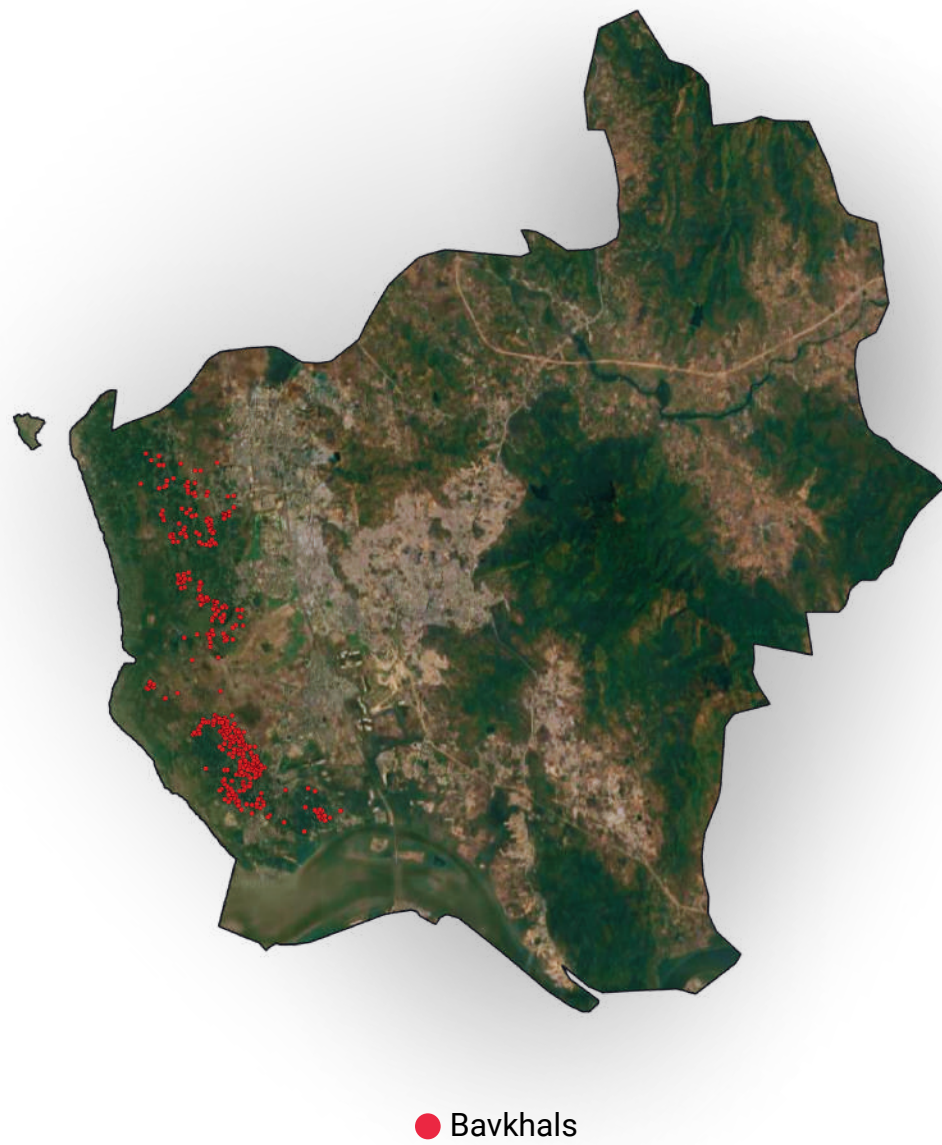




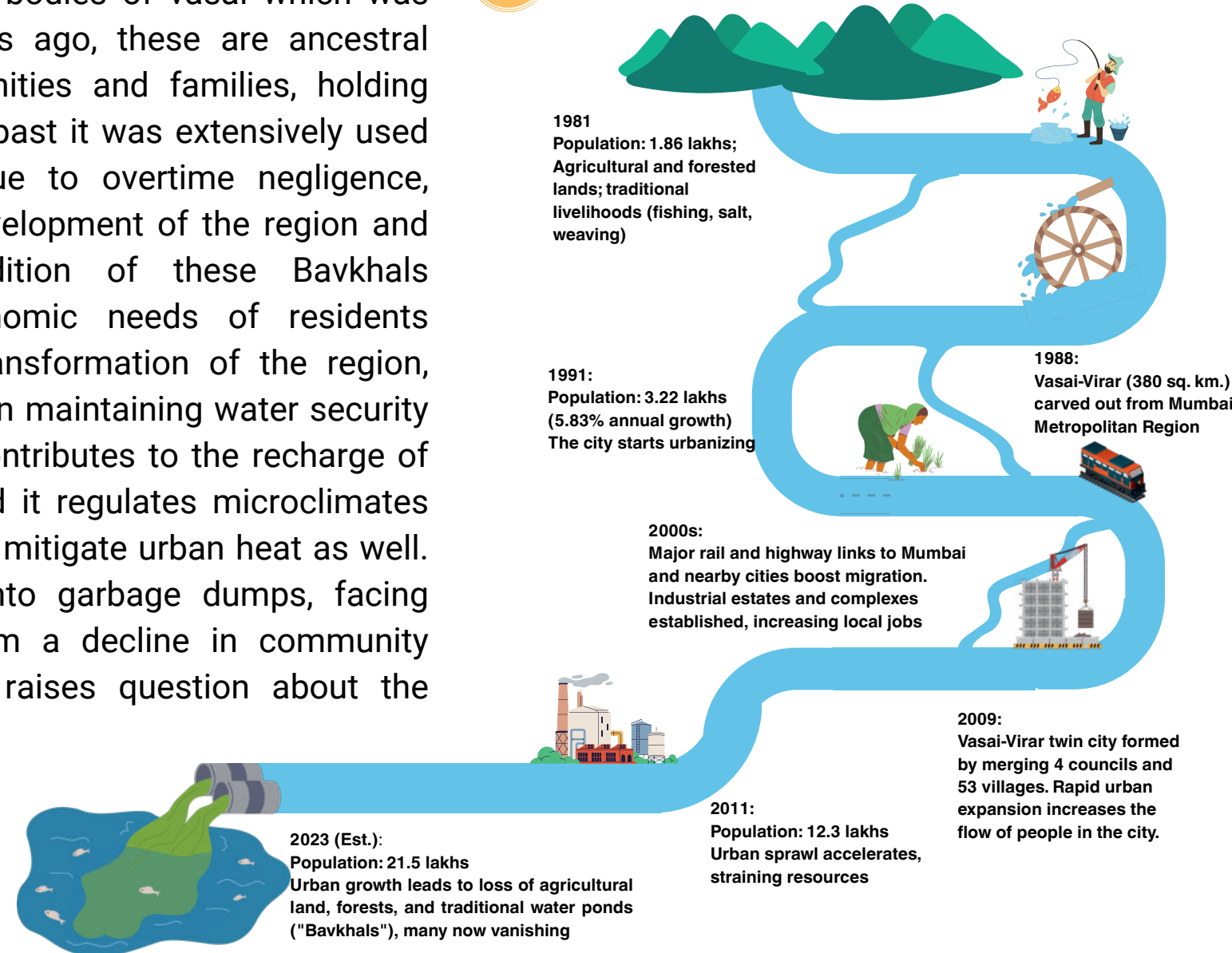
BAVKHALS: Vasai's 200-Year Water Legacy Under Threat



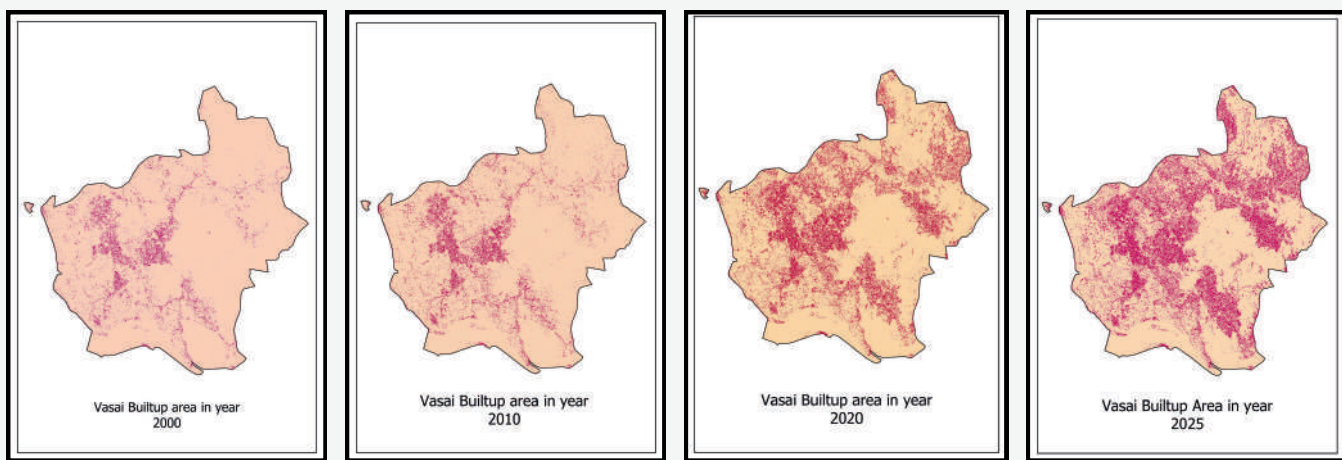
● Bakhals

Bavkhals are the traditional water bodies of Vasai which was constructed more than 200 years ago, these are ancestral resource, owned among communities and families, holding immense cultural heritage. In the past it was extensively used for irrigation and fishing but due to overtime negligence, Unchecked urbanization, rapid development of the region and increased population the condition of these Bavkhals deteriorated. As the socio-economic needs of residents changed gradually the spatial transformation of the region, played down the role of Bavkhals in maintaining water security for Vasai-Virar. These Bavkhals contributes to the recharge of groundwater, flood mitigation, and it regulates microclimates which can act as cooling zones to mitigate urban heat as well. But Bavkhals are now turning into garbage dumps, facing encroachment, and suffering from a decline in community care/attention. This degradation raises question about the water security in the region.

Vasai-Virar from 1981 to Present



Vasai-Virar's Built-up area from 2000 to 2025



The maps reveal a striking spatial transformation within the Vasai-Virar City Municipal Corporation (VVMC) boundary: from 2000 to 2025, built-up areas have expanded by a staggering 90.63%. This rapid urbanization is mirrored by a dramatic population surge rising approximately 182% from 2001 to the present, with current estimates nearing 1.8 million residents. The shift is fueled by migration seeking affordable housing and a booming real estate market. The city transformed from a landscape of traditional fishing, agriculture, and salt pans into a densely urbanized suburb.

Biodiversity Conservation

Bavkhals play a vital role in biodiversity conservation by providing habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species, supporting native vegetation, and maintaining microclimates. They help sustain ecosystem balance by recharging groundwater, reducing soil erosion, and supporting agricultural diversity, especially in coastal villages. Their restoration also enhances water availability and ecological resilience.



Tamarind, Mango, Fresh Mangrove, Fishtail Palm, Banara Trees



India Pond Heron, Little Egret, Spotbill, Kingfisher etc

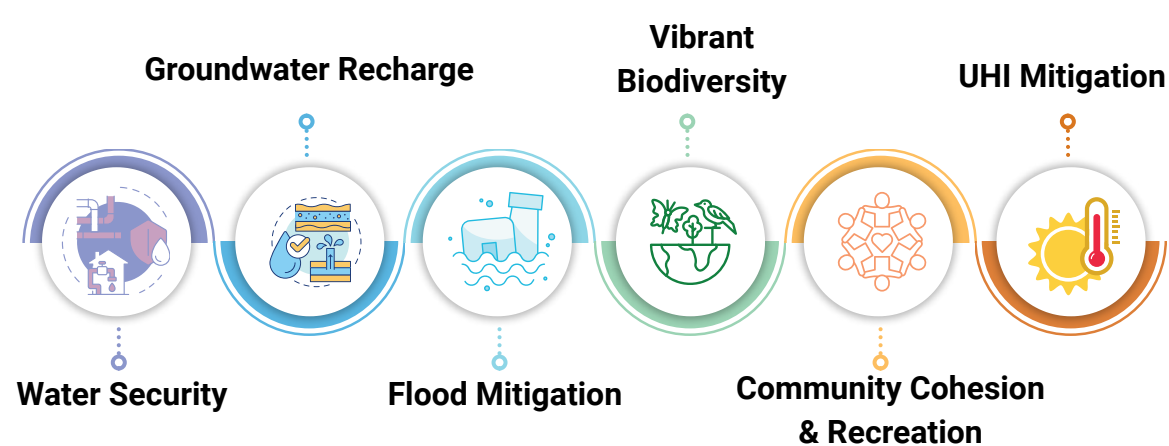


Catfish, Selone, Rohu, Katla

Hydrogeology of Vasai

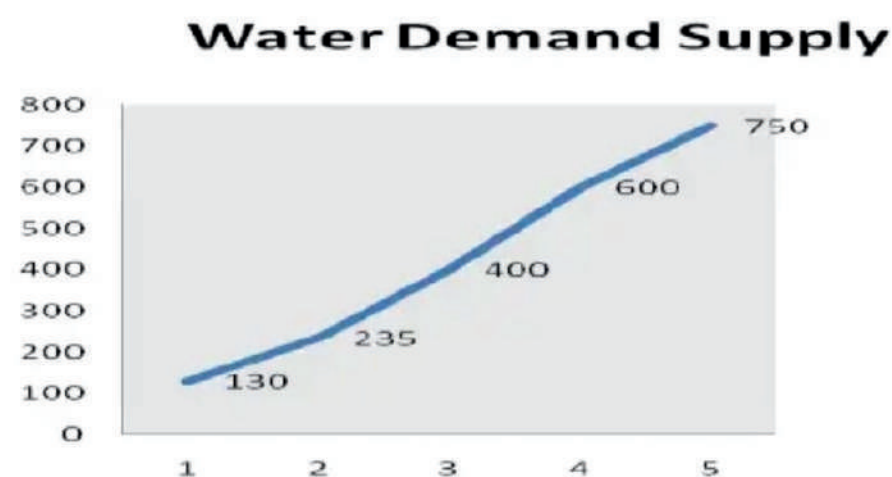
Soil Type	Coastal : Calcareous soils	Plains: Black soils	Hilly region: Clayey/Loamy soil
Rock Type	Predominantly basalt (Deccan Traps)	Bauxite in eastern hills	Coastal Region: alluvium
Aquifer type	Weathered Basalt		

Why are Bavkhal important to Vasai

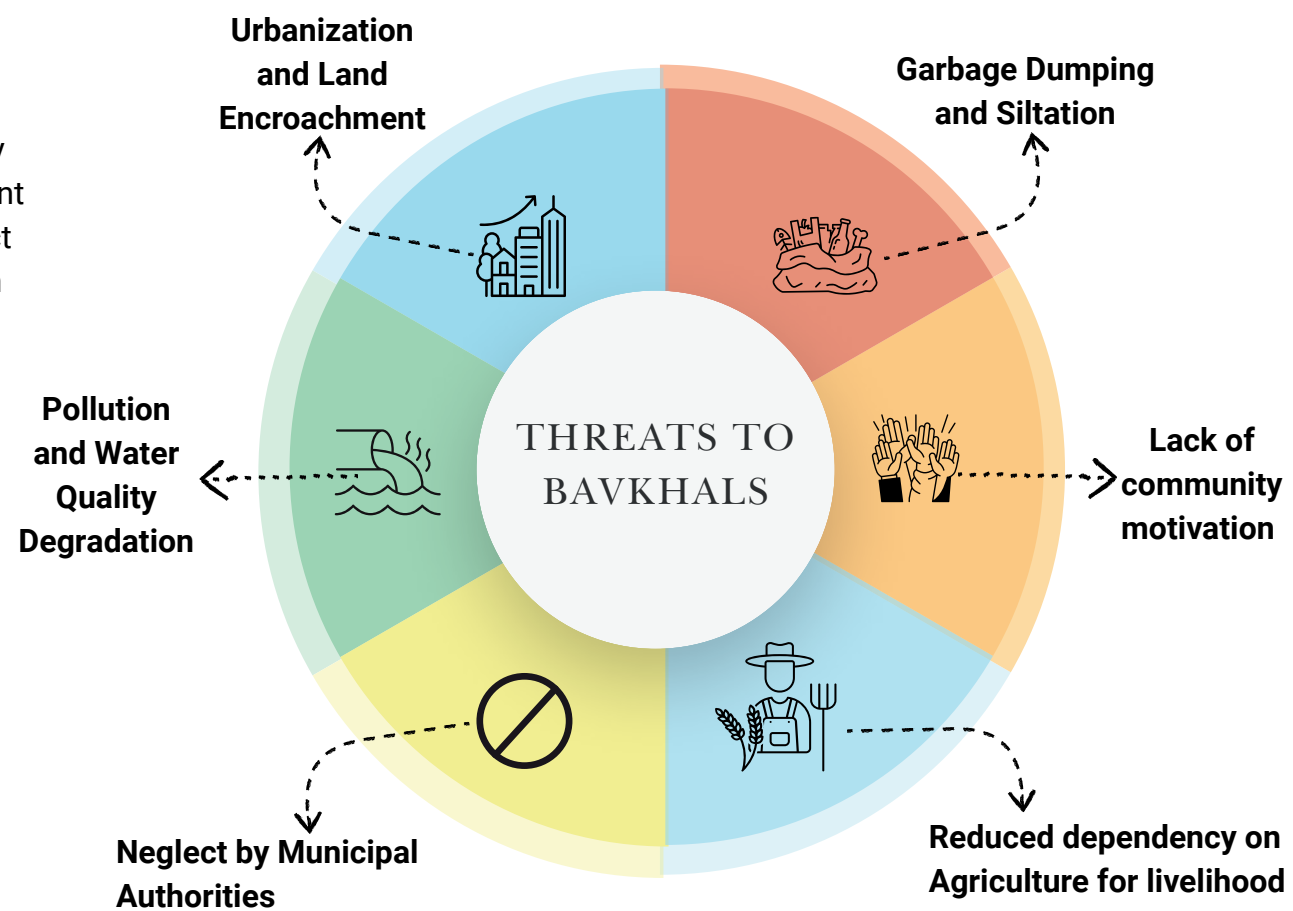


Current water scenario

Vasai-Virar's current water supply comes from local sources like Pelhar Dam, Valiv Water Scheme, and the Vaitarna pipeline, along with the Surya Regional Water Supply Scheme. Despite these, there is a current shortfall of over 130 MLD. The municipal tap water supply and service level benchmarking combined has only reached to 66.3% signaling a significant proportion of residents are unlinked. They are mostly dependent upon borewells to extract groundwater for drinking purpose. The Bavkhals are critical shallow aquifers which help in recharging the borewells and maintaining its salinity.



Source: Tandon & Associates- Vasai-Virar City Development Plan under scheme of UID in Setallite towns



Socio-cultural significance

Bavkhals hold deep socio-cultural significance in the Vasai-Virar region, serving as ancestral resources collectively owned by families and communities. While primarily used for irrigation and groundwater recharge, they also occasionally become focal points for community events and gatherings, strengthening local bonds and traditions. People have shared their childhood experiences including playing around bavkhals, swimming in it to religious activities like Rosary, Cribs during christmas.



Water Festival

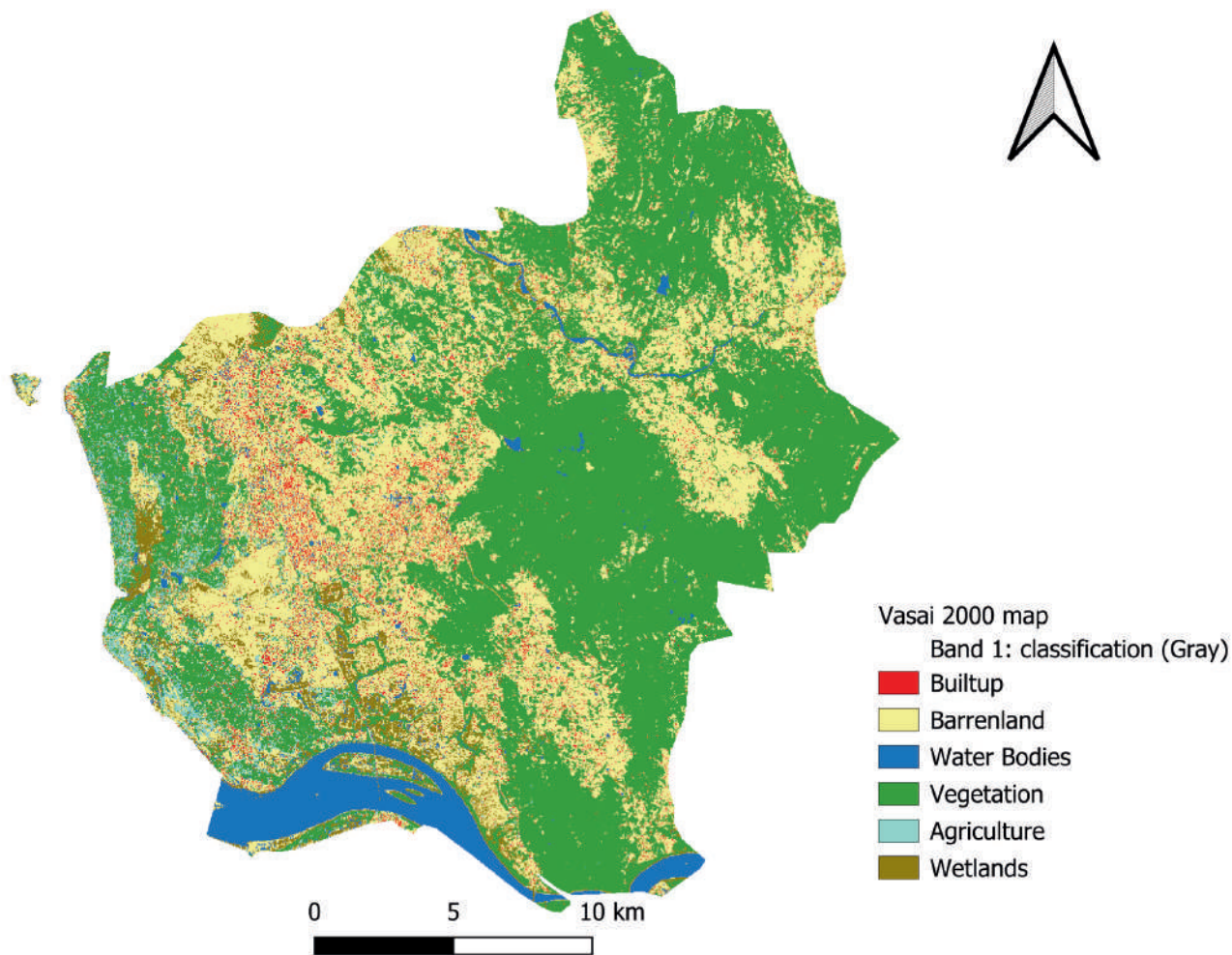


Community Gathering

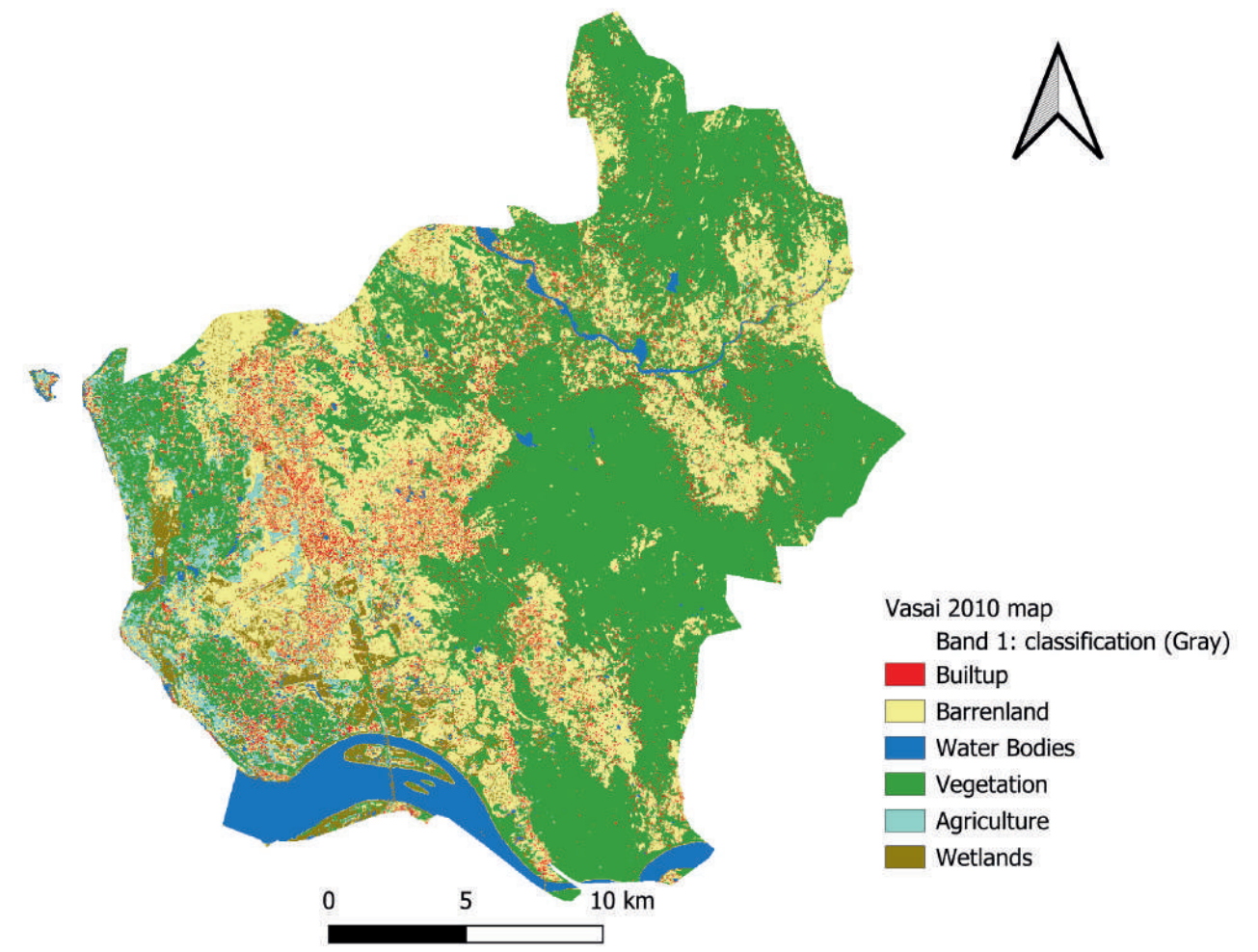
LULC (Land Use Land Cover) Classification of Vasai from 2000 to 2025

The Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) changes within the Vasai-Virar municipal administrative boundary from 2000 to 2025, derived from LULC classification using LANDSAT 5 (for 2000 and 2010) and LANDSAT 8 (for 2020 and 2025) imagery. The analysis focuses on changes in Built-up area, Barrenland, Water Bodies, Vegetation, Agricultural cover, and Wetlands. LULC classification is key for monitoring land changes, assessing urbanization impacts, and enabling informed decisions for sustainable city development. This LULC analysis unequivocally highlights rapid urbanization as the dominant force shaping the landscape of Vasai-Virar over the past quarter-century.

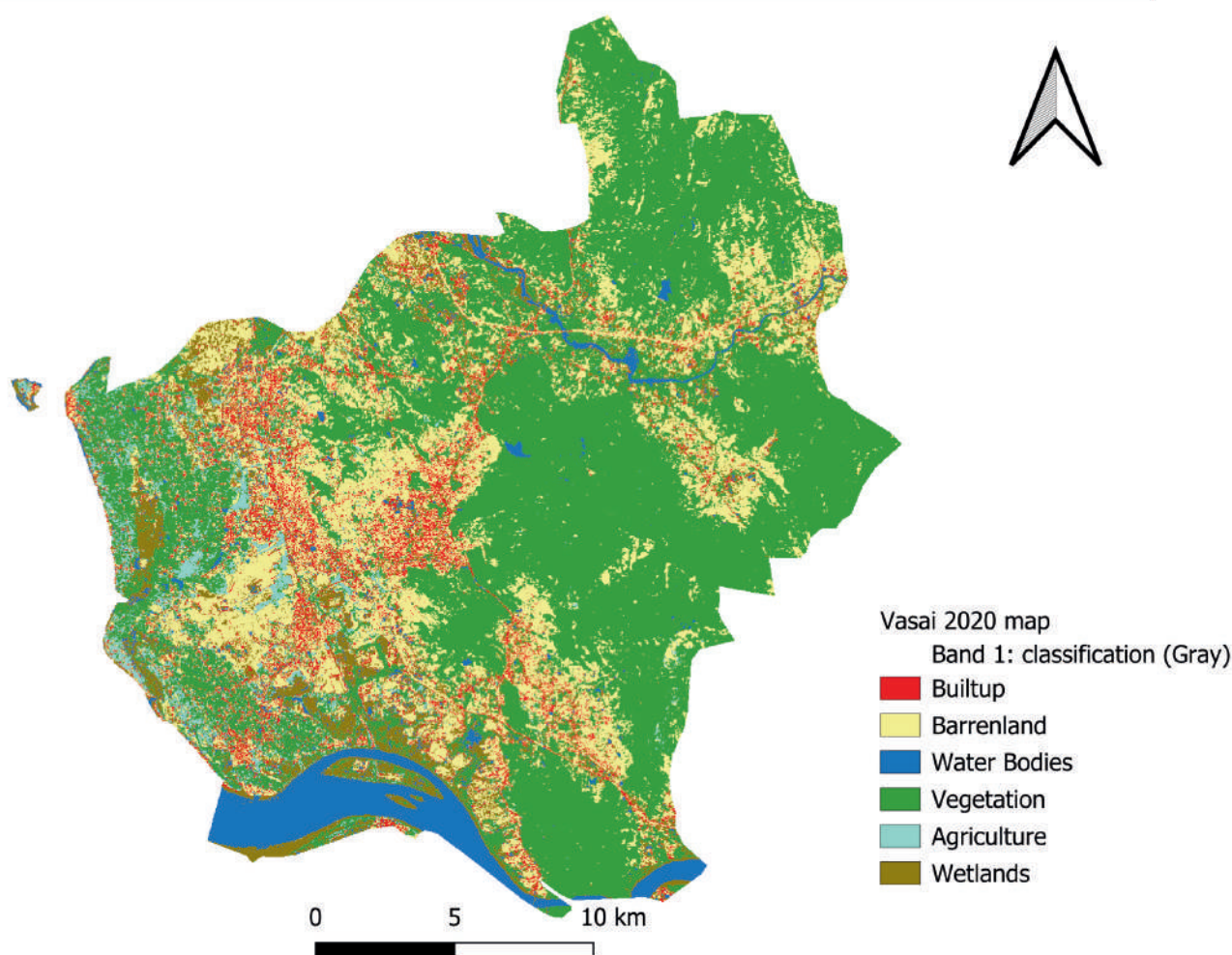
Vasai LULC classification for the year 2000



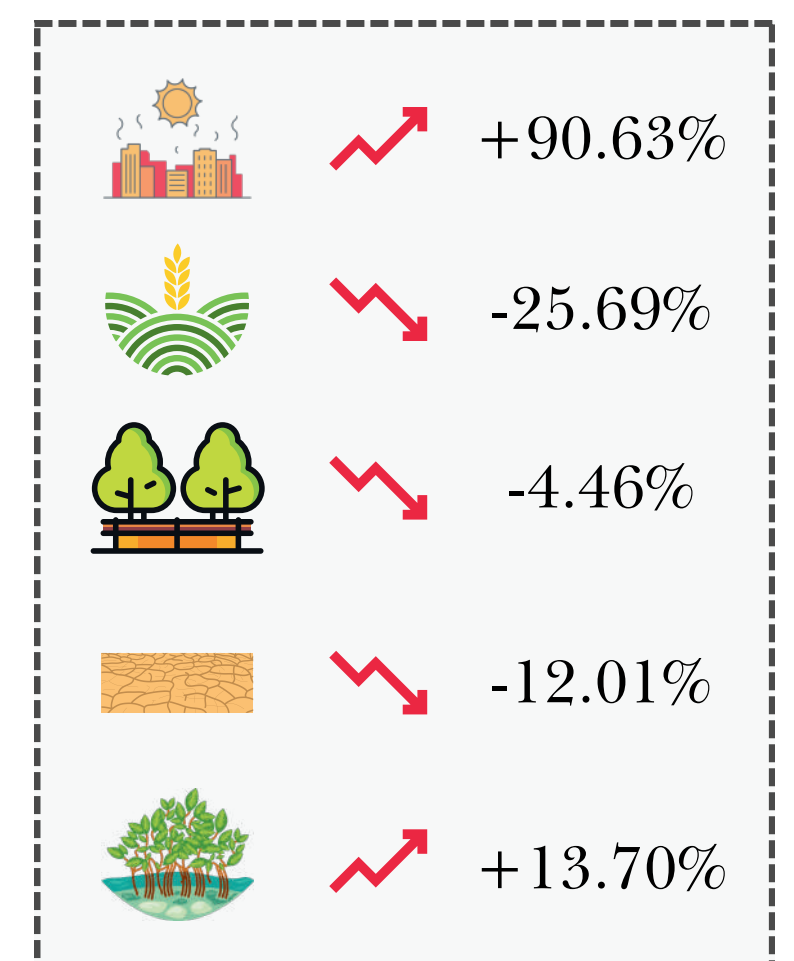
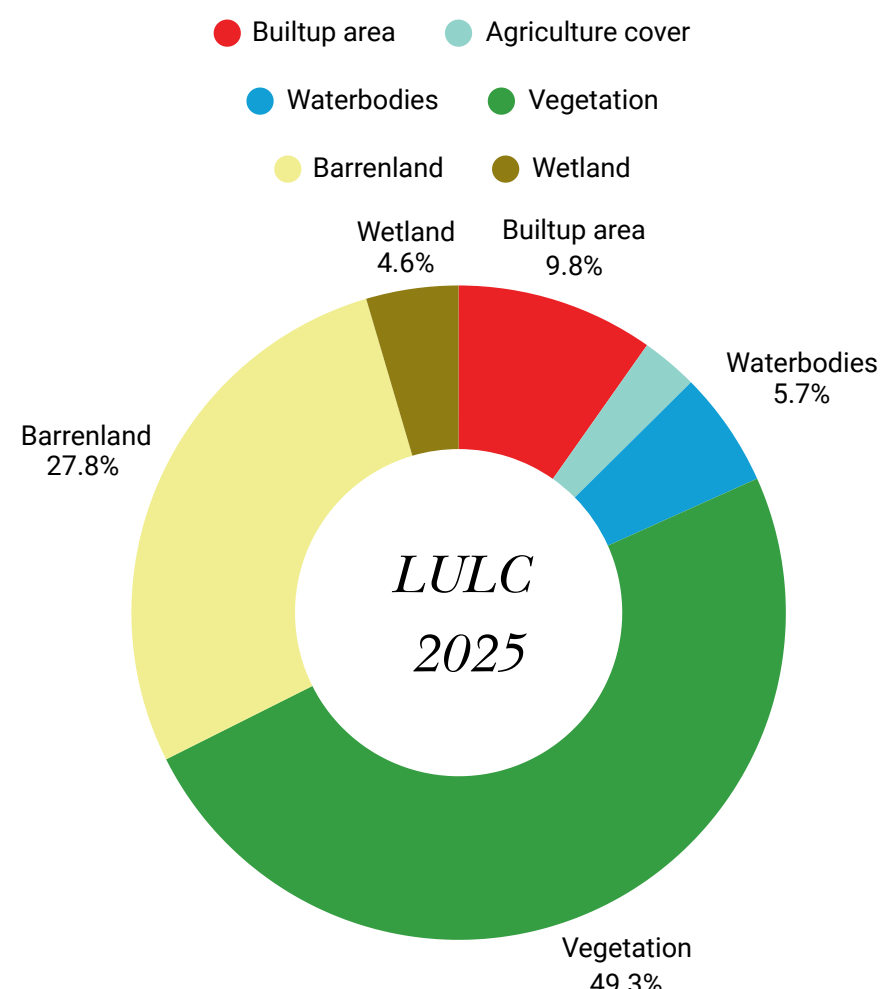
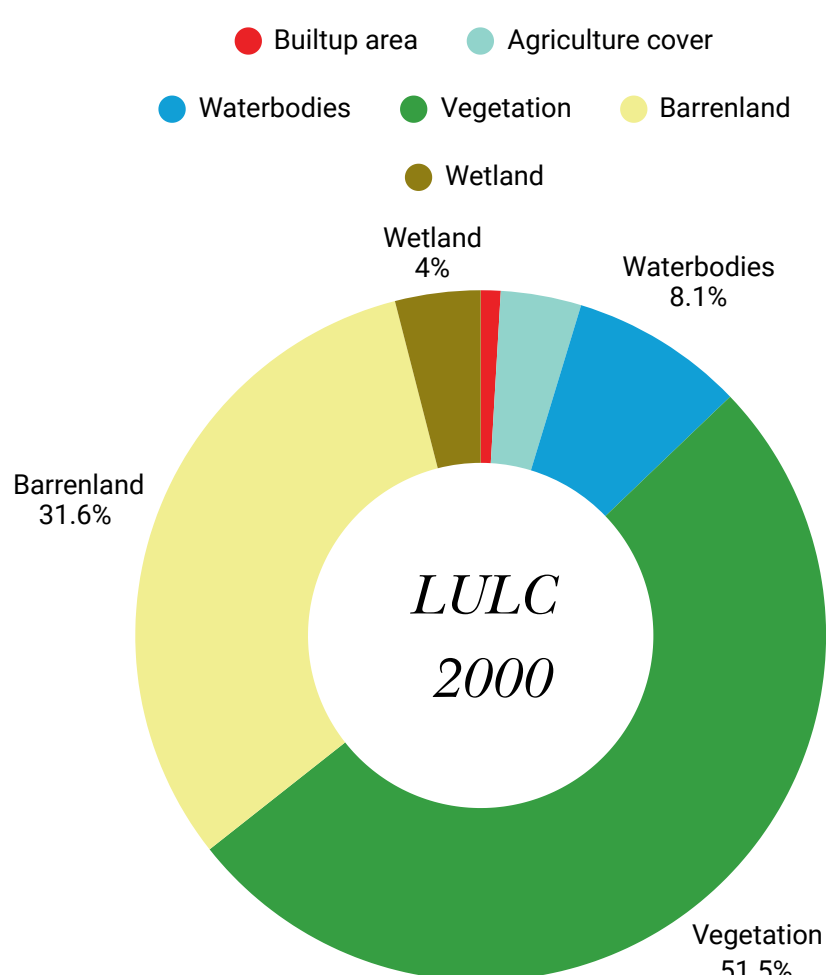
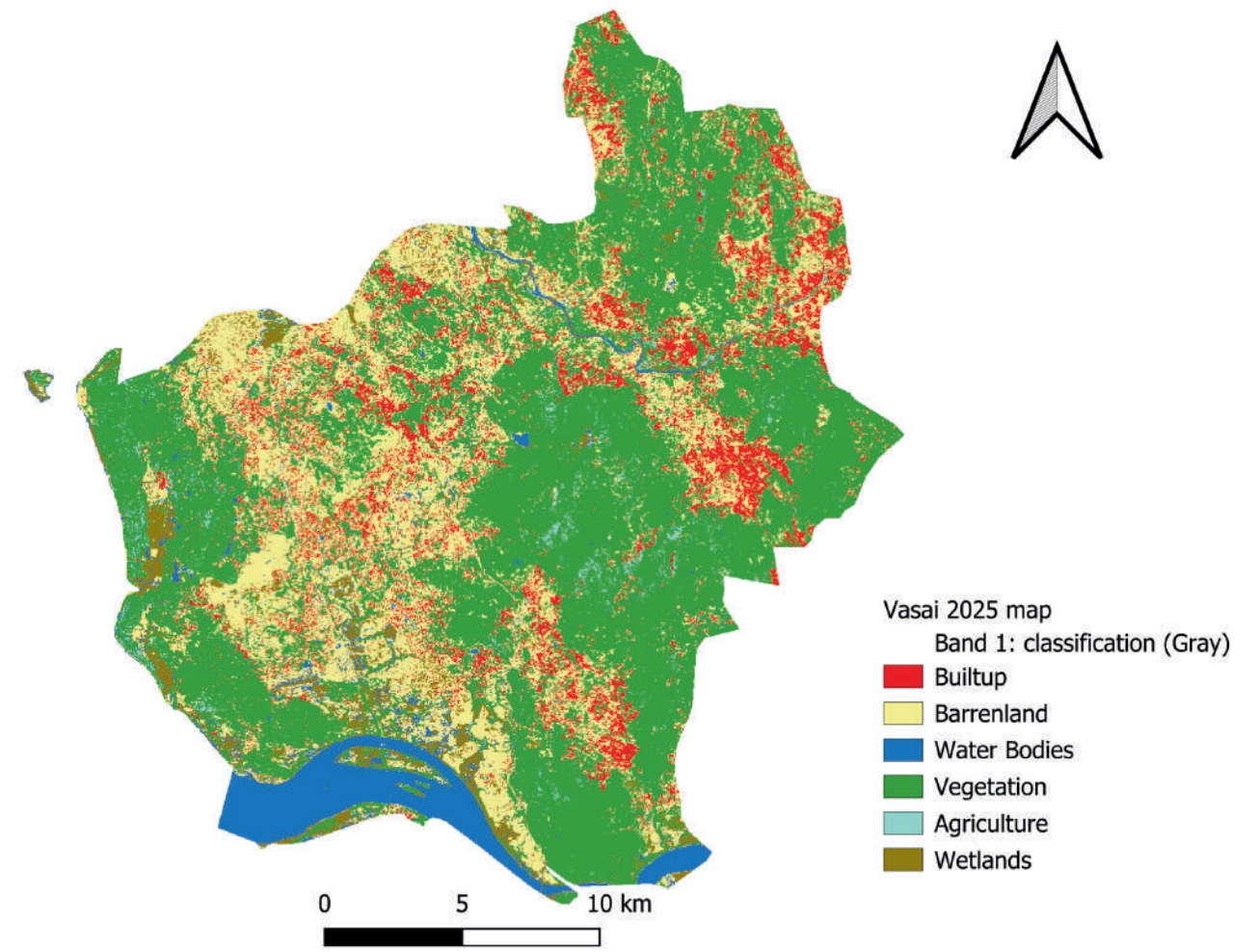
Vasai LULC classification for the year 2010



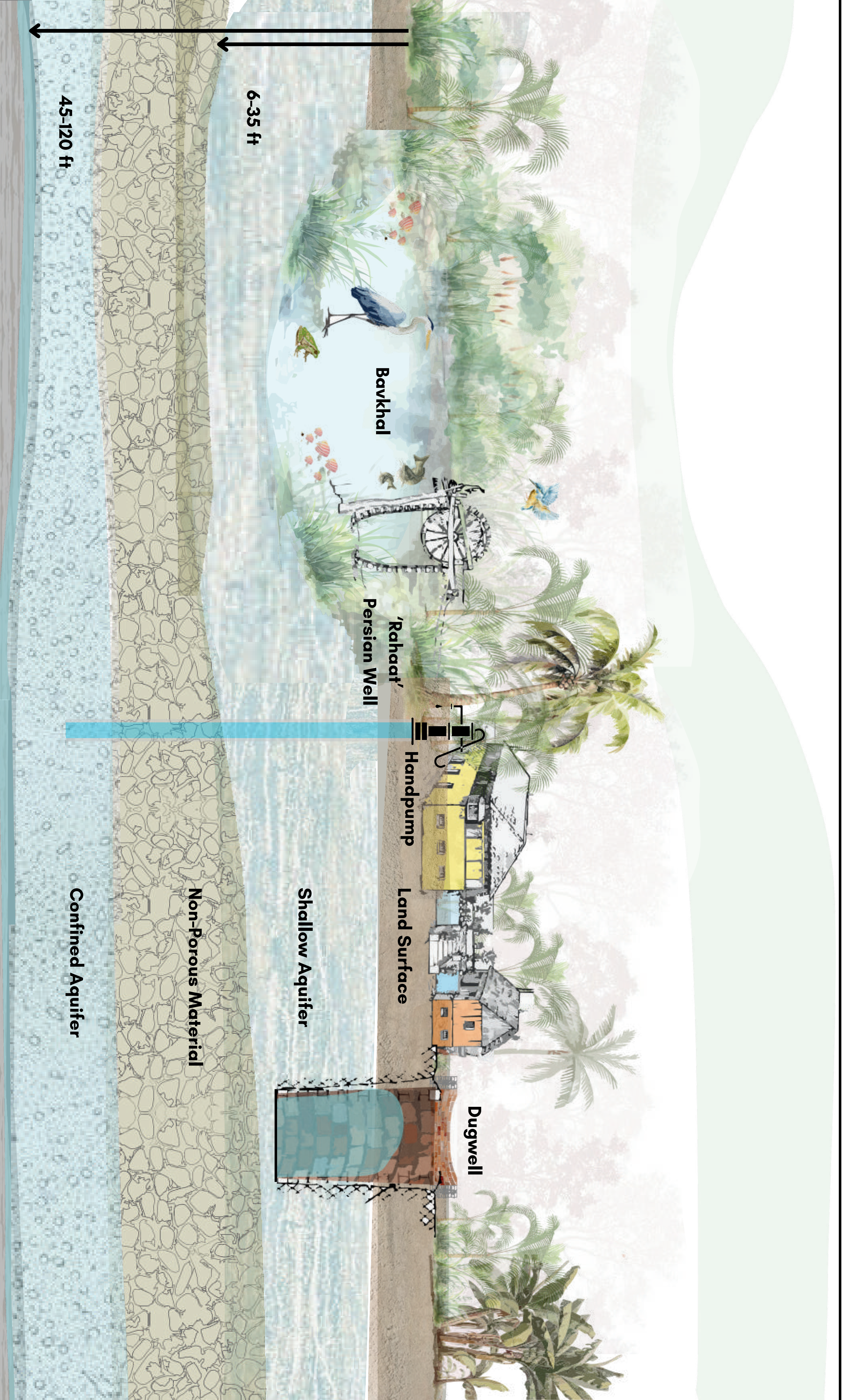
Vasai LULC classification for the year 2020



Vasai LULC classification for the year 2025



Cross-Section Sketch: Bavkhal as critical “shallow aquifers” contributing to the Groundwater flow in Vasai





Community-led revival efforts and socio-cultural conservation of Bavkhals



“ This bavkhal will benefit everyone in this village. If this remains clean, our drinking water will also be clean. We have invested in the digging and made it bigger so that we do not face water shortages unlike other villages. ”
-Janet Dias, Papdy Village

 Papdy Village, Khalbhat, Vasai

 Participant: Jenet Dias, 20 families are dependent (100+ members)

 Fishing, water festivals, groundwater recharge, maintaining the level of salinity in drinking water

Janet Dias, 60, a resident of Papdy Village, Vasai. She belongs to one of 20 families who collectively own for two historic bavkhals. Janet carries forward her family's deep-rooted agricultural legacy. Her father and grandfather once depended on these bavkhals and the traditional Baawdi (Persian Wheel, powered by oxen) to irrigate farmlands during Vasai's agrarian past. Janet shared how these bavkhals served as "shared water

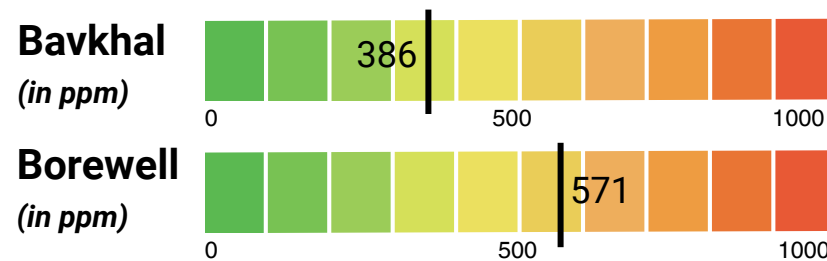
resources" but are no longer used with the advent of motorized borewells and dugwells. With the privatization of water sources for irrigation and drinking water, the bavkhals were left in a state of disuse. disuse for direct irrigation and drinking water. Yet Janet and her family understand that these ponds still play a vital role in groundwater recharge and maintaining water quality – crucial for the village's health and sustainability.

Community Celebrations around Bavkhal

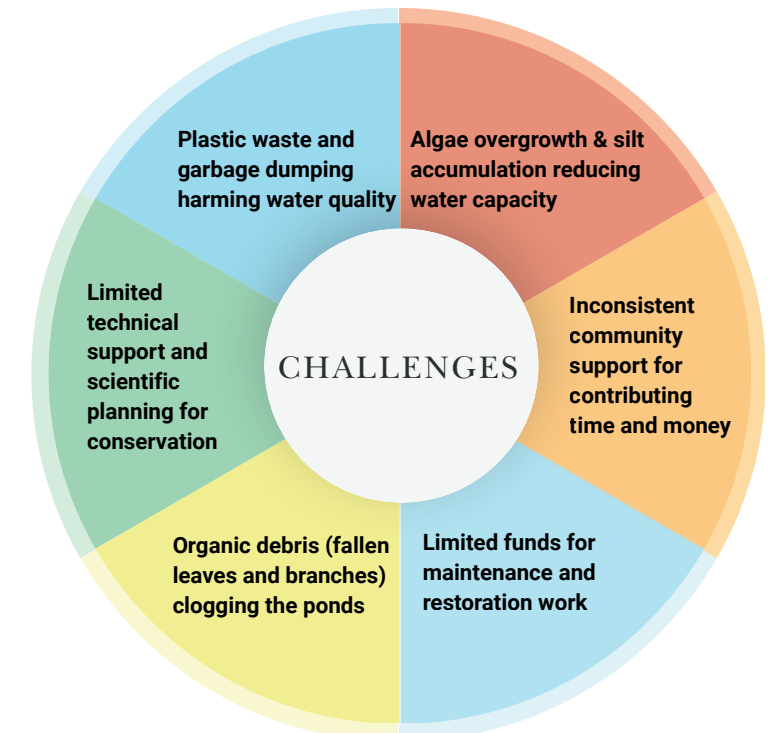


The local community of Papdy come down to the Bavkhal to celebrate St John's Fest, Christmas and other festivities and organize swimming competitions for newly-wed grooms, kids and others.

Water Quality Testing (10/06/2025)



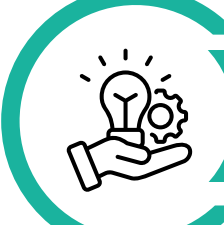


Current Challenges to Bavkhal Conservation



Community's Restoration Efforts

- Formation of Action Committee comprising 10 members at the village level who to oversee maintenance and mobilize funds.
- Regular discussions in meetings to tackle greywater discharge and garbage dumping.
- Installation of a public notice board on anti-littering, with penalty warnings.
- Tree plantation drives, featuring the planting of Newar (Fresh Water mangroves), Fishtel, and Tamarind, chosen to prevent soil erosion.
- Acting on jury recommendations to stop garbage dumping and fortify pond edges with branches and wood for natural protection and aesthetic appeal.
- Introduction of fish species like selone, katla, and rohu to naturally maintain water quality and support local livelihoods.

Why "My Bavkhal, Healthy Bavkhal" Matters

-  Technical support and scientific planning from AKAH India to restore and conserve the ponds
-  Practical solutions for algae control, silt removal, and debris management
-  Guidance on community-driven strategies to ensure regular upkeep

Safeguarding Nandwan's Bavkhal: A Community's Fight Against Flooding



Nandwan Village, Giriz, Vasai



Participant: Gilinita, 3 families are dependent (125 members)

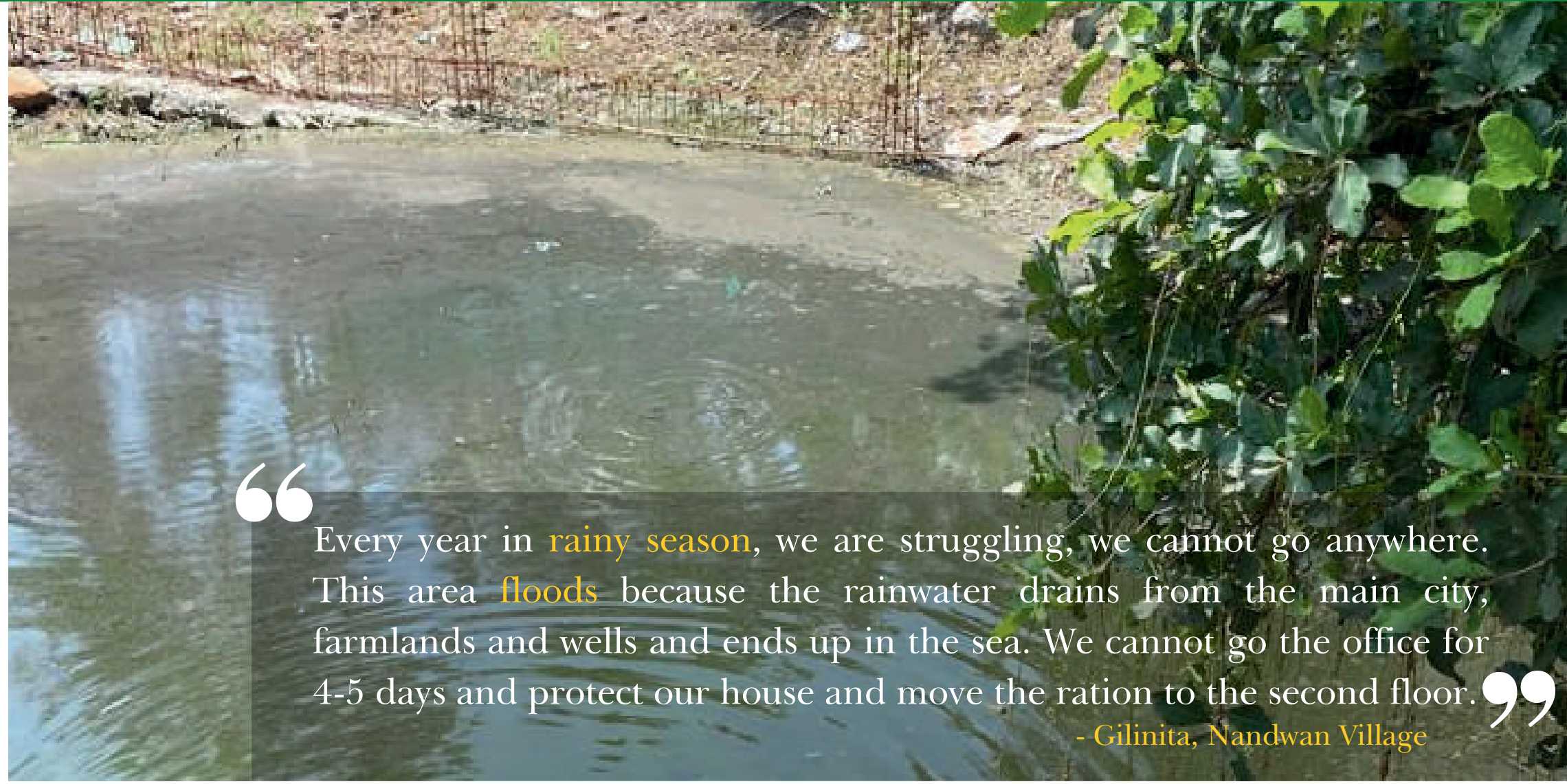


Urban Flood Mitigation, Groundwater Recharge, Community Gatherings, Leisure Activities

Bavkhals as Flood buffers



For Gilinita, the Bavkhal is more than a pond it is a vital flood buffer, a cooling oasis, and a symbol of community resilience.



“Every year in rainy season, we are struggling, we cannot go anywhere. This area floods because the rainwater drains from the main city, farmlands and wells and ends up in the sea. We cannot go the office for 4-5 days and protect our house and move the ration to the second floor.”
- Gilinita, Nandwan Village

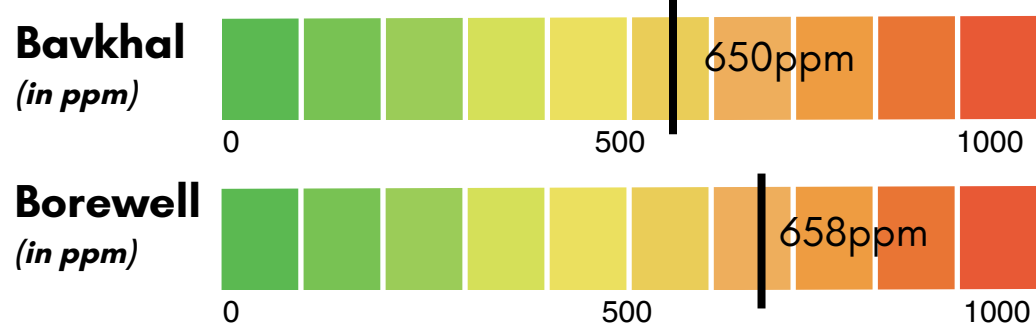
Gilinita, a school teacher and long-time resident of Nandwan hamlet in Giriz village, has become a passionate advocate for conserving her community's Bavkhal. Living in the coastal belt of Vasai, she and her neighbors – about 47–48 families, including three key families who own and maintain the Bavkhal – face repeated hardships every monsoon.

Due to the hamlet's low-lying coastal location, floodwaters pour in from the city across the railway tracks and from

nearby farmlands, inundating homes for days. Families are forced to move food supplies to higher floors and frequently lose 4–5 working days each monsoon season due to impassable roads and waterlogged houses.

Despite these hardships, Gilinita sees the Bavkhal not just as a relic of agricultural times but as an essential ecological buffer that helps manage urban flooding and cools the local microclimate.

Water Quality Testing (10/06/2025)



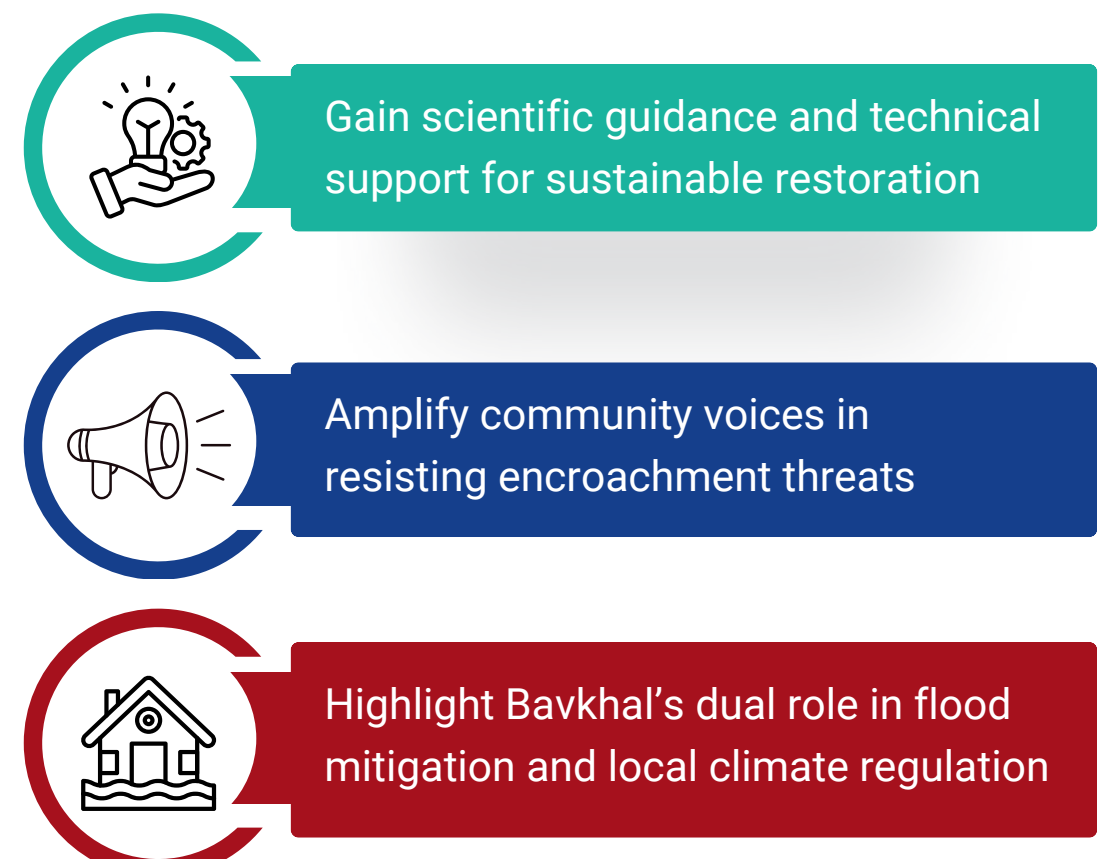
Current Challenges to Bavkhal Conservation



Community-Led Conservation So Far

- **Annual Desilting:** Deepen and desilt the bavkhal every year before the monsoon to maximize its water holding capacity – an effective way to reduce flood levels in the settlement.
- **Seasonal Clean-Up Drives:** Clean-ups are organized twice a year (pre-monsoon and in winter) to cover desilting, weeding, and structural maintenance.
- **Safety Fencing:** About 8–10 years ago, a metal barricade was installed around the Bavkhal to keep children safe and discourage misuse.
- **Sacred Space:** Beyond its ecological role, the Bavkhal now serves as a spiritual gathering place – for social and religious events.

Why “My Bavkhal, Healthy Bavkhal” Matters



Reimagining Resources: The Profound Innovation of Bavkhal Renewal



Waghmare Cross Village, Vasai



Participant: Alwyn, 3 families are dependent



Ensuring water security, Maintaining the level of salinity in the wells, Community Gatherings, Leisure Activities

The Bavkhal, a traditional pond, has historically been the heart of water security for six extended families living around it. This water body not only replenishes private wells but also supports home gardens, fruit trees, and daily household needs. Over time, neglect and silt accumulation severely reduced its capacity, worsening water scarcity – especially during the harsh summer months. By 2017, families faced a dire reality: wells dried up within minutes of pumping, recharge took days, and the Bavkhal itself turned into a dry pit by April each year – precisely when water was needed most.



“ We have transformed our Bavkhal through innovation, we moved beyond traditional methods, we used JCBs for deep desilting, implementing solar-powered systems for water oxygenation and CCTV for surveillance, and constantly exploring new solutions to integrate with our bavkhal. ”
-Allywn Hanso, Waghmare, Vasai

Memory-scapes

Alywn shared few photos taken by his parents where his family and the neighboring families could be seen bathing and playing in and around the bavkhal. He shares that a lot of memories are attached with this bavkhal and his entire childhood was spent around it. That's why he sees the bavkhal as the relic of the past, a heritage, that he wants to preserve.



Community Conservation Efforts



Solar Powered Filtration System



Desilting for deeper water storage capacity



Natural Fencing with tree branches



Plantation of a specific type of grass

Scenario Before Restoration

- Bavkhal used to dry up before April
- Wells used to get emptied in 10 mins that resulted in water scarcity
- Unable to draw water for gardening or irrigating private farmlands
- TDS ~800 (poor quality)
- Due to poor quality and less sunlight penetration, fish deaths were reported

Scenario After Restoration

- After desilting, it holds 6–10 ft of water even during summers
- Wells get recharged faster and sufficient water for drinking and gardening purposes
- TDS ~550–600 (safe & fresh)
- The solar filtration helped in balanced fish population, healthier ecosystem

Empowering the Next Generation of Youth for Conservation : The Story of Nambatwadi



“The conservation of our Bavkhals is a **communal undertaking**: it is the responsibility of our generation to raise awareness and foster community involvement, but ultimately, **the youth must take the initiative**, for the future of these cherished communal spaces rests with them, ensuring their legacy for generations to come”

- Rachel, Nambatwadi, Vasai



Nambatwadi, Remedy Village, Vasai



Participant: Rachel Miranda, 31 families are dependent (90 + members)

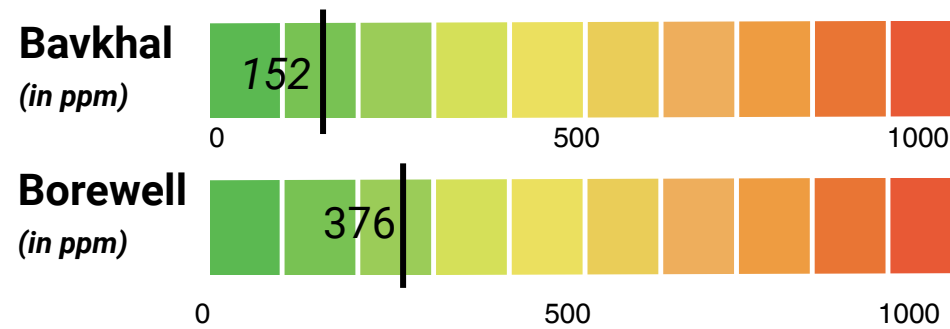


Water festivals, Community gatherings, Youth engagement, groundwater recharge.

Nambatwadi's community-owned Bavkhal serves 31 families comprising approximately 90 members, representing a traditional model of collective water resource management in Vasai. The water body historically functioned as a vital community hub, hosting annual May 1st rosary ceremonies, inter-parish cricket tournaments, and serving as a recreational space for children during holidays.

Rachel Miranda, a 25-year-old parish council member, emerged as the primary catalyst for restoration through the "My Bavkhal, Healthy Bavkhal" competition. As the sole village initiator, she organized community meetings and mobilized families around the principle that participation would compel collective action where none had existed previously.

Water Quality Testing (10/06/2025)



Current Challenges to Bavkhal Conservation



Youth-Led Transformation

Under 25-year-old Rachel Miranda's leadership, Nambatwadi's youth transformed their Bavkhal's water quality—152ppm TDS which demonstrates an excellent water quality. This transformation includes native species tree planting, cleaning and desilting of Bavkhal, collective action against hospital discharge, and regular maintenance and monitoring of Bavkhal. The Youth's of Nambatwadi transformed a neglected water body into a model of youth-led environmental stewardship, demonstrating how young leaders can unlock natural resources hidden potential.



31st March 2025



19th May 2025

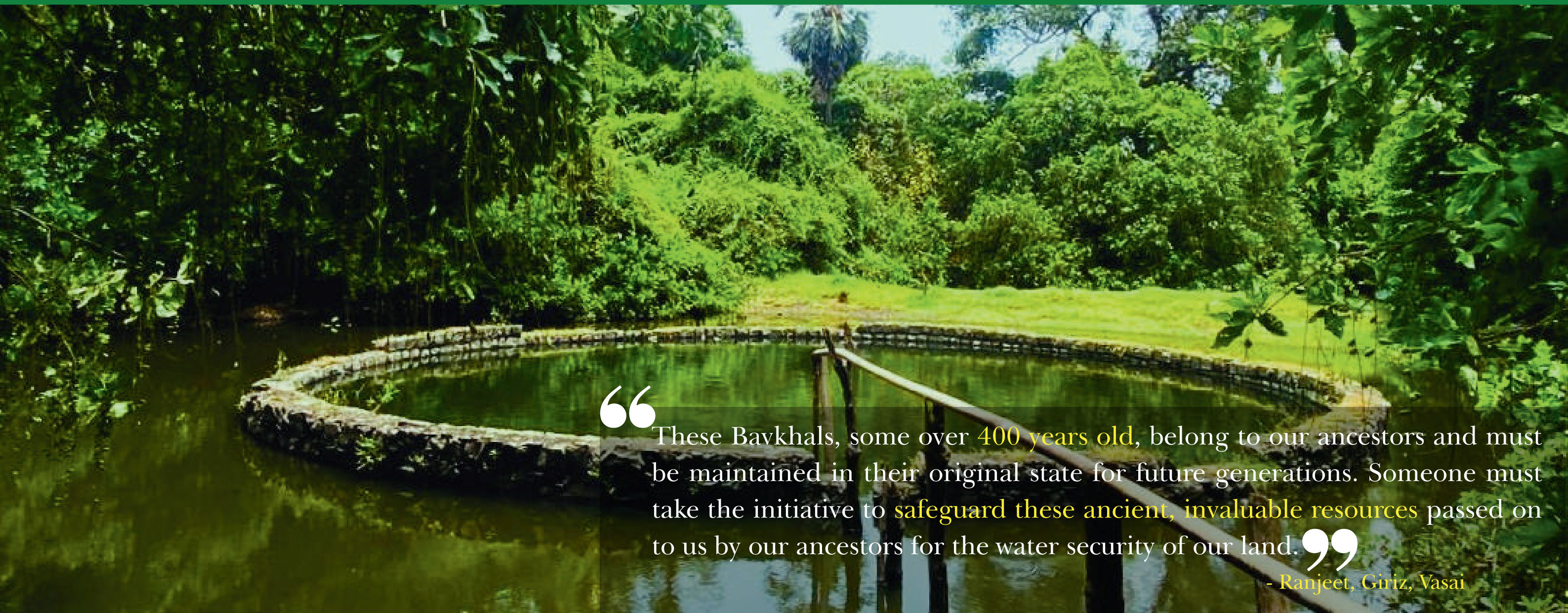


Plantation Drive on the banks of Bavkhal

Ongoing Conservation Efforts

- Community Contributions:** On an annual basis, ₹500–₹1000 per family for restoration and maintenance.
- Aquatic Life:** The community is dependent upon the bavkhal for personal consumption of fishes. The regular cleaning ensures the quality of fishes populating in the waterbody.
- Restoration Works:**
 - Began clearing bushes and trees.
 - Planted trees around the Bavkhal to stabilise the banks
- Future Conservation Plans:**
 - Solar purification system: Suggested by AKAHI to prevent algae growth and maintain water clarity – inspired by a site visit to Giriz Village's successful model.
 - Compound fencing: Initially planned concrete; after AKAHI's advice, considering a net fence as a cost-effective, eco-friendly alternative.

The Fight for Vasai's Water Heritage: Local Activism in Action



“These Bavkhals, some over 400 years old, belong to our ancestors and must be maintained in their original state for future generations. Someone must take the initiative to safeguard these ancient, invaluable resources passed on to us by our ancestors for the water security of our land.”
- Ranjeet, Giriz, Vasai

Sandor Village, Devtalav, Vasai

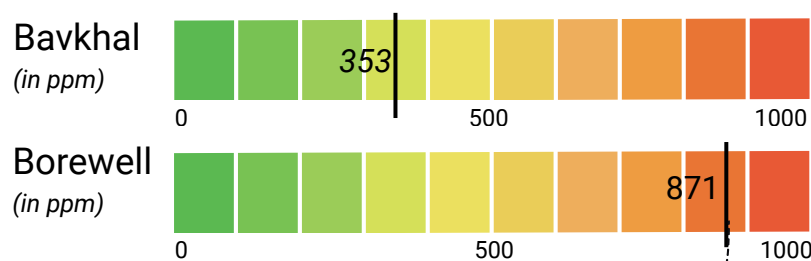
Participant: Mr. Ranjeet, Privately owned Bavkhal among with extended family.

Groundwater Recharge, Microclimate Zone, Fishing.

Mr. Ranjeet, a passionate activist from Vasai, is dedicated to preserving ancient water bodies known as 'Bavkhals', believing they are an ancestral legacy for future generations. His mission directly confronts real estate development, which poses a severe threat. He experiences illegal filling and encroachment of Bavkhals, with some reduced by as much as 70% to make way for garages and bungalows. A major concern is the misclassification of Bavkhals as "pottkharaba" (uncultivated land) in official Development Plans (DPs) by the VVCMC, enabling easy approval for construction on wetlands and mangroves.

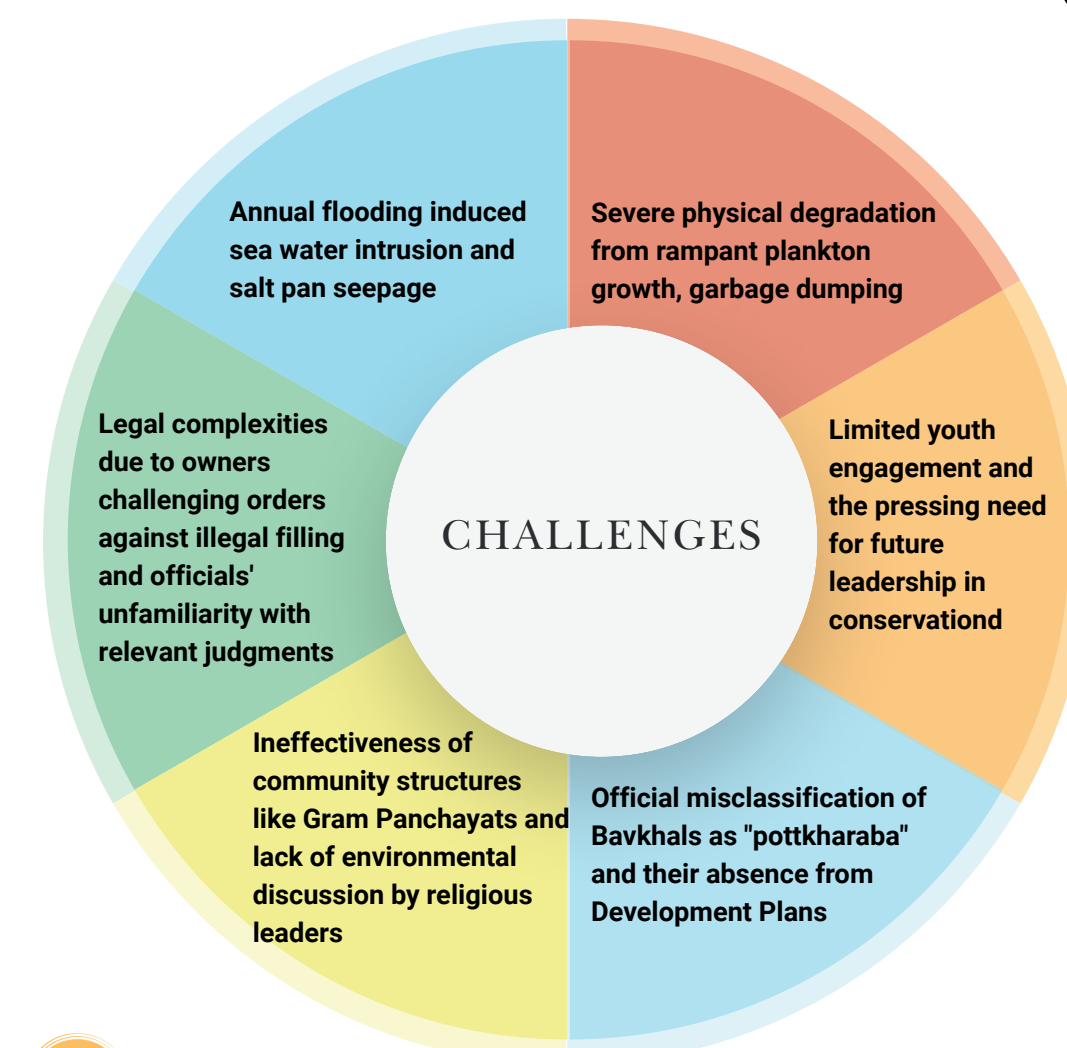
Ranjeet faces conflicted interests from his own family, battling over 40 members, including his brother and late father, who prioritize immediate monetary gain over long-term environmental consequences, such as selling ancestral lands to buy cars. The community exhibits a "disheartening lack of engagement," often oblivious to the ecological value, while traditional Gram Panchayats are ineffective. Even religious leaders, despite their influence, typically do not discuss environmental conservation in youth meetings. In response Mr. Ranjeet is often involved in advocacy, awareness and spreading consensus. For direct conservation of his Bavkhals, Ranjeet personally undertakes maintenance, cleaning plankton growth and removing garbage.

Water Quality Testing (10/06/2025)



The significantly lower TDS in the Bavkhal (353 ppm) versus the well (871 ppm) in Flood-prone Giriz village of Vasai demonstrates these traditional water bodies superior resilience against salt contamination. Bavkhals surface water characteristics and natural biological filtration processes provide better protection against flood induced salt pan seepage and saltwater intrusion compared to groundwater wells that directly tap into confined aquifers.

Current Challenges to Bavkhal Conservation



Mr. Ranjeet's vision

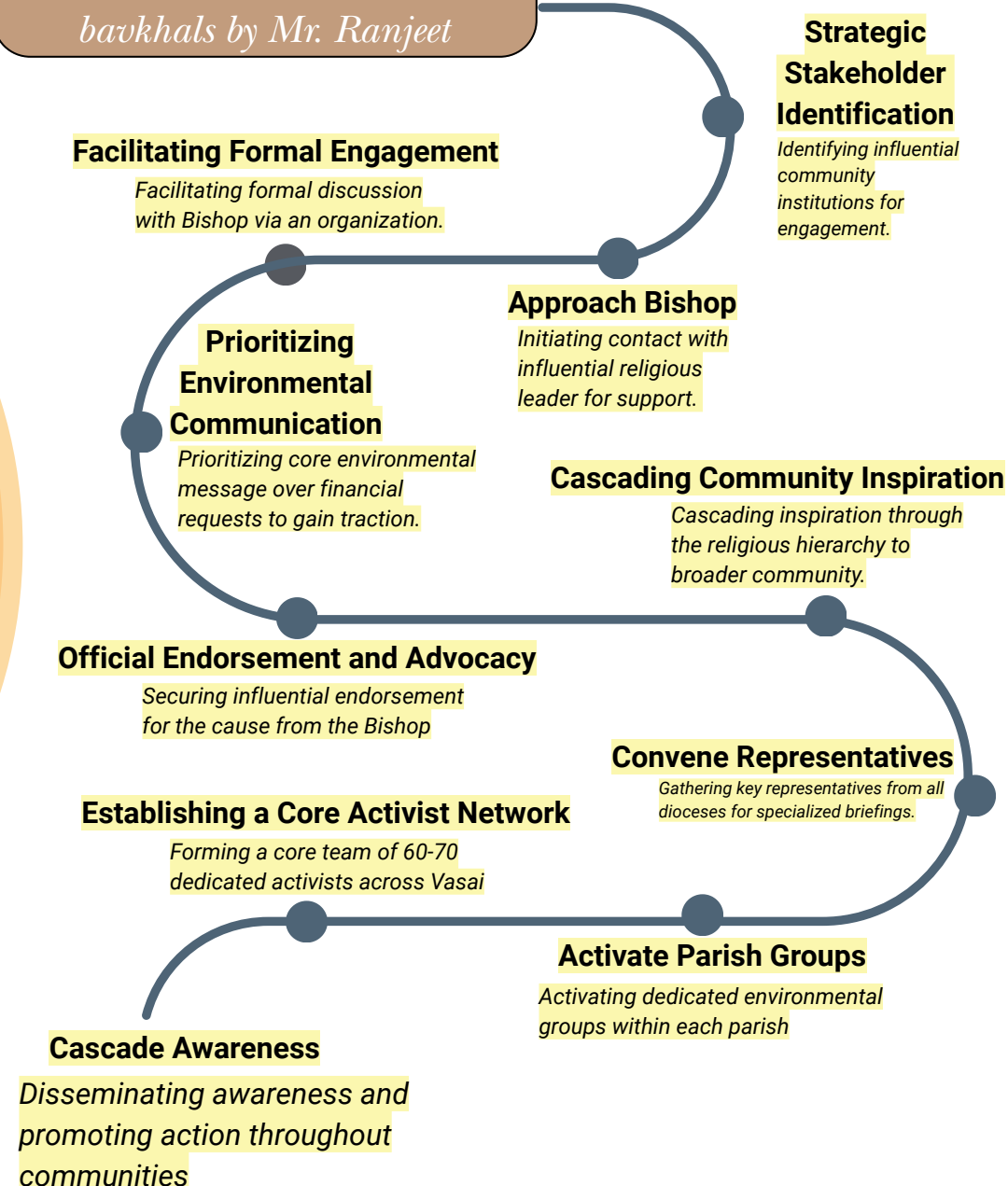
Political Perspective and Development Plan

- To classify bavkhals as waterbodies in the development plan.
- To issue a separate budget in the development plan for Bavkhal preservation.

Socio-Cultural Perspective

- Community mobilization through church's network.
- Integration of Environmental discussion on Sunday masses.
- Aims to build a network of environmentally active individuals within each parish for cascading awareness and action.

10 step strategy for community mobilization in vasai to conserve bavkhals by Mr. Ranjeet



Challenges posed by Plankton growth over Bavkhals

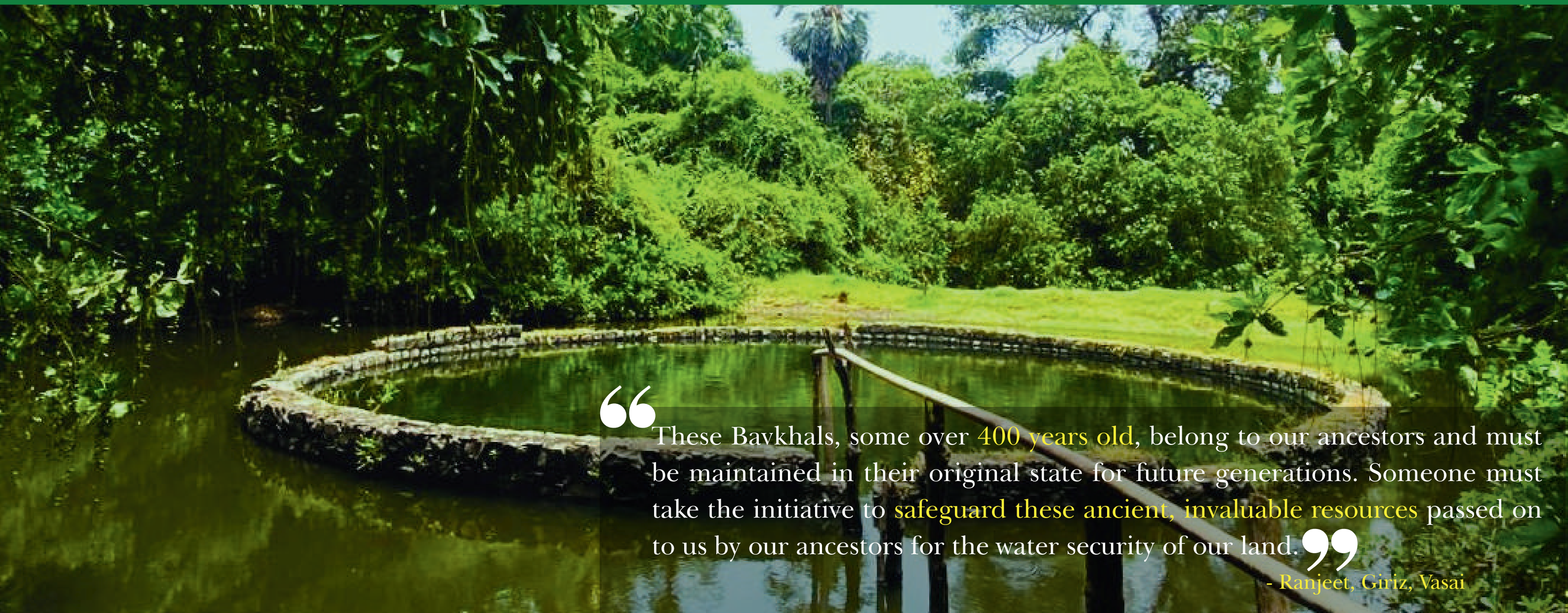


- Rampant plankton growth is an ongoing battle in Bavkhals.
 - This growth turns the water black and dirty, making it resemble a gutter.
 - Cleaning these dense plankton layers is a laborious and costly work.
 - Many other Bavkhals in the area are hidden and completely choked with planktons
- The Koli community members are traditional fishermen from Rangaon, Vasai, and Mr. Ranjeet maintains a good relationship with them. Their involvement allows him to manage the recurring cleaning of the water bodies, even though it is a multi-day, labor-intensive process, while the others struggle to find labor for such tasks.

Bavkhal represents much more than a water body for Mr. Ranjeet; it embodies the memories of his ancestors, the essence of Vasai, and its vibrant community. His motivation extends beyond environmental concerns; it is rooted in the heritage he takes pride in.



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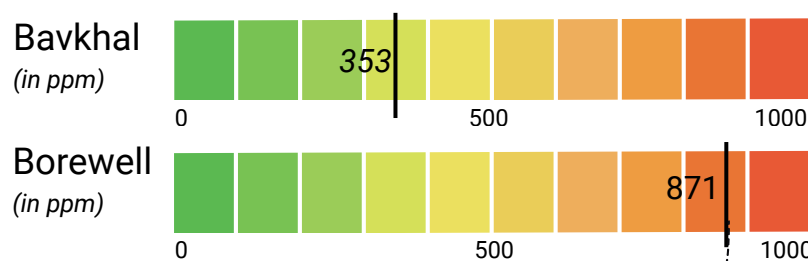
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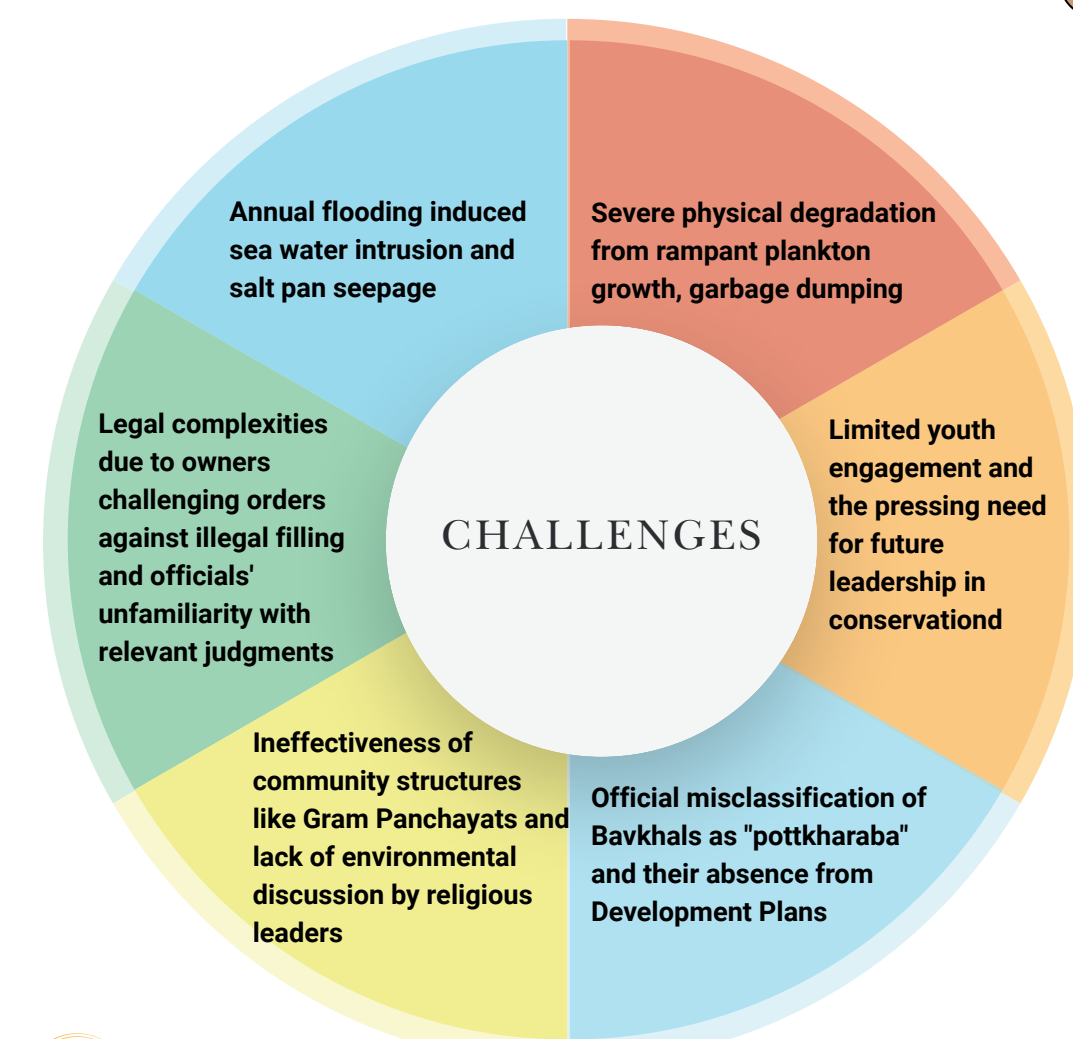
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Restoration work done on Bavkhal

Desiltation of Bavkhal

Desiltation work was carried out on six Bavkhals, with all activities conducted manually in collaboration with local tribal communities. The process began by extracting all the water from each Bavkhal, using pumps. Once the Bavkhals were emptied, manual desiltation commenced. The silt removed from the water bodies was then repurposed as manure, benefiting the surrounding neighborhoods.



Edge Restoration

The process of edge restoration was undertaken to prevent soil erosion along the edges of the Bavkhals. After desiltation, biodegradable jute nets were carefully laid along the banks. These nets help stabilize the soil and protect the edges from washing away. With a lifespan of up to three years, the jute nets provide an eco-friendly solution that supports the natural environment.



Plantation of Native Species

After desiltation and edge restoration, native species such as Neem and Black Jamun, Fresh Mangrove were planted around the Bavkhals. This important step not only supports the region's biodiversity but also helps strengthen the microclimate surrounding the Bavkhals. By choosing indigenous trees, the project fosters a healthier ecosystem and ensures long-term sustainability.



During Restoration

Post Restoration



Site 1
Sandor



Site 2
Bhuigaon



Site 3
Gomes Ali





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Edge Restoration

The process of edge restoration was undertaken to prevent soil erosion along the edges of the Bavkhals. After desiltation, biodegradable jute nets were carefully laid along the banks. These nets help stabilize the soil and protect the edges from washing away. With a lifespan of up to three years, the jute nets provide an eco-friendly solution that supports the natural environment.

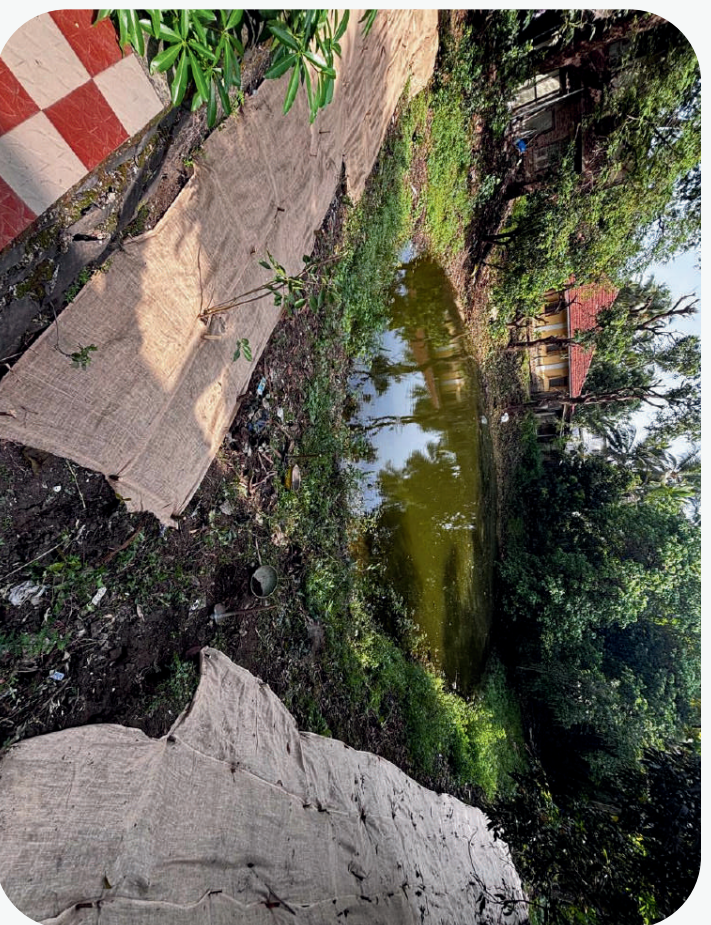


Plantation of Native Species

After desiltation and edge restoration, native species such as Neem and Black Jamun, Fresh Mangrove were planted around the Bavkhals. This important step not only supports the region's biodiversity but also helps strengthen the microclimate surrounding the Bavkhals. By choosing indigenous trees, the project fosters a healthier ecosystem and ensures long-term sustainability.



During Restoration



Post Restoration



Site 1
Sandor

During Restoration



Post Restoration



Site 2
Bhuigaon

During Restoration

Post Restoration



Site 4
Nandakal



Site 5
Golpa



Site 6
Satpala



Total of 6 Bavkhals were restored by Aga Khan Agency of Habitat (AKAH) India with the support of WIPRO Foundation.

During Restoration

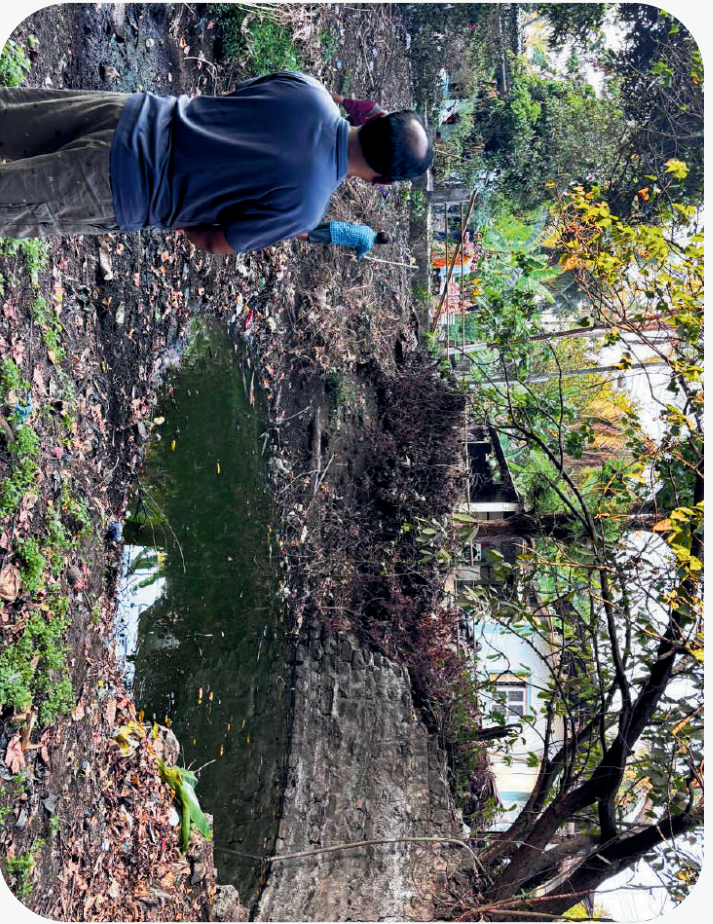


Post Restoration



Site 3
Nandakal

During Restoration



Post Restoration



Site 5
Satpala

During Restoration

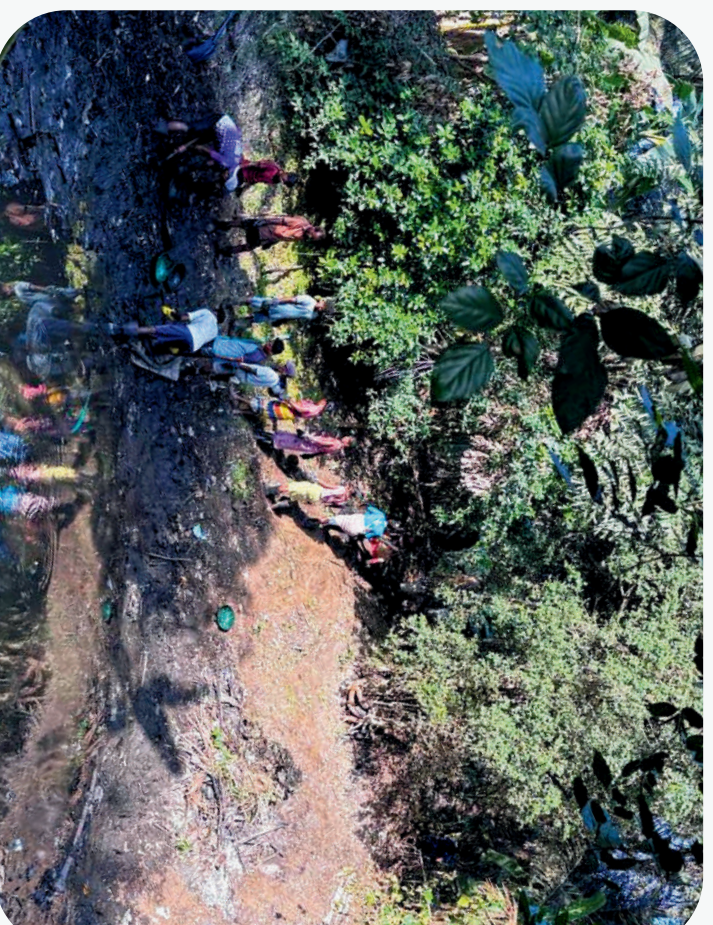


Post Restoration



Site 4
Golpa

During Restoration



Post Restoration



Site 6
Gomes Ali

Total of 6 Bavkhals were restored by Aga Khan Agency of Habitat (AKAH) India with the support of WIPRO Foundation.

भारतीय संविधान अन्वये

आर्टिकल ४८क व ५१क मूलभूत कर्तव्ये:

अनुच्छेद ४८क: पर्यावरणाचे संरक्षण व संवर्धन करणे आणि वने व वन्य जीवसृष्टी यांचे रक्षण करणे. "राज्य हे देशाच्या पर्यावरणाचे संरक्षण व संवर्धन करण्यासाठी आणि वने व वन्यसृष्टी यांचे रक्षण करण्यासाठी प्रयत्नशील राहिल."

अनुच्छेद ५१क: मूलभूत कर्तव्ये: वने, सरोवरे, नद्या, तलावे, विहीरी व वन्य जीवसृष्टी यांसह नैसर्गिक पर्यावरणाचे रक्षण करून त्यात सुधारणा करणे आणि प्राणिमात्रांबद्दल दयाबुद्धी बाळगणे.

ही प्रत्येक भारतीय नागरिकाची कर्तव्ये असतील.

लक्षवेध:

“It is the paramount duty of the State, (District, Taluka, City / Village) not only to protect the Ponds / Lakes / Water bodies in the State but also to ensure that Ponds / Lakes / Water bodies, which have been illegally filled in are RESTORED.

It is the Constitutional Duty of the State -District/ Taluka / City / Village to do so.”

Supreme Court Judgment (16/07/2024)

Cause Title: Mirza Abid Beg v. State of U.P and Ors. [Civil Appeal No(s).1904/2020]