

CASE STUDY

REVERSE MIGRATION



IN SHORT

The Swades Foundation works in the rural area of the state of Maharashtra the city of Mumbai in India. The Foundation is pursuing a holistic development strategy incorporating health and nutrition, education, water and sanitation, and economic development. An integral part of this has been the promotion of and support for reverse migration through which migrants to major cities such as Mumbai and Pune have returned to their rural villages in Raigad, Maharashtra. These returnees have benefitted through an increased income, wellbeing and social standing as they are mentored by the Swades Foundation team to start with an income generation activity that helps them develop and acquire the skillset and technical know-how to become first time entrepreneurs.

OVERVIEW OF REVERSE MIGRATION

The world has undertaken an historic shift to becoming majority urban for the first time. This rapid urbanization and development has led to decreased poverty and improved opportunities for many in the rural Global South, but has led to severe air, water, and land pollution. There have been increased concerns whether the levels of predicted urbanization are sustainable. In addition, the adaptation to life in the city for many rural to urban migrants is not easy, with many struggling with insecure employment, poor quality housing, and difficulties accessing education and healthcare, leading them to wonder if there is a way of living well and sustainably within their rural villages.

Government of India has started several policies to promote rural development, such as the Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana initiative that aims to develop model villages with housing, education, and healthcare and the Providing Urban Amenities to Rural Areas (PURA) strategy, which aims to improve the economic wellbeing of rural India through increasing connectivity between villages. However there is no formalized policy assisting rural reverse migration at place in India.

Swades Foundation is one such non-governmental organization (NGO) working to promote and assist reverse migration. However, the purpose is not to simply send migrants back to their villages, but to enable the transition through the development of a business plan and support for initial costs in starting the business. This is achieved through a structured process that involves not only the returnee, but also the village council (Gram Panchayat) and previous reverse migrants and arranges for multiple exposure visits along with assistance for first two years after migration. Swades Foundation is not only giving technical support to such returnees but also psychological support as such transitions are challenging especially in the initial few months.

Swades through its holistic development model for rural areas has successfully transformed whole villages using what it terms its 360-degree development model encompassing four areas – health and nutrition, education, water and sanitation, and economic development. They have provided access to water and sanitation in every home, improved infrastructure and host of activity based learning programmes in schools, as well as the creation of cadre of community health workers who are trained in conducting primary health screening and eye care, cardiac surgeries and anaemia alleviation programmes, as well as programmes to increase agriculture output and animal husbandry leading to increases in household income. All these factors create a favourable ecosystem for migrants to come back and restart their life in village and live an independent, dignified life.



RETURNING TO THE VILLAGE – A CASE STUDY

One such returnee is Sanjeev Dhasade. He was born and raised in Bhandare, a village near the small town of Mangaon located in Raigad district, around 150 kilometres from Mumbai. He migrated to Mumbai in 2013 where he made a living as a sales executive and lived in a small apartment with his family. He was successful enough to have continued living in the city, but had long desired to return to his native village. His father owned five acres of land with a plentiful water supply, so he had always felt that there was strong potential in the land but did not know how to fully harness it.

After attending an explanatory meeting by Swades Foundation, he immediately saw the opportunity and swiftly agreed to move back to his village with his family. Swades helped him in procuring 11 adult goats and 22 kids of a good breed of goats (called osmanabadi) at a subsidized rate and mentored him on farming, knowledge which he supplemented through watching online videos. After six months he earned 100,000 rupees from selling goats. He also turned to agriculture, again seeing a swift return for his efforts. After starting tilling in November and sowing in December, he was able to earn 200,000 rupees by May. In addition he set-up a vegetable shop earning 400 – 500 rupees per day profit (146,000 – 182,500 rupees per year, assuming it is open every day) that employs his family. Overall he has earned around 600,000 rupees (around US\$8,500 at April 2019 exchange rates) since returning, compared to his previous salary of 240,000 rupees per year.

Not only has he created a sustainable business for himself and other family members, but he has also helped revitalize the village he lives in. Once he started cultivating his land with seven or eight different types of crops, his abundant and verdant crops stood out in the uniformly brown fields of the village and soon other farmers started to copy him, boosting their own incomes. His success has in turn led to another two migrants returning to the villages, also hoping to be able find a means of flourishing in rural India.

IMPLEMENTATION

Swades Foundation implements their reverse migration through a multi-step process. First there are information meetings called City Committee Meetings whereby successful reverse migrants share their stories to encourage reverse migration. Interested migrants then have meetings with staff from Swades Foundation to assess their situation and a visit to their home village is undertaken. Discussions are undertaken with the village council, visits are undertaken to successful returnees, and a business plan is developed. Once the migrant has moved back to the village, Swades Foundation provide support and technical assistance to uptake livelihood programmes such as poultry, goat rearing, cashew processing, water for irrigation, dairy and so on depending on the interest of the returnees. In addition to providing expertise, Swades also links returnees with relevant government schemes. These returnees are also supported with a major part of their initial funding requirements for starting a business through grants from Swades as well as training and on-going advice. Swades continues to visit and support returnees for up to two years.

A key enabler for the success of the programme has been the supporting infrastructure that has been established that has made returning viable for the returnees. The returnees come back to villages that have been supported by Swades, so they have the infrastructure that can support their day-to-day lives and ensure that returnees do not feel they are missing out or disadvantaging their family through returning.

In addition, skills and knowledge given by the experts to the returnees has been critical, as have the study visits that the returnees undertake, as well as the efforts by the returnees to learn themselves, through a variety of means such as books, online videos, and trial and error. In response to the success of the project, Raigad District Administration opened a reverse migration cell in January 2019 to facilitate to credit and loans through banks and other government schemes that support rural development that are applicable for returnees have also provided a supportive policy framework to assist.



MEASUREMENT AND IMPACT

Swades Foundation measures impact through monitoring the progress of the returnees. The indicators are remaining in the village, income and business growth, and the willingness to support other returnees. Monthly visits continue for at least two years. Thus far, 142 migrants have been supported in reverse migrating with only three having returned to the city. Given that Swades monitors the returnees for such a length of time, it is clear that migrants are satisfied with their standard of living and income upon returning to the village. Currently Swades does not have indicators for measuring the environmental impact of the returnees. Nevertheless, as the migrants are returning to a rural life from the city, it is reasonable to assume that their carbon footprint would be reduced. However, their impact on the land would be dependent on the activities that they undertake and whether such activities are sympathetic to the local environment (for example, avoiding excessive use of fertilizer, not exhausting water sources, and avoiding deforestation).

SCALABILITY

There have been significant efforts to scale the activities of the scheme with the number of returnees growing rapidly from 33 in September 2017 to 142 by April 2019, meaning around nine to ten migrants a month are being recruited. However, as knowledge regarding the scheme has spread, it is becoming more popular and currently (April 2019) there are around 360 potential reverse migrants in different stages of migration. Swades also collects lists of closed households from the villages, which can indicate areas of need and form a basis for targeted recruitment.

Reverse migrants who accept help from Swades Foundation agree to motivate five more people from their contacts and network. These efforts will be supplemented by Swades Foundation holding increasing numbers of meetings in Mumbai – fifteen are planned for this fiscal year, and they expect another 180 - 200 returnees to migrate through the process. The scheme is in the early stages but currently appears to receive a lot of interest from potential returnees.

WAY FORWARD

Swades Foundation is planning to expand the scheme in the future. Specific plans are for expanding capacity for establishing the businesses through bank loans, business development training, study visits, and further facilitation from government schemes and involvement of village development committees. The scheme aims to attract 500 more returnees over the next two years through direct connections, referrals and community outreach.



REFERENCES

Submission to the Envisioning Future Low-Carbon Lifestyles and Transitioning Instruments Project Call for Case Studies and interview with Swades Foundation, March 2019
<https://swadesfoundation.org/>

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