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Grey to green – literally

Rajasthan in western India. Images that come to mind are those of camels stretching their legs over desert sand, hot, dry and rocky land, thirsty underfed livestock, and villagers wearing brilliant colors to offset their drab surroundings. This is just imagination one might argue, but it takes even more imagination to picture this landscape with green meadows, shady trees, and cool spots where the *Nilgai* (blue bull) rests. Such a place is evolving as we speak, thanks to the efforts of ICRISAT and a consortium of partners (Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, the NGO Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation, the Government of Rajasthan, various agencies within the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, and the National Remote Sensing Agency), who have converted hard, rocky, stony, unyielding land into useful pastures.



Before rehabilitation

The consortium and people from nearby villages took an area of 18 hectares of common village land in the district of Bundi in eastern Rajasthan, and using soil and water conservation measures such as continuous contour trenches, 200 staggered trenches, 293 mini-percolation tanks, and six gully plugs, brought it to a level hospitable to useful plants. They planted 25,000 *Jatropha curcas* and *Pongamia pinnata* trees (in time the mature seeds of these trees will produce diesel supplements), *Stylosanthes* grass and local Dhaman grass to hold the mud bunds together, *Glyricidia* trees to improve soil nitrogen, and commercially viable plants such as neem, *Ziziphus*, and *Acacia* for income generation in this area



The Green Island taking shape

The project started in June 2002 and will run for five years (the pictures are therefore of very young plants). Contrasted with the

nearby denuded common village land, this 'Green Island' will provide the valuable fodder for cattle and regular income to the *Panchayat* (local village government)

The benefits of the active participation by the community and the willing support from the Rajasthan Government and other consortium partners were evident at the recently-held ICRISAT Farmers Day in that part of the country, where the rehabilitated common ground was a big showpiece. The project is also being effected in a nearby 5 ha plot of land, and the partners expect to spread this technology to more and more degraded areas in and around the State by the end of the project term.

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