Raah FOUNDATION

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ROOTED IN NATURE

GROWING IN RESILIENCE



WHERE THE LIGHT BEGINS

Every diya we light this Diwali began as a handful of soil. Clay becomes the lamp, the lamp holds the flame, and the flame lights a home. It is a small reminder of how much of what we celebrate and depend on—begins with the earth beneath our feet. Our water, food and forests depend on healthy soil. That is what we mean by rootedness, and it is the thread running through this month's newsletter.

This year, our field teams across the northern Western Ghats have seen that thread begin to fray. The greens we expect to see in October—the deep green of paddy and the glossy leaves on the hill slopes—have been slipping into yellow and brown weeks ahead of schedule. Paddy that should still be growing looks straw-coloured and brittle, while leaves curl in the heat. The landscape is changing its palette early, and it is telling us something.

A SEASON THAT TURNED EARLY

The reasons extend beyond the fields. El Niño conditions weakened this year's monsoon, leaving Maharashtra with a rainfall deficit of roughly 19%. In Palghar, the damage was compounded by the timing of the rainfall. A prolonged dry spell during August and September depleted soil moisture, and the dry season arrived well before it was expected.

Across the villages of Jawhar and Dahanu, including hamlets such as Perabhpada, Nampada, Khobala, Nirgudpada and Patharpada, the same story emerges. In a normal year, open wells and village water sources continue to provide enough drinking water through September and October. This year, water levels began to fall sharply in early August. Women now walk long distances to distant streams and dried creek beds just to fill their pots.

The monsoon also paused for 15 to 20 days while the paddy was flowering and its grains were filling—a particularly sensitive stage in the crop's development. Where there should have been full, heavy panicles, our teams found light, brittle heads with poorly filled or empty grains. Pigeon pea, black gram, finger millet and little millet suffered too. Across a district with about 78,000 hectares under paddy cultivation, large stretches dried out before the crop matured.

Even the soil has changed. In a good year, enough moisture remains to prepare for the winter crop. This year, the topsoil is dust-dry. On 14 October 2026, the state government added Jawhar, Mokhada and Talasari to its list of drought-affected areas. Dahanu and Vikramgad are facing similar conditions. These additions follow the Maharashtra government's initial announcement identifying 265 talukas as severely drought-affected.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR COMMUNITIES

- **Palghar** is where our field teams are seeing some of the clearest signs of distress, but these pressures extend beyond district borders. Families who have lost their monsoon harvest now face an uncertain winter cropping season, rising debt and the possibility of leaving home in search of work.
- In **Nashik** and **Ahilyanagar,** where drought was declared earlier, rain-fed farms and village water sources are already under strain. Households face a lean season that has arrived early and may last longer than usual.
- In **Raigad**, streams drying early and parched hill soils put both farming and forest-based livelihoods at risk. In Mumbai, the effects are felt through pressure on water catchments and the arrival of families whose villages can no longer sustain their livelihoods.



KEEPING THE ROOTS ALIVE

Raah's work begins with one belief: resilience starts underground. Our teams continue to work on groundwater recharge, watershed development, agroforestry and regenerative farming so that soil retain moisture for longer and communities are better able to withstand an uncertain monsoon.

Our field assessments are helping us identify immediate priorities: water tankers for remote hamlets such as Khobala and Nirgudpada; support with crop-loss surveys to help eligible farmers access government relief and loan restructuring; and monitoring water availability in local dams to help protect standing crops.

For new plantations, shade, staking, protective rings and morning irrigation can help young plants survive. Access to work under MGNREGA can also help families earn an income while remaining in their villages.

A diya needs oil and a steady base to keep burning. Our communities, too, need secure foundations: healthy soil, reliable water and livelihoods that can withstand difficult seasons.

This Diwali, we invite our partners, donors, volunteers and friends to stand with us—through support, collaboration or simply by sharing this story. Together, we can help communities protect what sustains them and nurture the return of green.

Wishing you a bright, grounded and hopeful Diwali, and a joyful month ahead.

