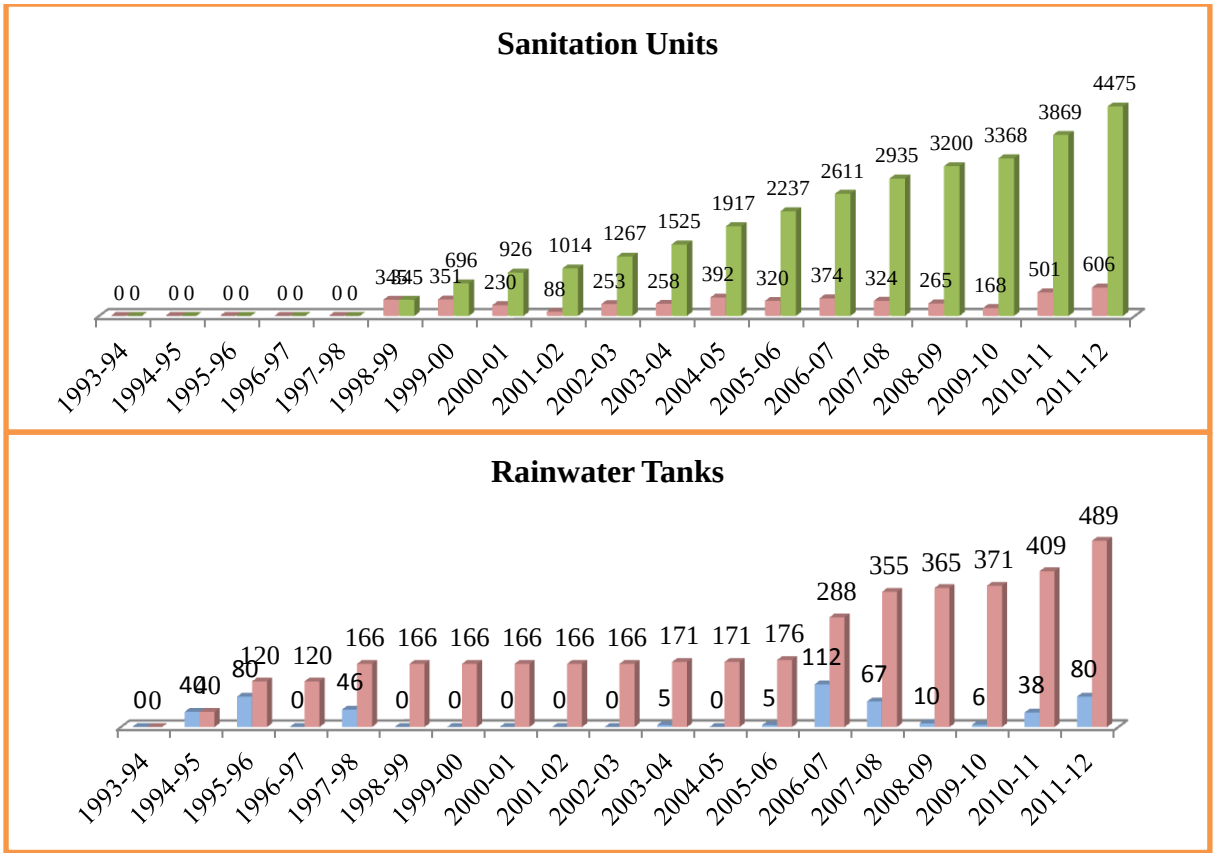
During the period under review, Grassroots continued to spearhead this action item in order to provide easier access to enhanced quantities of safe drinking water and basic sanitation facilities, through cost as well responsibility sharing mechanisms between communities and *barefoot engineers.* All together, 32 Infiltration Wells along with 606 toilets and 80 rainwater harvesting structures were installed in 7 districts of Uttarakhand.

As in the past, water quality monitoring exercises were continued and 720 water quality samples were tested in Gagas River Basin.

As usual, communities celebrated World Water Day at a function in the heart of the river basin with the active participation of men and women from various *gadheras*. The main agenda, besides sharing experiences, was the expression of solidarity across the river basin to renew the hydrology of *gadhera*-level ecosystems. This Sharing & Learning Platform is indeed providing fresh energy to new communities joining the *Gagas Bachao Abhiyan*.(A photo exhibition was also organised on the World Water Day.)

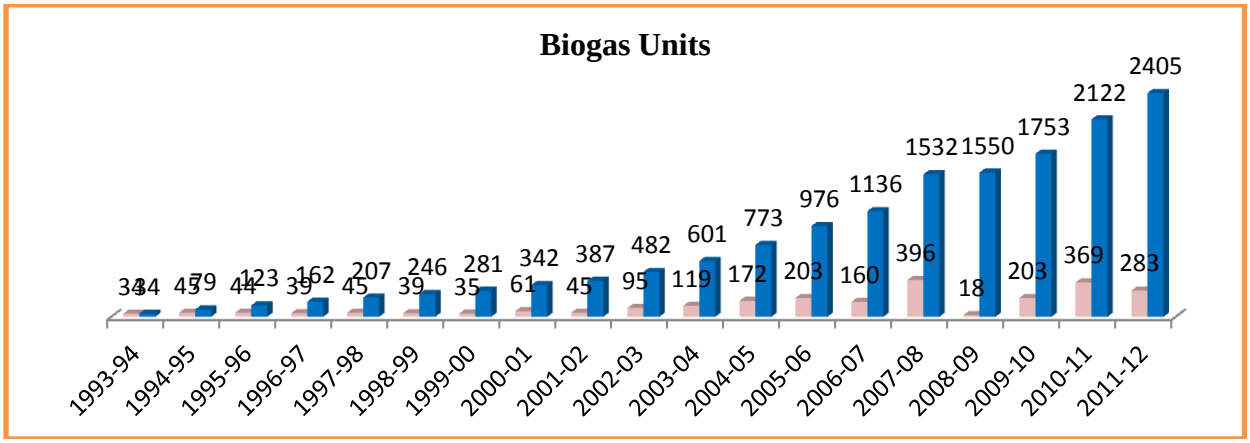
The benefits of various appropriate technology options for community-managed drinking water systems, twin-pit water-seal toilets and rainwater harvesting structures have spread as shown below:





Renewable Energy

During the period under review, 283 biogas units were installed – taking the cumulative total to 2,405 biogas units. This has certainly arrested the pace of environmental degradation by reducing the biotic pressure on scarce forest resources in a significant manner. At least 4,400 metric tonnes (which is about 440 truckloads) of firewood consumption has been reduced per year, at an average of 5 kgs per household per day. Additionally, not only have homes become smoke-free but 6,000 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions/annum have been reduced in the atmosphere @ 2.5 metric tonnes per biogas unit.



During the year, alongside regular user-group workshops, a new thrust was provided regarding the long term maintenance of biogas units. The idea is to organise clusters of 100 biogas users into Renewable Energy Groups wherein each user-household would enter into an annual maintenance contract with *barefoot engineers* with a payment of Rs. 150 – so that there would be at least two visits to each household in a year. Five such Groups have been formed in Himachal Pradesh and it is proposed to form several more Groups to benefit all biogas users over the next two years.

Considering the escalating costs of materials like bricks, cement and sand which are needed for the construction of biogas units, Grassroots is seriously considering the replacement of the Deenbandhu model with a more appropriate low cost design. So far it appears that the Chinese model, using engineering plastic, seems to be appropriate for several reasons: it takes just 2 days to install as compared to 15 days and the cost is less than Rs. 20,000 as compared to Rs. 25 – Rs. 30,000 of the current model.

Besides the cost factor there are other reasons for selecting a more appropriate model:

- A pilot effort of demonstrating the benefits of biogas units was undertaken in the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) at the request of World Wide Fund for Nature, New Delhi. At the end of the period under review, 120 biogas units were functioning in the Corbett Park Region in Uttarakhand and based on the success of this effort, WWF further requested Grassroots to undertake a field study to estimate the potential demand for biogas units, with the idea of reducing Man-Animal conflict in sanctuaries and protected areas.

  The study reveals that 10,000 units could be installed in the TAL. Obviously, the Deenbandhu model would not be able to cope with such demands. It would not only be time consuming to train several dozen *barefoot engineers* but it would also be extremely cumbersome to supervise the quality of construction as well as maintenance in the future.

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), New Delhi requested Grassroots to demonstrate the benefits of biogas technology in an ongoing watershed development program in upper regions of Chamoli district, Uttarakhand being implemented by Dasholi Gram Swaraj Mandal. At the end of the period under review, fifteen biogas units were installed and a significant demand generated amongst farmers for more such units. The cost factor in this region is even more severe – an additional Rs. 15,000 due to transportation of materials from distant markets.

It is indeed essential to study the new models developed in China and bring home a more appropriate technology for swifter spread of biogas units in the Indian Himalayan Region.

During the year under review, Grassroots continued with the spread of solar energy lights, especially in view of the poor voltage in rural areas which adversely affect the lives of school and college children interested in doing some homework! It is significant to mention that this appropriate technology is being disseminated in two ways: community charging stations and individual home lights/torches. Ten community solar charging stations continue to be managed for the second year by SHGs wherein 200 lanterns are being used and another 350 individual solar lanterns/torches have been adopted by people across the two states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

Livelihoods, Food Security & Micro Enterprises

In fragile ecosystems in the Himalaya, forests play a pivotal role in supporting mountain farming systems. The degradation of such essential support systems has affected traditional food security and enhanced risk to human health.

To find a fresh balance in the quality of lives for such marginalized farming communities, Grassroots has been involved with creating a platform for establishment of pro-poor business ventures, with women as the primary stakeholder.

Along with spearheading eco-restoration efforts in Gagas river basin, Grassroots has been involved in consolidating a network of over 2,000 women who are involved with various viable business activities, which provide small yet significant incomes on a sustainable basis. This operation is managed by a nascent producers company, Umang.

All products of the network are marketed under the brand name ***Kumaoni*** and ***HimKhadya*** and it is Umang's belief that those who purchase these products are directly assisting resource poor households through 'trade and not aid'. The turnover during the year under review has been over Rs. 110..00 lakhs and sales have reached Rs. 91.00 lakhs. During the year under review a total of 1,221 women shareholders benefited from this venture.

However, the most significant aspect of these local efforts in promoting the spirit of enterprise is a concern of the *institutional framework at the grassroots*: each and every business activity be directly controlled by the producer-group, all assets be owned by them and all are equal shareholders of the business. This arrangement ought to be also operated in a manner whereby the greatest portion of the consumer's rupee reaches the producer-groups.

In view of this, as well as future plans for further growth, Grassroots facilitated the process of obtaining registration of Umang as a Fair Trade organisation.

The challenge for Grassroots is to build upon the capacity of shareholders at all levels, from that of the producer-members in the various verticals of the business - hand-knits, fruit processing, bee-keepers and farmers – as well as the producer-members selected as the Board of Governors and the Team Members of the organisation.

An immediate task is to scale-up the business of Umang to a level which provides sustainable incomes to 2,000 producer-member families to the extent of Rs. 15,000 per annum, which would be an increase of fifty percent of current levels of income in the region. For this to be a reality, it is essential to forge forward linkages with markets in the metros as well as consolidate sales within the region.

The Umang showroom, during the year under review, was responsible for 27 percent of the total sales - Rs.24.35 lakhs. It is also significant to mention that Grassroots continued to facilitate the marketing-partnership with Himjoli, a social marketing firm; sales through this partnership amounted to 37 percent of the total. The idea is to establish 2-3 more Umang showrooms which would ensure that the share of direct-marketing increases to at least 50 percent.

Value added crops like chamomile and strawberry has led to increasing incomes significantly during the year under review and it is proposed to scale-up such field operations in the near future in order to benefit more and more farmers.

The farmers' organisations business plan needs adequate backward linkages as well as forward linkages, in order to bridge the gap between farm-gate and consumers. In view of this, Grassroots has formed five Walnut Growers Coops in Himachal Pradesh. And, for forward linkages, Grassroots has forged links with Shop for Change – an organisation devoted to promoting fair trade amongst urban consumers.

During the year under review, the status of revenue generation (Rs. in Lakhs) by the nascent producers company has been as follows:

Hand-Knitted Products	54.50
Fruit Preserves & Pickles	24.80
Natural Honey & Spices	12.80
Country Hens	6.80
HimKhadya	17.10

Total Rs.116.00 lakhs

Grassroots Leadership Initiative

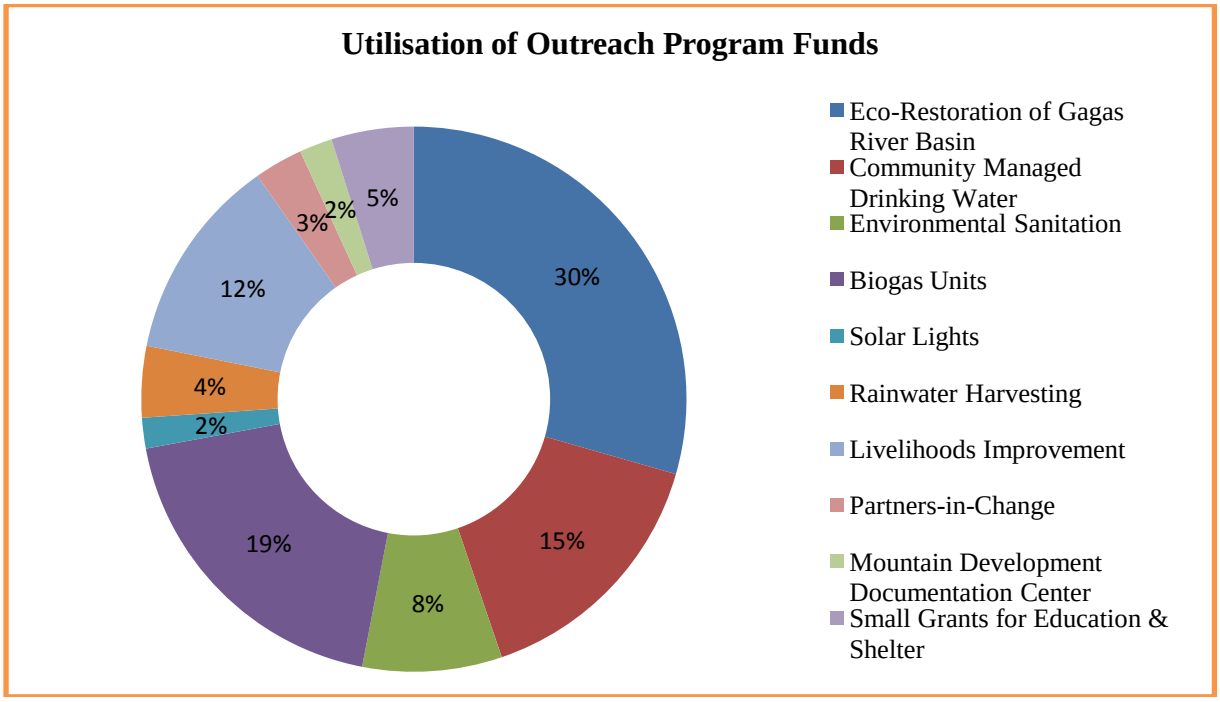
As always, Grassroots has encouraged visits of student-groups, farmers and professionals to experience and understand issues related to sustainable development of mountain ecosystems.

Most of the guests have been subscribers to the concept of HomeStays – which basically means that board/lodge is organised in the homes of local farmers and payments are shared with the community.

During the year under review, over 70 interns visited the Outreach Program Office as part of this Grassroots Leadership Initiative:

- A group of 12 students and 3 teachers from Lakeside School, Seattle, USA - selected for the Global Student Leadership Program supported by the Gates Foundation.
- A group of 3 students from Cambridge University, England spent six weeks as monsoon-interns. While two of them documented the growth in fulfilling Millennium Development Goals over the last 20 years, the third student was actively engaged in the study on promotion of renewable energy in TAL.
- Three students from TERI Open University, New Delhi spent four weeks as summer interns to learn about functioning of SHGs.
- Two students from Delhi School of Social Work worked on the Grassroots Livestock Improvement model as summer interns.
- A couple from United Kingdom spent six months to understand mountain culture and sustainable development models.
- One student from SIT Study Abroad Program, USA spent four weeks to learn about role of women in mountain farming systems.
- Two undergraduate friends from MIT and Chicago University, USA interned as monsoon interns to learn about sustainable development at the grassroots.
- One student from Twente University, Germany interned during summer to document the growth of SHGs.
- A group of 20 students and young professionals came on a study tour through the Center for Science & Environment, New Delhi.
- A group of 20 farmers from Bhutan spent a week to learn about holistic river basin restoration at the grassroots.

This initiative seems to be gathering momentum over the years.



The financial records of Grassroots are a matter of public record and as such are available

Council of Governors

Mrs H Bedi : Chairperson
Mr Deep Joshi Mrs Sumita Ghosh
Mrs Annie Sinha Mr Joydeep Gupta

The Council of Governors and the Executive Officers of Grassroots would like to acknowledge the assistance received from the following organizations during the year under review: 2011-2012

Trilegal
Tata Motors
Jamsetji Tata Trust
World Wide Fund for Nature
Government of Uttarakhand
Lakeside School, Seattle, USA
Government of Himachal Pradesh
International Union for Conservation of Nature
&
Friends of Grassroots!

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