

BAIF Development Research Foundation — 81 Million Trees and the Cattle That Changed Rural India

In 1967, Manibhai Desai — a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi who had worked with the Gandhian movement since India's independence — founded the Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation in Urulikanchan near Pune. His starting question was specific: why do India's rural poor remain poor desp...

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BAIF's answer was to take the crossbreeding technology directly to villages — building a network of artificial insemination centres that brought high-yielding genetics to whatever cattle a poor family already owned. A family with three crossbred milch animals, BAIF's own data shows, earns Rs 60,000-75,000 per annum — enough, in most rural contexts, to cross the poverty line.

From that founding livestock programme, BAIF has grown into one of India's largest and most methodologically rigorous rural development organisations — now working across 13 states, 351 districts, and more than 100,000 villages.

Who They Are

BAIF Development Research Foundation is headquartered in Pune, Maharashtra, with field programmes in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Odisha, and Jharkhand. Their cumulative reach across five decades: 81.7 million families across 98,000 villages have improved their livelihoods through BAIF programmes. Their current annual reach as of 2024-25: 32.9 lakh families from 99,452 villages in 13 states.

BAIF's 2024-25 Annual Report documents 147,924 farmers trained in livestock development, NRM, and farm-based livelihoods. 200,000 farmers accessed information across 5 states through their eDost digital extension platform, with 141 eDost agents and more than 65 online e-learning modules. The scale is consistent: BAIF has produced evidence across 50+ years of field operations rather than from a single high-profile programme.

The Wadi Model: Agri-Horti-Forestry for Tribal Families

BAIF's most replicated innovation is the Wadi model — agro-horti-forestry based livelihood systems developed for tribal families in tribal areas with marginal land, limited rainfall, and high drought vulnerability. Originally developed in Gujarat's tribal districts, the Wadi model has since been implemented across 21 states.

A Wadi is an integrated plot of fruit trees, forest trees, and food crops — typically covering 0.4 to 2 acres — designed around the specific land and water conditions of a tribal family's existing holdings. BAIF provides the saplings, the technical guidance, and sustained follow-up. Mature Wadis (10 years and older) sequester approximately 23 tonnes of carbon per hectare, rehabilitating wastelands into carbon-neutral assets while curbing soil erosion and boosting biodiversity.

By 2023, the Wadi programme spanned over 84,000 hectares across 10 states, benefiting more than 200,000 households through diversified income streams that have raised average farm earnings by integrating high-value horticultural outputs. A tribal family through Wadi can earn Rs 40,000-55,000 per year from the same marginal land that previously produced subsistence food. In 2024-25, Wadi expansion covered 2,828 hectares, aiding 7,625 families in 376 villages.

The Watershed Record

BAIF has developed 3.5 lakh hectares of agricultural land under 728 watersheds across India — one of the largest watershed development records in the civil society sector. With the increase in cropping area by 20-30 percent that watershed development produces, and the year-round employment that water-secured land generates even for landless labourers, the watershed programme generates the multiplied livelihoods that a single crop improvement programme cannot.

Odisha and the Seed Savers

BAIF's specific Odisha presence is documented in their 2023-24 programme data: 4,000 tribal farmers from Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Odisha engaged in conservation, seed production, and upscaling of worthy landraces through seed saver groups. In 2024-25 this expanded to 3,552 farmers from 75 villages across 10 clusters in Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Odisha. The seed saver programme specifically targets the diversity of traditional varieties that industrial agriculture has eroded — keeping tribal farmers as custodians of agrobiodiversity that has national and global significance.

BAIF's presence in Odisha connects directly to JaBaSu's Agriculture & Markets sector. Their watershed, Wadi, and seed saver models are applicable in KBK's tribal districts. Their eDost digital extension platform — 200,000 farmers, 141 agents, 65 modules — is a model for digital agricultural advisory that Odisha NGOs can adapt.

The Livestock Genetics Legacy

BAIF has bred over 5 million cattle and buffaloes, generating milk worth Rs 17,500 crores annually. In September 2024, Tata Chemicals and BAIF signed an MOU for collaboration on rural livelihoods and regenerative agriculture — a signal that BAIF's institutional credibility now attracts corporate partnerships of the kind that most civil society organisations cannot access.

Contact and Further Reading

Website: baif.org.in | **BISLD (field implementation arm):** Urali Kanchan, Pune

Key evidence:

- BAIF website: baif.org.in — live cumulative impact counters, 2024-25 Annual Report
- Grokikipedia: BAIF Development Research Foundation — comprehensive institutional history with sourced citations
- CSRBox BAIF profile: 81 million trees, 728 watersheds, 3.5 lakh hectares, livestock milk value
- Wikipedia: BAIF Development Research Foundation — founding history and Wadi model origins

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