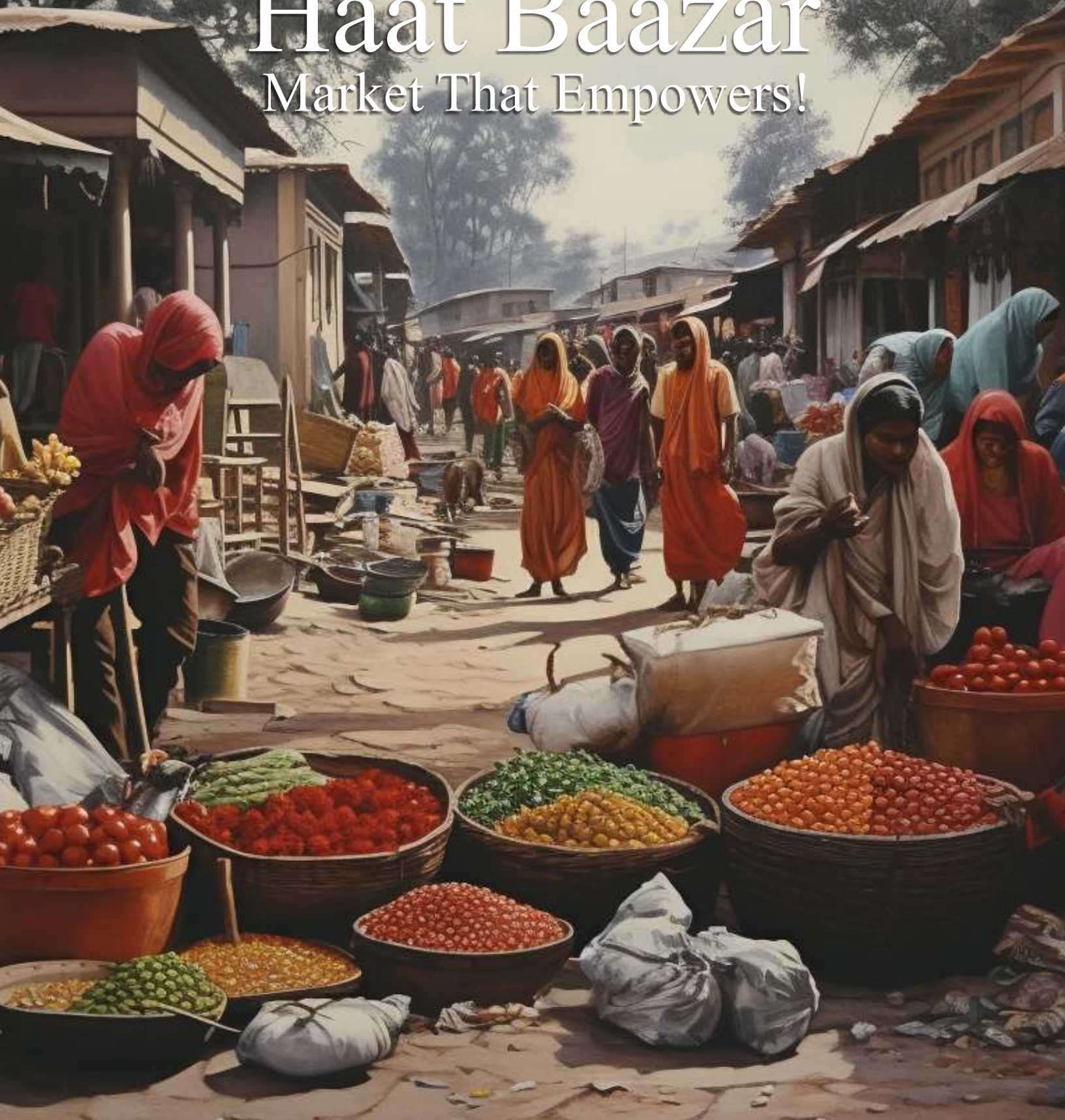


# Haat Bazaar

Market That Empowers!





A man in a light-colored shirt is riding a bicycle away from the camera on a dirt road. The bicycle is heavily loaded with fresh produce. A large wicker basket on the back is filled with green leafy vegetables, broccoli, and orange carrots. A bag on the side of the bicycle contains more produce, including what looks like red chilies. The road is flanked by lush green trees and foliage, creating a canopy effect. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

# Haat Bazaar Market That Empowers!

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# Message

I am delighted to share the impact story compilation 'Haat Baazar: Market That Empowers' which highlights the transformative power of the community markets started by Saksham programme. It is incredibly fulfilling to see local farmers, artisans, and small businesses thrive, creating vibrant and democratic marketplaces in rural areas. These Haat Baazars are not just places of commerce but a hub of empowerment and self-reliance that makes healthy food accessible and affordable to all.

Community markets, such as the Haat Bazaars presented in this compendium of impact stories, provide a vital platform for local farmers, artisans, and small businesses to sell their products directly to consumers. This local exchange not only ensures that money stays within the community but also fosters a robust local economy. By creating a space where local goods are prioritized, these markets help reduce food miles, the distance food travels from production to consumer, thus minimizing the environmental impact associated with long-distance transportation. The direct access to fresh, locally grown produce that community markets provide is invaluable for promoting healthy eating habits and improving overall public health.

Additionally, community markets contribute significantly to job creation and economic empowerment. These markets also promote

entrepreneurship, especially among women, by providing them with an accessible and supportive environment to start and grow their businesses. This fosters economic empowerment and self-reliance, as individuals gain confidence in their decision-making abilities and entrepreneurial skills.

This compendium of stories on weekly markets is a showcase of the remarkably impactful Saksham project that Caritas India and her eighteen partners have been implementing in five North Indian states for the last two years. Words of gratitude and acknowledgement are due to Misereor, Germany for offering the pivotal funding support to Saksham. These stories of transformation would not have been possible without the persistent efforts of Saksham partners who have ably supported communities in their endeavors to realize their ambition of setting up rural markets. And hats off to the industry, tenacity and the indomitable will of communities that were instrumental in the scripting of these stirring stories of transformation.



**Fr. (Dr.) Jolly Puthenpura**  
Executive Director  
Caritas India



# Haat Bazaar: An Introduction

The localization mantra assumes critical significance in empowering the economically backward rural communities and freeing them from the vicious cycle of dependency. There is a direct relationship between the market dependency of communities and their disempowerment which eventually results into exploitation. Localization of farming sector is in consonance with the Gandhian concept of Swadeshi which envisages achieving self-sufficiency by eliminating all forms of colonizing and disempowering dependencies on external forces. In the present rural context where local economy of villages is getting wedged open by the market, the first casualty of the bulldozing run of the market is communities' self-reliance. The organic relationship that once existed in rural societies between production, distribution and consumption is being devoured by the greedy and self-serving market.

Caritas India and her partners had promoted Haat Bazaar or weekly market as a remedy not only to the dependency syndrome of the agrarian community but as a powerful mechanism for bolstering the micro-economy of villages. In the times when villages are projected and accepted as consumer communities, Haat Bazaar has helped a large number of rural farming households to emerge as traders and entrepreneurs.

Caritas India and her eighteen partners had started Saksham project in the North and Central India in 2022 with the objective of helping communities insulate themselves from livelihood and food and nutrition insecurity. For achieving this objective, Saksham employed a multi-pronged strategy which sought to increase input self-reliance of

farming communities, strengthen farm practices by arresting and reversing environment damages, and increasing farm returns by strengthening the negotiation power of communities in the market. One of the principal considerations of Saksham was to develop local markets which are (i) more democratic in character in terms of participation and decision-making, (ii) more empowering for farmers through ownership, (iii) more economically beneficial with the assurance of better price for produces, and (iv) more accessible to farmers by increasing access and inclusivity.

Saksham had implemented several measures of sustainable agriculture that helped rural communities significantly enhance self-reliance in terms of farm inputs which contributed to increase in savings. These measures also helped rural communities to reverse the damages of chemical farming and increase farm production in an eco-sensitive way. Having helped farmers achieve farm level efficiency and economy, it was logical for Saksham to establish community markets which have the untapped potential to yield five below-given dividends.

Firstly, Saksham believed that an efficient mechanism needs to be functionalized which can absorb the surplus production with an assurance of good returns to farmers. Farming strengthening initiatives of Saksham had considerably increased the yield and the production had exceeded the subsistence threshold to generate surplus which needed to be sold. This was the first impelling reason for communities to start local markets.

Secondly, rural communities are generally

disadvantaged by long distances that they have to traverse in an inclement environment – physical, social and cultural - to reach the nearest market to procure their supplies and to sell their produce. This causes money drain on two fronts – travel cost and the high cost that traders would exact from the unsuspecting villagers. Local markets have tremendous potential in checking money drain and increasing returns for farmers' produce.

Women entrepreneurship and remoteness of market have an inverse relationship. To put it more simply, the farther the market, the lesser the women entrepreneurship. Since there are several culturally imposed mobility restrictions and disabilities on women, markets need to be brought closer to women for helping them to express their business abilities. Saksham adopted the strategy of localization of market with the objective of promoting women entrepreneurship.

Fourthly, all types of dependency on external agencies are ever-widening money drain outlets for rural communities. Communities have become habituated to purchasing, at an intimidating premium, even the goods and services that they could mobilize or obtain locally. Community-led markets can plug these money drain points and thereby create more savings at household level.

The fifth advantage of local markets is the consumer-producer connect. Local markets enhance transparency and trust, allowing consumers to know exactly where their products come from and how they are made. This direct connection often leads to better product quality and freshness, especially in the case of perishable goods like fruits and vegetables. Cutting out intermediaries helps consumers lower costs and increase profit margins for farmers. This connection also fosters a sense of community and support for local economies.

Despite the several benefits of local markets, communities have not explored all possibilities of setting up local markets in North India. The reasons for the reluctance of communities to start local markets range from lack of space to restraining administrative bottlenecks, and absence of community-based market management system to community apprehensions. Saksham adopted a strategy to clear these bottlenecks by way of facilitation and capacitation. In the last two years, Saksham helped 20 village communities start local markets, locally known as Haat Baazar, all of which have flourished since their inception. Major steps of starting community markets are;

1. Community consultation and consensus building.
2. Raising and strengthening groups/forums that can spearhead the market initiation.
3. Building capacities of groups on market management.



4. Helping communities develop a market management system.
5. Assisting communities to obtain administrative clearances.
6. Mobilization of communities and information dissemination on the weekly market.
7. Preparing farmers to become traders and sellers.

The weekly markets or Haat Baazars have emerged as resounding testimonies of community cohesion and will. More than the pecuniary benefits that communities have achieved, local markets have created democratic spaces where the micro economy of a village can thrive. It is also a fertile nourishing ground for rural entrepreneurship, especially of women. The weekly markets have thus emerged as convincing examples of sustainable, equitable, and empowering cyclical economy that everyone profits from.



# From Growers to Sellers: An Empowering Story of a Peasant Village

The 200-odd households of Dhamnod earned their living by selling farm produce to traders who would visit the village every week. The villagers received very little profit because they had no alternative other than selling their produce to middlemen who would pocket most of the earnings.

The absence of a local market caused a double financial drain for the community in this remote village in Vidisha district of Madhya Pradesh. “We had to spend a good amount of our savings on traveling to the market to purchase commodities, particularly food materials,” said Sairam Ahirwar, a farmer. The two nearest markets for the Dhamnod community are in Gyaraspur, which is eight kilometers away, and in Haidergarh, which is even farther at 20 kilometers.

“The Saksham project team encouraged us to start a local market where we could sell our produce. In one of our meetings, we discussed the possibility of starting a local weekly market. After all, what is the need of traveling eight kilometers to buy things that we could buy from the village itself?” said Suresh Kushwah, a member of the

youth group established by the Saksham project. Manav Vikas Seva Sangh (MVSS) started the Misereor-supported Saksham project in 15 villages of Vidisha district in April 2022 to help farmers gain more control over agriculture. As part of the program, the Saksham team raised and strengthened farmers' groups, youth groups, and women's groups that worked on sustainable agriculture and good governance.

“We consulted with the elders of the village and held discussions with the Panchayat members. We also mobilized farmers and informed them about the benefits of a Haat Bazaar (weekly market). After six months of consultations, there was a consensus in the village to start a Haat Bazaar,” said Premchand Ahirwar, the president of the Bajrangbali youth group. Once the consensus was reached, the farmers' group and the women's group of the village also joined the campaign. The group members then requested Mr. Mahesh Rona, the Sarpanch (village headman), to obtain the necessary legal and administrative clearances for starting the local market. “We made a representation before the Sub Divisional Magistrate to start the market on Saturdays on the





community land in the village. After completing the documentation formalities, we were given the administrative clearance to start the Haat Bazaar at the space we had identified,” said Mahesh Rona.

Mr. Rona further mentioned that the village community constituted a 6-member committee comprising community leaders, youth leaders, farmers, and Panchayat members as the management team of the Haat Bazaar. The committee was also tasked with addressing grievances of sellers and buyers and resolving any disputes regarding space sharing at the marketplace.

After all community-level preparations, which included extensive mobilization of farmers, the first weekly market opened on 24 September 2022 with 12 farmers setting up their stalls. “It was a new experience to open a shop and sell something for the first time. I didn't even know how to weigh things. But I sold bottle gourd, tomatoes, potatoes, and chili peppers that I grew on my farm,” said Dheeraj, a young farmer with a gleeful smile. Gradually, the number of stalls at the market increased. The Haat Bazaar, which started with a humble 12 stalls, expanded to 80 stalls in just two months.

“The Haat Bazaar is a big relief for the unemployed youth of the village, as many of them started opening shops or stalls like Paani-puri, tea, grocery, mobile accessories, etc.,” said Mr. Anil Lodhi, a youth who recently started a Paani-Puri stall in the weekly market.

“When the market starts at 12 noon, the entire village springs to life with hustle and bustle. Now people from nearby villages also come to our village for purchasing and selling things. I normally earn around Rs. 2000 profit by selling vegetables,” said Ratan Kushwaha, a local farmer. The weekly market operates from 12 noon to 9 pm every Saturday.

“Initially, we were hesitant to open a shop because we had never sold anything in the market. Our women farmers' group members decided to try our luck at selling our farm produce. Fortunately, our decision to start our stalls succeeded, and we now have another dependable income source,” said Mrs. Lata Kumar, one of the first four woman farmers who opened stalls in the weekly market.



# Community Market: Freedom At Last from Exploitative Traders

Farmers lose control over their own produce the moment they step into the market with it. Local traders know how to suppress prices by forming an unscrupulous behind-the-curtain coalition that determines the rates at which the produce will be bought and sold. The unorganized farmers, who cannot afford to take back their produce due to doubling transportation costs, are forced to sell at the rates dictated by traders.

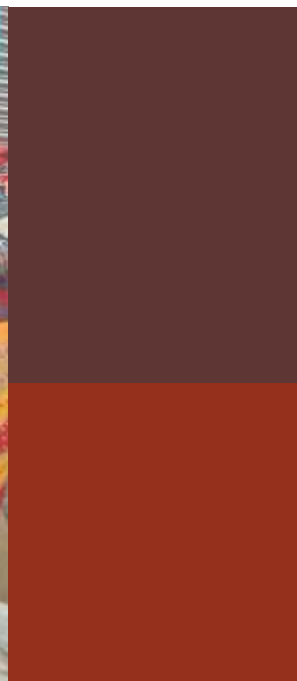
“We spend big money to take the organically grown produce to Mathura, hoping for a good price. Once we bring our produce to the traders, we have to accept the rates they decide. Since we cannot take it back home, we sell at whatever rate they offer. Seldom do we get the rate we expect,” described Mr. Gangaram, a farmer from Junsuti village in Mathura district, Uttar Pradesh.

“We have to transport our produce either by hiring tractors or on motorcycles to Mathura city, which is 12 km away, to sell our farm produce. It takes a full day to transport the produce to market, identify a trader offering a decent price, and return home. Some days, when we take our produce to the market, we do not earn

as much as we would doing daily wage work in the village,” complained Ms. Kiran Devi, another farmer from Junsuti. All farmers in Junsuti echo the same story of organized exploitation by traders and their own helplessness.

The Agra Diocesan Social Service Society (ADSSS), which implements the Saksham project in Junsuti, encouraged the community to consider starting a local market or Haat Bazaar to remedy trader exploitation. Saksham, implemented with the support of Misereor and Caritas India, seeks to empower marginalized communities in agriculture and governance.

Haat Bazaar is a popular type of community market in central and northern India, often managed by local communities or the panchayat, the local self-government agency. Unlike regular markets where traders buy directly from producers, in Haat Bazaar, producers open their own stalls to sell produce and wares to buyers, usually from their own or adjoining villages. Haat Bazaar effectively removes the exploitative middlemen and traders.





“Some months back, the Saksham team discussed in our Kisan Club (farmers' club) meeting the possibility of starting a Haat Bazaar. We didn't know much about Haat Bazaar then. Since our frustration with traders was growing, our Kisan Club decided to give Haat Bazaar a serious thought,” said Mr. Dhynachand, a member of the Kisan Club, about how the journey started. The Kisan Club was constituted in the village as a solidarity platform for farmers cultivating in nature-friendly ways. The Kisan Club meets every month to discuss solutions for replacing harmful farm inputs, exploring marketing possibilities for their produce, and working on common civic issues in the community.

“We approached the Pradhan (headman) of our Panchayat with the proposal to start Haat Bazaar in Junsuti. Knowing the exploitative tendencies of traders and being a farmer himself, the village Sarpanch readily supported the idea and decided to hold a public meeting to discuss the possibilities of starting the Haat Bazaar,” said Mr. Pavan Kumar, another member of the Kisan Club. “A general meeting of the village was organized immediately, and the community decided to have the Haat Bazaar every Sunday near the main road that intersects the village. It was also agreed that the market would be held from 12 noon to 6 pm,” Pavan Kumar added.

The Junsuti community launched a publicity campaign using loudspeakers in neighboring villages to announce the commencement of the Haat Bazaar. “We formed a 5-member monitoring committee to oversee the overall management of the weekly market. This committee is responsible for mobilizing the community, drawing up market management plans, identifying the most suitable location for the market, and handling grievances,” said Mr. Rajendra Upadhyay, the Sarpanch of Junsuti Panchayat.

On 18 June 2023, Sarpanch Rajendra Upadhyay inaugurated the Haat Bazaar with 15 stalls of local farmers. “On the opening day, many farmers from Junsuti village sold their produce themselves for the first time. Even though there were very few stalls, more than 600 people visited the market to buy from the farmers,” said Mr. Upadhyay about the success of the Haat Bazaar. “It was an empowering event marked by the freedom of farmers from the clutches of traders,” he added.

“The new Haat Bazaar helped us save money and time traveling to the market in Mathura. We can now focus more on farming, expecting good returns by selling directly in our own market,” said Mr. Gangaram, a smallholder farmer from Junsuti village.

“The local market is a blessing for us because we get fresh and healthy vegetables at cheaper rates than the market. It has also helped us save money on traveling,” said Ms. Kamlesh Devi from the village.

Another woman farmer from Junsuti, Ms. Ramavati Devi, said, “I earn around Rs. 1000 from the vegetable shop I open on market days.” The weekly market, which started on a small scale, has now grown from a humble 15 shops to 60.





# Journey of a Forest Village Towards Economic Resilience

Katrikadi village is situated in the lush greenery of the forest expanse of Aithi Panchayat in Sidhi district of Madhya Pradesh. The primarily tribal community earns its livelihoods from agriculture, daily wage labor, animal husbandry, and the collection of minor forest products. The villagers had to travel 25 kilometres to the nearest market in Sidhi, the district headquarters. This travel would become particularly challenging during the rainy season when stretches of the road would disappear, and vehicles were rarely available to ferry the villagers to and from the city.

With no nearby market, the Katrikadi community faced losses on two fronts: the high cost of travel to the city to buy provisions and supplies, and the high cost of transporting their produce to the city for selling. Whenever they took their produce to the market, traders would offer low prices, knowing the farmers wouldn't take back their wares. Mr. Hiralal, a marginal farmer, shared his struggle, saying, "In the absence of a market to sell my produce profitably, I was finding it extremely difficult to meet household needs with whatever I could produce from my small piece of land."

The Misereor-supported Saksham project was started in Katrikadi to help the community achieve livelihood security through sustainable agriculture and diversification and strengthening of existing livelihoods. Saksham raised several Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to spearhead sustainable agriculture and good governance initiatives. One of the first activities Saksham implemented was micro-planning, a platform for the village community to voice their pressing needs, prioritize them, and develop





an action plan for solving community challenges. During one of the micro-planning meetings, the Saksham team floated the idea of a Haat Bazaar, which the community readily accepted. Several rounds of discussions were held in the village to create community ownership of the Haat Bazaar proposal, culminating in the submission of a memorandum to the local Panchayat seeking the facility to start the Haat Bazaar.

The Haat Bazaar plan initially faced difficulties in locating a market space on communal land and obtaining administrative clearances. Despite these hurdles, the community persisted with their plan. It was a historic day for the village community on 16 March 2024, when the Haat Bazaar was formally inaugurated.

Mrs. Anarkali, a village member, proudly declared, "The Haat Bazaar has changed my life. I've seen a remarkable increase in my weekly earnings. And I'm not alone—25 other women, just like me, have discovered new opportunities for livelihood by opening their stalls." Ever since the Haat Bazaar became functional, dozens of villagers turned entrepreneurs by opening shops and selling their produce directly to consumers from neighboring villages. The Katrikadi community holds the Haat Bazaar every Saturday.

Mr. Hiralal, a marginal farmer from the village, is jubilant, "We celebrate the fair price that we get for our produce as there is no middleman involved. Farmers now receive their due share and the market has stopped our money drain." Another farmer, Mr. Mahipal Singh, adds, "The Haat Bazaar has created a large number of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for the villagers. Ever since the Haat Bazaar started, there has been a general improvement in the incomes of families."

The Haat Bazaar of Katrikadi is not just a marketplace offering economic opportunities to the villagers but a symbol of resilience and empowerment that fuels the collective aspirations of the Katrikadi community. Mr. Arjun Singh, a village leader, reflects, "The weekly market has become a lifeline for Katrikadi. It has fostered a sense of solidarity and mutual support among the villagers."





## Haat Bazaar: A Market That Increases Local Food Availability

It is a troublesome weekly routine for villagers in the North and Central India to travel long distances to markets to purchase household supplies, including food materials. For most villagers, the market is synonymous with a money drain due to the expenditure they incur on travel and purchases.

“We have to invest an entire day whenever we go to the market. Some of us have to sacrifice daily wage labor and travel eighteen kilometres to Mathura to buy vegetables,” narrated Mr. Lakhansingh, a member of the Kisan Club of Rampur village.

Caritas India is implementing the Saksham program in Rampur village, Mathura district, Uttar Pradesh, to strengthen the rural livelihoods of small and marginal farmers. One of the goals of Saksham is to help communities establish Haat Bazaars (weekly markets) under community initiative and leadership, reducing their dependency on the exploitative market.

The Saksham team established a Kisan Club, or farmers' club, where several rounds of discussions

were held on the possibility of starting a local market, as the nearest market in Mathura was more than 18 kilometres away. “During Kisan Club meetings, the members discussed the possibility of starting a local market since the village had enough population to sustain a weekly market. Initially, the idea was not accepted as viable, but detailed discussions helped us find a practical solution,” elaborated Mr. Kaluram, a leader of the local Kisan Club.

“The Kisan Club members decided to take the demand to start the Haat Bazaar plan to our Pradhan (village headman) for his consideration and approval,” Mr. Lakhansingh, a member of the Kisan Club, narrated how the movement to start the local market took off.

“The community brought me the proposal to start a Haat Bazaar within the village bounds. Since I was aware of the poor connectivity of the village to the nearest market, I assured them that we would find a way to start the local market,” said Mr. Bhagwan Singh, the headman of Rampur.

Encouraged by the positive response from the





village headman, the Kisan Club members convened a community meeting to discuss operational matters like place, time, and dates of the weekly market. “During the community meeting that the Pradhan had convened, we discussed how a local market would help us increase income by selling our produce locally and how we could reduce our expenses on travel to a remote market. We found it to be a win-win proposal for both the consumer and the seller,” described Ms. Hukuma, a member of the local SHG, which joined hands with the farmers' club to start the Haat Bazaar.

“We decided in the general meeting that we would hold the Haat Bazaar every Saturday along the sides of the road that passes through the village from 3 pm onwards,” said Mr. Bhagwan Singh, the Pradhan. In the meeting, it was unanimously decided to constitute a management committee to supervise the market and address the complaints of buyers and sellers. Subsequently, a five-member team, headed by the Pradhan himself, was formed to oversee the preparations and management of the Haat Bazaar. The management committee later sent vehicles with loudspeakers to adjacent villages to announce the commencement of the Haat Bazaar on 22 July 2022.

“On the inauguration day, ten vegetable stalls were opened by local villagers, and more than 400 people visited these stalls,” said Mr. Gulab Singh, one of the monitoring committee members, excitedly. “I was so happy that I opened my own vegetable shop for the first time. It is such a nice feeling,” said Ms. Sita, a farmer of Rampur. “I have always been a housewife, but for the first time, I have come to market to sell something I grew myself. It is truly an empowering feeling,” she added.

“Nowadays, I can buy fresh and organic vegetables grown in the village itself, at affordable rates, thanks to the weekly market that we have started. Earlier, we had to go to Mathura city to buy vegetables,” said Ms. Chandravati, a member of the local women's SHG.



# Haat Bazaar: A Beacon of Hope and Economic Transformation



In the heart of Uttar Pradesh's Lalitpur district, the village of Nathikheda is witnessing a remarkable transformation. The establishment of the Nathikheda Haat Bazaar, a community-driven marketplace, has become a beacon of hope and economic opportunity for the region's small farmers who were until recently dependent on exploitative middlemen.

The story began with the courageous initiative of Mrs. Mamta Ahirwar, the leader of Nathikheda's women Self-Help Group. Reflecting on the pivotal moment when the community decided to start its own Haat Bazaar, she recalls, "The Saksham program broadened our economic horizons with its awareness initiatives on diversifying livelihoods. We had heard about the success of the Haat Bazaar in our neighbouring Hansarkalan village, which Saksham had started. Inspired by this success, we united to achieve our dream of economic prosperity by starting a Haat Bazaar in our village."



Just 5 kilometers from Hansarkalan where the first community led Haat Bazaar was started by Saksham, Nathikheda's journey towards starting its own Haat Bazaar was not without challenges. However, the triumph of the Hansarkalan Haat Bazaar instilled a new sense of confidence in Nathikheda's residents. Mrs. Meera Ahirwar, another key community member, emphasized this newfound belief, "seeing the success of the Hansarkalan Haat Bazaar strengthened our resolve to establish our own."

Critical to the Bazaar's establishment was the support of Mrs. Anjeeli Yadav, the Gram Pradhan of Nathikheda. She provided the necessary legal backing, reassuring the community and promising to clear all administrative and regulatory bottlenecks.

On 5 December 2023, the Nathikheda Haat Bazaar was officially inaugurated in the presence of village elders and enthusiastic committee members. Operating every Tuesday, the market has quickly become a vital economic hub. Local villagers bring fresh farm produce, handicrafts, and other goods to the weekly market, thereby fostering a vibrant local economy.

Mrs. Mamta Ahirwar, who for the first time started selling her produce in the Haat Bazaar, shared her optimism, "The community has become increasingly aware of the importance of sustainable livelihoods. With the Haat Bazaar, I've started cultivating a small piece of land. As my income grows, I plan to expand my vegetable and crop cultivation. The market will certainly increase my income because I get good prices for my produces from the Haat Bazaar."

The Haat Bazaar's influence extends beyond mere economic growth. It has inspired a societal transformation. Mr. Jalam Ahirwar, a Bazaar Committee member, credits the Saksham program for uplifting marginalized communities. "Thanks to the support I've received, I now earn an extra income of Rs. 800 to Rs. 900 per market day, greatly enhancing the sustainability of my family's livelihood," he stated. This additional income has enabled families to invest in education, healthcare, and better living conditions, creating a positive ripple effect throughout the community.

Nathikheda is experiencing both collective and individual advancement. Mr. Ram Sarup, a dedicated committee member, reflected on the market's evolution, "The Haat Bazaar is a testament to the power of collective action and the solid willpower of our people."

Farmers like Mr. Gagan Ahirwar from nearby Azadpura have seen firsthand the benefits of the Haat Bazaar. "The local Haat Bazaar of Nathikheda has changed my life financially as I get regular income from selling my produce in the market. I do not need to travel long distances to sell my produce, and middlemen do not fleece us either," he said. This marketplace has provided farmers and producers with new avenues to sell their goods, significantly improving their livelihoods.

The Nathikheda Haat Bazaar stands as a symbol of hope, resilience, and the transformative power of community collaboration. As the village continues to thrive, this marketplace serves as a testament to what can be achieved when a community comes together with a shared vision of progress and prosperity.



Villagers of Rasulpur in Varanasi district, Uttar Pradesh, had grown skeptical of the profitability of vegetable cultivation due to diminishing returns. The majority of the 500 households in the village rely on vegetable cultivation and animal husbandry for their livelihood.

“I have to transport my produce to the vegetable market at my own cost. The moment I arrive, I lose control over my produce. Middlemen and traders set the prices, almost always at a loss for me. This is where my profits always leak,” said Mr. Pawan Kumar, a farmer of Rasulpur, with helplessness written large on his face. “Since there are no other markets in the vicinity, we find ourselves at the mercy of the local traders and middlemen. We also incur heavy expenses on transportation,” he added.

Traveling to the nearest market in Pindara city, 15 kilometers away from Rasulpur, means losing a day's wage labor for most villagers. “I have to leave my daily wage work once a week to travel to the market to buy essentials, including vegetables,” said Mr. Sanjay, a member of the local youth group called Shri Ganesh Yuva Mandal. “We had to find a way to free ourselves from the traders and middlemen who fleece us,” he added.

The Diocese Of Varanasi Social Welfare Society (DOVSWs) started the Saksham project in fifteen villages of Varanasi district in 2021 to strengthen farming systems and bolster the farm economy of poor communities. While working to enhance the community's self-reliance on farm inputs, DOVSWs assisted



## Empowering Rasulpur: The Journey To A Thriving Local Market





communities in profitably marketing their farm produce. As part of the community organization drive, DOVSWs raised several Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), including SHGs, farmers' groups, village development committees, and youth groups.

It all started with the initiative of a youth group in the village. “In one meeting, group members discussed the prospects of a haat bazaar (weekly market) and whether such a market could be started in the village. Everyone in the meeting accepted the proposal with excitement as a local market would secure better prices for the farmers,” said Mr. Santosh, a youth group member, narrating how the youth of the village took the first step towards starting a local market.

“The Saksham team, youth group, and village development committee started mobilizing people around the idea of a community market. They informed people about the benefits of a rural market. It took more than three months to build a consensus on starting a weekly market,” said Mr. Amit, a member of the Kisan Club. Since the weekly market required a large space within the village, the community approached the Sarpanch (village headman) to identify a suitable location.

“The farmers of the village, especially women, were producing organic vegetables but were not getting the right price for their produce. The village community was confident that a weekly market would help them get good prices for their farm produce. Hence, we decided to approach the district administration to start a weekly market on public land available in the village,” said Mr. Kailash Yadav, the Sarpanch of Rasulpur village. While narrating the preparations for the village market, he said, “The Rasulpur community identified a square piece of community land on the periphery of the village. The identified spot had the advantage of easy accessibility for neighboring communities.”

The village community, after demarcating the marketplace, launched a campaign to prepare and clean the identified space. For the Rasulpur community, 16 February 2023 was a memorable day. In the presence of government officials and community leaders, the much-awaited dream of the community materialized as the weekly market was inaugurated. “It feels surreal to have our own weekly market where we are assured of good returns for our produce. We unanimously decided to hold the weekly market on Sundays and Thursdays,” said the Sarpanch jubilantly.

The first weekly market featured 25 shops selling local farm produce. The market's first day was well received by the community, with many villagers, including women, becoming business owners for the first time. “I had never considered myself capable of selling my vegetables in the market. It felt great selling my produce directly to consumers at a price that I set,” said Ms. Swati, a woman farmer of Rasulpur, who now regularly participates in the market with her vegetable shop.



The market not only reduced the villagers' expenditure on travel and transportation but also helped farmers achieve attractive returns for their farm produce. “We don't need to go to a remote market anymore. With the help of our weekly market, we can save on transportation costs and the commission that middlemen used to extract from us. On the first day of the market, I made a profit of ₹900 by selling the vegetables from my farm,” beamed Ms. Roopmati Devi, a farmer of Rasulpur.

# Farmers Start Weekly Market To Free Themselves From Middlemen

Farmers of Sonsa village in Mathura district, Uttar Pradesh, had no choice but to sell their produce in the Mathura market at prices arbitrarily set by local traders. Farmers found themselves at the mercy of these traders, who manipulated rates for their benefit.

"Traveling 20 kilometers, especially during the rainy season, with heavy bags of produce has not been easy for us. The irregular public transport worsened our difficulties. We had to bear heavy expenses for travel and the loss of wage labor," said Mr. Ram Singh, a farmer from Sonsa village. "We urgently needed to find a way to escape the exploitation of the traders," he added.

Agra Catholic Diocesan Social Service Society (ADSSS) initiated the Saksham program in 15 villages, including Sonsa, in 2022. The program aimed to strengthen local farming systems and help farmers find and implement solutions that would reduce their dependence on the market for inputs and sales. One of the initial activities was organizing farmers, particularly women, and helping them identify and implement empowering local solutions.

"The Saksham team sparked the idea of starting a Haat Bazaar or weekly market in one of our farmer club meetings. We had never considered this option before. All the farmer club members unanimously accepted the idea of setting up a community-managed weekly market in Sonsa," said Mr. Omprakash, a member of the farmers' club. "After several rounds of discussion, we realized the usefulness of the weekly market in substantially reducing our expenses and increasing our incomes," he said. The farmer club decided to approach the village headman with the request to start the weekly market.





“Since the success of the weekly market requires the participation of all villagers, we decided to have a general discussion and seek suggestions from village elders and Panchayat members. It took close to two months of discussions to reach a consensus on opening the Haat Bazaar,” Mr. Giriraj Singh, a farmer club member, explained. Considering the community's enthusiasm, the headman of the Panchayat, Mr. Tej Singh, extended his support and assured the completion of all administrative and legal formalities for starting the weekly market.

"A five-member monitoring committee was constituted to manage the weekly market. This committee was tasked with finalizing the location, time, and date for the weekly market," Mr. Tej Singh said. In a general meeting held later, the community decided to hold the weekly market every Sunday from 12 noon to 6 pm on the main road of the village. "The Panchayat employed a person with loudspeakers to inform neighboring villages about the commencement of the weekly market," Mr. Omprakash shared.

"On the inauguration day, 21st May 2022, around 20 vegetable stalls were set up, and more than 700 people visited," mentioned monitoring committee member Mr. Mohan Singh. People from nearby villages like Shahpur and Nagla came in large numbers, and the footfall has been increasing due to word-of-mouth publicity.

The local market has become very popular among the locals because it gives them access to affordable and healthy vegetables grown locally. "We get fresh vegetables in the village, so we don't need to go to the Mathura market, saving on travel costs as well," Ms. Kamla shared her experience. "Setting up my stall for the first time and deciding a fair rate for my produce gives me great satisfaction compared to selling to big traders," said Mr. Saini with a broad contented smile.



# Empowering Journey of Katholi Village To Prosperity

"Not long ago, it used to be a day's journey to reach Sidhi, the district headquarters some 22 kilometres away, to purchase household items and groceries", narrates Mr. Rangdev Singh from Katholi village. Community of Katholi village, located on the fringes of forest in the backward district of Sidhi, Madhya Pradesh, earned its livelihood principally from agriculture and daily wage labor. Absence of local market and the compulsion to travel long distances to Sidhi created significant challenges to villagers. Not only the farmers had to endure long travels but had to settle for lower prices whenever they take their produces to the market. This situation contributed to mounting poverty and distress migration to cities for employment, depriving children of education and darkening the village's prospects.

However, the entry of the Saksham program triggered a wave of change. Various groups, including Self-Help Groups, Children Parliament, and farmers' groups were formed. These groups started mobilising communities on the subjects of good governance, nature-friendly farming, livelihood strengthening and community empowerment. "Saksham provided us with literacy on local governance and farming practices, improving our farming techniques and leading to the establishment of kitchen gardens in every household," says Mr. Mahabir Singh, a marginal farmer from the village. This initiative not only ensured self-sufficiency in vegetable production but also fostered a sense of community empowerment.







As the surplus from the kitchen gardens increased, the need for a nearby market grew stronger. The concept of a local Haat Bazaar emerged in the village at Saksham's initiative. Katholi community needed a platform for selling the surplus vegetables, grains, and forest products that the villagers had with them. Despite initial challenges in finding a suitable location, the perseverance of the villagers, supported by the Gram Pradhan, resulted in the inauguration of the Haat Bazaar on 19 October 2023. This event marked a significant turning point for Katholi village.

Reflecting on the establishment of the Haat Bazaar, Ms. Premwati Devi, an SHG leader from Katholi village said, "The Haat Bazaar opened new economic avenues for us. I have taken a loan from my SHG to open general store. Every week open my shop in the market. My business is doing good as I earn about Rs. 800 – Rs.1000 per market. Now, almost all households in our village are connected to the market, earning some income", Ms. Premwati said.

Ms. Sumitra Singh is another local farmer who found new livelihood opportunity with the commencement of the local market. "For the past four to five months, people from our village have

taken an interest in cultivating vegetables. They are no longer migrating; instead, they are finding employment by either cultivating vegetables or opening different shops in the market and earning income. It is indeed a development that our village desperately needed", Ms. Sumitra said.

The impact of the market was profound. Mr. Mahabir Singh, a local marginal farmer expanded his business beyond vegetables and Mr. Rangdev Singh utilized his earnings to invest in agricultural infrastructure. Ultimately, the awareness fostered by Saksham not only improved livelihoods but also kindled a spirit of entrepreneurship and self-reliance among the Katholi community. As Ms. Bagiya Devi from the village aptly narrates, "the journey from cluelessness to empowerment is a testament our resilience and determination".

Katholi village, once mired in challenges, is now a thriving example of what community empowerment and persistent effort can achieve. The story of Katholi is a powerful case of how a seemingly powerless community can achieve creditable economic growth by starting a local market. Katholi also is a shining example of how a disadvantaged community can forge a path to recovery from exploitative markets.



# Local Market and Organic Farming Transform Village

The farming community of Sethmoa village faced a pressing challenge. Traditionally, their farms produced just enough for their consumption. However, a shift to organic farming led to increased yields, and without a market connection, farmers were left to the mercy of unscrupulous middlemen who manipulated prices to their disadvantage.

For decades, chemical farming had depleted Sethmoa's soil and reduced productivity. Reflecting on this transformation, Mr. Ram Khuswaha Rawat, a member of the local farmers' club, shared, "I found myself at a crossroads, grappling with the harmful impacts of chemical farming and spiralling costs. For generations, my family relied on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which destroyed our farm's productivity." The turning point came with the Caritas India-supported Saksham program, which promoted localized farm inputs using various botanical solutions. "The organic farming techniques that Saksham introduced were cheap and locally

prepared. These solutions quickly revitalized our fields, and production increased considerably," Mr. Rawat said.

The change extended beyond farming practices. Mr. Rajesh Kumar, another farmers' club member, recounted, "When farmers faced challenges selling their surplus produce, Saksham proposed an innovative solution: the local Haat Bazaar. Initially, the community was hesitant, but several rounds of discussions dispelled our doubts and gave us the confidence that the Haat Bazaar could be profitable for everyone."

On 1 November 2023, the Sethmoa Haat Bazaar began operations, with a formal inauguration on 24 January 2024. "Initially, 15 farmers from the Saksham program and another 25 local farmers participated by setting up shops," Mr. Rajesh explained. The market, which started humbly with 35 shops, has flourished. "Operating twice a week—Wednesdays and Sundays—our Haat Bazaar has become a bustling hub, drawing people





from seven neighbouring villages. Approximately 600 households now benefit directly," he added.

"As a close observer of local market dynamics," noted Mr. Mahangi Lal, "I've witnessed the transformative impact of the Sethmoa Haat Bazaar. It disrupted the dominance of larger retailers and middlemen, promoting fair trade and healthy competition, thereby benefiting the village's farmers."

For farmers like Mr. Ram Khuswaha Rawat, the benefits were significant. "I earn an average of Rs. 1000 per market day," he shared. "The Haat Bazaar has shielded us from the exploitation of middlemen and adverse weather conditions, significantly boosting our earnings."

Mr. Pradeep Kumar, a community member, highlighted the market's potential: "Before the Haat Bazaar, accessing fresh, organic vegetables meant arduous journeys to distant markets. Now, we have convenience, accessibility, and affordability right here in our village."

Summing up the community's sentiment, Mr. Rajesh Kumar declared, "The Haat Bazaar has ushered in a new era of economic empowerment and agricultural sustainability. It exemplifies the transformative power of collective action in uplifting marginalized farmers and fostering vibrant rural economies."



# Tribal Community Unites to Start Weekly Market

The tribal community of Sapniduari village in Sidhi district of Madhya Pradesh was used to braving scorching heat and pothole-filled roads to reach the nearest market in Sidhi town, which was 18 km away, where they were certain of facing inclement and exploitative traders. Despite knowing about the exploitation of traders, community members had to still frequent the market for getting essential supplies and to sell their produces.

“I used to travel every week to the market to buy groceries and other household items. Every market visit was heavy on the pocket because of the high cost that will have to be coughed up for the purchases and the loss of wage for that day”, lamented Mr. Nilesh Singh from Sapniduari. Families of this remote tribal village had to rely on the market in Sidhi just because they didn't have any other alternative. “Until last year we had no market, no roads, and no proper transportation,” said Mr. Ramlal a local farmer.

This was not an isolated case in the region. “We were not the only community that didn't have any market in the reachable limits. Communities of the neighboring villages Khatrikhadi, Chiwalaha, Pawai, and Kothar also had to travel several miles to Sidhi”, said Ms. Ramkali Baiga, the president of Kranti women Self Help Group of Sapniduari.

Samaritan Social Service Society (SSSS) had started Saksham project in fifteen villages of Sidhi district in 2021 to strengthen local farming systems by identifying and propagating locally viable solutions, including local market. Saksham, a Misereor-supported project, had organized local farming communities into dozens of community-based organisations that vigorously worked to enhance local self-reliance. Collective action of communities always followed a detailed micro-planning that communities completed in a meticulous and participatory





manner. “In one meeting of our farmers club, we identified and prioritized our development challenges. The principal problem that we identified for our collective action was starting a local market”, said Mr. Pappu a member of the farmer group in Sapniduary. Saksham project had raised farmers groups in all intervention villages as platforms for strengthening community solidarity and to help communities launch collective action.

“Saksham team had placed before us the possibility of setting up a haat bazaar (weekly market) and informed us about the benefits of such people-led markets. The entire community discussed the possibility of setting up a haat bazaar and everyone was unanimous on starting the haat bazaar”, said Mr. Shivraj, the president of the farmers club. The community then decided to submit a formal application to Ms. Shobha Yadav, the Sarpanch (village head).

Women and men farmers clubs of Sapniduary launched a sensitization campaign in the village to inform the community about the necessity to have a consensus for starting a haat bazaar. Community prepared a memorandum with signatures of the villagers and submitted it to the village head demanding to start the haat bazaar in the village bounds. “After I received the application from the community, I informed the block-level officials including Tehsildar (Revenue Officer) about the community demand for haat bazaar. I also requested them to grant the necessary legal permissions so that the market could be started soon”, Ms. Shobha Yadav, the Sarpanch said.

While the administrative clearance was still being pursued by the Sarpanch, the community identified a 2.5-acre communal land at the three-way junction near the village as the designated place for the haat bazaar. The Sarpanch held a meeting with the group members and decided to hold weekly markets on Thursdays from 1 pm to 7 pm. Soon, to the cheers of the community, the approval from the administrative officials arrived thus clearing the last hurdles for the haat bazaar. On 17 November 2022, the haat bazaar of Sapniduary was officially inaugurated in the presence of local administrative officials and a large number of locals.

The haat bazaar on its first day witnessed 30 locals setting up shops mostly of farm produces and grocery. Ever since, the number of shops zoomed to 170 and the haat bazaar has started attracting vendors and buyers from neighboring villages. The haat bazaar turned out to be an expression of entrepreneurship of the locals as well. “I have been selling groceries in this market since its beginning. I earn in the range of ₹800 - ₹1000 per market”, said Mr. Hiralal, a vendor from neighboring Kothar village.

“Now we get all provisions from our own haat bazaar. We do not have travel long distances to Sidhi for purchasing the essentials for our households. Apart from the savings, the haat bazaar has given business opportunities to us. Our Thursdays have become so much lively ever since haat bazaar was started”, said Mr. Akhilesh Sahu from Sapniduari.





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