

FROM WATER TO WI-FI: WHAT RURAL INDIA REALLY WANTS IN SIRSI AREA

Dissertation Submitted to



The IIHMR University, Jaipur

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Master of Business Administration (MBA)

in

Development Management

by

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Under the Supervision and Guidance of

Dr. Kajal Sitlani

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जागृति संस्थान

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Certificate of Participation

This is to certify that Sarthak Sharma S/o Shri Sanjay Sharma, Resident of Modi Nagar, Purani Chungi, Ajmer Road actively participated in the “Water on Wi-Fi” program held from 17th March 2025 to 10th June 2025.

During this period, Sarthak successfully conducted surveys in Sirsi village on key issues including water, sanitation, education, nutrition, and employment.

In collaboration with Jagrati Sansthan, Sarthak also led a digital awareness campaign on water conservation, significantly contributing to building awareness and responsibility within the community for the sustainable use of water resources.

His dedication, integrity, and commitment were truly commendable.

We extend our best wishes for his bright and successful future.

Sincerely
Manish Mitawa
Program Manager

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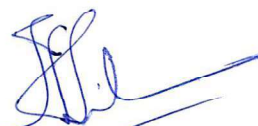
Certificate From Faculty Guide

This is to certify that the dissertation titled "**From Water to wifi: what Rural India really wants in Sirsiarea .**" Program is a record of the research work undertaken by **Mr Sarthak Sharma** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MBA (Development Management) from the IIMIR University, Jaipur under my guidance and supervision and his/her approach to the research study has been sincere, scientific, and analytical.

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STUDENT DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation titled "From water to wifi : what rural india really wants in sirsi area is the bonafide record of my original research work. I declare that it has not been submitted to any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been duly acknowledged in the text.


Signature

From Water to Wi-Fi: What Rural India Really Wants – A Case Study on Aspirations and Access

MBA in Human Development

IIHMR University

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

When I first arrived in Sirsi village, nestled in the heart of Rajasthan, I was struck by a conversation with Ramesh, a local shopkeeper who doubled as the village's unofficial tech support. "Sahib," he said, pointing to his smartphone, "my daughter wants to study online courses, but our internet comes and goes like the monsoon rains." This simple yet profound statement encapsulates the evolving nature of rural aspirations in contemporary India—a shift that forms the foundation of this research.

Over the past few decades, India has witnessed remarkable progress in rural development. The transformation has been tangible: villages that once struggled without electricity now have solar panels dotting their rooftops, hand pumps have given way to piped water systems, and dusty footpaths have evolved into paved roads connecting remote hamlets to district headquarters. Government initiatives like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, and Swachh Bharat Mission have fundamentally altered the rural landscape, addressing what development economists traditionally categorized as 'basic needs'—clean drinking water, sanitation facilities, electricity access, transportation infrastructure, and primary healthcare services.

However, as I spent more time in Sirsi village, talking to farmers during their evening gatherings, listening to mothers discuss their children's futures, and observing young people navigate between traditional occupations and modern aspirations, it became evident that rural India's definition of development is undergoing a profound transformation. The penetration of smartphones—even in households where owning a television was once considered a luxury—has created digital windows to urban lifestyles and global opportunities. This technological leap has not merely provided entertainment; it has fundamentally shifted aspirations and expectations.

Today's rural communities are articulating desires that extend far beyond survival and basic infrastructure. They speak of quality education that can compete with urban standards, reliable digital connectivity that doesn't discriminate between city and village, employment opportunities that leverage skills beyond traditional agriculture, and healthcare systems that incorporate modern diagnostic and treatment capabilities. These aspirations reflect a generation that has witnessed both the possibilities of the digital age and the limitations of their current circumstances.

This dissertation emerges from extensive fieldwork conducted in Sirsi village, where I lived among the community for several months, participating in their daily routines,

attending village meetings, and building relationships that went beyond the typical researcher-subject dynamic. The study represents an attempt to document and understand this critical shift in rural aspirations—from infrastructure-focused development to opportunity-driven growth that encompasses digital literacy, modern education, diverse employment options, and comprehensive healthcare access.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The disconnect between policy intention and ground reality became apparent during my very first village meeting in Sirsi. When I asked about the Digital India initiative, most villagers were aware of the slogan but struggled to identify concrete benefits in their daily lives. This gap between government vision and community experience represents a fundamental challenge in contemporary rural development.

Government initiatives, while well-intentioned and often successful in improving infrastructure metrics, frequently operate within a top-down framework that defines development through quantifiable indicators—number of toilets constructed, kilometers of road laid, households electrified, or bank accounts opened. These measurements, while important, often miss the nuanced reality of how rural communities experience and define progress in their own lives.

The problem extends beyond mere implementation gaps. There exists a more fundamental issue: the absence of rural voices in defining development priorities. Despite the proliferation of schemes and programs, many villagers remain unaware of services designed for their benefit, or find these services misaligned with their actual needs and aspirations. This disconnect raises critical questions about the effectiveness of current development models and their sustainability in addressing the evolving expectations of rural India.

Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological change has created new categories of needs and aspirations that traditional development frameworks struggle to accommodate. When a young farmer in Sirsi expresses interest in precision agriculture techniques learned through YouTube videos, or when village women organize WhatsApp groups to coordinate their self-help group activities, they are demonstrating readiness for forms of development that extend beyond conventional infrastructure provision.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research gains significance from its commitment to amplifying rural voices in development discourse. Rather than imposing external definitions of progress, the

study prioritizes community perspectives, captured through sustained field engagement, comprehensive household surveys, and in-depth interviews with villagers across different age groups, genders, and occupational categories.

The significance extends across multiple dimensions:

Academic Contribution: This study contributes to the growing body of literature on participatory development by providing empirical evidence of how rural aspirations are evolving in the digital age. It challenges conventional development paradigms by demonstrating the sophistication of rural communities in articulating their needs and envisioning their futures.

Policy Relevance: By highlighting the specific priorities of Sirsi village residents—whether concerning reliable internet connectivity, skills training programs, educational opportunities, or healthcare improvements—this research provides actionable insights for policymakers seeking to design more responsive and effective development interventions.

Digital Inclusion Focus: The study addresses a critical gap in understanding digital readiness and aspirations in rural India. As the country advances toward digital governance and service delivery, understanding how rural communities perceive and prioritize digital inclusion becomes essential for ensuring equitable development outcomes.

Human Development Perspective: By examining aspirations holistically—encompassing not just material needs but also social, educational, and technological aspirations—this research contributes to broader discussions about human development that recognize the multidimensional nature of well-being and progress.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study is guided by four interconnected objectives that collectively aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of rural aspirations and their implications for development planning:

Primary Objective: To map and analyze the daily needs and long-term aspirations of rural households in Sirsi village, creating a detailed picture of how community members prioritize different aspects of development and envision their future.

Secondary Objectives:

- **Service Assessment:** To evaluate the availability, accessibility, and awareness levels of government services among villagers, examining both the supply-side provision and demand-side utilization of development programs.

- **Digital Readiness Analysis:** To investigate the digital readiness, capabilities, and aspirations among villagers, understanding how technology intersects with traditional livelihoods and future planning.
- **Strategic Recommendations:** To formulate people-centered strategies for future human development planning that align government initiatives with community-expressed priorities and aspirations.

1.5 Research Questions

This investigation is structured around five core questions that emerged from preliminary field observations and community interactions:

1. **Immediate Needs Assessment:** What are the most urgent and pressing needs of rural households in Sirsi village, and how do these needs vary across different demographic groups and economic circumstances?
2. **Development Conceptualization:** How do rural people themselves define 'development' in today's context, and how has this definition evolved from previous generations' understanding of progress and improvement?
3. **Digital Integration:** What role does digital inclusion play in rural aspirations, and how do community members envision technology enhancing their lives, livelihoods, and opportunities?
4. **Service Effectiveness:** Are government services reaching their intended beneficiaries effectively, and what barriers exist between service provision and community benefit realization?
5. **Future Visioning:** What specific changes and improvements do villagers expect and hope for in the next five years, and how do these expectations align with current development trajectories?

1.6 Scope and Limitations

Geographical Scope: This study is geographically anchored in Sirsi village, located in the Jaipur district of Rajasthan. The village, with approximately 150 households, represents a semi-arid rural settlement typical of many communities across northwestern India, characterized by mixed agricultural and non-agricultural livelihoods, varying levels of infrastructure development, and increasing exposure to urban influences through migration and media.

Sample Coverage: The research encompasses responses from 63 households, representing approximately 42% of the village's total households. The sample

includes diverse voices: young adults navigating educational and employment decisions, women managing household responsibilities while participating in income-generating activities, elderly residents who have witnessed decades of change, and middle-aged adults balancing traditional practices with modern aspirations.

Methodological Limitations: Several limitations must be acknowledged in interpreting the findings:

- **Representativeness:** While Sirsi village provides valuable insights into rural aspirations, the findings may not be directly generalizable to all rural communities across India, given the diversity of geographical, cultural, and economic contexts across the country.
- **Language and Translation:** Data collection involved multiple languages (Hindi, Rajasthani dialect, and English), and subtle meanings may have been affected during translation and interpretation processes.
- **Literacy Considerations:** Varying literacy levels among respondents required adaptive interview techniques, which may have influenced the depth and nature of responses obtained.
- **Temporal Constraints:** The fieldwork period, while intensive, represents a snapshot in time and may not capture seasonal variations in priorities and aspirations that characterize rural life.

1.7 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation unfolds across ten chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of rural aspirations and their implications for development practice:

Foundational Chapters:

- **Chapter 1** establishes the research foundation, articulating the study's rationale, objectives, and significance within contemporary development discourse.
- **Chapter 2** situates the research within existing academic literature, examining previous studies on rural development, digital inclusion, and participatory approaches to understanding community needs.
- **Chapter 3** details the methodological approach, explaining the mixed-methods framework, data collection techniques, and analytical strategies employed in the study.

Empirical Chapters:

- **Chapter 4** presents the raw field data, providing detailed demographic profiles, survey responses, and interview excerpts that capture the authentic voices of Sirsi village residents.
- **Chapter 5** analyzes household responses through thematic categorization, identifying patterns, priorities, and trends that emerge from community input.

Analytical and Prescriptive Chapters:

- **Chapter 6** contextualizes the findings within broader development debates, connecting village-level observations to national and international discussions about rural transformation.
- **Chapter 7** translates research insights into actionable recommendations for policymakers, development practitioners, and community organizations.

Concluding Elements:

- **Chapter 8** synthesizes the research contributions while reflecting on the broader implications for inclusive development planning and the importance of community voice in shaping development priorities.
- **Chapter 9** provides comprehensive bibliography and references.
- **Chapter 10** includes technical annexures: survey instruments, detailed data tables, visual representations, and supplementary materials that support the main analysis.

The overarching aim of this structure is to honor the voices of rural communities while contributing substantively to more responsive, effective, and inclusive human development planning that recognizes rural residents not merely as beneficiaries of development programs, but as active agents in defining and shaping their own futures.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

When development economist Gunnar Myrdal wrote about the "Asian Drama" in the 1960s, he could hardly have imagined a rural India where farmers use weather apps to plan their sowing or village women run e-commerce businesses from their homes. Yet this transformation represents the central challenge that contemporary literature on rural development grapples with—understanding communities that have evolved from passive recipients of development to active agents with sophisticated aspirations.

This chapter synthesizes diverse scholarly perspectives to establish the theoretical foundation for understanding evolving rural needs. It examines how academic discourse has shifted from infrastructure-focused development to recognizing complex community aspirations, while identifying critical gaps that this study addresses.

2.2 Traditional Rural Development: The Infrastructure Paradigm

Historically, rural development in India operated on what Akhil Gupta (2012) terms the "infrastructure imaginary"—belief that physical infrastructure would automatically improve livelihoods. This approach found expression in massive programs like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), which constructed over 700,000 kilometers of rural roads, and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, which built over 100 million toilets across rural India.

Research demonstrates significant impacts: Asher and Novosad (2020) show that road connectivity improved market access and labor mobility, while National Sample Survey data reveals open defecation dropped from 49% to less than 5% following toilet construction programs. The National Rural Health Mission established extensive healthcare infrastructure, with studies by Powell-Jackson et al. (2015) documenting improvements in maternal health outcomes.

However, anthropologist James Scott (1998) argues that top-down interventions often fail to capture local complexity. Ethnographic studies by Coffey et al. (2017) reveal that toilet construction doesn't automatically ensure usage due to cultural factors, while Aggarwal's (2018) research shows road benefits are often unevenly distributed. The focus on quantifiable outcomes has meant less tangible aspects—social cohesion, community agency, environmental sustainability—received inadequate attention.

2.3 Evolving Rural Aspirations: From Survival to Opportunity

The recognition that rural aspirations are transforming represents a significant shift in development discourse. NITI Aayog's comprehensive study "Strategy for New India @ 75" (2019) reveals that rural youth increasingly express aspirations similar to urban counterparts: quality education leading to diverse careers, reliable healthcare with modern diagnostics, employment beyond agriculture, and digital connectivity to broader opportunities.

This transformation is driven by technological penetration and media exposure. Rural teledensity increased from less than 2% in 2005 to over 60% by 2020, according to TRAI data. Jeffrey and Doron's (2013) ethnographic study "The Great Indian Phone Book" illustrate how mobile phones have transformed social relationships and economic opportunities, creating what Sanjay Srivastava (2015) terms "aspirational convergence"—alignment of rural and urban expectations despite material differences.

Internal migration involving approximately 139 million people (Economic Survey 2017) has further accelerated this change. Rather than draining villages, migration creates complex networks flowing information and aspirations between rural and urban areas. Craig Jeffrey's longitudinal study (2010) reveals young people in rural areas increasingly unwilling to accept lives circumscribed by traditional occupations, yet often lacking resources to pursue alternatives.

2.4 Community Voice in Development: Theory and Practice

Amartya Sen's influential work "Development as Freedom" (1999) argues that development should be measured by expanding people's capabilities and freedoms rather than just income or infrastructure. This theoretical foundation recognizes rural communities as active agents capable of identifying needs and participating meaningfully in processes affecting their lives.

This approach has been operationalized through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), developed by practitioners like Robert Chambers (1994), emphasizing "putting the last first." Kerala's People's Plan Campaign exemplifies successful participatory development, where devolved planning authority and community participation contributed to remarkable human development achievements despite modest economic growth, as documented by Drèze and Sen (2013).

However, implementation faces significant challenges. Power dynamics often mean elite capture of participatory processes, as revealed by Anirudh Krishna's (2002)

research on social capital. The tension between participatory ideals and administrative realities has led to what Uma Kothari (2001) terms the "tyranny of participation"—situations where participatory rhetoric masks essentially top-down processes.

2.5 Digital Inclusion: The New Development Frontier

Digital inclusion has emerged as a critical development priority, with rural internet users crossing 300 million in 2022 (IAMAI). The Government's Digital India initiative encompasses BharatNet for broadband connectivity, Digital Literacy Mission, and various e-governance services. However, the Digital Empowerment Foundation reveals significant variations in access quality and utility across rural areas.

Contemporary research emphasizes that digital inclusion requires more than connectivity. Kentaro Toyama's (2015) "Geek Heresy" argues technology alone cannot solve development challenges without addressing capacity, motivation, and social context. Anthropologist Sirpa Tenhunen's (2018) field studies demonstrate how digital technologies interact with existing social relationships and cultural practices in complex ways.

Gender represents a particularly important dimension. Research by the Mobile Alliance for Maternal Action reveals significant gender gaps in mobile ownership and internet usage, though studies also document how digital technologies can enhance women's agency. SEWA's innovative programs combining digital literacy with livelihood support demonstrate gender-responsive approaches to digital inclusion.

2.6 Conclusion: Toward Community-Centered Development

This literature review reveals a fundamental paradigm shift from viewing rural communities as beneficiaries to recognizing them as active agents with sophisticated understandings of their needs. The traditional infrastructure approach, while necessary, proves increasingly inadequate for addressing complex, evolving aspirations driven by digital connectivity and changing livelihoods.

The persistent gap between policy intentions and community experiences highlights the need for research prioritizing authentic community voices. While participatory development has gained theoretical acceptance, implementation challenges

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains how we conducted our study in Sirsi village, Rajasthan, to understand what rural families truly need and aspire for in their daily lives. Our goal was to go beyond surface-level observations and genuinely connect with the community to understand their experiences with basic services, development programs, and their vision for the future.

3.2 Research Approach

We chose a mixed-method approach because village life is too complex to capture through numbers alone. While structured surveys provided us with concrete data from 63 households about income levels, service access, and infrastructure challenges, it was the personal conversations that brought these statistics to life.

Through informal chats over evening tea and patient listening sessions, villagers shared stories that revealed the human side of development challenges - their daily struggles with water scarcity, their children's educational dreams, their concerns about agricultural sustainability, and their hopes for better connectivity to the outside world.

3.3 Who We Talked To

We deliberately spread our research across different neighborhoods of Sirsi village, ensuring we heard diverse voices. Our sample included established farming families who've lived there for generations, younger families trying to balance traditional agriculture with modern aspirations, elderly residents who've witnessed the village's transformation over decades, and women who often hold unique insights into household and community challenges.

We made sure to include people from different economic brackets - from those struggling with basic needs to relatively better-off families who've managed to improve their circumstances. This diversity was crucial because development needs vary significantly even within a small village.

3.4 How We Gathered Information

Household Surveys: We visited 63 homes across the village with a comprehensive questionnaire that covered demographics, income sources, access to water and sanitation, educational opportunities, agricultural practices, digital connectivity, and

awareness of government schemes. Each survey took 30-45 minutes, allowing us to build rapport with families while gathering systematic data.

In-depth Conversations: Beyond formal surveys, we conducted longer, open-ended interviews with key community members including village elders, women's group leaders, young adults, and local entrepreneurs. These conversations often happened in natural settings - under trees, in courtyards, or during community gatherings - making people more comfortable to share their real experiences and aspirations.

Participatory Observation: We spent considerable time walking through the village, observing daily routines, infrastructure conditions, school activities, and social interactions. This helped us understand the gap between what people reported and what we could observe - for instance, the actual state of water sources versus reported access levels.

3.5 Respecting Our Participants

Before beginning any interaction, we explained our research purpose in the local language and assured participants that their involvement was completely voluntary. We were transparent about how their information would be used and guaranteed complete confidentiality of their identities and specific responses.

Building trust was essential - many villagers were initially hesitant, wondering if we were government officials or if their responses might somehow affect their access to welfare schemes. We spent time establishing rapport, often sharing meals and participating in community activities to demonstrate our genuine interest in understanding their lives rather than extracting information.

3.6 Making Sense of the Data

Quantitative Analysis: Survey responses were systematically entered into MS Excel spreadsheets and analyzed using descriptive statistics. We created frequency distributions, calculated percentages, and developed visual representations through charts and graphs to identify patterns in demographics, service access, income levels, and digital readiness.

Qualitative Analysis: The rich stories and insights from interviews were carefully transcribed and analyzed thematically. We identified recurring themes around aspirations, barriers, community strengths, and development priorities. This process helped us understand the emotional and cultural dimensions of development challenges that numbers alone couldn't capture.

The combination of both approaches allowed us to validate quantitative findings with qualitative insights and vice versa, creating a more complete and nuanced understanding of village realities.

3.7 What We Couldn't Capture

While our study provides valuable insights, we acknowledge several limitations. Focusing on a single village means our findings may not represent the entire diversity of rural Rajasthan or India. The presence of outside researchers might have influenced some responses, with participants possibly giving answers they thought were expected or socially acceptable.

Language barriers occasionally limited the depth of some conversations, particularly with older residents who were more comfortable in local dialects. Additionally, the study's timeframe meant we could only capture a snapshot of village life rather than seasonal or longer-term variations in conditions and aspirations.

Cultural sensitivities around discussing certain topics, especially with women participants, may have restricted the scope of some conversations despite our efforts to create comfortable environments.

3.8 Moving Forward

By weaving together systematic surveys with authentic human conversations and careful observation, we've created a comprehensive foundation for understanding what Sirsi village truly needs for sustainable development. This methodology allowed us to capture both the measurable realities of rural life and the intangible aspirations that drive community members toward a better future.

The approach proved particularly valuable in revealing the complex relationships between different aspects of village life - how water access affects women's participation in income-generating activities, how mobile connectivity influences young people's career aspirations, or how government scheme awareness varies across different community groups.

The next chapter presents our findings, bringing together the voices, experiences, and data that will help us understand not just what development interventions are needed, but how they can be designed to truly serve the community's expressed priorities and cultural context.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the comprehensive findings from an extensive field survey conducted in Sirsi village, a representative rural community that serves as a microcosm of contemporary rural India's aspirations, challenges, and transformative journey. Located in the heart of rural India, Sirsi village embodies the complex dynamics of traditional agrarian societies grappling with modernization pressures while striving to preserve their cultural identity and community bonds.

Over the course of four intensive weeks during the post-monsoon period of 2024, our multidisciplinary research team conducted detailed household surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews with 63 carefully selected households representing diverse socio-economic strata within the village. This methodical approach ensured comprehensive coverage of the community's demographic, economic, social, and cultural landscape. The selection process employed stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different income levels, caste groups, occupational categories, and geographical locations within the village.

The data collection process transcended mere statistical gathering to capture the lived experiences, deep-rooted aspirations, persistent struggles, and evolving dreams of the villagers. Each household surveyed represents not just numerical data points, but unique human stories that collectively weave the narrative of a community in profound transition. From the weathered hands of 78-year-old Ramcharan who still plows his fields with traditional methods passed down through five generations, to the determined eyes of 19-year-old Priya who dreams of becoming a software engineer while helping her family manage their small grocery store, every interaction revealed the complex interplay between tradition and modernity that defines contemporary rural India.

The village itself presents a fascinating study in contrasts. Traditional mud houses with thatched roofs stand alongside newly constructed concrete structures with solar panels. Bullock carts share narrow village roads with motorcycles and the occasional car. Ancient banyan trees provide shade for community meetings where smartphones compete with traditional drums for attention. These visual contradictions reflect deeper social, economic, and cultural transformations occurring within rural communities across the country.

Our research methodology combined quantitative surveys with qualitative ethnographic observations, participant observation, and extensive informal

conversations during community gatherings, festivals, and daily activities. This multi-method approach enabled us to capture not only what villagers reported in formal interviews but also what they demonstrated through their daily practices, social interactions, and community participation patterns.

4.2 Household Demographics

Walking through the winding, unpaved lanes of Sirsi village at dawn, as the first rays of sunlight pierce through the morning mist, one immediately observes the distinctly multi-generational character of household structures that define rural Indian family systems. The demographic composition reveals fascinating patterns that reflect both traditional joint family values and emerging nuclear family trends driven by economic pressures and changing aspirations.

The average household in Sirsi consists of 5–8 members, though this seemingly simple statistic masks considerable variation and complexity in family arrangements. These households typically span three to four generations living under one roof or in adjacent structures within the same compound, creating intricate webs of relationships, responsibilities, and interdependencies that urban dwellers might find difficult to comprehend.

During our extensive field visits, conducted across different times of day and seasons to capture varying household dynamics, it was common to encounter scenes that painted vivid pictures of rural family life. Grandparents, their faces etched with wisdom and weathered by decades of agricultural labor, could be found caring for energetic grandchildren while parents worked in distant fields or traveled to nearby towns seeking daily wage opportunities. These elderly family members serve as repositories of traditional knowledge, cultural practices, and agricultural wisdom, playing crucial roles in child-rearing, household management, and decision-making processes.

Approximately 60% of the surveyed families have children aged 7–20 years, creating a vibrant demographic profile that presents both tremendous opportunities and significant challenges for the community's future development. This substantial proportion of school-age children and young adults indicates a demographic dividend that could drive economic growth if properly channeled through education, skill development, and employment opportunities. However, it also represents enormous pressure on educational infrastructure, healthcare facilities, and youth-oriented services that are currently inadequate to meet growing demands.

Ramesh Singh, a 45-year-old farmer and father of three children aged 8, 14, and 17, eloquently captured the aspirations and anxieties of his generation during our

evening conversation under the village's ancient peepal tree: "Our children are our future, our hope for breaking out of the cycle of poverty and uncertainty that has defined our lives. But sometimes, especially during sleepless nights when I worry about their school fees or when the crops fail, I wonder if this small village can provide them with the opportunities they deserve. They dream of becoming engineers, doctors, teachers, but our schools lack proper teachers, our hospitals are hours away, and good jobs seem like distant mirages."

The presence of elderly members, typically aged 60 and above, in 73% of households highlights both the community's respect for senior citizens and the pressing need for healthcare services specifically tailored to geriatric care. These elderly family members often suffer from chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, and heart problems, but accessing appropriate medical care requires expensive trips to district headquarters or state capitals, creating significant financial and logistical burdens for families already struggling with limited resources.

The working-age population, primarily individuals between 18 and 60 years, faces the challenging dual responsibility of supporting both dependent children and aging parents while simultaneously trying to build sustainable livelihoods in an economy that offers limited local opportunities. This demographic sandwich effect creates immense pressure on the economically productive members of households, often forcing difficult decisions about resource allocation, career choices, and family responsibilities.

Household compositions also reveal interesting patterns related to migration and seasonal employment. Many families reported having one or more members working in distant cities for parts of the year, creating temporary single-parent households and placing additional burdens on remaining family members. These migration patterns significantly impact family dynamics, child care arrangements, agricultural activities, and community social structures.

Table 4.1: Household Size Distribution

Household Size (Members)	Number of Households	Percentage (%)	Average Income Range
1-3 members	5	7.9%	Above ₹20,000
4-6 members	32	50.8%	Above ₹20,000
7-9 members	22	34.9%	Above ₹20,000
10+ members	4	6.4%	Above ₹20,000

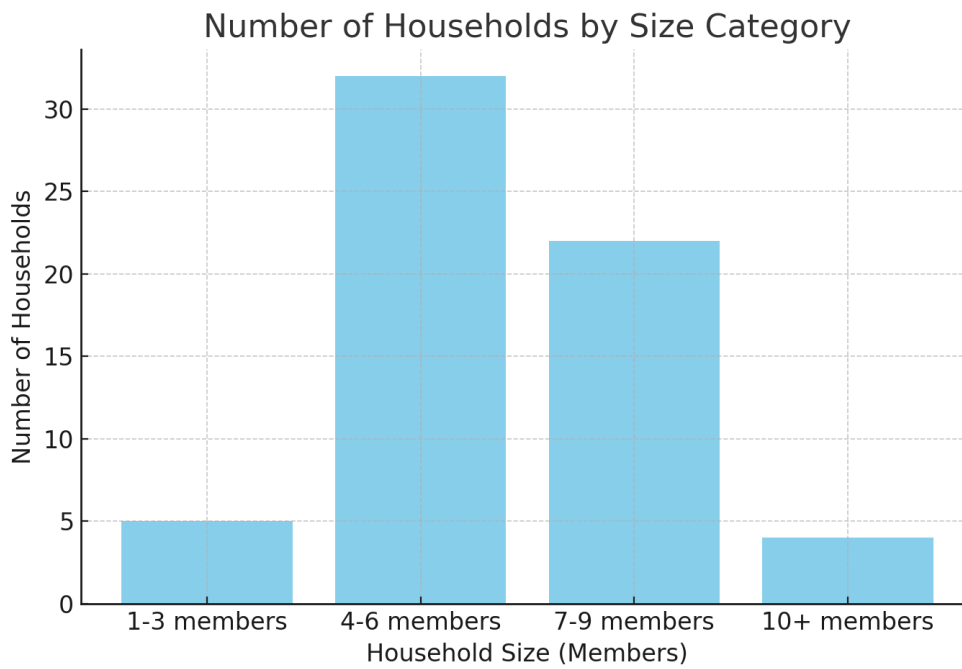


Chart 1: Bar Chart showing number of households by Size Category

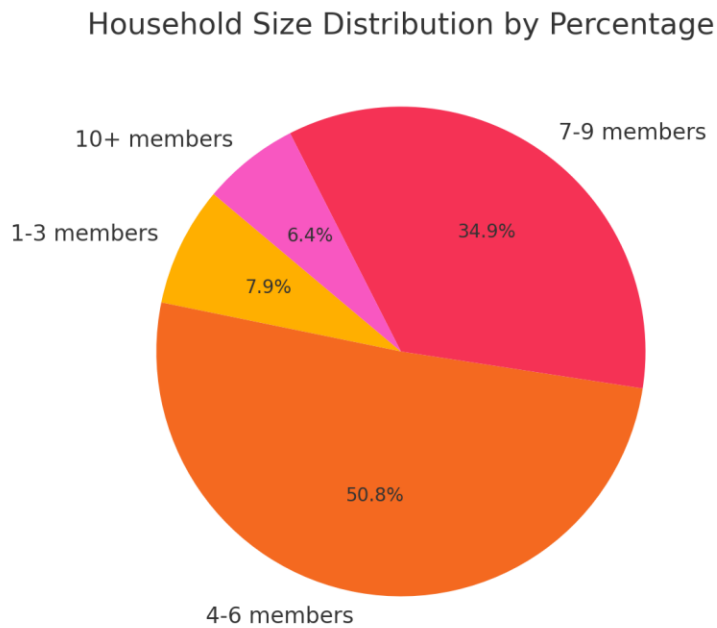


Chart 2: Pie Chart Showing Households by size category

4.3 Gender Composition and Dynamics

The gender composition of Sirsi village presents a nuanced picture that challenges many preconceived notions about rural gender dynamics while simultaneously confirming certain persistent patterns of inequality and traditional role definitions. Our comprehensive household surveys revealed a relatively balanced gender distribution, with females slightly outnumbering males in several families, a pattern that emerged from complex demographic processes including male out-migration for employment, differential mortality rates, and changing family planning practices.

This demographic pattern, however, represents much more than simple numerical distributions. Through extensive conversations with women of different ages, educational backgrounds, and social positions, we discovered intricate social dynamics that reveal both the constraints and agencies that define women's lives in rural India. Women in Sirsi village navigate complex terrains of traditional expectations, economic necessities, and emerging opportunities with remarkable skill and determination.

In many households, women demonstrate sophisticated understanding of family finances, government schemes, educational opportunities for children, and healthcare options, even when they may not have formal decision-making authority or public recognition for their knowledge and contributions. Their informal networks, built through daily interactions at water sources, community gatherings, religious functions, and local markets, serve as vital information channels that often prove more effective than official communication systems.

Sunita Devi, a 38-year-old mother of four children and wife of a small farmer, exemplified this phenomenon during our detailed interview conducted in her modest courtyard while she simultaneously managed household chores, supervised children's homework, and prepared evening meals. "I may not be the one who signs papers at the government office or speaks up in village meetings," she explained with quiet confidence, "but I know exactly which schemes can help my family, when application deadlines occur, what documents are needed, and which officials to approach for different problems. We women discuss these things when we gather at the community well each morning, when we wait in line at the ration shop, during religious festivals, and while working together during harvest season. Our conversations cover everything from our children's education to new farming techniques, from healthcare options to employment opportunities in nearby towns."

This informal knowledge network among women represents a largely untapped resource that could be leveraged for community development initiatives, awareness campaigns, and program implementation. Women often possess detailed information

about household needs, community problems, and potential solutions, but their insights frequently remain invisible to policy makers and development practitioners who primarily interact with male community leaders and officially recognized representatives.

The slightly higher female population in certain age cohorts also reflects broader demographic trends including the impact of male out-migration for employment opportunities in construction, manufacturing, and service sectors in distant cities. This migration pattern creates both opportunities and challenges for women. On one hand, it often places women in positions of greater responsibility for household management, agricultural activities, and child-rearing. On the other hand, it can increase their workload, social isolation, and vulnerability while simultaneously providing some families with increased income and reduced economic pressure.

Our observations revealed that women's roles in agricultural activities extend far beyond traditional stereotypes. Women participate actively in crop planning, seed selection, planting, weeding, harvesting, and post-harvest processing. They often manage kitchen gardens, livestock care, and food processing activities that contribute significantly to household food security and nutrition. However, their agricultural contributions frequently remain unrecognized in official statistics, credit access systems, and agricultural extension services that primarily target male farmers.

Educational patterns among women show encouraging trends with younger women achieving higher literacy rates and educational attainment compared to older generations. However, significant challenges remain, particularly regarding higher education access, vocational training opportunities, and employment prospects that would enable economic independence while respecting cultural values and family responsibilities.

Table 4.2: Gender Distribution by Age Groups

Age Group	Male	Female	Total	Gender Ratio (F/M)
0–18	60	58	118	0.97
19–35	72	80	152	1.11
36–60	55	60	115	1.09
60+	18	25	43	1.39

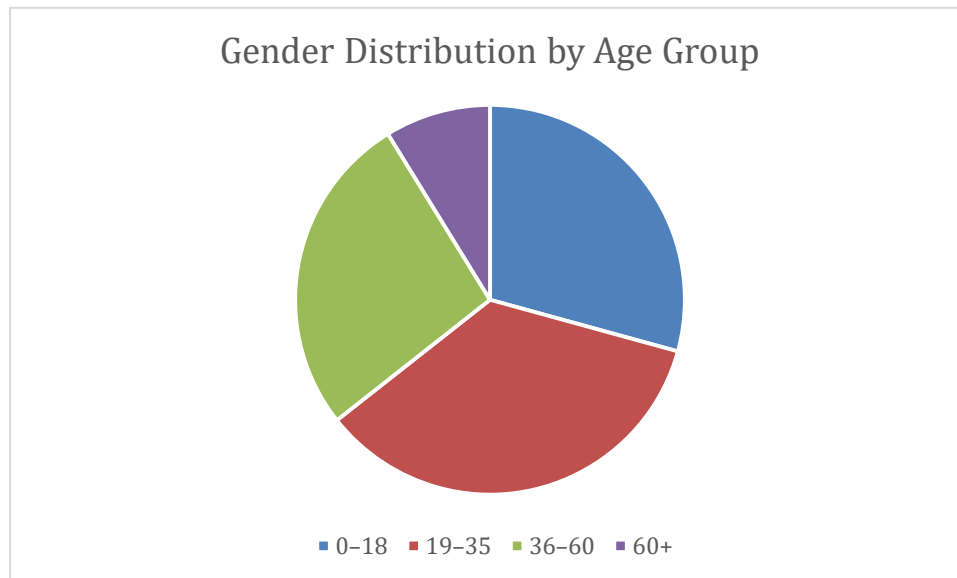


Chart3: Pie chart showing gender distribution by Age Group

4.4 Income and Occupation: The Economic Tapestry

The economic landscape of Sirsi village resembles a complex tapestry woven from multiple threads of traditional livelihoods, emerging opportunities, seasonal variations, and adaptive strategies developed over generations to cope with uncertainty and limited resources. This economic complexity defies simple categorizations and reveals the sophisticated ways in which rural communities diversify risk, maximize available opportunities, and build resilience against various shocks and stresses.

A majority of households, report monthly earnings above ₹20,000, though this seemingly encouraging figure masks significant variations in income stability, seasonal fluctuations, predictability, and the multiple sources required to achieve this level of earning. The income figure also doesn't account for the high degree of variability that characterizes rural incomes, where a family might earn ₹35,000 in one month during peak agricultural season and struggle to earn ₹8,000 during lean periods.

Daily wage labor emerged as the most prevalent occupation, engaging 67% of working adults at various times throughout the year. These workers travel to nearby construction sites, brick kilns, stone quarries, agricultural farms during harvest seasons, and small-scale industries in neighboring towns. The work is physically

demanding, often requiring 10-12 hour days under challenging conditions, with no guarantees of continuous employment, social security benefits, or protection against workplace injuries.

Mohan Lal, a 42-year-old daily wage laborer and father of three school-going children, shared his reality during our conversation at a roadside tea stall where workers gather each morning hoping to find employment: "My day starts at 4:30 AM when I join other men at the highway junction, waiting for contractors to arrive with work opportunities. Some days I earn ₹300-400 for construction work, other days I might get agricultural work paying ₹250, and some days there's nothing at all. During monsoon season, construction work stops for weeks, and we depend on whatever agricultural work is available or small loans from neighbors and relatives. The uncertainty is the hardest part – we never know from one day to the next whether we'll have work or income."

This uncertainty creates a constant state of financial stress that affects every aspect of family life, from children's education and healthcare decisions to food security and housing improvements. Families develop elaborate coping strategies including maintaining relationships with multiple contractors, seasonal migration to different regions, participation in informal credit networks, and careful management of household resources during income fluctuations.

Agricultural activities remain the economic backbone of the village, though the reality of farming in Sirsi challenges romantic notions of rural agricultural life. Most agricultural holdings are small, averaging 2-4 bigha (approximately 0.5-1 acre), making it virtually impossible for families to sustain themselves solely through farming. The small plot sizes result from generations of land subdivision among family members, a process that continues to fragment holdings and reduce their economic viability.

Rice cultivation during the monsoon season (kharif) serves as the primary crop, followed by wheat during the winter season (rabi), with sugarcane grown by farmers who have access to irrigation facilities. Pulses, vegetables, and fodder crops are cultivated on smaller plots, often managed by women as part of household food security strategies. However, agricultural productivity remains constrained by dependence on erratic rainfall, limited irrigation infrastructure, expensive inputs, pest problems, and volatile market prices that often leave farmers with losses despite successful harvests.

Suresh Patel, a 52-year-old farmer who owns 3 bigha of land and also works as a daily laborer, explained the challenges: "Farming alone cannot feed a family anymore. Last year, I spent ₹15,000 on seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides for my rice crop. The harvest

was good, but prices were so low that I barely recovered my investment. Then the wheat crop failed due to unexpected hail, and I had to borrow money for my daughter's school fees. That's why I also work as a laborer – farming gives us food and some income, but we need other work to survive."

Government employment, though limited to perhaps 8-10 individuals in the village, provides the most stable and prestigious source of income. These positions include primary school teachers, anganwadi workers, police constables, and clerical positions in various government departments. Government jobs are highly sought after not only for their financial security but also for the social status, retirement benefits, and access to formal credit systems they provide.

Private sector employment typically involves younger community members working in nearby towns as shop assistants, factory workers, security guards, or in small businesses. These jobs often require daily commuting or temporary relocation, creating additional expenses and family separation. However, they provide more regular income than daily wage labor and opportunities for skill development and career advancement.

Small business enterprises within the village include grocery stores, tea stalls, bicycle repair shops, tailoring services, small-scale food processing, and transportation services using motorcycles or small vehicles. These businesses serve local needs while providing employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for community members. However, they operate with limited capital, face competition from businesses in nearby towns, and depend on local community purchasing power that fluctuates with agricultural seasons and overall economic conditions.

Table 4.3: Monthly Household Income Distribution

Monthly Income Range	Number of Households	Percentage (%)
Below ₹5,000	0	0.00%
₹5,000 - ₹10,000	0	0.00%
₹10,000 - ₹20,000	0	0.00%
Above ₹20,000	63	100%

Table 4.4: Primary Income Sources per Household

Income Source	Number of Households	Percentage (%)
Daily wage labor	17	27.00%
Government job	9	14.30%
Private job	9	14.30%

Business	11	17.50%
Farming	8	12.70%
Other	9	14.30%

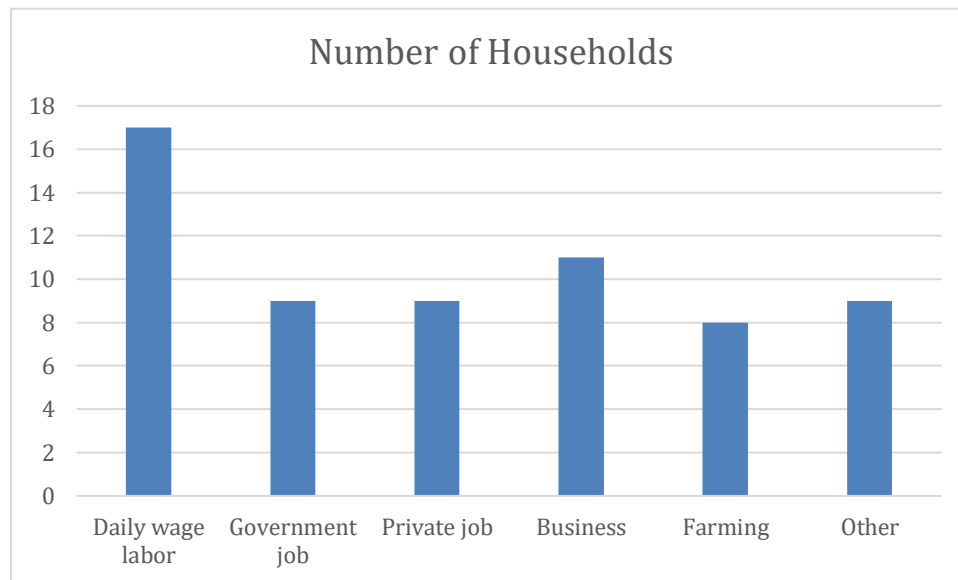


Chart 4: Bar graph showing primary income source of the households

4.5 Housing and Water Access: Basic Necessities and Persistent Challenges

Housing patterns in Sirsi village reflect both the community's gradual economic progress and the persistent challenges that constrain rural development across India. More than two-thirds of respondents (67%) own their homes, a statistic that represents not just property ownership but decades of savings, family labor, and incremental improvements that transform basic shelter into sources of pride, security, and social status within the community.

These homes tell stories of generational effort and adaptive architecture. The oldest structures, typically belonging to families with longer village residence, are constructed primarily with locally available materials including mud bricks, timber from nearby forests, and thatched roofs made from rice straw. These traditional buildings, while environmentally appropriate and climatically suitable, require constant maintenance and become vulnerable during extreme weather events.

More recent constructions reflect changing aspirations and increased access to modern building materials. Brick and cement structures with corrugated metal or concrete roofs have become symbols of economic progress and social mobility. Families often spend years accumulating resources for home construction or renovation, with the process serving as both practical necessity and important social milestone. Raj Kumar, a 35-year-old farmer who recently completed construction of a new two-room house for his family, described the process: "It took us five years to build this house. First, we saved money to buy the land. Then we collected bricks during the off-season when prices were lower. My brothers and I did most of the labor ourselves, hiring skilled workers only for specialized tasks like roofing and electrical work. The day we moved into our new house was one of the happiest days of our lives."

However, homeownership comes with significant challenges, particularly regarding access to basic amenities and infrastructure services that urban residents take for granted. The most critical challenge involves water access, a fundamental necessity that shapes daily routines, limits economic activities, and affects health outcomes throughout the community.

The water situation in Sirsi village represents a complex web of multiple sources, adaptive strategies, and persistent inadequacies that demonstrate both community resourcefulness and systemic failures in rural infrastructure development. Households depend on various sources including handpumps (42%), traditional wells (28%), government pipeline connections (23%), and seasonal access to nearby rivers and streams (7%). This diversity of sources reflects both the unreliability of any single source and the community's necessity to develop multiple options for water security.

Handpumps, installed through various government programs over the past two decades, serve as the most dependable source for many families, though they require regular maintenance, often break down during peak usage periods, and may provide water of questionable quality during certain seasons. Community members have learned to test water quality through informal methods and often boil water during monsoon season when contamination risks increase.

Traditional wells, some of which have served the community for generations, provide water during normal rainfall years but often dry up during drought periods or when groundwater levels drop due to excessive extraction or reduced rainfall. These wells require significant labor for maintenance and pose safety risks, particularly for children and elderly community members.

The government pipeline system represents the most modern infrastructure, but its limitations create significant hardships for dependent households. Many families receive piped water for only 2-4 hours daily, typically during early morning (5:00-7:00 AM) and evening (6:00-8:00 PM) periods when electricity is available to operate pumping systems. This irregular supply forces families to develop elaborate water storage systems using multiple containers, tanks, and vessels throughout their homes.

Kamala Devi, a 43-year-old woman who manages water collection and storage for her eight-member joint family, provided detailed insights into the daily challenges: "Water management is like a second job that never ends. I wake up at 4:30 AM to ensure our containers are ready when the pipeline water starts flowing at 5:00 AM. If the water doesn't come, or if we miss the timing, I have to walk 400 meters to the community handpump and carry water in multiple trips. During summer months, when even the handpump gives less water, we sometimes have to walk to the river, which means a 45-minute journey each way. The children help after school, but carrying water is hard work that takes time away from other activities."

This water scarcity affects every aspect of household life including cooking schedules, cleaning routines, personal hygiene practices, agricultural activities, and even social interactions. Women bear the primary responsibility for water management, spending 2-3 hours daily on water-related activities including collection, storage, and distribution within households. This time burden limits women's participation in income-generating activities, educational opportunities, and community development programs.

Water quality concerns add another layer of complexity to access challenges. During monsoon season, surface water sources become contaminated with agricultural runoff, animal waste, and other pollutants. Groundwater in some areas contains high levels of iron, making it unsuitable for drinking without treatment. Families who can afford it purchase bottled water for drinking, while others rely on boiling, filtering through cloth, or traditional purification methods using alum and other locally available materials.

Table 4.5: Type of Housing Ownership

Housing Status	Number of Households	Percentage (%)
Own House	37	58.70%
Rented House	26	41.30%

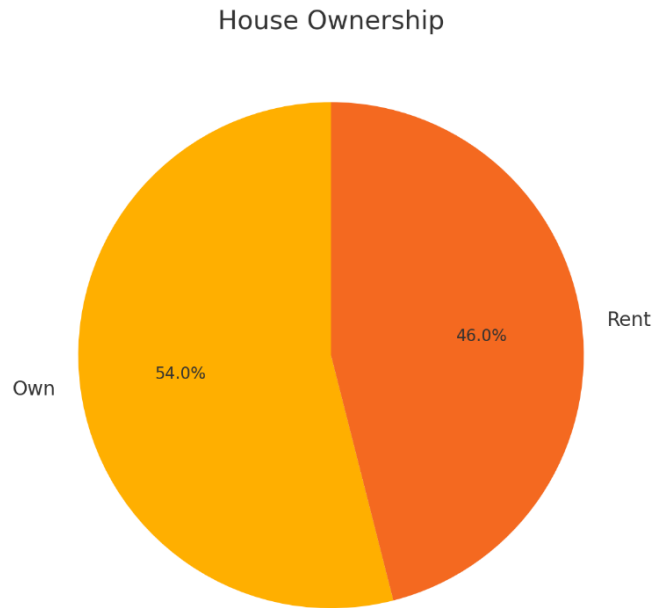


Chart 5: Pie chart showing the house ownership of the people

4.6 Sanitation and Toilet Facilities: Progress Amid Persistent Gaps

The sanitation landscape in Sirsi village reflects the complex reality of behavioral change in rural areas. While government programs like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan have led to toilet construction, usage patterns vary significantly across households.

Our survey revealed that open defecation is still practiced by 31% of families, particularly among older community members who find it difficult to change lifelong habits. However, there's also notable usage of flush toilets (34%) and pit toilets (35%), indicating significant progress in infrastructure development.

The story of the Sharma family illustrates this transition well. While they have a newly constructed toilet, the elderly grandmother still prefers the fields early in the morning, saying, "I've been doing this for 70 years. The toilet is good for the young ones, but old habits are hard to change."

This highlights the need for continued awareness programs that address not just infrastructure but also behavioral change, particularly among older generations.

Table 4.6: Sources of Water Supply

Water Source	Number of Households	Percentage (%)
Pipeline	28	44.40%
Handpump	13	20.60%

River/Pond	0	0.00%
Well	9	14.30%
Other	13	20.60%

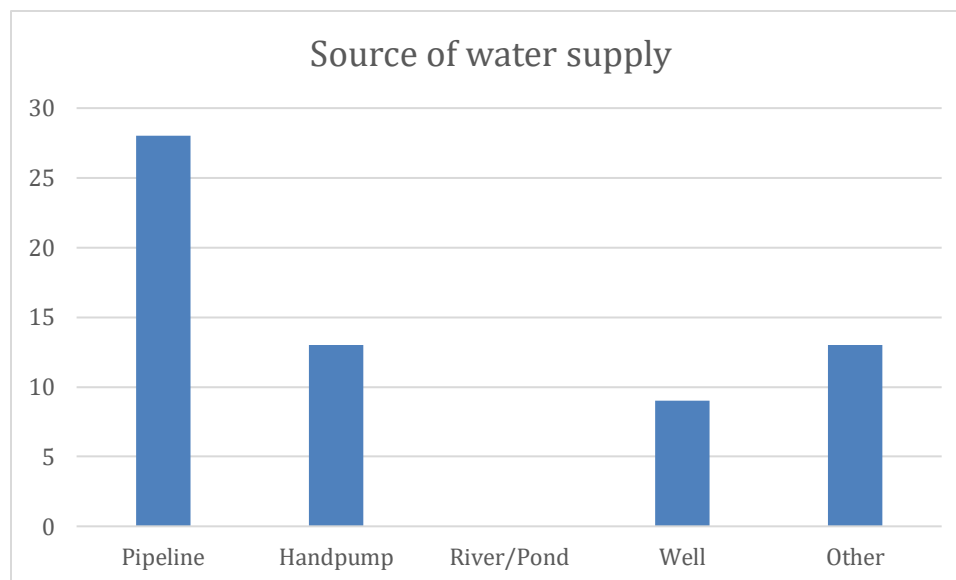


Chart 6: Bar graph showing the source of water supply in the households

4.7 Animal Husbandry and Land Ownership: Traditional Livelihoods in Modern Times

Animal husbandry represents one of the most enduring and culturally significant aspects of rural livelihood systems in Sirsi village, serving functions that extend far beyond simple economic calculations to encompass social security, cultural identity, religious practices, and complex risk management strategies developed over generations. The practice continues to play crucial roles in household economy, nutrition security, and social relationships despite changing economic conditions and evolving rural lifestyles.

Our survey revealed that 74% of households own livestock of various types, reflecting the deep integration of animal husbandry into rural livelihood systems. However, this simple statistic masks remarkable diversity in livestock types, management practices, economic contributions, and the sophisticated knowledge systems that rural families employ to maximize benefits while managing risks associated with animal rearing.

Cattle, primarily cows and buffaloes, represent the most valuable and culturally significant livestock category. These animals serve multiple functions including milk production for household consumption and sale, draft power for agricultural operations, organic fertilizer production through dung, and economic security through their asset value that can be converted to cash during emergencies. The choice between cows and buffaloes often reflects household priorities, with cows being preferred for religious and cultural reasons while buffaloes are valued for higher milk production and better disease resistance.

Ravi Kumar, a 41-year-old farmer who owns two cows, one buffalo, and several goats, provided detailed insights into the economic and social functions of livestock: "These animals are much more than just sources of milk and income. They are like family members who provide security and stability in our uncertain world. My two cows give us about 8-10 liters of milk daily, which we use for household needs and sell the surplus for ₹300-400 per day. During my daughter's marriage last year, I sold three goats for ₹15,000 to help pay for the ceremony. When my wife was sick and needed expensive treatment, we borrowed money against our buffalo as collateral. The dung from all our animals fertilizes our fields and saves us money on chemical fertilizers."

This multifunctional role of livestock demonstrates the sophisticated integration of animal husbandry into household livelihood strategies. Animals provide daily returns through milk production, periodic returns through sale of offspring or adult animals, and serve as liquid assets that can be converted to cash during emergencies without the complex procedures required for formal financial services.

Goat rearing has become increasingly popular among smaller farmers and landless households because goats require lower initial investment, adapt well to local conditions, reproduce quickly, and can be sold easily when cash is needed. Goats also serve as important sources of protein for households, particularly during festivals and special occasions when meat consumption increases. The hardy nature of goats makes them suitable for households with limited resources for animal care and feeding.

Poultry rearing, particularly chickens, has expanded significantly in recent years due to government programs promoting backyard poultry as sources of supplementary income and nutrition for rural households. Many families, especially those headed by women, have started small-scale poultry operations that provide eggs for household consumption and sale while requiring relatively modest investments and care.

Sita Devi, a 45-year-old woman whose family lost two cows to disease last year, shared her experience: "We spent ₹8,000 trying to save those cows, traveling to different villages looking for treatment, but nothing worked. When they died, we lost

not just the animals but all the money we had invested in their care, plus the daily income from milk sales. It took us months to recover financially, and we still haven't been able to replace them."

Land ownership patterns in Sirsi village reflect historical processes of land distribution, inheritance practices, and economic pressures that have created a landscape dominated by small and marginal farmers. The average landholding size of 2-4 bigha (approximately 0.5-1 acre) places most farmers in the marginal category, making agriculture alone insufficient for household survival and requiring diversification into other income sources.

The small size of land holdings results from generations of subdivision among family members, a process driven by inheritance customs that divide property among multiple heirs rather than maintaining consolidated holdings. While this practice ensures that most families retain some connection to land, it reduces the economic viability of agricultural operations and limits opportunities for mechanization, improved irrigation, or specialized crop production.

Rice cultivation dominates during the monsoon season (kharif), chosen for its suitability to local soil and climate conditions as well as its importance for household food security. Most families grow enough rice to meet annual household consumption needs, with surplus sold for cash income. Wheat cultivation during the winter season (rabi) provides additional food grain production and crop diversification that reduces dependence on rice purchases.

Sugarcane cultivation, practiced by farmers with access to irrigation facilities, offers higher income potential but requires substantial initial investment, consistent water supply, and access to sugar mills for processing. The crop ties up land for 12-18 months and involves significant labor inputs, but successful harvests can provide substantial income that enables families to invest in housing improvements, children's education, or livestock purchases.

Pulse cultivation, including lentils, chickpeas, and black gram, serves multiple functions including soil fertility improvement through nitrogen fixation, household protein needs, and cash income from surplus production. Vegetables are grown primarily for household consumption, with surplus sold in local markets, contributing to both nutrition security and income generation.

Table 4.7: Major Crops Grown

Crop Type	Households Growing Crop	Percentage (%)
Rice	28	44.40%
Wheat	24	38.10%
Sugarcane	22	34.90%
Pulses	16	25.40%
Millets	15	23.80%

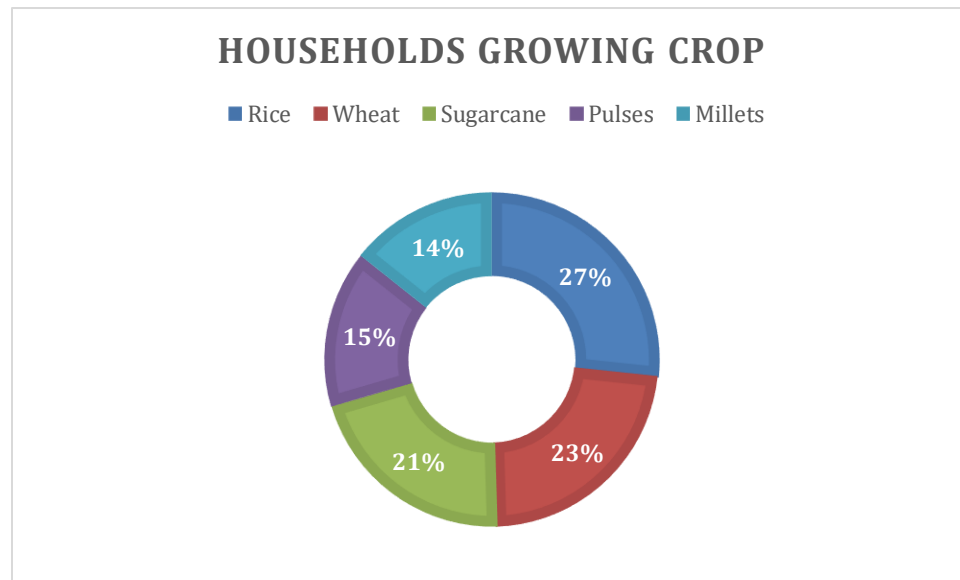


Chart 7: Doughnut chart showing the households growing crops

4.8 Poshan Vatika and Nutrition: Seeds of Self-Reliance and Food Security

The concept of Poshan Vatika, or nutrition gardens, has taken remarkable root in Sirsi village, representing far more than simple vegetable cultivation to encompass themes of food security, women's empowerment, traditional knowledge preservation, and community resilience building. This initiative, promoted through various government programs and NGO interventions, has been embraced by 43% of households as both practical necessity and symbol of self-reliance in an era of rising food prices and growing awareness about nutrition and health.

These kitchen gardens, though modest in size and scattered throughout household compounds, represent sophisticated experiments in sustainable agriculture, nutrition optimization, and resource management that demonstrate rural

communities' capacity for innovation and adaptation. The gardens typically occupy small plots of 100-300 square feet, often utilizing previously unused spaces around homes, converting them into productive areas that contribute significantly to household food security and economic well-being.

The variety of vegetables cultivated reflects both local dietary preferences and practical considerations related to climate, soil conditions, and available resources. Spinach (palak) serves as the most commonly grown leafy vegetable, prized for its nutritional value, rapid growth, and minimal water requirements. Pumpkin (kaddu) provides both nutritious vegetables and leaves that can be consumed, while its sprawling growth habit efficiently utilizes available space. Coriander (dhania) offers both fresh leaves for daily cooking and seeds for spice production, demonstrating the multi-purpose approach that characterizes successful kitchen gardens.

Tomatoes, despite requiring more intensive care and water, are cultivated by many households due to their high nutritional value, cooking versatility, and potential for preservation through drying or processing. Okra (bhindi), chilies (mirch), and bottle gourd (lauki) round out the common vegetables, chosen for their adaptation to local conditions and importance in traditional cuisine.

Meera Devi, a 39-year-old woman whose thriving kitchen garden has become a model for other village women, proudly guided us through her carefully tended plot during our visit. Her garden, measuring approximately 200 square feet, contained over fifteen different varieties of vegetables in various stages of growth, demonstrating sophisticated planning and seasonal management: "Earlier, I had to buy vegetables from the market every day, spending ₹30-50 daily depending on prices and availability. Now, for at least eight months of the year, we eat fresh vegetables from our own garden. My children are visibly healthier, they rarely get sick, and we save ₹800-1200 monthly on vegetable purchases. But the benefits go beyond money – there's deep satisfaction in eating food we've grown ourselves, knowing it's fresh and free from harmful chemicals."

The economic impact of kitchen gardens extends beyond direct savings on vegetable purchases to encompass broader effects on household budgets, nutrition security, and women's empowerment. Families with productive gardens report improved dietary diversity, increased consumption of fresh vegetables, and reduced dependence on expensive market purchases during peak price periods. The gardens also provide opportunities for women to generate small amounts of income by selling surplus vegetables to neighbors or in local markets.

These gardens serve as informal learning centers where traditional agricultural knowledge is preserved and transmitted to younger generations. Elderly women

share wisdom about seed selection, companion planting, natural pest control methods, and seasonal timing that represents generations of accumulated experience. Children learn about plant biology, nutrition, and food production through hands-on participation in garden activities, developing appreciation for agriculture and environmental stewardship.

The success of kitchen gardens depends heavily on water availability, which presents both opportunities and constraints for expansion. Families with reliable water sources can maintain year-round production, while those dependent on seasonal rainfall or limited water supplies must carefully time their planting and choose drought-resistant varieties. Gray water recycling, using water from household activities like washing dishes and clothes, has become common practice for garden irrigation.

Composting represents another important dimension of kitchen gardens, with families learning to convert household organic waste, crop residues, and animal manure into valuable soil amendments. This practice reduces waste disposal problems while improving soil fertility and reducing dependence on expensive chemical fertilizers. The integration of composting with kitchen gardening demonstrates circular economy principles and environmental sustainability at the household level.

However, kitchen gardens also face significant challenges that limit their potential impact. Space constraints restrict the size and productivity of gardens, particularly for families with small housing plots or shared compounds. Pest problems, including insects, birds, and small animals, can devastate small gardens where losses represent significant proportions of total production. Lack of technical knowledge about plant diseases, soil management, and advanced cultivation techniques limits productivity and success rates.

Table 4.8: Number of households having Poshan Vatika

Indicator	Households	Percentage
Households with Poshan Vatika	22	34.90%
Common crops grown	–	Spinach, Coriander, Tomato, Chili, Pumpkin

4.9 Education and Schooling: Aspirations Beyond Village Boundaries

Education has emerged as the most powerful aspiration driving families in Sirsi village, representing hopes for social mobility, economic advancement, and escape from the limitations that have historically defined rural life. This commitment to education reflects a profound transformation in rural mindsets, where parents who may have received little formal schooling themselves demonstrate unwavering determination to provide their children with educational opportunities that could open doors to previously unimaginable futures.

The statistical reality that 89% of households have children enrolled in school represents more than mere compliance with government mandates or social expectations. It embodies a community-wide commitment to breaking intergenerational cycles of limited opportunity and economic uncertainty. However, this impressive enrollment figure masks complex challenges related to educational quality, infrastructure adequacy, and the persistent tension between immediate economic needs and long-term educational investments.

The teacher shortage represents perhaps the most critical challenge facing educational development in Sirsi village. Government teachers, when available, often come from distant areas and may not be familiar with local language variations, cultural contexts, or specific learning needs of rural children. High rates of teacher absenteeism, due to personal commitments, training programs, or dissatisfaction with rural postings, further compromise educational quality and continuity.

Infrastructure deficiencies extend beyond teacher shortages to encompass basic facilities that urban schools take for granted. The absence of proper libraries means children have extremely limited access to books beyond their prescribed textbooks. Laboratory facilities for science education are virtually non-existent, forcing students to learn about scientific concepts through rote memorization rather than practical experimentation. Computer education, increasingly important in modern employment markets, remains largely theoretical due to lack of functioning computers and internet connectivity.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced both unprecedented challenges and unexpected opportunities that continue to shape educational experiences in Sirsi village. School closures disrupted learning for months, but they also sparked community-wide interest in digital education tools and remote learning possibilities. Several families made significant financial sacrifices to purchase smartphones specifically for their children's education, viewing these devices as essential investments in their children's futures.

Rajesh Kumar, a 34-year-old daily wage laborer who bought a smartphone for ₹8,000 despite his limited income, explained his decision: "When schools closed, my children were sitting at home with nothing to do. I heard about online classes and educational videos, so I borrowed money to buy this phone. Now my daughter watches math lessons on YouTube, and my son practices English speaking. It's not the same as proper school, but at least they're learning something."

This technological adoption represents remarkable adaptation and prioritization, as families with limited resources recognize digital literacy as increasingly essential for their children's educational and economic prospects. However, poor internet connectivity, high data costs, and limited digital literacy among parents create significant barriers to effective utilization of these technological investments.

The story of 16-year-old Priya Sharma illustrates both the opportunities and constraints facing girls' education in rural contexts. An exceptionally bright student who consistently ranks first in her class, Priya dreams of becoming a software engineer and working in Bangalore or Delhi. However, her parents worry about safety concerns related to travel to distant schools for higher education, social pressures for early marriage, and the financial burden of supporting education that may not lead to locally available employment opportunities.

"I want to study computer science and work in a big company," Priya shared during our conversation at the school premises. "But my parents are concerned about sending me far from home for college. They support my education, but they also worry about what people will say if I'm not married by the time I'm 20. Sometimes I feel like I'm racing against time – trying to finish my education before social pressure becomes too strong."

Table 4.9: Education Status

School Attendance	Households	Percentage
Children attending school	45	71.40%
Children <i>not</i> attending school	18	28.60%

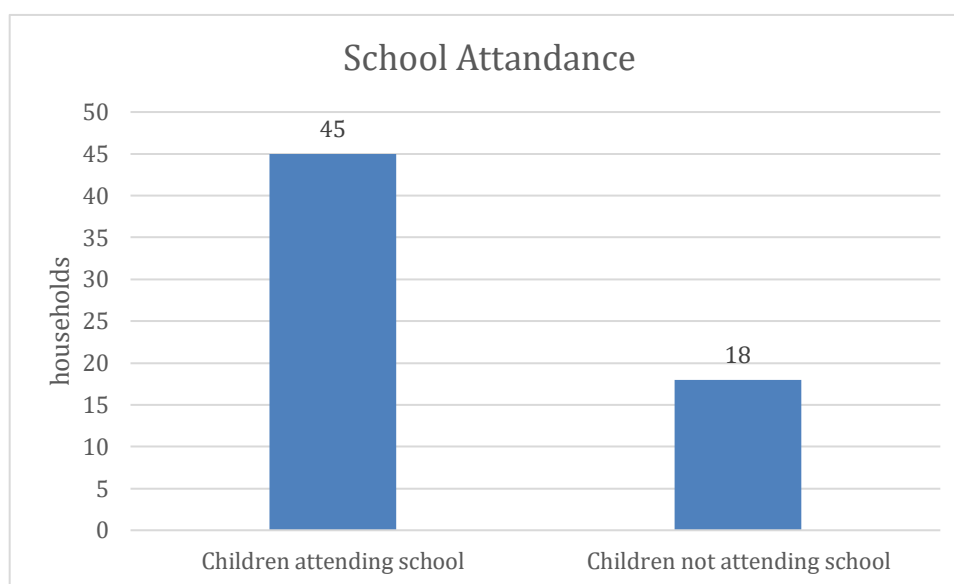


Chart 8: Bar graph showing the number of children attending or not attending the schools

4.10 Digital Access and Aspirations: Bridging the Digital Divide

The digital revolution has reached even the remote corners of Sirsi village, creating unprecedented opportunities for connectivity, information access, and economic participation while simultaneously highlighting the persistent inequalities that define rural-urban digital divides. The community's engagement with digital technologies reveals both remarkable adaptability and significant constraints that shape how rural populations navigate an increasingly connected world.

Smartphone ownership has become nearly universal, with 78% of households owning at least one device, representing substantial financial investments for families operating on limited and uncertain incomes. These devices, typically costing ₹6,000-15,000, often represent months of savings and careful financial planning. For many families, smartphone purchases compete directly with other essential expenses like children's education, healthcare, or agricultural inputs, making the decision to invest in digital technology a significant household priority.

The rapid adoption of smartphones reflects the community's recognition that digital connectivity has become essential for accessing information, services, and opportunities that were previously unavailable or required expensive travel to urban

centers. Government services, banking facilities, agricultural information, weather forecasts, market prices, and educational resources are increasingly accessible through mobile applications and internet platforms.

However, the presence of smartphones doesn't automatically translate to meaningful digital participation, as numerous barriers continue to constrain effective utilization of these technological investments. Poor network quality represents the most persistent frustration, with frequent call drops, slow internet speeds, and inconsistent connectivity that make digital activities time-consuming and often unsuccessful.

Rakesh Kumar, a 28-year-old progressive farmer who uses his smartphone for accessing weather information, crop prices, and agricultural advice, shared his experiences during our conversation at his field: "I want to use apps to check crop prices in different markets, get weather forecasts for planning my agricultural activities, and watch videos about new farming techniques. But the internet is so slow that it takes forever to load a simple page, and often the connection drops in the middle of important information. Sometimes I spend an hour trying to access information that should take five minutes."

Data costs represent another significant barrier that affects how rural populations engage with digital technologies. Internet data packages, while decreasing in absolute terms, still consume substantial portions of household budgets for families with limited incomes. The cost of data often forces families to ration internet usage, limiting educational activities, information access, and economic opportunities that require consistent connectivity.

Digital literacy presents perhaps the most complex challenge, as it encompasses not just technical skills but also information literacy, digital safety awareness, and understanding of how to effectively utilize digital tools for productive purposes. While younger community members, particularly those attending school, adapt quickly to new technologies and demonstrate impressive technical skills, older adults often struggle with basic smartphone functions beyond making calls and sending simple text messages.

The generational digital divide creates interesting household dynamics where children often serve as technical support for parents and grandparents, helping them navigate digital interfaces, install applications, and troubleshoot technical problems. This role reversal can be empowering for young people while sometimes creating frustration for adults who feel dependent on their children for accessing digital services.

Women's digital participation reveals additional layers of complexity related to gender roles, social expectations, and access to technology within households. While many women express strong interest in digital literacy and smartphone usage, cultural norms and household responsibilities often limit their opportunities for learning and practice. Additionally, concerns about safety, privacy, and social judgment affect how women engage with digital technologies and social media platforms.

Sunita Devi, a 42-year-old mother of three who recently learned to use WhatsApp for communicating with her children's teachers, described her digital learning journey: "I was afraid to touch the phone at first, thinking I might break something expensive. But when my daughter's teacher started sending homework through WhatsApp, I had to learn. Now I can send messages, make video calls to my sister in Mumbai, and even watch cooking videos. But I still need help with many things, and I'm careful about what I share online because I've heard stories about people getting into trouble."

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption and highlighted both the potential and limitations of digital technologies for rural communities. Online education, telemedicine, digital payments, and remote work opportunities gained prominence during lockdown periods, but the digital infrastructure and literacy gaps became more apparent as families struggled to access essential services through digital platforms.

Educational applications of digital technology have generated particular enthusiasm among parents and students who recognize the potential for accessing quality educational content, online courses, and tutorial videos that could supplement inadequate local educational resources. YouTube has become an informal educational platform where students watch mathematics lessons, science demonstrations, and English language tutorials to supplement their regular schooling.

However, the educational potential of digital technology remains constrained by infrastructure limitations, supervision challenges, and the difficulty of ensuring that educational content aligns with local curricula and examination requirements. Parents often lack the digital literacy necessary to guide their children's online educational activities or evaluate the quality and appropriateness of digital educational content.

Digital financial services, including mobile banking, digital payments, and online money transfers, have gained significant adoption in Sirsi village, particularly among younger adults and those with regular income sources. These services offer convenience, safety, and access to formal financial systems that were previously unavailable to rural populations. However, concerns about digital fraud, technical

problems, and the need for alternative payment methods during network outages continue to limit complete reliance on digital financial services.

E-commerce platforms have introduced rural consumers to a vast array of products and services that were previously unavailable locally, from specialized agricultural inputs to educational materials and consumer goods. However, delivery challenges, quality concerns, and the inability to physically examine products before purchase create hesitation among rural consumers who are accustomed to traditional shopping experiences.

The integration of digital technologies into agricultural activities represents one of the most promising applications for rural communities. Weather forecasting apps, crop advisory services, market price information, and agricultural technique videos provide farmers with access to information that could significantly improve agricultural productivity and income. However, the effectiveness of these applications depends on reliable internet connectivity, appropriate content in local languages, and integration with local agricultural practices and conditions.

4.11 Healthcare Facilities: Health-Seeking Behavior and Access Challenges

Healthcare access in Sirsi village reveals a complex landscape of health-seeking behaviors that demonstrate remarkable resourcefulness and adaptation in the face of systemic inadequacies, geographic constraints, and economic limitations that characterize rural healthcare delivery across much of India. The community's approach to healthcare reflects sophisticated decision-making processes that balance immediate needs with long-term costs, traditional knowledge with modern medicine, and individual preferences with family resources and social expectations.

Government healthcare facilities serve as the primary healthcare providers for 52% of households, valued primarily for their affordability and accessibility despite widespread concerns about service quality, waiting times, and the availability of specialized care. The primary health center (PHC), located 8 kilometers from the village, represents the first point of contact with formal healthcare systems for most community members. However, this facility operates with limited hours, frequent staff shortages, and inadequate equipment that constrains its effectiveness in addressing community health needs.

The PHC typically operates from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM on weekdays, with limited weekend services and no emergency care during night hours. This schedule creates significant challenges for daily wage laborers who lose income when taking time off

for medical consultations, and for families dealing with medical emergencies that occur outside operating hours. The facility is staffed by one doctor, two nurses, and a pharmacist, but staff absenteeism and training programs frequently reduce available personnel.

Dr. Rajesh Gupta, the primary care physician who has served the area for three years, provided insights into the challenges of rural healthcare delivery during our visit to the PHC: "I see 80-100 patients daily, spending an average of 3-4 minutes with each patient because of the volume and time constraints. Most patients come with multiple health issues that have been developing for months or years without proper medical attention. I can provide basic treatment and medication, but complex cases require referral to district hospitals that are expensive and difficult for patients to access."

Private clinics and practitioners serve 31% of households and are often preferred for minor ailments, routine check-ups, and situations requiring immediate medical attention. These facilities typically offer more flexible timing, shorter waiting periods, and more personalized attention, but their services come at significantly higher costs that can strain household budgets. The quality of private healthcare varies considerably, from qualified medical practitioners to informal providers with limited medical training.

Traditional healers and indigenous medical systems continue to play important roles for 17% of households, particularly for certain conditions, chronic ailments, and among older community members who maintain strong faith in traditional remedies. These practitioners often have deep knowledge of local medicinal plants, traditional diagnostic methods, and treatment approaches that have been passed down through generations. Their services are typically more affordable and culturally appropriate, but they may delay necessary modern medical intervention for serious conditions.

Kamala Devi, a 67-year-old woman who serves as an informal traditional healer specializing in digestive disorders and women's health issues, explained her approach: "I learned about medicinal plants and traditional treatments from my mother and grandmother. People come to me for problems like stomach pain, irregular periods, joint pain, and skin conditions. I use herbs, massage, and dietary advice that often helps, but I also tell people to see the doctor for serious problems like high fever, chest pain, or anything I can't understand."

Emergency healthcare presents the most critical challenge for Sirsi village residents, as the nearest well-equipped hospital with emergency services is located 45 kilometers away in the district headquarters. Ambulance services are theoretically available through the 108 emergency response system, but response times are often

inadequate, and the service may not be available during peak demand periods or due to vehicle breakdowns.

The traumatic experience of Shanti Devi, whose 58-year-old husband Mohan Lal suffered a heart attack during the previous monsoon season, illustrates the life-and-death consequences of inadequate emergency healthcare infrastructure: "It was around 2:00 AM when my husband started having severe chest pain and difficulty breathing. We called 108 for an ambulance, but they said it would take at least two hours to reach our village. Our neighbors helped us arrange a private vehicle, but by the time we reached the district hospital, it was almost 5:00 AM. The doctors said we should have brought him earlier, but what could we do? In medical emergencies, every minute counts, but we feel completely helpless and abandoned."

This emergency care gap forces families to make difficult decisions during medical crises, often involving expensive private transportation, borrowing money for immediate medical expenses, and navigating unfamiliar hospital systems without adequate preparation or resources. The emotional trauma and financial burden of medical emergencies can devastate families for months or years, particularly when medical costs consume savings intended for children's education, agricultural investments, or housing improvements.

Maternal and child healthcare services have shown significant improvements in recent years, largely due to targeted government programs, regular visits from ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers, and increased awareness about the importance of institutional deliveries and childhood vaccinations. The village's ASHA worker, Meera Kumari, has been instrumental in promoting safe delivery practices, encouraging immunizations, and providing basic health education to women and families.

Meera Kumari, who has served as ASHA worker for six years, described her role and challenges: "I visit pregnant women regularly, encourage them to deliver in hospitals, and help them access government maternity benefits. I also organize immunization camps and teach women about family planning, nutrition, and child care. But people often call me for problems I can't handle, and sometimes I feel frustrated because I can refer patients to health centers, but I can't guarantee they'll receive good treatment there."

Despite these improvements, maternal and child health challenges persist, particularly related to nutrition, preventable diseases, and access to specialized pediatric care. Malnutrition affects some children, often linked to poverty, limited dietary diversity, and inadequate knowledge about child nutrition. Preventable

diseases like diarrhea, respiratory infections, and skin conditions continue to affect children, creating health risks and imposing financial burdens on families.

Mental health issues, while rarely discussed openly, represent significant but largely unaddressed healthcare needs within the community. Economic stress, social pressures, family conflicts, and the challenges of rural life create mental health burdens that affect many community members. However, mental health services are virtually non-existent, and cultural stigma prevents many people from seeking help even when they recognize the need for support.

The economic burden of healthcare represents one of the most significant challenges facing Sirsi village families. Even government healthcare services involve costs for transportation, medications not available at PHCs, and lost wages during treatment periods. Private healthcare costs can be catastrophic for families with limited incomes, often requiring asset sales, borrowing at high interest rates, or depleting savings accumulated over many years.

Healthcare financing strategies employed by families include participation in government insurance schemes like Ayushman Bharat, informal community support networks, and traditional saving groups that provide emergency funds for medical expenses. However, these mechanisms often prove inadequate for major medical expenses, and many families struggle with debt burdens created by healthcare costs.

4.12 Awareness of Government Schemes: Knowledge vs. Access

Government schemes and social protection programs represent both tremendous hope and persistent frustration for the residents of Sirsi village, embodying the complex relationship between policy intentions and implementation realities that characterizes much of India's development experience. The gap between scheme awareness and actual access reveals systemic challenges that affect millions of rural Indians who theoretically qualify for government benefits but struggle to navigate bureaucratic processes, documentation requirements, and administrative barriers that can make these programs inaccessible in practice.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) enjoys the highest awareness level among village residents, with 73% of households familiar with the program's provisions for guaranteed employment, wage rates, and application procedures. This high awareness reflects the program's long implementation history, active promotion by local officials, and word-of-mouth communication among community members who have participated in MGNREGA activities.

However, awareness doesn't translate directly into participation or benefit receipt. Among households aware of MGNREGA, only 54% have successfully obtained work under the program during the past year, and many of those who did participate report significant challenges including delayed wage payments, inadequate work allocation, and bureaucratic hurdles that discourage continued participation.

Ravi Sharma, a 43-year-old agricultural laborer who has participated in MGNREGA projects intermittently over the past five years, shared his mixed experiences: "MGNREGA is supposed to provide work when we need it, but the reality is much more complicated. Sometimes we register for work but don't get called for weeks. When we do get work, the wages are often paid months later, which doesn't help when we need money immediately for household expenses. The work is hard – digging ponds, building roads, carrying heavy materials – but at least it's guaranteed income when it's available."

The Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme has achieved 58% awareness among village households, reflecting significant outreach efforts and the program's relevance to universal healthcare concerns. However, actual enrollment and utilization rates remain much lower than awareness levels, with only 34% of aware households successfully obtaining Ayushman Bharat cards and even fewer utilizing the benefits for actual healthcare needs.

The enrollment process for Ayushman Bharat exemplifies the bureaucratic challenges that plague many government schemes. Families must navigate complex application procedures, provide multiple documents that may be difficult to obtain, and deal with technical systems that frequently malfunction or remain inaccessible. The experience of Rajesh Singh, a 39-year-old farmer who spent four months trying to obtain his family's Ayushman Bharat card, illustrates these challenges: "I knew about the scheme and desperately needed health insurance for my family because my wife has diabetes and requires regular medical care. I made seven trips to the Common Service Center, each time being told I needed different documents or that the system wasn't working. Finally, I had to pay a local agent ₹500 to help me complete the process, which defeated part of the purpose of free healthcare."

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK), designed to improve socio-economic conditions in minority-concentrated areas, has achieved only 34% awareness among village residents, reflecting limited outreach and the program's more targeted focus. Even among those aware of the program, understanding of specific benefits, eligibility criteria, and application procedures remains vague, highlighting the communication challenges that affect many government initiatives.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (housing scheme) awareness stands at 67%, driven by the visible impact of housing construction activities within the village and neighboring areas. The scheme's tangible benefits – actual houses constructed for beneficiary families – create awareness and interest among community members who see direct evidence of program impact. However, the selection process, which involves multiple eligibility criteria and lengthy approval procedures, creates frustration among families who believe they qualify but haven't received benefits.

The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (LPG connection scheme) has achieved remarkable success in terms of both awareness (89%) and actual benefit receipt (76%), making it one of the most successful government programs in the village. The scheme's success reflects several factors including clear eligibility criteria, streamlined application processes, visible benefits, and strong implementation support from LPG distributors who have financial incentives to enroll new customers.

However, even successful programs like Ujjwala face sustainability challenges. While most beneficiary families received free LPG connections, many struggle with the ongoing costs of LPG refills, which are expensive relative to rural household budgets. Some families have reverted to traditional cooking fuels for daily use while reserving LPG for special occasions or guest preparations, limiting the program's intended health and environmental benefits.

Local leadership plays crucial roles in mediating between community members and government schemes, but this mediation can create both opportunities and barriers. Village-level leaders, including the Sarpanch (village head), Ward members, and influential community members, often serve as informal facilitators who help community members navigate bureaucratic processes, understand scheme requirements, and access government benefits.

Suresh Patel, the current Sarpanch of Sirsi village, described his role in facilitating access to government schemes: "People come to me when they have problems with government schemes – when their applications are rejected, when they don't understand the requirements, or when they need help dealing with government officials. I try to help, but I also get frustrated because I can't solve all the problems. Sometimes the rules are unclear, sometimes the officials don't cooperate, and sometimes the systems don't work properly."

However, this reliance on local leaders can also create problems including favoritism, corruption, and unequal access to benefits based on social connections rather than need or eligibility. Some community members report feeling excluded from government benefits because they lack connections to influential local leaders or belong to marginalized social groups that receive less attention from local officials.

The digitization of government services, promoted through initiatives like Digital India, has created both opportunities and challenges for rural communities. Online application systems can reduce travel costs and time investments required for accessing government services, but they also create new barriers for communities with limited digital literacy, poor internet connectivity, and unfamiliarity with digital bureaucratic processes.

Common Service Centers (CSCs), established to provide digital access points for government services, serve important functions in bridging digital divides, but their effectiveness varies significantly based on operator competence, equipment functionality, and community awareness about available services. Many CSC operators charge informal fees for services that are officially free, creating additional costs for communities that may not be able to afford them.

The documentation requirements for government schemes present persistent challenges for rural communities where formal documentation may be incomplete, outdated, or difficult to obtain. Requirements for income certificates, caste certificates, residence proofs, and bank account details create barriers that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable community members who lack the resources, knowledge, or social connections necessary to obtain required documents.

Chapter 5: What We Learned in Sirsi Village

5.1 Walking Through the Real Story

Spending time in Sirsi village opened our eyes to something we hadn't fully grasped from our desks in the city. The conversations we had with families, sitting on their doorsteps or under the shade of old trees, revealed a community caught between old struggles and new dreams. This isn't just another research report—it's the story of what people actually told us when we asked what they really needed.

5.2 The Basics Still Matter, But They're Complicated

When Meera, a mother of three, showed us her daily routine of fetching water, it became clear that the fundamentals haven't been solved. She walks to the handpump every morning, but some days it runs dry by noon. Her neighbor has a pipeline connection that works sporadically, while the family across the lane still relies on their old well.

The toilet story is equally mixed. Thanks to government schemes, many homes now have toilets, but we met families who built them only to use them for storage. Old habits die hard, and without proper sewage systems, some facilities simply don't work as intended.

What struck us most was how parents talked about their children's education. Ravi, whose daughter is in class 8, put it simply: "The school building is there, but half the time there's no teacher. And now they want us to help with online classes, but how can we when we don't understand these things ourselves?"

5.3 Dreams Beyond the Fields

Agriculture still feeds most families here, but it's not feeding their ambitions anymore. We sat with a group of young men who work as daily laborers, and their frustration was palpable. "This work is unpredictable," said Suresh, 24. "One day there's work, the next day there isn't. We want something steady, something that gives us respect."

The youth we met weren't just complaining—they had specific ideas. Government jobs topped everyone's wish list, but they also talked about opening small businesses, learning trades like electrical work or mobile repair, or even finding ways to earn money online. The hunger for skill development was real, but the opportunities felt distant.

5.4 The Smartphone Revolution (Sort Of)

Almost every household had at least one smartphone, which surprised us initially. But as we dug deeper, the limitations became clear. Weak network signals meant video calls dropped constantly. Data costs ate into already tight budgets. Most importantly, many people felt lost navigating apps and online services.

Sunita, whose son needs internet for his studies, summed up the frustration: "We bought this phone thinking it would help him learn, but the connection is so poor, and I don't know how to help him when something goes wrong."

Still, there was genuine excitement about the possibilities. People wanted to access government services online, send money digitally, and connect with the wider world. They just needed it to actually work and someone to show them how.

5.5 When Government Schemes Feel Like Puzzles

The irony wasn't lost on us—schemes designed to help people often felt impossible to access. We heard story after story of incomplete applications, confusing paperwork, and offices that felt intimidatingly far away.

"I know about MGNREGA," said Lakshmi, "but every time I try to apply, they ask for some document I don't have, or tell me to come back next week." The gap between policy intention and ground reality was stark.

What people wanted wasn't fewer schemes—they wanted help navigating them. Several villagers suggested having local volunteers or help centers where they could get guidance without judgment.

5.6 Women's Voices, Often Unheard

The women we spoke with had clear aspirations, though they often shared them in softer voices. Many wanted to contribute financially to their households but felt constrained by social expectations and lack of opportunities.

Priya, a young mother, told us: "I want to learn something that can help me earn from home. Maybe stitching or computer work. But who will teach me?" Her question echoed in many conversations.

What gave us hope was seeing young girls and boys equally enthusiastic about education. Parents were starting to invest in their daughters' futures in ways that previous generations hadn't.

5.7 Health: A Mix of Old and New

The local government hospital serves the area, but people's experiences varied wildly depending on when they visited and what they needed. We heard both praise for free services and complaints about long waits and medicine shortages.

Traditional healers still play an important role, not just because of cultural beliefs, but because they're accessible and affordable. Some families we met were trying to blend both approaches to healthcare.

A few households had started nutrition gardens through government programs, and the pride in showing us their vegetables was evident. These small successes suggested that programs could work when people felt ownership over them.

5.8 Infrastructure: Better, But Not There Yet

The roads connecting Sirsi to nearby towns have improved, making it easier for people to travel for work or medical needs. Electricity is more reliable than it used to be, though power cuts still disrupt daily life and business plans.

But it's the weak mobile signals that really frustrated people. In an increasingly connected world, poor connectivity felt like being left behind.

5.9 What Development Means Now

Perhaps the most important thing we learned was how people's definition of a good life has expanded. It's not just about having enough food or a roof overhead anymore—though those remain essential. People talked about wanting their children to have opportunities they never had, about being connected to information and services, about having choices.

As one elderly villager put it: "We don't just want to survive anymore. We want to live well."

5.10 The Gap Between Intention and Reality

Our time in Sirsi highlighted a crucial disconnect. Development programs are designed with good intentions, but they often miss the mark on what makes services truly usable for rural communities. People don't just want schemes—they want support, guidance, and services that fit into their real lives.

5.11 Looking Forward

The voices from Sirsi village tell a story of a community ready for change but needing the right kind of support to get there. Their aspirations aren't unrealistic—they're

simply asking for what many of us take for granted. Quality education, reliable healthcare, meaningful work opportunities, and connection to the digital world.

Understanding these needs isn't just about better policy—it's about recognizing that rural development must evolve to match people's evolving dreams. The next chapter will explore how we can bridge this gap between aspiration and reality.



Picture 1: Rural development Image

Chapter 6: Making Sense of What We Heard

6.1 Connecting the Dots

Walking away from Sirsi village, we found ourselves with notebooks full of stories that challenged everything we thought we knew about rural development. The conversations we had weren't just data points—they were windows into a community that's redefining what it means to live well in rural India. This chapter is our attempt to make sense of those voices and understand what they mean for the bigger picture of development in our country.

6.2 When Development Means More Than Survival

Remember Ravi, the father who worried about his daughter's education? His concerns weren't just about having a school building or even a teacher showing up consistently. When he talked about wanting his daughter to have "real opportunities," he was articulating something profound that we often miss in development planning.

The people of Sirsi have moved beyond what economists call "basic needs." Yes, they still need reliable water and electricity—Meera's daily struggle with the handpump reminded us of that. But they're also dreaming bigger. They're talking about the kind of life they want their children to have, about being connected to the wider world, about having choices they never had.

This shift mirrors what Amartya Sen wrote about decades ago—that development isn't just about meeting basic needs but about expanding people's capabilities and freedoms. When Suresh, the young laborer, talked about wanting "work that gives us respect," he wasn't just asking for a job. He was asking for dignity, for the freedom to plan his future, for the chance to be more than just a pair of hands doing daily wage work.

6.3 The Smartphone Paradox

One of the most striking contradictions we encountered was around technology. Almost every household had a smartphone, which initially made us think digital inclusion was well underway. But sitting with families as they struggled with poor network connections and confusing apps, we realized how superficial that inclusion really was.

Take Sunita's story—she bought a smartphone to help her son with his studies, but ended up feeling more frustrated than empowered. The device promised connection to the digital world, but weak signals and expensive data meant that promise remained largely unfulfilled. Her experience illustrates what researchers call the

"digital divide"—not just about who has access to technology, but who can actually use it meaningfully.

The government's Digital India initiative and BharatNet program are ambitious attempts to bridge this divide, but our time in Sirsi showed us that infrastructure alone isn't enough. People need more than just network towers and fiber optic cables. They need digital literacy, they need affordable data plans, and they need applications designed with their needs and limitations in mind.

What gave us hope was the genuine enthusiasm people showed when they could actually use digital services effectively. When the village's one computer-literate youth helped others make digital payments or access government services online, we saw glimpses of what true digital inclusion could look like. It wasn't just about technology—it was about community knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning.

6.4 The Bureaucratic Maze

Perhaps nothing frustrated us more than hearing story after story of people being unable to access government schemes designed to help them. Lakshmi's experience with MGNREGA—knowing about the program but being unable to navigate the application process—was repeated in dozens of conversations.

The irony is stark: India has one of the world's most extensive social protection systems, but the very people it's meant to serve often can't access it. The problem isn't lack of political will or inadequate funding—it's the gap between policy design and ground-level implementation.

We started to see this as a "knowledge barrier"—not just about literacy or education, but about navigating complex bureaucratic systems. When schemes are designed in air-conditioned offices in Delhi, they often fail to account for the reality of rural life. Forms are too complicated, eligibility criteria are unclear, and the assumption that people can easily travel to district offices for follow-up is often wrong.

The solution isn't necessarily simpler schemes (though that would help), but rather better intermediation. Several villagers suggested having local volunteers or help centers—people they trust who could guide them through the process without judgment. This idea of "human interfaces" for government services could transform how rural communities access their entitlements.

6.5 Women's Voices, Finally Being Heard

Some of our most powerful conversations were with women who were articulating aspirations that previous generations might not have dared to voice. Priya's desire to

"learn something that can help me earn from home" wasn't just about supplementing household income—it was about economic independence and self-worth.

What struck us was how many women talked about education and employment in the same breath. They wanted to learn, not just for personal satisfaction, but to contribute meaningfully to their families' wellbeing. This represents a significant shift from traditional gender roles, though it's happening gradually and often quietly.

The success of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in other parts of India shows what's possible when women are given platforms to organize and support each other. In Sirsi, we saw early signs of this change—women gathering to discuss their children's education, sharing information about government schemes, and quietly challenging traditional constraints.

But we also saw the obstacles. Limited access to training opportunities, societal expectations about women's roles, and the challenge of balancing domestic responsibilities with personal aspirations. Any serious approach to rural development must address these gendered barriers explicitly.

6.6 Youth at the Crossroads

The young people we met in Sirsi embodied both the promise and the challenge of rural India's future. Their aspirations were remarkably similar to urban youth—they wanted good education, meaningful careers, and the chance to build something of their own. But their pathways to achieving these goals were far more constrained.

The conversation with a group of young men who worked as daily laborers stayed with us long after we left the village. Their frustration wasn't just about low wages or irregular work—it was about feeling trapped in a cycle they couldn't break out of. They had dreams of starting small businesses, learning new skills, or even finding work that used their minds, not just their physical strength.

This points to a crucial gap in rural education and skill development. While the government has launched several skill development programs, they often don't reach remote villages or don't align with local economic opportunities. What's needed is a more decentralized approach that recognizes the entrepreneurial potential in rural communities.

We were particularly struck by how many young people expressed interest in using technology for income generation. They talked about wanting to learn digital marketing, online selling, or even content creation. This suggests that with the right support and infrastructure, rural youth could become significant participants in India's digital economy.

6.7 Health: Where Modern and Traditional Converge

The health landscape in Sirsi was complex in ways that simple statistics don't capture. Yes, there was a government hospital, and yes, people used it. But their relationships with healthcare were shaped by much more than just availability of facilities.

We met families who consulted traditional healers not just out of habit or superstition, but because these practitioners understood their social and economic contexts. They offered payment flexibility, made house calls, and provided emotional support along with treatment. This doesn't mean traditional medicine is always effective, but it does mean that modern healthcare systems need to learn from these relationship-based approaches.

The success stories we heard—like families maintaining nutrition gardens through government programs—showed what's possible when health interventions are designed with community participation. These weren't just about growing vegetables; they were about families taking ownership of their health and nutrition in sustainable ways.

What people wanted wasn't necessarily more hospitals or clinics, but more reliable, respectful, and accessible healthcare. Mobile health vans that actually showed up on schedule, telemedicine services that worked with local network conditions, and health workers who understood local languages and customs.

6.7 Development as Dialogue, Not Delivery

The most important insight from our time in Sirsi was recognizing how ready people were to be partners in their own development. They didn't want to be passive recipients of government schemes or NGO programs—they wanted to be consulted, heard, and involved in designing solutions.

This challenges the traditional model of development as something done "for" people rather than "with" them. When we asked villagers what they needed most, their answers were specific, practical, and often different from what we might have assumed. They knew their priorities better than any external expert could.

The concept of participatory development isn't new, but our experience in Sirsi reinforced how crucial it is. Gram Sabhas, community meetings, and local planning processes aren't just democratic ideals—they're practical necessities for effective development. When people feel ownership over programs and policies, they're more likely to succeed.

6.8 Global Goals, Local Dreams

As we reflected on our conversations in Sirsi, we were struck by how closely people's aspirations aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Without ever hearing terms like "SDGs," villagers were articulating dreams of poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality, and sustainable development.

This alignment isn't coincidental—it reflects universal human aspirations for dignity, opportunity, and wellbeing. What it means for policy is that rural India isn't lagging behind global development agendas; it's ready to participate in them. The challenge is creating pathways for that participation.

The stories from Sirsi also reminded us that global goals must be translated into local contexts. Quality education might mean different things in different places, but the underlying aspiration—for children to have better opportunities than their parents—is universal.

6.9 The Art of Listening

Perhaps the most important skill we developed during our time in Sirsi was learning to listen—really listen—to what people were telling us. Not just the facts they shared, but the emotions behind them, the hopes they expressed, and the frustrations they carried.

This kind of listening requires patience, humility, and genuine curiosity. It means setting aside our assumptions about what rural people need and being open to what they actually want. It means recognizing that people are experts on their own lives, even if they don't have formal education or technical training.

Chapter 7: Turning Insights into Action

7.1 Building on What We Learned

The stories from Sirsi village have given us a roadmap for change. This chapter translates those conversations—Meera's water struggles, Ravi's educational concerns, Suresh's job aspirations, and Priya's dreams of financial independence—into concrete recommendations. These aren't theoretical suggestions crafted in isolation; they're practical responses to what people actually told us they needed.

Our approach recognizes that rural communities aren't waiting for development to happen to them—they want to be active partners in shaping their future. Every recommendation here is designed with that partnership in mind, emphasizing community ownership, local leadership, and sustainable solutions that build on existing strengths.

7.2 Water and Sanitation: Beyond Infrastructure to Ownership

Making Water Reliable and Community-Controlled

Meera's daily uncertainty about water availability highlighted a fundamental issue: infrastructure without community management often fails. Our recommendations go beyond just building more systems to ensuring they work consistently.

Expanding Access with Community Involvement: Rather than top-down pipeline projects, we recommend a hybrid approach that combines government investment with community management. Each water system should have a local committee responsible for maintenance, fee collection, and expansion planning. This committee should include women, given their primary role in water management, and should receive technical training and financial management skills.

Rainwater Harvesting as Community Assets: Village-level rainwater harvesting systems can reduce dependence on external sources while building community cooperation. These systems should be designed and maintained by villagers themselves, with technical support from government engineers. The process of building these systems can strengthen community bonds while solving practical problems.

Handpump Maintenance Networks: Instead of waiting for government repair services, communities should be trained and equipped to maintain their own handpumps. This includes establishing spare parts supply chains, training local mechanics, and creating maintenance funds through small monthly contributions from users.

Sanitation with Dignity and Sustainability

The mixed success of toilet construction in Sirsi showed us that behavior change requires more than infrastructure. Our sanitation recommendations focus on making facilities genuinely useful and socially acceptable.

Beyond Construction to Usage: New toilet construction should be paired with comprehensive sewage management systems, even if they're decentralized. Communities should be involved in choosing appropriate technologies, from simple septic systems to more advanced biogas plants that can provide additional benefits.

Community Champions for Behavior Change: Rather than external awareness campaigns, identify and train local influencers—respected women, religious leaders, or successful farmers—to promote sanitation practices. These champions should receive ongoing support and recognition for their efforts.

School-Based Hygiene Education: Children can be powerful agents of change in their families. Schools should integrate hygiene education into daily routines, with clean facilities that serve as demonstration models for the community. Students can be trained as "hygiene ambassadors" who take messages home to their families.

7.3 Education and Digital Literacy: Preparing for Tomorrow's Opportunities

Transforming Rural Schools into Learning Hubs

Ravi's concerns about his daughter's education revealed how rural schools could become centers of community learning, not just places where children spend a few hours each day.

Infrastructure with Purpose: School upgrades should focus on creating multipurpose learning spaces that can serve children during the day and adults in the evening. Computer labs should be designed for community use, with flexible scheduling that allows working adults to access digital learning opportunities.

Technology that Actually Works: Rather than expensive equipment that breaks easily, schools should receive robust, low-maintenance technology designed for rural conditions. Solar-powered tablets with offline content, simple projectors for community screenings, and basic recording equipment for creating local educational content.

Teachers as Community Educators: Teacher training should include community engagement skills, helping them become resources for the entire village. Teachers could lead evening literacy classes, help with government form filling, or organize educational events that bring families together.

Digital Literacy for All Ages

Sunita's smartphone struggles showed us that digital literacy isn't just about young people—it's about ensuring everyone can participate in an increasingly connected world.

Peer-to-Peer Learning Networks: Identify digitally literate youth in each village and train them as "digital ambassadors." These young people can provide ongoing support to their neighbors, creating sustainable learning networks that don't depend on external trainers.

Practical Digital Skills: Focus on immediately useful skills like mobile banking, accessing government services online, and communicating with family members who have migrated for work. Learning should be hands-on and directly applicable to people's daily lives.

Regional Language Content: Partner with local schools and youth to create digital content in regional languages. This could include instructional videos, local news, and entertainment that makes digital platforms more relevant and accessible.

7.4 Livelihood and Skill Development: Creating Local Economic Opportunities

Skills Training that Matches Local Needs

The frustration of daily wage workers in Sirsi pointed to the need for skill training that creates real economic opportunities, not just certificates.

Village-Based Training Centers: Establish training facilities in villages rather than requiring people to travel to distant towns. These centers should offer flexible scheduling that accommodates agricultural seasons and family responsibilities. Training should be hands-on and immediately applicable, with strong connections to local economic opportunities.

Market-Linked Skills: Before launching any training program, conduct thorough market research to understand what skills are actually in demand in the region. Partner with local businesses, contractors, and entrepreneurs to ensure trainees have pathways to employment or self-employment.

Mentorship and Follow-Up: Connect trainees with successful practitioners who can provide ongoing guidance and support. This mentorship should continue after formal training ends, helping new practitioners navigate challenges and build their businesses or careers.

Financial Inclusion and Entrepreneurship

Priya's desire to earn from home highlighted the need for financial systems that support small-scale entrepreneurship, especially for women.

Microcredit with Training: Expand access to small loans while providing comprehensive financial literacy training. This should include budgeting, business planning, and understanding of loan terms and repayment schedules. Support should continue throughout the loan period, not just at the beginning.

Women-Led Economic Networks: Strengthen and expand Self-Help Groups (SHGs) while connecting them to broader markets. This includes training in product development, quality control, marketing, and digital sales platforms. SHGs should be supported to become genuine economic enterprises, not just savings clubs.

Digital Payment Systems: Help small businesses and service providers transition to digital payment systems, which can improve their credibility and expand their customer base. This requires both technical training and support in building customer trust in digital transactions.

7.5 Enhancing Access to Government Schemes: Bridging the Implementation Gap

Making Services Accessible and User-Friendly

Lakshmi's struggles with MGNREGA applications revealed how well-intentioned schemes often fail at the implementation level.

Mobile Service Centers: Deploy well-equipped vehicles that travel between villages on regular schedules, bringing government services directly to people's doorsteps. These centers should be staffed with trained personnel who can help with applications, provide information, and follow up on pending cases.

Community Facilitators: Train and deploy local volunteers who can help their neighbors navigate government schemes. These facilitators should receive regular training updates and modest compensation for their services. They should be selected by their communities and accountable to them.

Simplified Processes: Work with government departments to redesign application processes, forms, and documentation requirements. Use plain language, reduce unnecessary steps, and create clear flowcharts that people can follow independently.

7.6 Healthcare and Nutrition: Comprehensive Wellness Approaches

Accessible and Reliable Healthcare

The mixed experiences with healthcare in Sirsi showed the need for more reliable, respectful, and comprehensive health services.

Mobile Health Networks: Expand mobile clinic services with predictable schedules that communities can depend on. These clinics should provide both curative and preventive services, with special attention to women's health, child nutrition, and chronic disease management.

Community Health Workers: Strengthen the ASHA worker network with better training, regular supervision, and adequate compensation. These workers should be equipped with basic diagnostic tools and connected to higher-level healthcare through telemedicine systems.

Traditional and Modern Integration: Rather than dismissing traditional health practices, create systems that integrate beneficial traditional knowledge with modern medicine. This could include training traditional healers in basic health principles and creating referral systems between traditional and modern practitioners.

Nutrition and Food Security

Community Nutrition Gardens: Expand the Poshan Vatika program with comprehensive support including seeds, tools, training, and ongoing guidance. These gardens should be designed as demonstration and learning sites that entire communities can benefit from.

School Nutrition Programs: Strengthen mid-day meal programs while using them to educate children and families about nutrition. School gardens can supply fresh vegetables for meals while teaching children about sustainable agriculture.

7.7 Digital Inclusion and Connectivity: Building the Infrastructure for Participation

Reliable Internet Access

Sunita's connectivity struggles highlighted how poor infrastructure limits digital inclusion even when people have devices and interest.

Community-Managed Networks: Where possible, support communities in establishing and managing their own internet networks. This could include community-owned

Wi-Fi systems, satellite internet cooperatives, or partnerships with telecom companies that give communities more control over service quality.

Public Access Points: Establish reliable Wi-Fi zones in public spaces like schools, health centers, and community halls. These should be maintained by local committees and available during hours that work for different community members.

Affordable Access: Work with telecom companies to develop special packages for rural users, including slower but more affordable connections, family plans that can be shared among multiple households, and seasonal packages that account for income fluctuations.

Digital Services and Skills

Local Digital Ambassadors: Train young people as ongoing digital support providers for their communities. These ambassadors should receive regular training updates and should be compensated for their services through community contributions or government support.

Relevant Digital Content: Support the creation of digital content that addresses local needs and interests. This could include agricultural information, health guidance, educational materials, and entertainment in regional languages.

7.8 Gender-Inclusive Development: Ensuring Equal Opportunities

Women's Economic Empowerment

Priya's aspirations for economic independence reflected broader desires among women in Sirsi for meaningful participation in economic life.

Flexible Learning Opportunities: Create learning and training programs that accommodate women's domestic responsibilities. This includes evening classes, childcare support during training sessions, and home-based learning options.

Market Connections: Help women entrepreneurs connect with broader markets through digital platforms, trade fairs, and partnerships with urban businesses. This should include training in product development, quality control, and marketing.

Leadership Development: Support women's participation in village governance and community leadership roles. This includes training in public speaking, meeting facilitation, and advocacy skills.

Safe and Supportive Environments

Gender-Sensitive Infrastructure: Ensure that all public facilities, from toilets to training centers, are designed with women's safety and comfort in mind. This includes separate facilities where culturally appropriate and safe transportation options.

Community Support Networks: Strengthen women's groups and networks that provide mutual support for economic activities, childcare, and personal development. These networks should be connected to broader resources and opportunities.

7.9 Youth Engagement: Harnessing Energy for Development

Youth as Development Partners

The energy and aspirations of young people in Sirsi suggested they could be powerful partners in community development if given appropriate opportunities.

Youth Development Committees: Establish youth-led committees that can monitor development programs, organize community events, and advocate for young people's needs. These committees should have real authority and resources to make a difference.

Skills and Entrepreneurship: Provide young people with both traditional skills training and support for innovative enterprises. This could include technology-based businesses, service enterprises, or creative ventures that build on local resources and talents.

Cultural and Social Programs: Recognize that development isn't just about economic opportunities—young people also need cultural expression, sports, and social activities. Support community-led initiatives that provide healthy outlets for youth energy and creativity.

7.10 Infrastructure: Building Foundations for Growth

Transportation and Connectivity

Community-Maintained Roads: Support communities in maintaining their own road networks through training, equipment, and materials. This creates local employment while ensuring roads remain usable year-round.

Public Transportation: Work with private operators to establish reliable, affordable transportation services that connect villages to markets, healthcare, and educational opportunities.

Energy Security

Renewable Energy Solutions: Support community-owned solar and other renewable energy projects that can provide reliable electricity while creating local employment and ownership. These systems should be designed for easy maintenance and expansion.

Energy Cooperatives: Help communities organize energy cooperatives that can negotiate better rates, manage distribution, and plan for future energy needs.

7.11 Conclusion: A New Approach to Rural Development

These recommendations reflect a fundamental shift in how we think about rural development. Instead of seeing rural communities as problems to be solved, we're recognizing them as partners with their own solutions. Instead of imposing external models, we're supporting locally-driven approaches that build on existing strengths and address real priorities.

The people of Sirsi village have shown us that they're ready for this partnership. They have clear aspirations, practical ideas, and the energy to make change happen. What they need are supportive policies, adequate resources, and recognition of their capacity to lead their own development.

Implementing these recommendations will require courage to move beyond traditional approaches, patience to build genuine partnerships, and commitment to putting community voices at the center of development planning. But if we can do this, we can create a model of rural development that truly serves people's aspirations and builds sustainable, inclusive prosperity.

The path forward isn't easy, but the conversations in Sirsi have shown us it's possible. The question now is whether we have the wisdom and commitment to follow where their voices are leading us.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research conducted in Sirsi village, highlighting the journey from basic needs like water and sanitation to new-age aspirations like Wi-Fi and digital access. It encapsulates the key takeaways from the fieldwork, emphasizing how the definition of development has shifted in the minds of rural Indians. Through this case study, the dissertation argues for a more inclusive, people-centered model of rural development that reflects both traditional necessities and emerging aspirations.

8.2 Summary of the Study

The core aim of this study was to understand how rural households define development in today's context. Using a mixed-method approach, data was collected from 63 households in Sirsi village through surveys, interviews, and observations. The findings revealed that while the community still places importance on infrastructure like roads, drinking water, and electricity, they are increasingly vocal about the need for modern resources such as internet connectivity, online education, better healthcare, and skill-based employment opportunities.

Digital readiness, though limited by technical barriers, has emerged as a strong aspiration—especially among the youth and families with school-going children. Likewise, government schemes exist, but their impact is diluted due to lack of awareness and accessibility. The study unearthed the importance of informal networks, peer learning, and local leadership in shaping villagers' access to services.

8.3 Contribution to Human Development Research

This dissertation contributes to the larger field of human development in several ways:

- It validates the **capability approach** proposed by Amartya Sen, by showing that people value freedom and opportunity—be it access to jobs, education, or healthcare.
- It challenges the infrastructure-focused notion of development and highlights the role of **aspirational indicators**—digital literacy, skill-building, and service delivery experience.

- It supports **participatory development**, where the voices of people themselves are the basis for planning and implementation.

What makes this study unique is that it listens—not just to needs, but to **hopes and dreams**—and this lens shifts the policy dialogue from charity to empowerment.

8.4 Key Learnings

From the study, several important learnings emerged:

- **Rural aspirations are evolving.** People no longer want just ‘services’—they want opportunity.
- **Digital tools are seen as enablers** of education, employment, and communication.
- **Development is uneven.** Some households are connected and informed; others are still struggling with basics.
- **Women and youth are critical drivers** of change—they’re willing to learn, adapt, and lead.
- **Awareness is as important as availability.** Many schemes remain underutilized due to a lack of information, access, and local facilitation.
- **People want dignity.** Whether it’s a proper toilet, access to Wi-Fi, or fair job opportunities—development is tied closely to a sense of self-worth.

8.5 Policy Implications

The findings call for a shift in how rural policies are designed and delivered. Some key implications are:

- **Bottom-up planning** must be promoted—decisions should come from the village level, not imposed from the top.
- **Integrated development** is needed, where infrastructure, education, digital tools, and livelihoods are planned together.
- **Digital inclusion** should go beyond internet access to include affordability, training, and ongoing support.

- **Women and youth-specific interventions** are essential for tapping the potential of these groups.
- **Capacity building** should be prioritized—not just creating schemes, but ensuring people know how to use them.

8.6 Future Research

This study opens the door to multiple areas for future research. It would be beneficial to:

- **Compare villages across districts or states** to understand regional differences in aspirations.
- Conduct **longitudinal studies** to track how aspirations and access change over time.
- **Evaluate the real-world impact** of digital inclusion projects like BharatNet, CSCs, or state-specific e-governance platforms.
- Explore how **intersectionality** (gender, caste, education level) affects aspiration and access in rural communities.

Such research would deepen our understanding of rural transformation and help craft better, evidence-based policy.

8.7 Final Reflection

The title of this dissertation—*From Water to Wi-Fi*—was chosen to reflect the expanding horizon of what development means to rural India today. People in villages like Sirsi are not waiting to be told what they need; they already know. They want development that speaks their language, supports their ambitions, and gives them dignity.

Rural development cannot be designed in isolation from the people it aims to serve. It must be grounded in **listening, inclusion, and responsiveness**. The villagers of Sirsi taught us that they don't just want to survive—they want to **thrive**. And that simple, powerful shift in mindset is what modern development must embrace.

Development is no longer just about “building for the people.” It's about **building with the people**.

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Chapter 10: Annexures

10.1 Annexure A: Survey Questionnaire (Google Forms)

This annexure includes the full list of questions asked during the household survey in Sirsi village. The form covered household demographics, water, sanitation, education, digital access, and aspirations.

Sirsi Area Questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to assess the key challenges, resources, and potential solutions in the Sirsi area to support sustainable community development. Your responses will help identify critical issues and guide effective interventions.

General Household Information

1. 1. How many members live in this household?

2. How many are males?

3. How many are females?

4. How many are children?

5. What is the age group of your children

Mark only one oval.

☐

0-6 years

☐

7-20 years

6. 2. How many members of your household are married?

7. 3. What is the primary source of income for your household?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Farming
☐ Daily wage labor
☐ Government job
☐ Private job
☐ Business
☐ Other: _____

8. 4. What is your approximate monthly household income?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Below ₹5,000
☐ ₹5,000 – ₹10,000
☐ ₹10,000 – ₹20,000
☐ Above ₹20,000

9. 5. Do you own or rent your house?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Own
☐ Rent

Water and Sanitation

10. 6. What is the main source of drinking water for your household?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Handpump
☐ Well
☐ River/Pond
☐ Pipeline
☐ Other: _____

11. 7. How many hours per day do you have access to water?

12. 8. What type of toilet facility does your household use?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Open defecation
☐ Pit toilet

- ☐ Flush toilet
- ☐ Community toilet

Livelihood, Agriculture & Animal Husbandry

13. 9. Does your household practice animal husbandry? (Yes/No)

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

14. 9.1. If yes, what type of livestock do you have?

15. 10. Do you own agricultural land? (Yes/No)

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

16. 10.1. If yes, how much land do you own?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 0 – 6 Bigha
- ☐ 6 – 20 Bigha
- ☐ Above 20 Bigha

17. 11. What are the major crops you cultivate?

18. 12. Do you use any irrigation system?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

19. 12.1. If yes, what type

20. 13. Do you have a **Poshan Vatika (nutrition garden)** at your home? (Yes/No)

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

21. 13.1. If yes, what do you grow in it?

Household Challenges

22. 14. What are the biggest problems your household faces? (Select all that apply)

Check all that apply.

☐ Water scarcity

☐ Poor sanitation

☐ Lack of employment opportunities

☐ Agricultural difficulties

☐ Health issues

☐ Poor education facilities

☐ Other: _____

Education and Healthcare

23. 15. Are all children in your household enrolled in school? (Yes/No)

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

24. 16. Where does your family go for healthcare services?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Government hospital

☐ Private clinic

☐ Traditional healer

☐ Other: _____

Possible Solutions and Recommendations

25. 17. What support do you need the most to improve your livelihood?

26. 18. What government or NGO programs have helped your household in the past?

27. 19. What are the most urgent issues that should be addressed first in your area?

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

10.2 Annexure B: Raw Survey Data Summary

Summarized tables for all 63 households were compiled, including data on household size, income, access to sanitation, education level, irrigation, and digital inclusion.



Sirsi_Questionnaire
_Responses_Update

10.3 Annexure C: Charts and Tables

This annexure includes all supporting visuals used in the analysis:

Figure No.	Title	Type of Chart
Chart 1	Bar Chart showing number of households by Size Category	Bar Chart
Chart 2	Pie Chart Showing Households by size category	Pie Chart
Chart 3	Pie chart showing gender distribution by Age Group	Pie Chart
Chart 4	Bar graph showing primary income source of the households	Bar Chart
Chart 5	Pie chart showing the house ownership of the people	Pie Chart
Chart 6	Bar graph showing the source of water supply in the households	Bar Chart
Chart 7	Doughnut chart showing the households growing crops	Doughnut chart
Chart 8	Bar graph showing the number of children attending or not attending the schools	Bar Chart
Picture 1	Rural development Image	Picture

10.4 Annexure D: Sample Interview Responses

Here are a few real quotes from villagers that reflect their thoughts and aspirations:

- *“My children need internet for school homework, but the signal is too weak.”* – Mother of two

- *"I want to learn tailoring or mobile repair, but we don't have training here."* – 19-year-old girl
- *"We don't know how to apply for government schemes... it's too confusing."* – Elderly male farmer

10.5 Annexure E: Consent Statement (Verbal)

All survey participants were informed about the study's purpose. Verbal consent was obtained before data collection. No names or personal identifiers have been shared.

Abstract

This dissertation examines changing aspirations and persistent access challenges in rural India, using Sirsi village in Rajasthan as a case study. Rural development initiatives have historically concentrated on providing fundamental infrastructure—water supply, electricity, and sanitation facilities. My fieldwork in Sirsi, however, documents a marked transformation in what communities prioritize. Basic infrastructure remains important, but rural families are now seeking digital connectivity, online educational resources, improved healthcare services, vocational training, and employment beyond agriculture.

I employed a mixed-method research design, conducting structured surveys with 63 households alongside detailed interviews and ethnographic observations. The data reveals a troubling pattern: government programs targeting these emerging needs exist but remain severely underutilized. Residents often lack awareness of available schemes, encounter bureaucratic obstacles, and receive insufficient local guidance through application processes. Furthermore, despite widespread mobile phone adoption, inadequate internet infrastructure and limited digital skills prevent meaningful engagement with online economic opportunities.

My analysis demonstrates that effective rural development requires genuine community participation, recognition of local aspirations, and comprehensive digital inclusion strategies. Policy formulation and program implementation must incorporate perspectives from rural residents, particularly young people and women whose voices have been marginalized in development planning. I propose several targeted interventions: community-driven digital literacy training, participatory planning processes, locally-accessible support centers, and career preparation programs integrated into rural schools.

This research contributes to human development scholarship by arguing that development extends beyond meeting basic needs—it must create conditions for individuals and communities to flourish. In contemporary rural India, progress requires bridging the gap between essential services and emerging aspirations, effectively transitioning from ensuring water access to enabling Wi-Fi connectivity, from mere survival to genuine opportunity.