



## A Boat, A Bridge, and a Tradition of Collective Efforts

Every monsoon, Bastwad village in Kolhapur faces the same nightmare. Wedged between a river on one side and a lake on the other, the community is at the mercy of floodwaters that rise each year. Their suffering is made worse by unplanned infrastructure projects and poor inter-state coordination. But Bastwad did not wait for help. Years ago, through collective efforts, the village secured a community boat from the Zilla Parishad. That boat became more than a vessel - it became the village's only lifeline during floods. Over time, the responsibility of maintaining it fell to a group of community emergency responders: young swimmers, Anganwadi & ASHA workers, and youth groups.

What has emerged is remarkable. Every year before the monsoon, the entire community now gathers - cutting across religion and caste - to worship the boat together. It is a new tradition born of resilience, solidarity, and survival.

This year, when the boat needed urgent repairs, the community once again led the way. They pooled almost **30% of the cost themselves** and **HAI** supported for the remaining amount. In just **13 days**, they completed the entire process - welding, painting, and making repairs themselves. What could have been delayed for months was resolved swiftly and cost-effectively by the community itself.

And this is not an isolated act. The same group has already secured a **new bridge through collective efforts**, and has been at the forefront of promoting interstate flood management. Their persistent efforts bore fruit this year: improved coordination meant that for the first time in years, floodwaters did not enter most of the houses.

This is the impact of the Saarathi approach, championed by **HAI** in India. Aid is now:

- **Community-led:** The people of Bastwad identify their own priorities and act on them.
- **Rapid:** From decisions to implementation, the boat repairs were completed in less than two weeks.
- **Cost-effective:** With pooled contributions and collective management, every rupee created an outsized impact.

The story of Bastwad is not just about a repaired boat. It is about a community reclaiming power over its own safety, turning tradition into resilience, and proving that when survivors lead, disasters don't have to end in tragedy.

