HDFC’s ‘Jalmitras’ lend a hand for Paani Foundation’s Shramdaan 2018

On May 1, 2018, which is also Maharashtra Day, HDFC employees came together once again to offer ‘Shramdaan’ (voluntary physical labour) for Paani Foundation’s (Paani) flagship volunteering activity ‘Chala Gaavi’.

We had invited employees from our branches in Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur and Nashik to sign up to be a Jalmitra and do Shramdaan. We received an overwhelming response from over 400 HDFC and HDFC Sales employees who participated in the Maha Shramdaan. Last year 140 employees from the Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur branches of HDFC and HDFC Sales had volunteered and participated in the event.

Shramdaan 2018

This year, over 1.3 lakh citizens across Maharashtra responded to Paani’s call to action to offer Shramdaan in the drought-prone villages.

The largest group of corporate volunteers to participate in the Maha Shramdaan on May 1 was from HDFC. 340 employees from the HDFC and HDFC Sales branches across Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur and Nashik offered Shramdaan in select villages near Pune, Satara, Nashik and Nagpur. This year’s event saw the participation of some of the HDFC support staff as well.

We asked some of the volunteers why they registered for the event giving up a holiday and choosing to brave the sweltering heat to offer Shramdaan and this is what they said:

This is my second year at the Paani Shramdaan event. The first year, I had signed up for the event purely out of curiosity and I realised how satisfactory and fulfilling it was. It filled me with a sense of pride to be able to contribute to this worthy cause. I wanted to relive all the feelings which I experienced the first time and hence I signed up for the event once again.

_Nilesh Sutar - HDFC, Mumbai_

Activities like Shramdaan make us aware of the problems that plague the villages in our country. Shramdaan gave me the chance to partner with hundreds of others to solve the water problem in Maharashtra, an opportunity I couldn’t miss.

_Vishal Nandanwar - HDFC, Nagpur_
ABOUT PAANI FOUNDATION

The water crisis in India is widespread and needs immediate and strong efforts. Maharashtra has been dealing with water scarcity for the last few decades; regions of Maharashtra especially Marathwada and Vidarbha have suffered from severe and frequent droughts that have adversely affected the farming community.

Paani was established by Mr Aamir Khan and Ms Kiran Rao to create a drought-free Maharashtra. Paani’s implementing strategy has been training & empowering men and women from villages across the selected talukas in Maharashtra on watershed management and leadership skills, through a holistic experiential training programme. The training culminates in the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup - a competition spread over 45 days, where participating villages compete to do the best work in watershed management. This competition aimed at generating a people’s movement has grown from 116 villages in 3 talukas in 2016 to over 4,000 villages in 75 talukas this year.

HDFC, through the H T Parekh Foundation, is one of the key supporters of Paani’s work, along with the Tata Trusts, Reliance Foundation, Piramal Foundation and Jankidevi Bajaj Gram Vikas Sanstha.

HDFC employees offered Shramdaan in Siddeshwar Nimbodi (Pune District), Konambe (Nashik District) and Umtha (Nagpur District). All the HDFC Jalmitrans were greeted by the villagers with a traditional welcome. The volunteers worked in the village all morning, dug and ploughed tirelessly using pickaxes and spades to create Continuous Contour Trenches (CCTs) in Pune, a 100 meter long bund (small dam) in Nagpur and soak pits in Nashik. They were guided by the representatives of Paani and the trained villagers. HDFC employees were humbled and overwhelmed by the warmth of the villagers. As a token of gratitude, all the volunteers were served meals cooked by the villagers at the end of the Shramdaan.

Each of us took away memories for a lifetime at the end of the day. Some of HDFC’s Jalmitrans gave us a glimpse of the day spent in the village.

I am from Raigad and my village faces similar issues with water. It felt great to see that people are helping villages overcome this water crisis. I hope next year this programme extends to my village as well.

Ashwin Gogawale - HDFC Support Staff, Mumbai

The warm welcome we received from the villagers and their willingness to assist us was excellent. The presence of Ms Kiran Rao motivated everybody; one could see her sincerity and enthusiasm for the cause. Every volunteer worked with hundred percent commitment and dedication. It was an amazing experience.

Shubha Kasat - HDFC, Nashik

Till date, I had never picked up a pick axe or a hoe and attempted to break the ground. It humbles one to recognise how much hard work there is in labour intensive jobs.

Another first-time exciting moment was scrambling up a moving tractor with hoards of us being driven down a very winding hill, balancing precariously wondering if we would survive the ordeal. This was followed by a much needed fresh and hot meal in the village.

Anjali Tarapore - HDFC, Mumbai

The Water Cup 2018 is now over and the villagers will be judged post the monsoons on the work done by them over the 45-day period of the competition. Winners will be declared in August based on the amount of water storage created by them. However for all the HDFC Jalmitrans, hopefully this was the beginning of a personal journey of increased social consciousness towards some of the pressing issues facing the country and how each individual’s contribution is important. We tried to capture their thoughts on what they took back from the event.

During the event we dug canals and ditches to create a capacity of several thousand litres of water in just a couple of hours and this was unbelievable. If just a small group of people with a collaborative effort in a short span of time can achieve this much, then over the course of time I believe we can solve this crisis.

Akash Oswal - HDFC Sales, Pune

The grit and passion of all participants inspired me. Discussing issues like water management and actually doing hands-on work to bring about a change are two very different things. I am glad I was a part of this event.

Pooya Murtidhar - HDFC, Nagpur

Nashik shramdaan volunteers with villagers at the end of the programme