



COMMONS TALES

Compendium of Stories

IInd Edition

presented at

**Commoning the Commons Conference 2023
Celebrating Community Stewardship**

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Commons Tales: Compendium of Stories

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Introduction

Commons, or shared natural resources, such as forests, rivers, pastures, groundwater, oceans, and the cultural knowledge associated with them, play a vital role in sustaining our lives. The collective human endeavour of accessing, using, managing, and preserving these shared resources has helped civilisations thrive, and continues to enrich our lives today. However, these Commons and the act of Commoning are facing a rapid decline due to various factors, with climate change exacerbating the situation. This poses serious concerns for the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable communities across the world.

The relationship between communities and their practices of preserving and managing the Commons is not just of cultural significance, but also holds immense socio-economic importance. Communities across the world have collectively developed rules for the protection and governance of a range of Commons, effectively stewarding them for generations. The diverse voices of indigenous groups, forest-dwellers, farmers, and pastoralists echo the wisdom, expertise, and deep understanding of interlinkages between resource systems and our lives. In this era of ecological crises, they are also the first responders to these challenges. Their insights have much to teach us on how we should shape our relationship with nature, while we aid their efforts to create a sustainable future in the face of climate change. It is critical to harness their collective potential to transform the looming ‘tragedy’ threatening these Commons into the ‘promise’ they hold for our collective futures.

The Community Conference was one such endeavour to hear the voice, experiences and share the knowledge of communities who are the primary champions of the Commons. As a part of the Annual World Commons Week (December 4-10, 2023), the virtual conference - “Commoning the Commons: Celebrating Community Stewardship”, organised by a collection of civil society partners - Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), Indian Commoner (IC), Awakening People’s Action for Rural Development (APARD), Seba Jagat, Jan Chetan Sansta(JCS), Kenono Foundation, PHIA Foundation, Rainfed Livestock Network (RLN), was held from December 4th to 6th, 2023 as a celebration which promotes sharing of knowledge and experiences around Commons. The conference brought together practitioners, academicians, reporters, media personalities, and policymakers, along with members of civil society, who benefited from the rich and diverse experiences shared. Three parallel channels

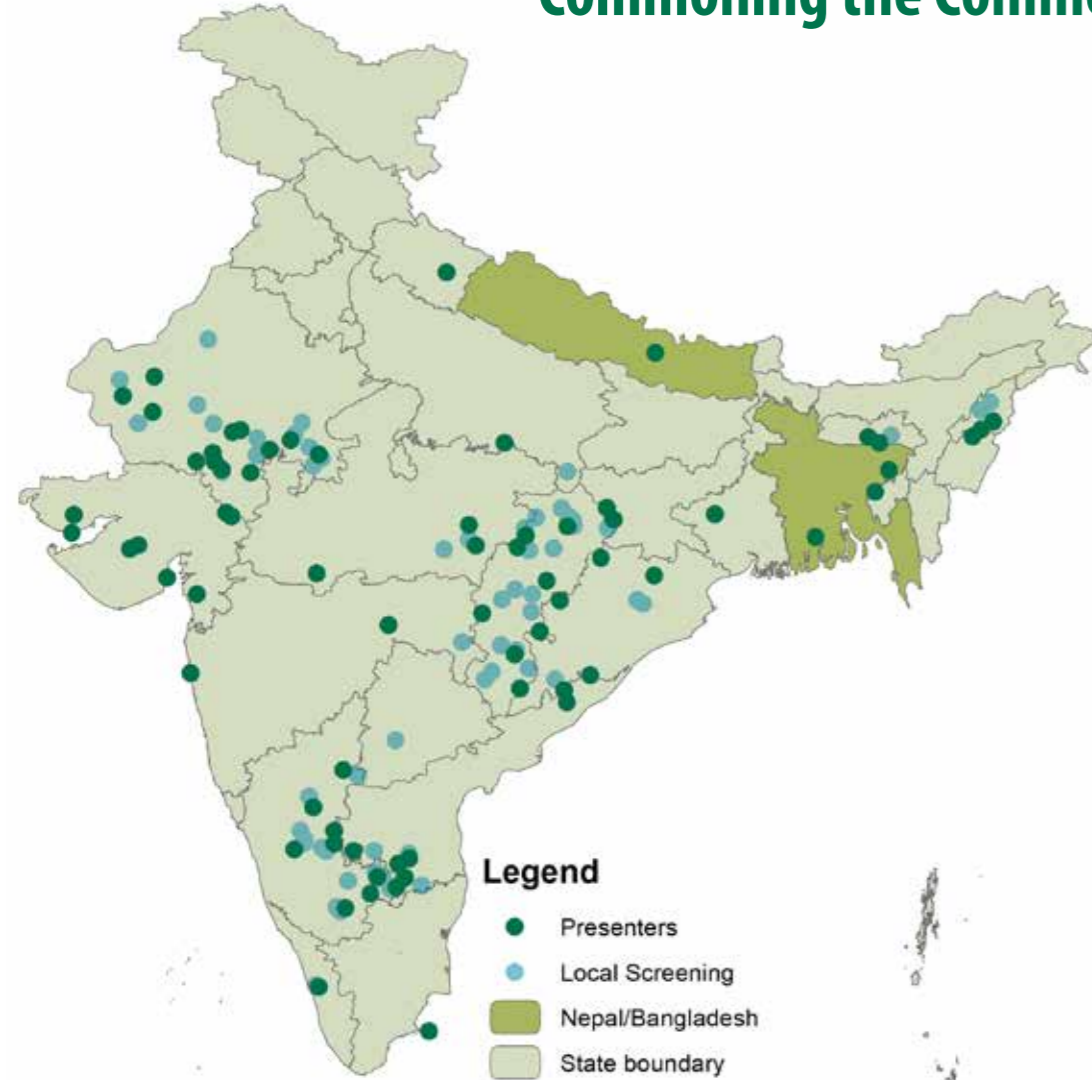
were conducted for the conference, where 77 speakers from 19 states within India and 2 other countries shared their experiences under 7 themes across 3 days. The themes of the Conference were:

- Land and Water Commons
- Commons and Biodiversity
- Commons and Livelihood
- Commons and Gender
- Commons and Culture
- Commons and Food
- Struggles of Commoning

The Conference operated through three parallel Zoom channels, hosting approximately 25 presentations each day. During each presentation, the community leaders delivered a 10-minute narrative sharing his/her experiences in their preferred language, followed by a 5-minute summary by the facilitator of the session, either in English or Hindi. Additionally, the event also witnessed the involvement of numerous NGOs, researchers, and academics who served as facilitators for the community leaders as well as who joined as participants to the discussions. The conference encouraged individuals and organisations to organise local screening of the virtual conference. A total of 127 local screenings were held across 11 Indian states that helped several communities, officials, students and civil society organisations. The conference drew a participation of over 4000 attendees (online and through local screenings.)

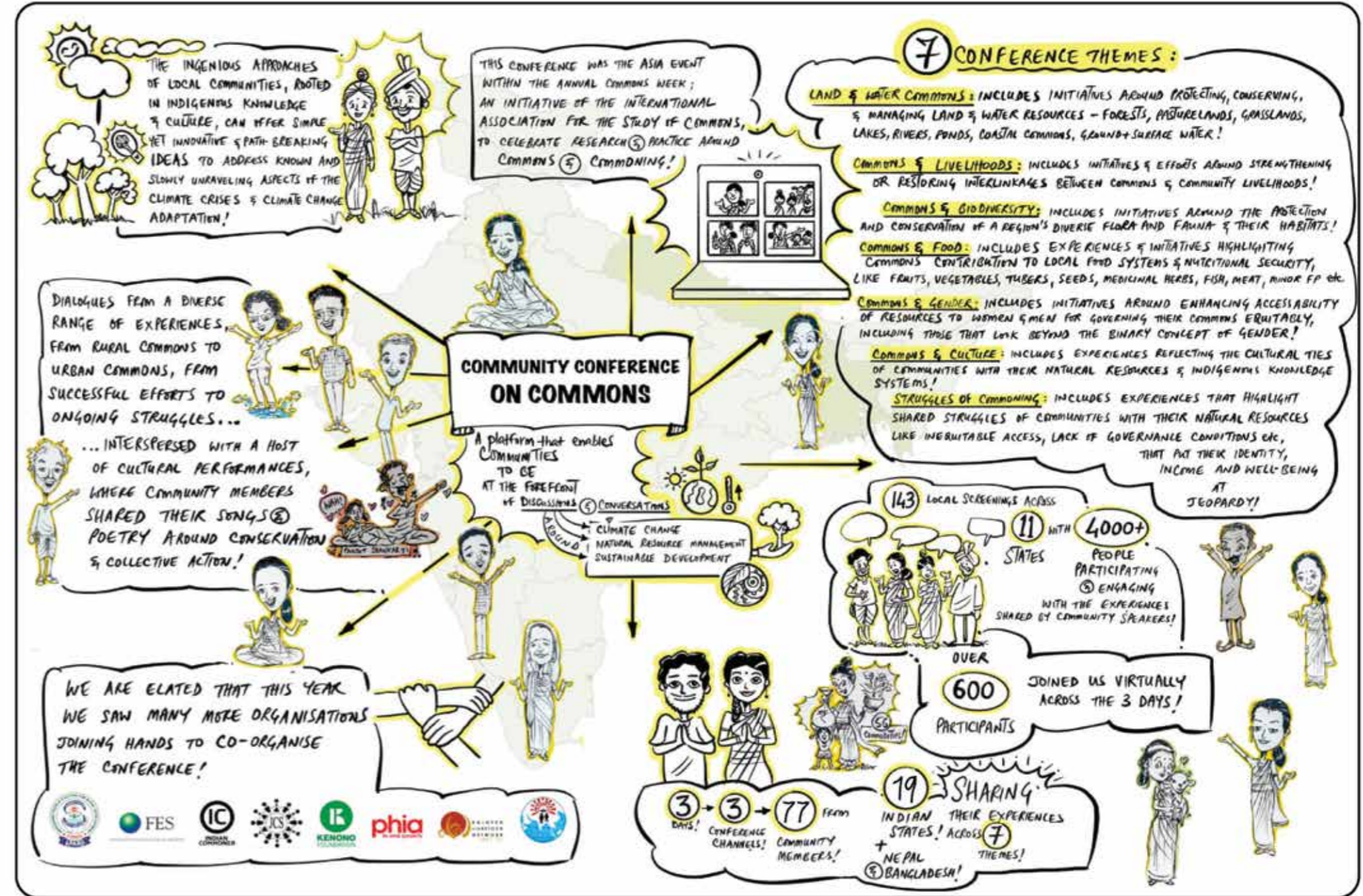
This publication, titled “Commons Tales,” serves as a testament to the invaluable knowledge and practices associated with Commons, offering a unique glimpse into the varied themes explored. Storytelling is at the core of the conversations and dialogues in the Conference. It is integral to realising the shared goal of spotlighting community voices and experiences, and to emphasise best practices and failures alike in the journey of conserving and managing Commons. It binds people from diverse geographies and lived realities, and becomes a melting pot of learning and exchange, while continuously highlighting the shared resilience and innovation within communities. This compendium aims to capture these stories, celebrating the wealth of knowledge exchanged across the platform. We sincerely hope you find this compendium engaging and informative and look forward to your suggestions to enhance and refine our efforts in future endeavours.

Reach of Commoning the Commons 2023



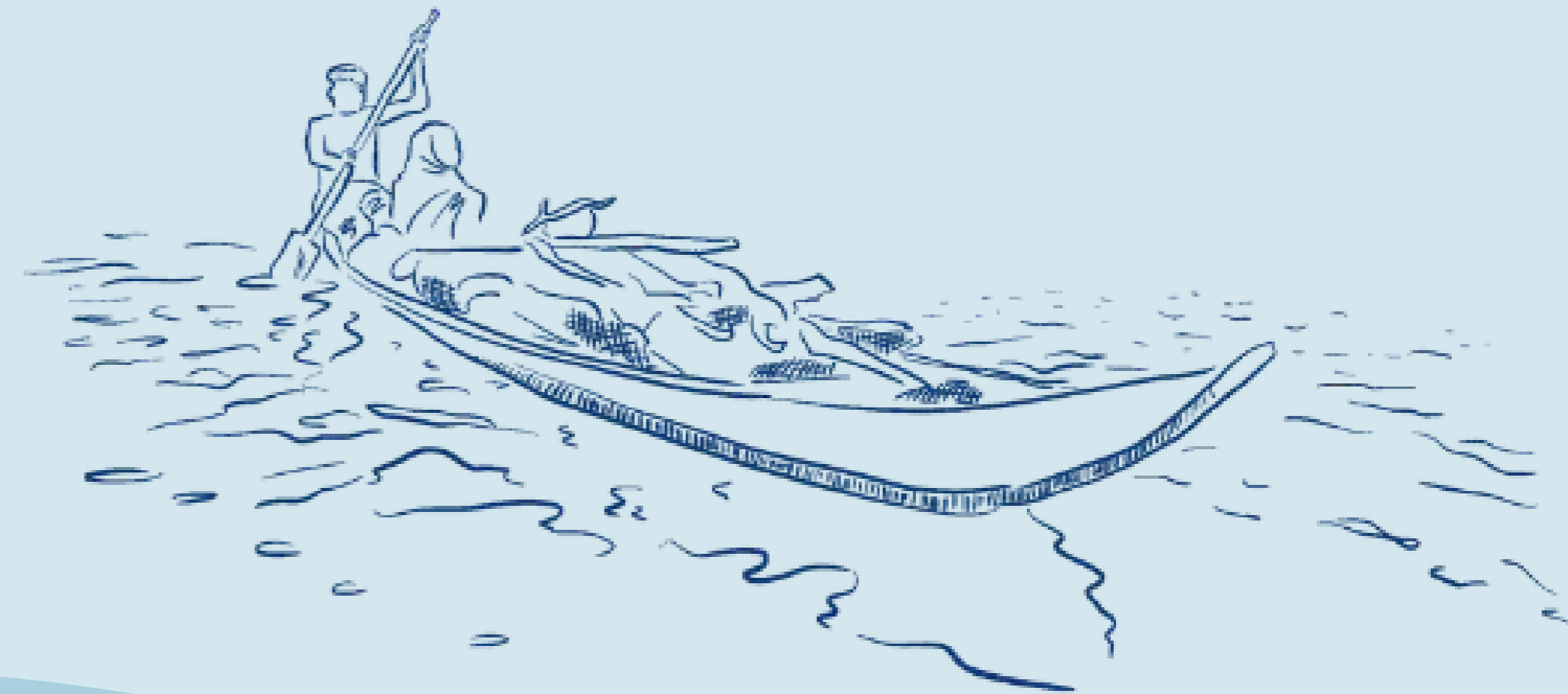
77
presenters

143
screenings



Land and Water Commons

Socio-ecological systems that integrate human and ecological communities fostering land and water stewardship through shared livelihood interests, knowledge, and values to protect, conserve and manage resources like pasturelands, grasslands, lakes, rivers, ponds, ground and surface water.



Collective Action For Conservation And Restoration Of Pasturelands

In the village of Jainagar, Begun block of Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, Bherulal Dhakad, the Secretary of Jai Shiv Shankar Gram Vikas Samiti, has become a guiding force in protecting the community's common pastureland. This 128 acres land is essential for the community, providing grazing space for livestock, fuel wood, and other valuable natural resources.

Half a century ago, community members collectively built a stone wall around the pasture to protect it from encroachment, using their own funds and labour (*shramadhan*). This practice continues each monsoon, with community members reinforcing the wall by adding thorny bushes for extra protection. Every household contributes labour to this maintenance; if a family cannot send a person, they must pay a small fine. To use the land for grazing, community members pay a fee of twenty rupees per animal, which helps maintain the Commons. While they are allowed to gather dry wood, cutting green branches or trees is strictly prohibited, with fines imposed on those who violate the rule.

A gatekeeper is employed to guard the pasture, receiving twelve thousand rupees annually plus cow dung cakes as part of his payment. The pasture also provides income through the sale of *khejari ki fali* (pods of acacia trees), which are sold to neighbouring communities as goat feed, generating an income of about 10,000 - 15,000 rupees each year. Additionally, in the month of Kartik (September), members harvest a type of grass called *boari* to make brooms. The Bhil community which is dependent on NTFP for their livelihoods has special permission to collect dry wood year-round and to gather fruit and gum from *kher* (acacia) trees for their own use.

The community follows a grazing schedule that allows livestock to graze from August until the next monsoon, after which the pasture is closed to allow the land to regenerate. This rotational system helps keep the pasture sustainable and fertile. The pasture also hosts a variety of wildlife, including rabbits, jackals, *nilgai*, and boars, and is home to medicinal plants.

Under Bherulal's leadership, the community has taken up efforts to improve the land use and its fertility. This year, they collectively removed invasive lantana plants, which threatened the pasture's natural vegetation. Their efforts are not only about conserving the land but also about creating a sustainable future. Thanks to Bherulal's guidance, the community has a strong, organised system for managing their Commons, making Jainagar a model of sustainable, community-driven pasture management in Rajasthan.



Bherulal Dhakad
Jainagar, Begun,
Chittorgarh, Rajasthan

Satyam Ojha, FES
(Facilitator)



Seeds Of Change: Cultivating Unity And Sustainability In Akdada Village

Located 57 kms from the Barmer district headquarters, and 10 kilometres east of Baytu Gram Panchayat, the village of Akdada houses around 70-80 families with most households relying on agriculture for their livelihoods. There are no grazing pasture lands in the community but the livestock depend on the 191 acres of common wastelands for their fodder requirements.

During the community level discussions, members highlighted the problem of stray cattle raiding the agricultural fields and destroying the crops due to the absence of sufficient fodder in the Commons. A Gram Panchayat Development Committee was established that recognised the immediate need to undertake measures to resolve this menace faced by the stray cattle. Insufficient fodder in the common lands was the primary reason for the stray cattle to graze in the agricultural fields. The common lands were infested with *kantili jhadiya (Prosopis Juliflora)* which was not suitable for livestock in the area. The committee with active participation of the Panchayat members resolved to revive native grass species in the common lands by undertaking the plantation of the *Dhaman grass (Cenchrus ciliaris)*. However, insufficient resources were a concern to take up the activity. The community came together and contributed in terms of money and resources and took up the plantation activity in their Commons. Mechanised machinery was hired by the community funds to clear the bushes and overgrowth. Following which, more than 40-50 tractors were mobilised within the community to plough the lands to be able to sow the grass seeds. Grass seeds were sourced locally from various line departments and nurseries by the community. The entire activity was undertaken by the efforts of the community in terms of shramadhan with no external support or intervention.

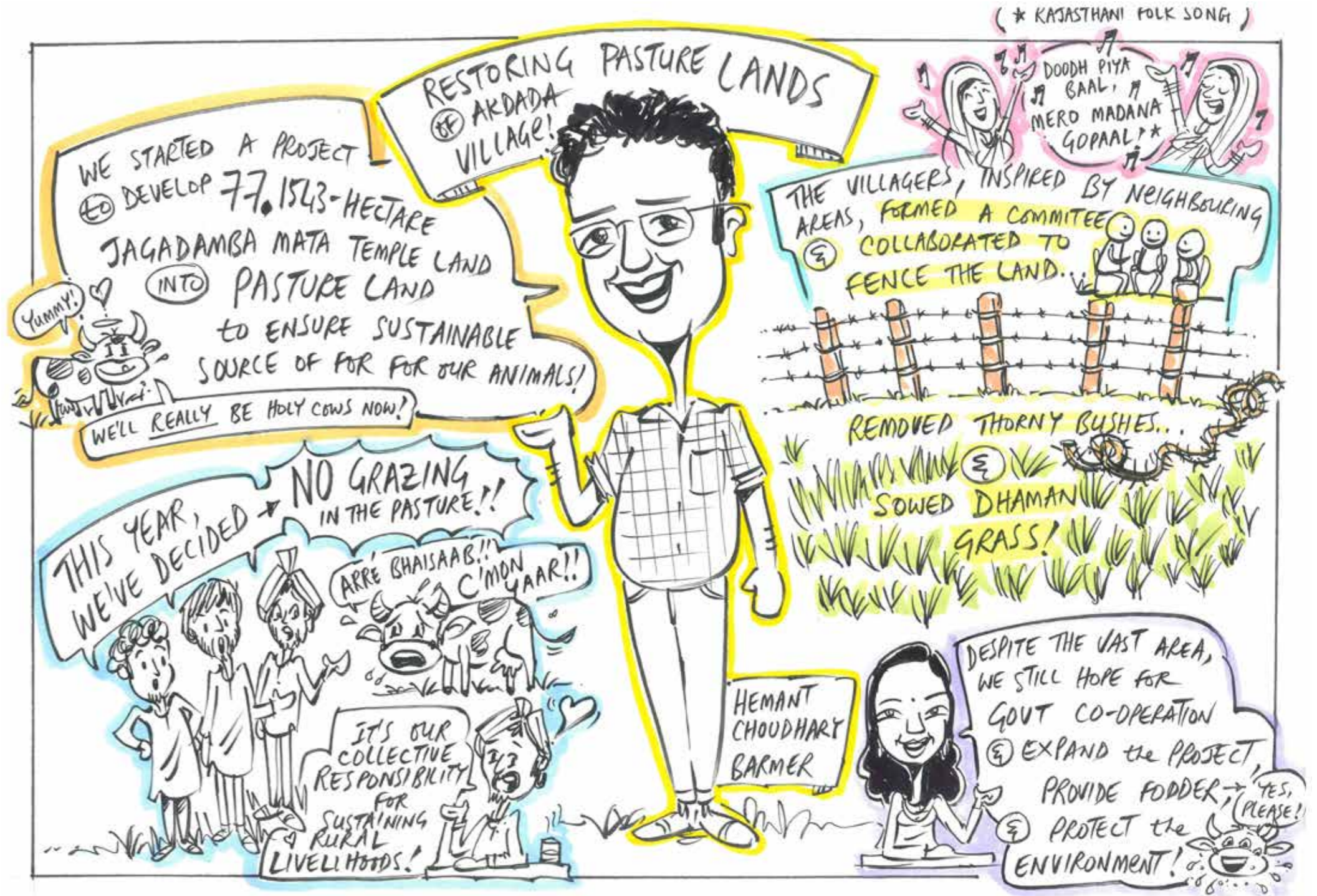
After the rains, the seeds sprouted and the area was fenced by the community. Once the grasses were stabilised, livestock was allowed to freely graze on the Commons. The community also undertook the construction of a tubewell so that the livestock had easy access to water on the Commons. The easy availability of fodder and the fencing around the Commons ensured that cattle and other livestock did not stray into the agricultural fields and destroy the crop.

Collective community action demonstrated in Akdada is an example for other communities in the region to actively manage and conserve their common resources for the betterment of the community.



Hemant Kumar Chaudhary
Akdada, Baytu, Barmer, Rajasthan

Dimpal Kumari, FES
(Facilitator)



Sagarpali Van Suraksha Samiti Transforms Barren Hill into Lush Green Forest

Kurladungri is the name of the hill that surrounds the Sagarpali village in Sundargarh district, Odisha. During 1970-75, due to the illicit felling of trees and repeated forest fires, the forest hill extending to almost 300 acres became severely degraded and lost all its native tree species and biodiversity. The livelihoods of around 12 neighbouring communities depended on the hillock as it was a vital source for forest produce. In 1975, the youth of Sagarpali, a community with 130 households, came together forming a *Sagar Yubak Sangh* for the restoration and protection of Kurladungri. Over the next 2 decades, the *Sangh* took up a few measures to help protect the hillock. In the year 1993, the same group along with the Forest Department formed a *Van Suraksh Samiti* (VSS) to take up conservation measures for their community. The committee also established a governance mechanism with fundamental bylaws to monitor the activities.

Collective action and community contribution have been the key elements in the struggle for management of the natural resources in Sagarpali. Through *shramdaan*, every household in the community undertook plantations and protection of one peepal and banyan tree on their Commons. Along with this, through *shramdaan* they dug cattle trenches for protecting trees from grazing and also to arrest any soil erosion from the upper reaches of the hillock.

Along with *shramdaan*, *muthidana* was a system followed regularly in the community; where every week at least a handful of paddy was collected from every household in the community. This paddy was then sold and a corpus fund established. Each household according to their financial capacity would also contribute to the fund that was registered under the Village committee name. These funds were used for conservation activities of the community.

Through the *Thengapalli* system, every two households on rotational basis were given the responsibility to patrol the forests to keep a check on any encroachments or intruders. Violations were reported to the Village Committee and were penalised by the same. The community members also created a fire line along the hillock to control forest fires in the regions. The VSS actively engaged the youth by creating a youth fire brigade which aimed to ensure that forest fires were prevented in the area. Every member who had completed their tenth standard exam was a member of the fire brigade, which not only helped to douse fires in the forest but also created awareness among the community to increase the knowledge about managing forest fires. Community members have also evolved a mechanism to sustainably harvest NTFPs in their community. Many members have shifted to LPG and thus there is a significant reduction in fuelwood collection from the forests.

Concerted efforts of the community have resulted in the regeneration of the Kurladungri hillock. Sagarpali has demonstrated resilience and determination to successfully manage and conserve their natural resources thus ensuring sustainability for their future.



Digambar Upadhyay
Sagarpalli, Tangarpalli, Sundargarh, Odisha



Community Land Reclamation In Chichari Gram Panchayat

Driven by the collective efforts of the community, in the village of Chichari, located in the Chargaon Development Block of Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh, a significant transformation took place. The community was facing a significant problem. The common lands were being encroached upon, and the forest resources they depended on were steadily dwindling. Community members used these lands to gather forest products like bamboo, tendu leaves, and firewood, and also for cattle grazing. But with increasing pressure on these resources, it became clear that something needed to change.

The situation worsened as Chichari's proximity to the buffer zone of Kanha National Park led to increased resource extraction, particularly by the Baiga community. Many community members began to realise the importance of securing their rights over the land. This realisation sparked a movement within the community to assert their land rights under the Forest Rights Act.

The first step was the formation of the Gram Paryavaran Samiti (Village Environment Committee) by the Gram Panchayat. Together, they initiated the process for Community Forest Rights (CFR) under the Forest Rights Act. Participatory mapping helped identify 35 acres of community land that could be reclaimed and managed sustainably.

The Samiti, along with the Panchayat, developed rules and regulations to protect and manage these reclaimed lands. Some key rules included:

1. A fine of ₹5,000 for cutting green wood without permission, and a reward to anyone reporting violations.
2. A ban on the unauthorised collection of minor forest produce.
3. Prohibition of the use of forest resources for up to three years if needed.
4. Legal action against any encroachment on the community land.

These regulations were designed to ensure sustainable use of the land and forest resources, balancing the needs of the community with environmental conservation.

As a result of these collective efforts, the community saw positive outcomes. Revenue from tendu leaf collection grew significantly from ₹1 lakh in 2017, to ₹1.5 lakh in 2018, and ₹2.5 lakh in 2019. This increase in income not only demonstrated the success of the land reclamation efforts but also highlighted the community's capacity to manage and protect their resources.

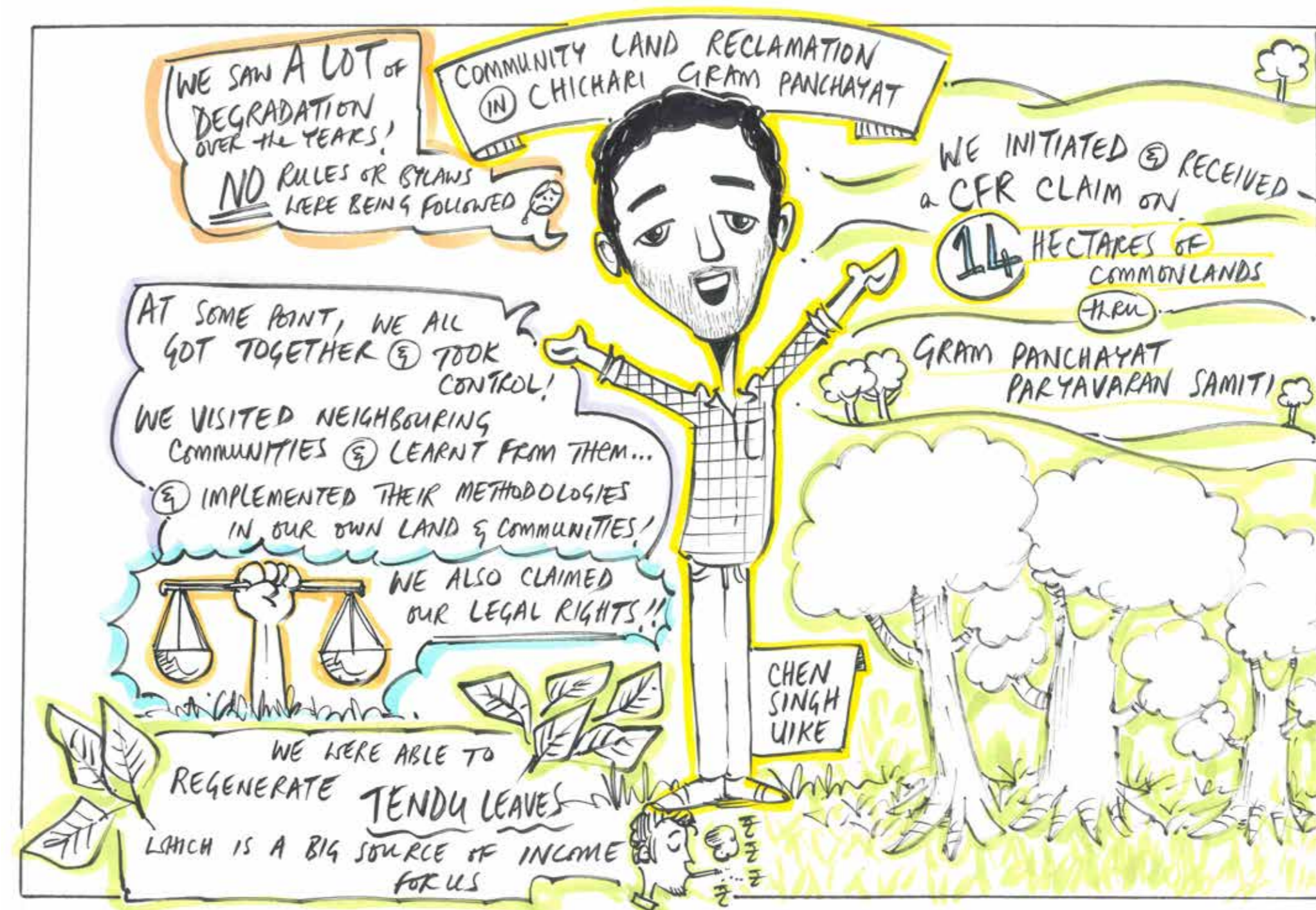
Chichari Gram Panchayat's journey from land encroachment to sustainable forest management is an inspiring example of how community action can lead to both environmental conservation and economic growth.



Chen Singh Uike

Chargawn
Bichhiya, Mandla, Madhya
Pradesh

Ram Kumar Yadav,
FES (Facilitator)



Shaping A Healthy River Ecosystem: A Case Study Of Devgaon Village

Devgaon is a small village located in Niwas block in Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh. Three decades ago, the banks of the River Gaur experienced soil and water erosion due to the degradation of the neighbouring forests for activities like agriculture and fuelwood collection. Consequently, the scarcity of water emerged as an alarming concern for the community members dependent on the river.

With the declining common resources, the community came together and resolved to take necessary actions to address the problem. They organised meetings in the community to help form bylaws for conservation and management of forest resources. It was decided that on rotation two individuals would patrol the forests to check for encroachers and any violations would be heavily fined by the community institution. Following this, a suitable site for construction of a check dam was identified and through *shramdaan*, the community constructed the check dam to help store water for the community.

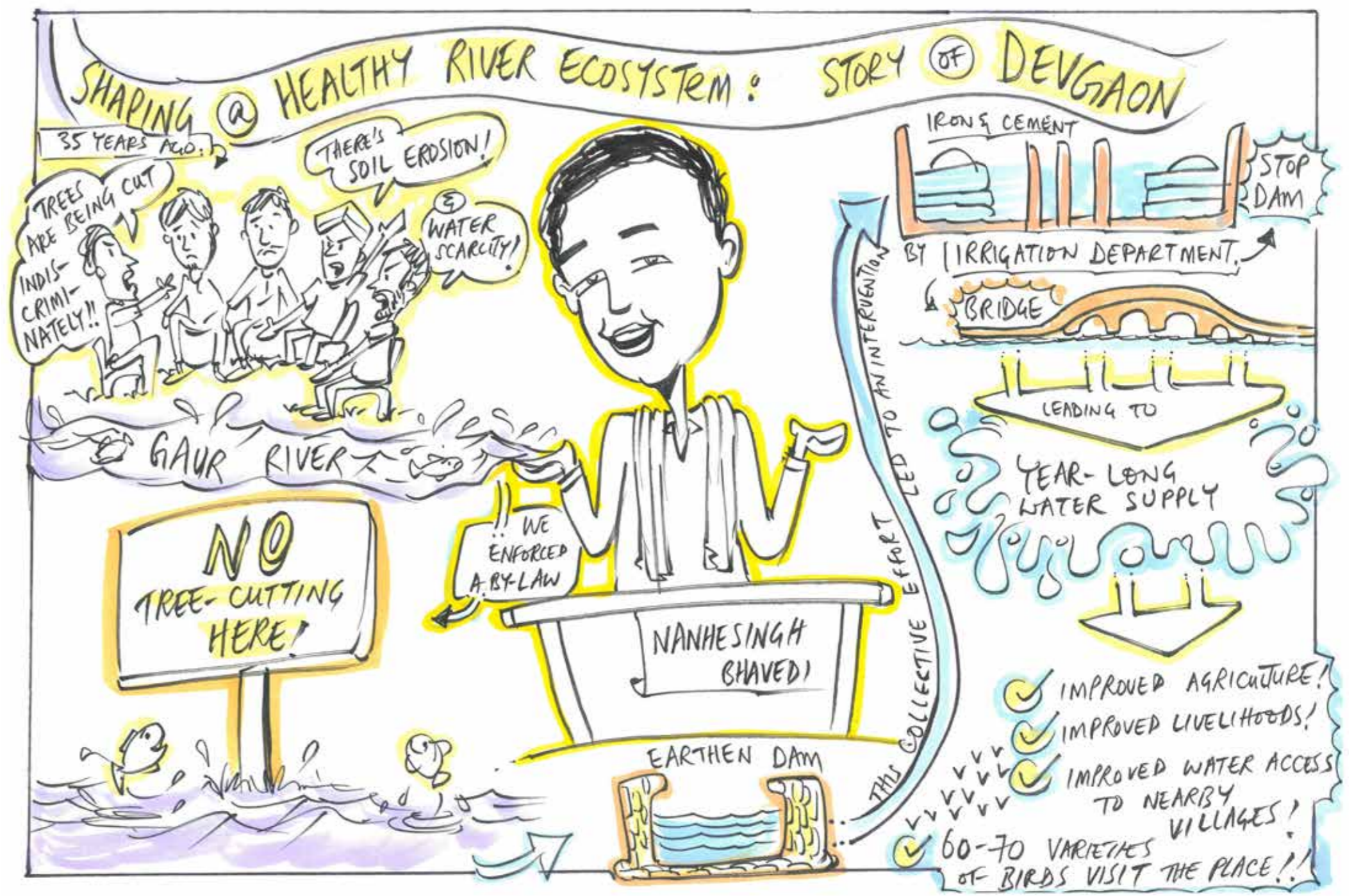
Over the years, almost every household voluntarily contributed to the maintenance of the check dam. Their consistent efforts were recognised by the Irrigation Department who lent their support to install the iron crest gates of the dam and an overbridge as well. FES also supported the initiative by providing necessary raw materials for the same.

These steps helped transform the entire riverine ecosystem. The reduction in felling of trees helped the rejuvenation of the forests and enabled year-round storage of water. This benefited the community through improved irrigation and supply of water for livestock. The check dam currently supports livestock from 2-3 neighbouring villages throughout the year. Moreover, the region also attracts around 60-70 bird species during the winters, and a host of butterflies and dragonflies showcasing the richness in flora and fauna. Tree species such as *arjuna*, *palash*, *karunj*, *kusum*, *babul*, *tendu*, etc. can be found on the banks of the River. The lush canopy of these trees not only provide shade to grazing animals but also provide shelter to communities during peak summers. The case of Devgaon highlights the power of the community to identify the problems and work towards successfully resolving it with collective efforts thereby ensuring shared benefits and sustainability.



Nanhe Singh Bhavedi
Devgaon, Niwas, Mandla,
Madhya Pradesh

Alok Vishnoi, FES
(Facilitator)



Restoring Hunasagatta's Traditional Kalyani Tanks

Nature and human connections have been intertwined since time immemorial. In Karnataka, community water sources like the *kalyani*, a traditional stepwell, have not only provided drinking water but also held deep cultural significance. These structures were commonly seen during the Chola empire. In Hunasagatta village, Honnali Taluk, Davanagere District, Karnataka, the *kalyani* was fed through carefully designed surface and underground channels and it served as a water source and a cultural icon for the community. Gangadharappa and his community level institution championed the preservation of such spring water sources after recognising its importance to the region.

Dating back to the Chola period, this *kalyani* holds cultural value for the village, as it is connected with local deities like *Anjaneya Swamy*, *Gadiga Swami*, *Pulingamma*, and *Mathingamma*. Communities have relied on its water for daily use and continue to honour it as a sacred resource. The *kalyani* also plays a central role in community ceremonies and rituals.

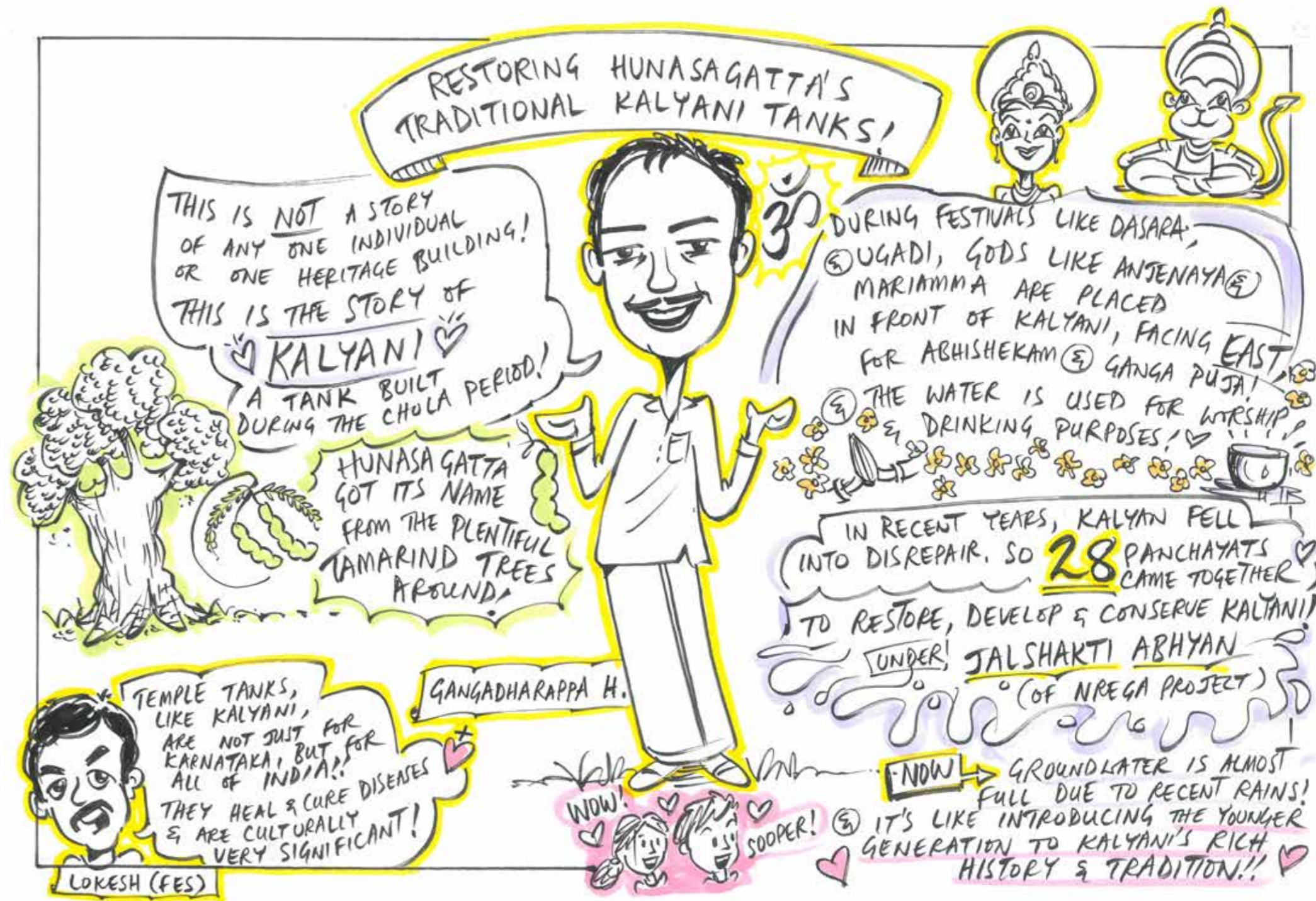
The *kalyani* first dried up in 1980. But later due to the lack of maintenance, it became a forgotten resource. However, the Hunasagatta Gram Panchayat with 20 local workers, undertook the renovation of the *kalyani*, through the *Jal Shakti Abhiyan* programme with an estimated budget of ₹16.4 lakhs. The restoration project involved multiple government departments and community representatives who ensured timely and effective work.

The collaboration between multi level stakeholders demonstrated how communities can be empowered to achieve development. This teamwork restored the *kalyani* to its former glory, drawing the community once again for cultural practices, prayers, festivals, and ceremonies.



Gangadharappa H
Hunasaghatta, Honnali,
Davanagere, Karnataka

Prakash Lambi, FES
(Facilitator)



Nurturing Bengaluru's Lakes: A Participatory Governance Paradigm For Sustainable Urban Resilience

Bengaluru, once known for its lush greenery and abundant lakes, has faced the brunt of rapid urbanisation, resulting in the encroachment and degradation of its water bodies. Among these, the Rachenahalli Lake stands as a testament to the power of community-led initiatives in revitalising traditional water management systems and contributing to the health of urban ecosystems. The JalMitra group, Guardians of Rachenahalli Lake, has spearheaded a transformative journey since 2015, employing participatory governance as a cornerstone in their efforts. The problem was dire: encroachment, pollution, and neglect threatened the existence of the Rachenahalli Lake. Livelihoods depended on its waters, yet it faced a myriad of threats, from debris dumping to sewage entry. Recognising the urgency of the situation, the JalMitra group mobilised local citizens to take action, and what started as a humble individual project blossomed into a strong team of 200 dedicated members.

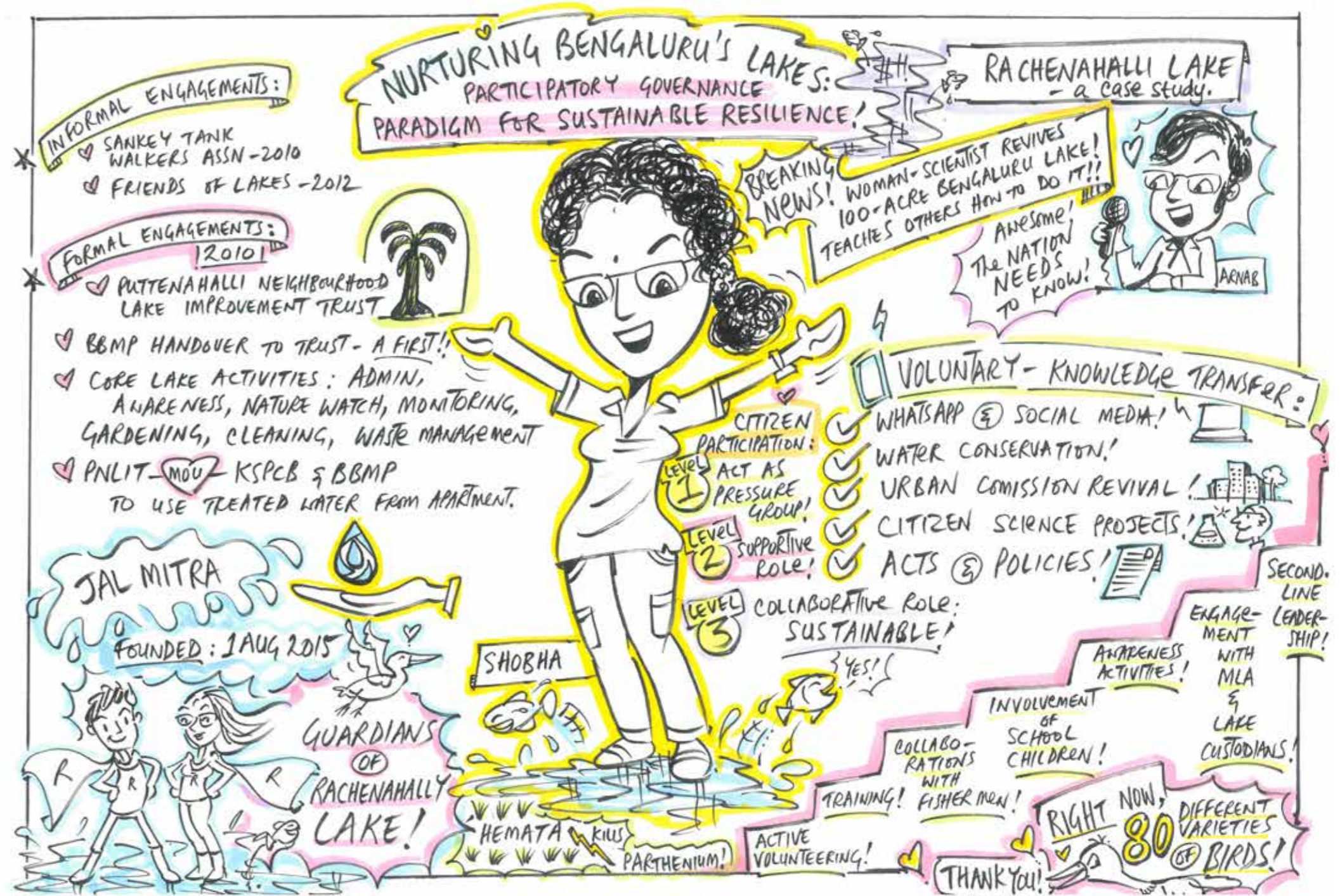
Their intervention was built on the foundation of a tripartite agreement among the Jal Mitra Trust, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), and the United Way for Bengaluru, paving way for a collaborative approach towards lake restoration. The group's activities span a spectrum of lake-related endeavours, ranging from administration and monitoring to waste management and community engagement. Their approach goes beyond conventional restoration efforts; it fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among local communities. Through events, cleanathons, and planting drives, JalMitra empowers residents to become stewards of their environment, and take charge of their present and future by revitalising the essential lake ecosystems in the city. However, this journey has not been devoid of challenges. Initial collaboration hurdles were overcome through concerted efforts, aided by the involvement of government bodies, civil society groups, and community members. Collaborating with fishing communities and the local MLAs, they amplified their reach, engaging thousands in the cause. Their approach wasn't just about rejuvenating a lake; it was about nurturing a sense of ownership and responsibility among the community, ensuring the sustainability of their efforts. Despite facing resistance and compromises, the group persisted, driven by a vision of ecosystem restoration for the greater good, rather than commercial interests.

Crucially, citizen participation has been central to their strategy. From raising awareness among residents to engaging with policymakers and local legislators, JalMitra has mobilised a diverse coalition of stakeholders. This inclusive approach has not only amplified their impact but also paved the way for influencing government decisions and policies. As they look to the future, JalMitra advocates for a deeper integration of participatory governance into urban planning frameworks. They envision a landscape where citizens play a pivotal role in shaping policies, guided by constitutional amendments highlighting citizen participation. Direct engagements with governmental bodies through memorandums of understanding (MOUs) offer a pathway for influencing decisions and ensuring the sustainable management of water bodies.

As the JalMitra group continue their endeavours, their story serves as inspiration for communities worldwide, illustrating the profound impact of collective action in safeguarding our natural heritage for generations to come.



Shobha Ananda Reddy
Bengaluru, Karnataka



Historical Necessity & Contemporary Significance of Lakes in Sustaining Communities

The Tungabhadra River flows through the Koppal district in Karnataka. It is a lifeline for most farmers and communities in Karnataka. In spite of the flowing Tungabhadra, many areas in Koppal district are drought prone and rainfed agriculture is practised. Doddi and Kaltavaragere of Koppal District are two villages who depend upon *Obalappakere*, a rainwater fed lake, for all their water requirements through the year.

However, in the recent past, due to inadequate maintenance, the lake was under a state of neglect. Its boundaries were encroached upon, overgrown invasive vegetation, and the feeder channels were silted and dysfunctional.

Three years ago, the district and taluk panchayats provided the community with capacity-building sessions and information on the ecological and social benefits of maintaining lakes. Inspired by this, the community in Kaltavaragere formed a Village Environment Development Committee and engaged in development planning through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Their ideas were discussed in the gram sabha (village assembly) and incorporated into the Grama Panchayat's annual plan of works.

Once the plan and budget was approved, the desiltation and renovation work of the Lake was undertaken. Following guidance from panchayat technical staff, community members took part in the activities to repair the canals that supplied water to the lake. They desilted the lake and planted trees around its perimeter to stabilise the soil. The community also made the decision not to draw water directly from the lake, choosing instead to seal the lake's outlet and allow it to replenish the groundwater table. Today, *Obalappakere* meets the water requirements of the communities, livestock, and wildlife thereby transforming it into a local biodiversity hotspot. The improved groundwater levels have revived borewells, which now support agricultural activities thus enhancing the livelihoods of the community.

In 2022, Obalappa Lake was recognised under the Amrit Sarovar project. During the '*Jal Sanjeevini Rytha Samvad*' programme, community members discussed the development of water bodies under MGNREGA.

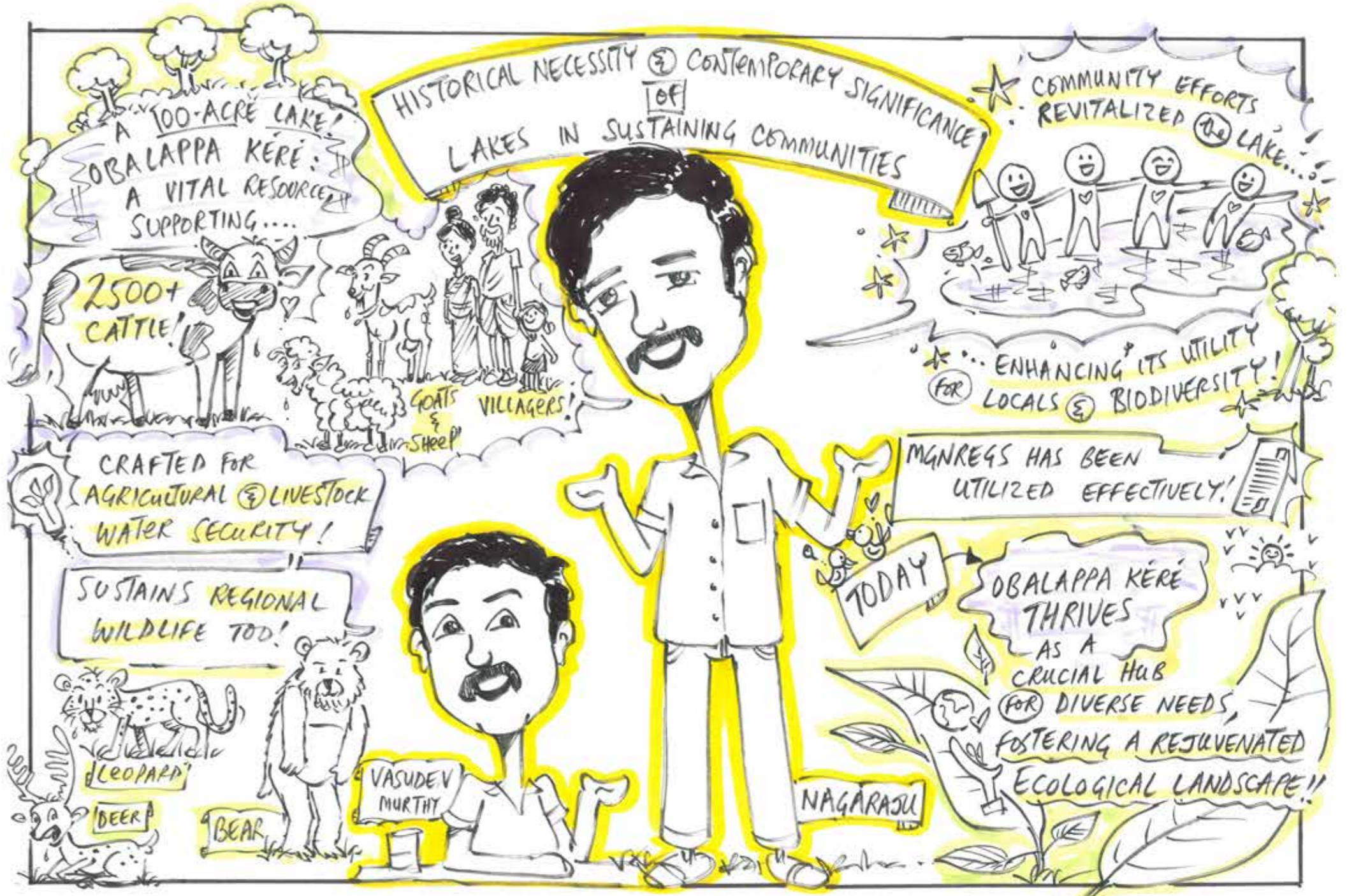
Shekamma Vani, an award-winning farmer from Kaltavaragere, shared her success in adopting organic farming on her two-acre rocky plot. Growing crops like lemon, guava, curry leaves, mango, sugarcane, jackfruit, bananas, and various vegetables, she achieved financial stability and is an example for others in the community.

As water is the foundation for civilisations, Obalappa Lake continues to be a foundation for harmony and collective action in this community.



Nagaraj
Kaltavargere, Koppal,
Karnataka

Vasudeva Murthy K,
FES (Facilitator)



Ruza Renaissance: Nurturing Agriculture in Nagaland's Arid Landscape

Nagaland, a state nestled in the northeastern region of India, boasts a rich cultural heritage intertwined with its agricultural practices. Among these practices, the Ruza system stands out as a beacon of sustainable water management, particularly in areas like Kikruma village, where water scarcity poses a significant challenge. The picturesque village of Kikruma lies in the rain shadow mountain region of Phek district in Nagaland, at an altitude of 1,643 metres. Kikruma receives only about 461.18 millimetres of rain annually while Nagaland's average annual rainfall is 2,000 millimetres with 150 rainy days. The Seidzu and Khuza rivers, which flow to the south and north of the settlement, are seasonal rivers that are incapable of meeting the community's water needs. In order to address the community's enduring water scarcity, they designed the Ruza (pronounced "ree-zah") system of impounding water and utilising it for agriculture. Developed over the course of a century, the Ruza system embodies the ingenuity and resilience of indigenous communities in adapting to their environment.

The Ruza system, also known as the Zabo system, traces its origins to the ingenuity of the Naga people in addressing water scarcity in steep terrains with limited rainfall. At its core, the Ruza system involves the creation of large ponds to collect runoff water, which is then utilised for gravity-based irrigation. This community endeavor integrates various aspects of agriculture, forestry, horticulture, fishery, and animal husbandry, fostering a holistic approach to resource management. The adoption of the Ruza system has yielded manifold benefits for agriculture and allied activities in Nagaland. By harnessing runoff water through strategically placed ponds, farmers can mitigate the impact of water scarcity and ensure consistent irrigation for their crops. This has led to increased agricultural productivity, particularly in dryland areas where conventional irrigation methods are impractical. Additionally, the integration of forestry and horticulture within the Ruza system promotes agroforestry practices, enhancing soil health and biodiversity.

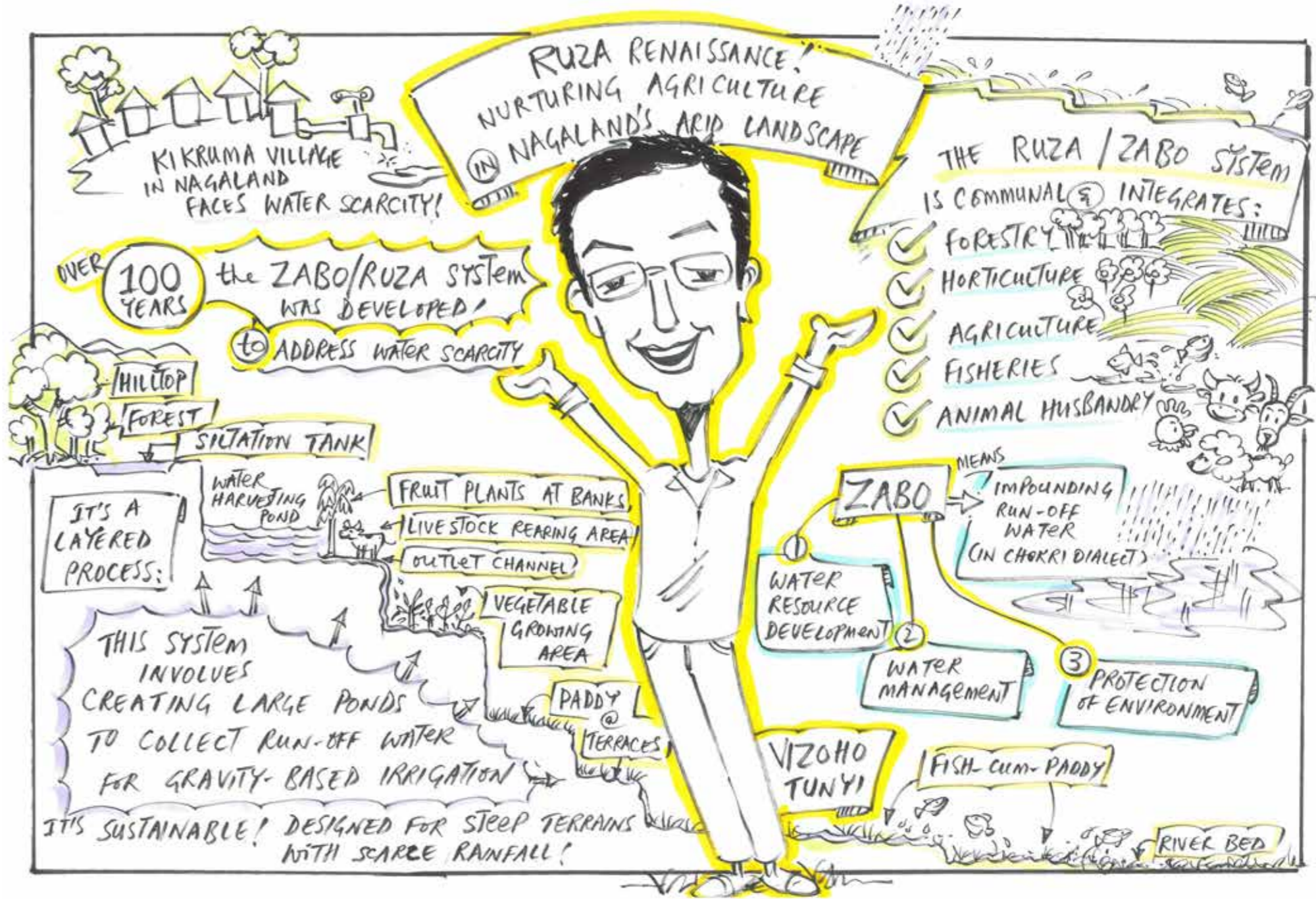
Furthermore, it supports fishery and animal husbandry activities by providing water sources for aquaculture and livestock rearing. The symbiotic relationship between these components fosters a balanced ecosystem, where each element contributes to the overall sustainability of agricultural practices.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Ruza system is its inherent sustainability and resilience in the face of climatic variations. As climate change poses increasingly severe challenges, traditional knowledge systems like Ruza offer valuable insights into adaptive strategies. The decentralised nature empowers local communities to manage their resources effectively, reducing reliance on external inputs and minimising environmental degradation. The success of the Ruza system serves as a testament to the potential of indigenous farming practices to address contemporary challenges. With appropriate technology interventions and support from governmental and non-governmental agencies the Ruza system can be replicated and adapted to similar agro ecological contexts across the region. Rainwater harvesting, a fundamental component of the Ruza system, holds immense promise for enhancing water security and mitigating soil erosion in hill agriculture. As we confront the complexities of a changing climate, initiatives like the Ruza system offer a ray of hope, demonstrating that resilience lies within the collective wisdom of local communities.



Vezohu Tunyi
Kikruma, Phek, Nagaland

Tekhe Chirah, FES
(Facilitator)



The Emerging Role Models Of Environment Protection – Narasimhappa And Venkataravanappa

Despite their limited literacy, 47-year-old Narasimhappa and 51-year-old Venkataravanappa, residents of the village S Gollahalli in the S. Devganahalli Gram Panchayat of Chikkaballapur district, Karnataka state, are guiding their community towards development.

The livelihoods of the communities dependent on Commons in S Gollahalli village were threatened due to the encroachment on the common resources. Over 200 acres of pasture land and common water bodies were under threat of encroachment by influential people of the area. Narasimhappa and Venkataravanappa withstood resistance and formed the *Gramavibiridhi Sangha* (village institution) in their community to help in the management of Commons in the area. In 2012, the Village Institution came into force under their leadership which included members from all class and caste groups.

Once the committee was formed, the community came together to create a resource map to identify all the resources of the community. Subsequently, after the declassification of collective properties by CLM, encroachment of the common lands was prevented by registering them in the property registry of the Gram Panchayat. Rules were established for the management and conservation of these Commons in the community. Plantation activities were undertaken on the gomala (pasture lands) where close to 9000 saplings were planted over the years.

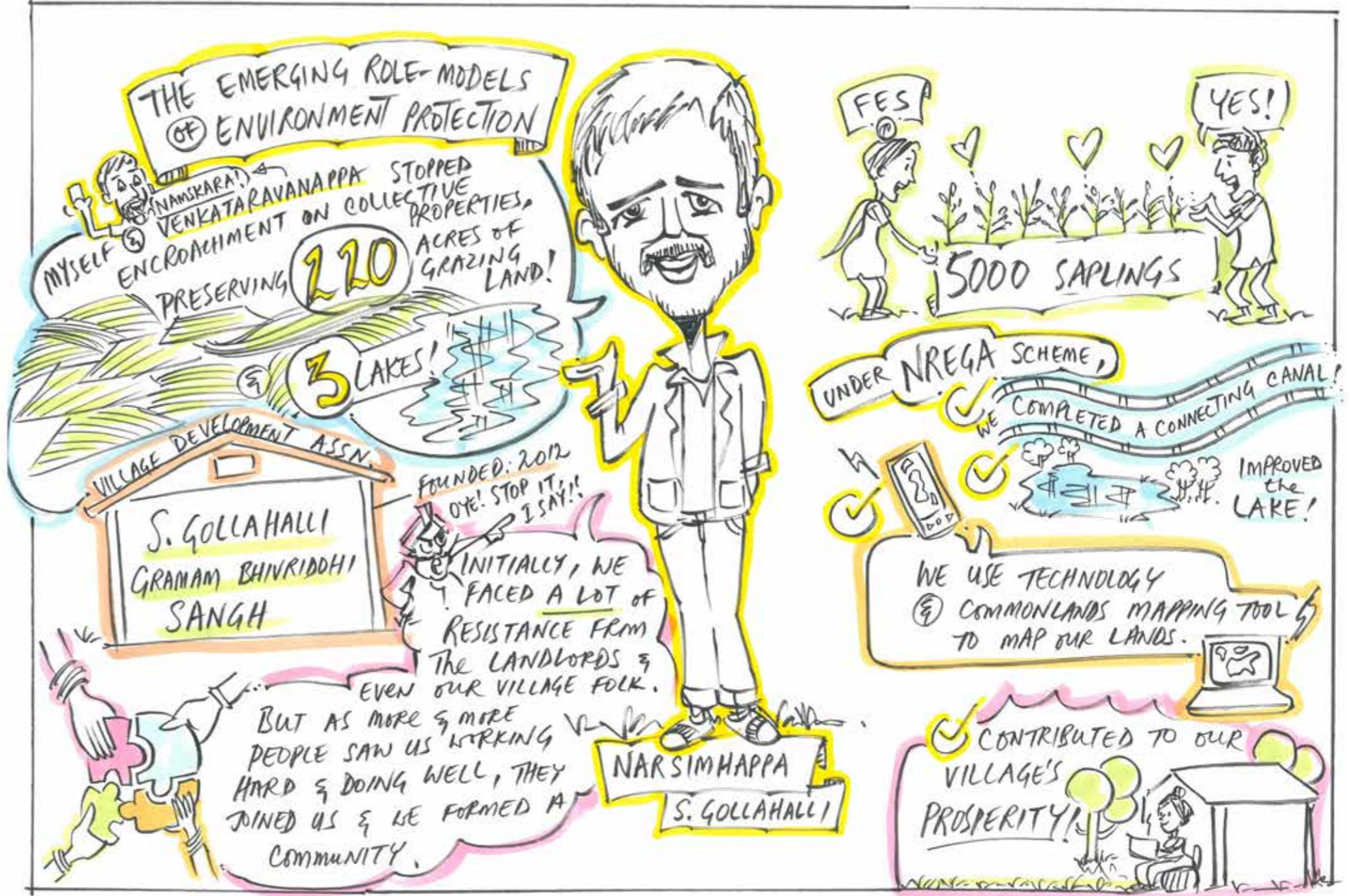
In spite of resistance, as part of the conservation efforts, under MGNREGA, Narasimhappa and Venkataravanappa helped to mobilise community members to construct a 1,280 metre canal that improved the water flow to the S Gollahalli Lake, thus supporting agriculture and livestock rearing. A total of 2.5 lakh rupees was collectively earned thus supporting incomes of the community. Subsequent projects, like stone walls and dams, further contributed to soil and water conservation. They have also been able to leverage MGNREGA to improve the local ecology through constructions of canal, stone barrages, dams, and afforestation. The community opines that these activities have helped improve the habitat for several wild animals like squirrels, jackals, rabbits and deer in the region.

Both Narasimhappa and Venkataravanappa actively work with youngsters, to ensure that these community experiences are carried forward, and enable communities in the better management of natural resources of the region.



Narashimappa
S. Gollahalli,
S Devganahalli,
Chikkaballapur, Karnataka

Ramesh, FES
(Facilitator)



Strengthening Livelihoods Through Cattle Pond Initiative On Common Lands

Kumar, a resident of Tailuru village, Somanahalli Gram Panchayat in Mandya, Karnataka, completed his SSLC and developed an interest in village development through the MGNREGA programme. Driven by a desire to support his community and livestock, he initiated efforts to restore the community lake, which is locally known as *Karlu Kere*.

Under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), a project was launched to rejuvenate and protect the lake. Located in Somanahalli village, Maddur Taluk, Mandya District, the lake serves as a crucial water source for the community and livestock in surrounding areas.

Karlu kere has been essential for the community, providing water for crops and livestock during the summer months. The availability of water in the lake for agriculture and drinking purposes has reduced the need for members of the community to migrate to other towns in search of livelihood opportunities as the agriculture is well sustained in their own community. However, over the years due to declining community interest, the lake was in a state of neglect, making the water unsafe for consumption.

The community united to restore the lake, and the Gram Sabha quickly passed a resolution to begin the project through MGNREGA. Community members were encouraged to actively participate in the project, and financial support was fully secured through MGNREGA. Local job cardholders took part in the labour, while the Zilla Panchayat approved an additional ₹5 lakh to fund the renovation. This collaboration of departments and the strong community involvement fostered a sense of ownership over their resources.

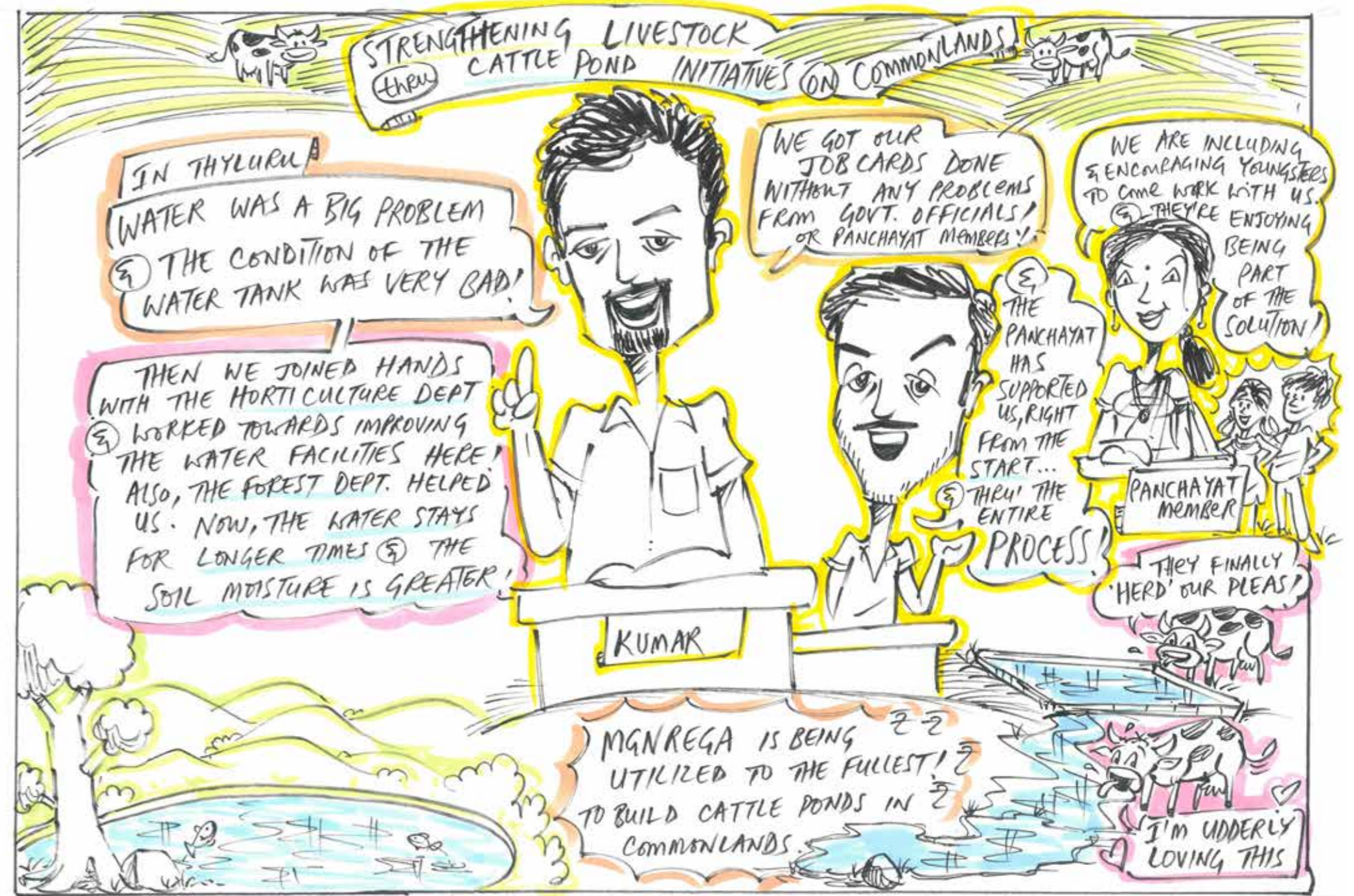
The project's success has inspired the community to undertake similar initiatives and engage with government programmes to restore more water bodies in the area. The community also hopes that MGNREGA will increase wages and extend labour days to maximise these benefits for the community.

On January 26, 2023, the community held a flag-hoisting ceremony around the rejuvenated lake, with Gram Panchayat members, schoolchildren, teachers, and residents joining together to celebrate the completion of the lake rejuvenation project. With the completion of the project, water availability for agriculture and livestock has been restored. Incomes of the community have been improved as the members actively took part in the labour of the project. This project exemplifies the collective action undertaken to safeguard and manage the resources effectively.



Kumar
Thyluru, Maddur, Mandya, Karnataka

Bheemanaika.B.R.,
FES (Facilitator)



Restoring Ramajogihalli's Traditional Kalyani Tank Through Community Effort

Ramajogihalli village is located 15 km west of Challakere taluk headquarters, Chitradurga, Karnataka. The village spans an area of 2596 acres and is characterised by black soil. Surrounded by the Jogihills to the north and west, a ditch to the east, and a hamlet at the north-west corner, Ramajogihalli extends across 2,596 acres and is home to 1,561 families.

For many years, the community of Ramajogihalli relied on the *Pushkarini* (a traditional stepwell) for drinking water. They would draw water with pots but in 1964, the Rural Development Minister, Virendra Patil, initiated the installation of a pump set to lift water from the *Pushkarini*, ensuring a more consistent water supply for the village. Groundwater levels in the area were at moderate levels and catered to the community's requirements. However, over the years, as the population grew, a decline in the water level was seen. Every year, the rains would bring in large amounts of soil into the *Kalyani*, leading to its gradual degradation. Over time, weeds and moss took over, and some members of the community began dumping garbage into the well as well. As the rainfall decreased annually, the water in the *Pushkarini* dried up and the community members turned to borewells for drinking water. However, there was still a shortage of water for their livestock, forcing them to fetch water from a distance of 3 to 4 kilometres.

Suresh Babu and Chidambara Reddy, discussed the issue with other Gram Panchayat members, and came up with a plan to desilt the *Pushkarini*, which was later included in the action plan under MGNREGA. Approved by the Grama Sabha, the restoration work was initiated in the year 2017-18. Desilting continued for about 22 days with community members actively participating in the plan. On the 8th day of the work, water was noticed seeping into the bottom of the *Kalyani*. The work under MGNREGA generated 549 man-days for the community. At present, a wire fence has been erected around the *Kalyani*, and the Gram Panchayat is responsible for its maintenance, ensuring that it is preserved primarily for drinking water.

Prior to the restoration work, community members travelled to distant fields to fetch water. But now, their requirements were fulfilled within their community. The surrounding borewells were recharged, improving the availability of groundwater; thus, leading to better crop yields of ragi, groundnut and onions, thereby benefiting the livelihoods of the community. The shortage of drinking water for the community was finally resolved. The rejuvenation work also prevented migration and improved the socio-economic conditions of the community. The Zilla Panchayat CEO emphasised the importance of rainwater harvesting in the drought prone area of Challakere. Inspired by the success of the *Pushkarini* restoration, the PDOs (Panchayat Development Officers) were instructed to desilt similar wells in the 40 neighbouring grama panchayats in the taluk as well.

The success story of the *Pushkarini* restoration was even published by *Vijaya Karnataka*, a prominent state newspaper, highlighting the collective action of the community in synergy with MGNREGA.



Chidambara Reddy
 Ramajogihalli, Challakere, Chitradurga, Karnataka

Bylappa B, FES
 (Facilitator)



Collective Action for Usri Nala Check Dam Renovation

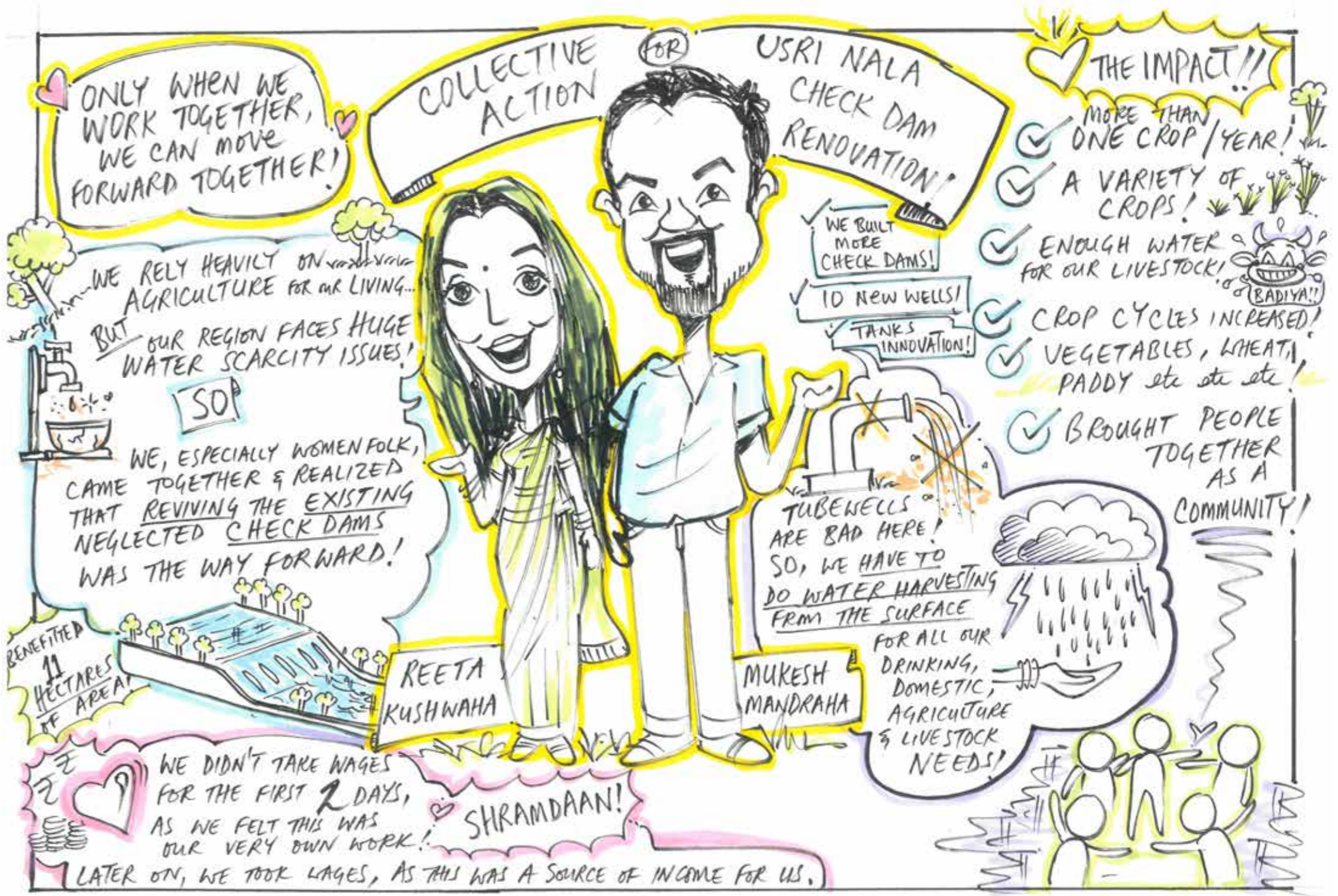
In the village of Bargarh in Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh, water scarcity caused by dry spells during the summer months in the recent decades has hindered the community's livelihood pursuits. Primarily agriculture and livestock rearing, water scarcity has raised concerns for the community. With irregular rainfall, and soil erosion compounding the issue, the community decided to come together under the leadership of the *Gram Vikas Samiti* and active participation of women to revive their common water resources. The local check dam, *Usri Nala* was identified to be renovated and discussed with the Gram Panchayat to be included under the MGNREGA shelf of works for the year. Started as shramdaan by the community, members enrolled under the MGNREGA and earned wages by undertaking the work. *Usri Nala* was renovated to conserve rainwater, mitigate soil erosion, and recharge groundwater in the area. As a result, 27 acres of farmland gained a steady water supply, allowing 36 farmers to diversify and boost their crop yields. The newfound water availability also meant they could sell surplus produce, enhancing their household income and ensure economic security.

Beyond agriculture, the renovation of *Usri Nala* has had an impact on the local environment, sustaining groundwater levels and stabilising the ecosystem. Community members felt a renewed sense of unity, having collaborated to build a sustainable water solution together, and took up the work of renovating many more check dams and tanks in the area. A critical impact of such collective action has been that the women in the community find confidence in putting forward their ideas for village development and resource management among the community. This project is now a model of resilience and self-reliance, showing how community efforts in water conservation can secure both livelihoods and environmental health, making a lasting difference for generations to come.



Reeta Kushwaha
Bargarh, Mau, Chitrakoot,
Uttar Pradesh

Mukesh Mandraha,
SRIJAN (Facilitator)



Building Community Ponds For Better Water Availability

In the village of Bagaspur, located 20 kilometres west of Kanha National Park in Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh, water scarcity was a significant challenge. With 58 households, including 2 Lohar families, 8 Ahir families, and 49 Adivasi (Gond) families, due to the lack of irrigation facilities, the community depended solely on rain-fed paddy as cultivating a second crop was not possible.

For years, the people of Bagaspur faced numerous difficulties related to water. With only two ponds, situated about 2 kilometres away from their village near the forests, the community members had to walk long distances to fetch water for bathing, washing, and providing for their livestock. This road became difficult to walk during the monsoon, and the threat of encountering wild animals increased.

In 2014, the community formed the Village Environment Committee with the support of FES, and envisioned to sustainably manage the resources of the community through the Committee. Rajkumar Variya, the Secretary of the committee, along with other community members, began holding regular meetings every fortnight or monthly to discuss relevant issues to help in the development of resources.

One of the critical issues raised in these discussions was the location of the ponds, which posed a risk due to their proximity to the forests. The community was determined to resolve the problem and decided to construct a pond closer to the village. In an act of solidarity, Rajkumar Variya offered half an acre of his own land for the construction of a new water pond for the community. The entire community agreed to contribute their labour towards building the pond, ensuring it remained a collective resource for them.

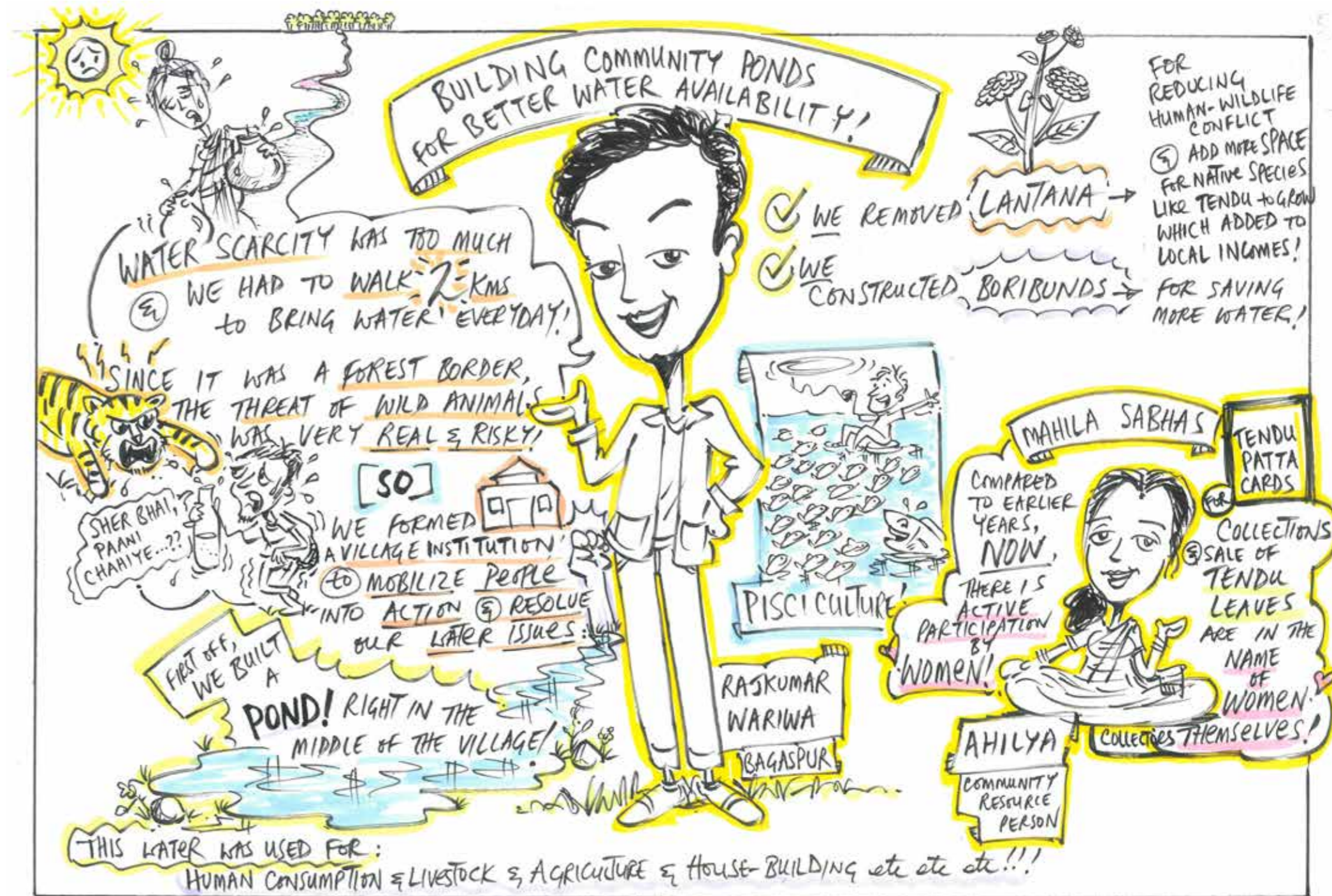
The pond, once completed, became a vital resource for the people of Bagaspur, providing water for essential daily activities such as bathing, washing, and livestock care. Rajkumar also took responsibility for fish farming in the pond, with the community agreeing that the fish would be his to harvest. The water usage was managed collectively, following rules set in 2014, which continue to be observed today.

This community-led initiative not only solved a critical water issue but also strengthened the bonds within the community, demonstrating the power of collective effort and the importance of sustainable resource management.



Rajkumar Variya
Bagaspur, Bichhiya,
Mandla, Madhya Pradesh

Mithun Bisen & Harshal Boniwar,
FES (Facilitator)



Empowering Commons: The Success Story of Thana Village in Rajasthan

Nestled among the rocky outcrops of the Aravallis, in Mandal Block of Bhilwara District, Rajasthan, lies Thana, a small village of 250 households. In the year 2006, battling problems of common land degradation, low fodder availability, low agricultural productivity and water scarcity, the community from Thana observed a noticeable change in the pastureland of the neighboring village Gyangarh. With active discussion with them, the Thana community approached FES for support and the village institution, 'Charagah Vikas Samiti, Thana' was formed in 2006. The VI was determined to construct a boundary for the pasture land to stop free grazing. However, the major challenge they faced was mobilising the community to work, since people refused to work doubting whether they would be paid. When community members refused to participate in the work, villagers from another village were invited to participate in the work. After a few days of work, the worker's wages were paid at the common Choupal of Thana village, in front of all community members. After observing that people from outside were earning wages by working on their common land, the community resolved to undertake the work themselves. Following this each household contributed Rs. 100 and a 1 km long wall was constructed in 3 days.

In 2006, the VI devised rules to protect their Commons. A guard was appointed to monitor the charagah, but it was a collective effort in protection. Nobody could enter the grazing land with an axe. A fine of Rs. 100 would be charged to anyone who lets her/his animal graze on the land without permission. The protected grazing land was closed for 5 months to facilitate revegetation, during which livestock feed in the open grazing land or are fed with fodder from private fields. Money was collected for grazing large ruminants. The money collected through this was used to pay the guard and for maintenance of the boundary wall. Fines were levied on violators in the community.

Following this under MGNREGA, 9 lakh was sanctioned for constructing a wall and other soil and water conservation structures around the 50 acre pasture land. Seeds were dispersed by SHG members and 7,000-8,000 locally suitable plants such as Neem, Dhokra, Khejdi, Arjuna and Desi Babool were planted in the grassland. As the restoration work was undertaken on the Revenue Waste Lands (RWL), the community members simultaneously undertook processes to claim their Commons, since they had no legal entitlement over the land. The VI approached the Gram panchayat in requesting permission to undertake the conversion process. After all the bureaucratic processes, the community was able to convert almost 90 acres of revenue waste land to grazing land.

Highlighting the interlinkage of grassland development with other resources, Shankar stated that the water level in wells had increased along with the soil moisture content which had enhanced their agricultural productivity. After claiming, restoring and protecting their degraded Commons, the community shines as a ray of inspiration for other communities, facing similar circumstances and reflects values such as humility in learning from others and being determined in the face of adversity.

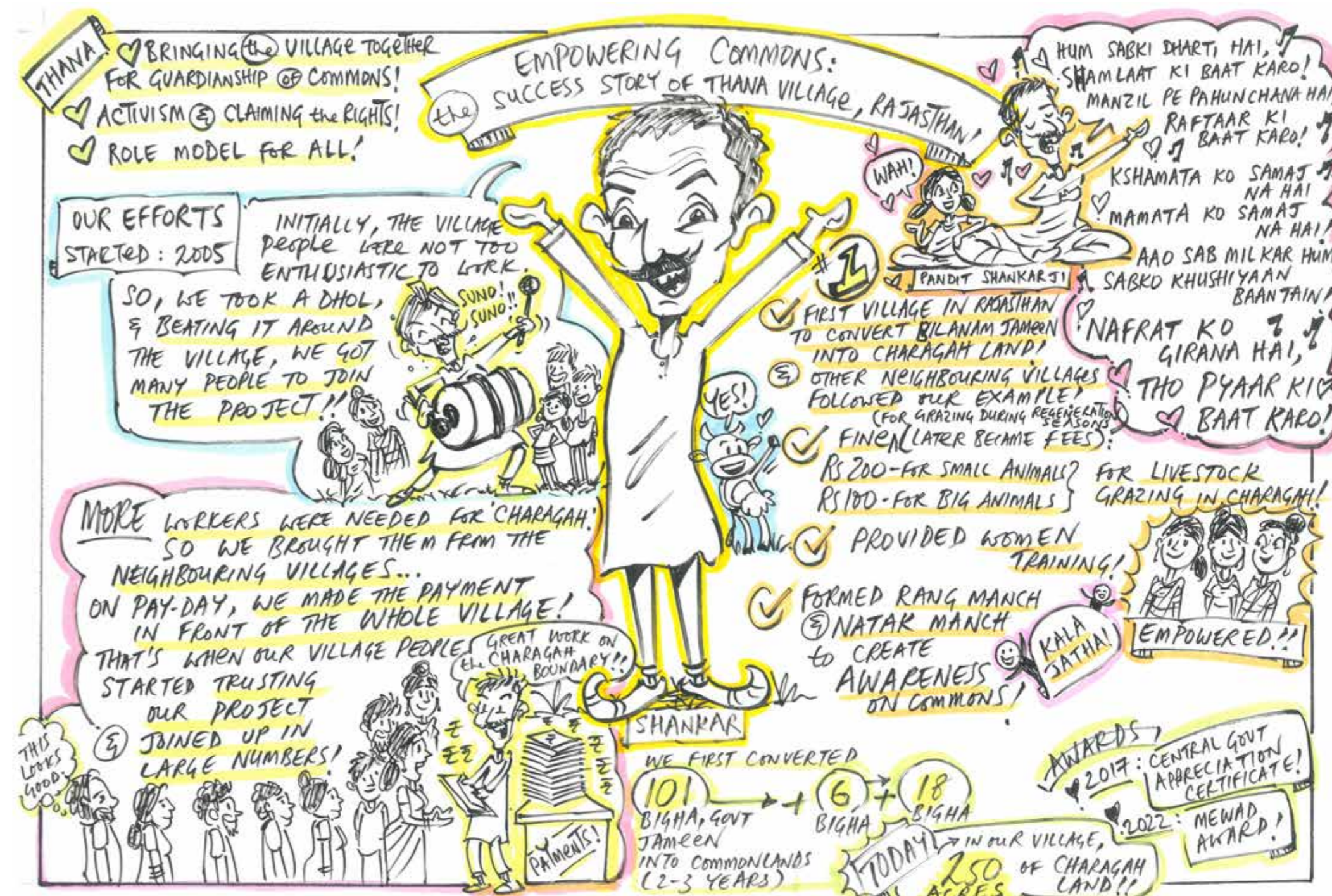


Shankar

Thana, Karera, Bhilwara, Rajasthan

Latika Sisodia, FES

(Facilitator)



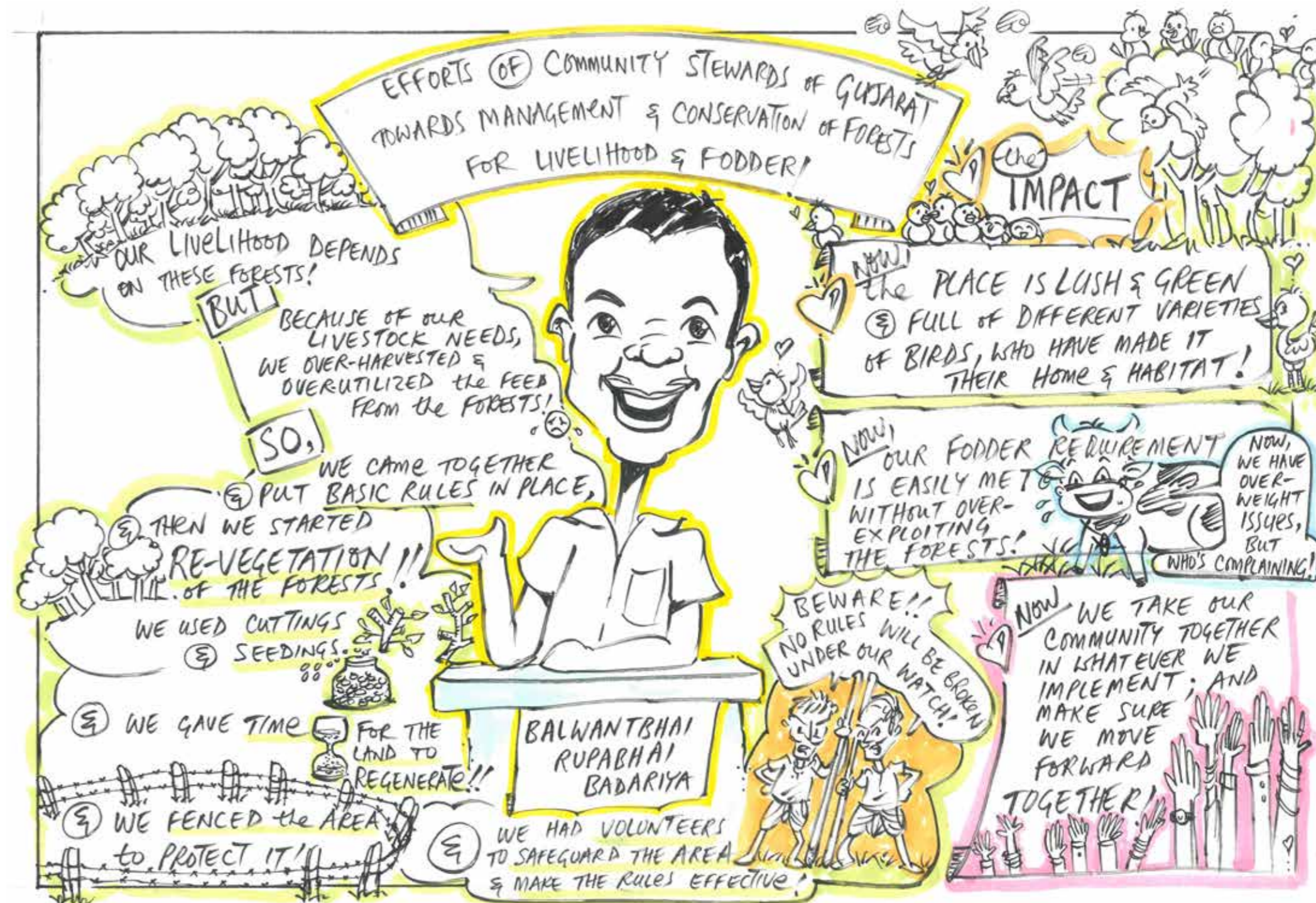
Efforts Of Community Stewards Of Gujarat Towards Management And Conservation Of Forest For Livelihood And Fodder

Siyal's community-led initiative for forest conservation and management is commendable. Siyal village of Kadana block of Mahisagar district, Gujarat has 371 acres of forest lands. Balvantbhai Padariya has been associated with forest management since 2003, initially through the Forest Department then later with local organisation FES through the Jay Ambe Van Vikas Vraksh Uchar Samiti (community level forest management committee). With the understanding that the communities would benefit from the local species of trees, the Samiti planted local species like *Sewan*, *Neem*, *Kher*, *Bamboo*, *Amla*, *Sag*, *Khati Amla*, *Gugad* and *Mahuda*. Locally, bamboo has been used for house construction, *Gugad* is used for puja, *Mahuda* is used for consumption by the members. Plantation of local species was undertaken on the Commons to help rejuvenate the barren lands and also intended to meet the fodder requirements of the community. The *Samiti* framed norms for regulating fodder collection and restricted open grazing on the plantation sites. Forty families are dependent on the forest for fodder grass, which is estimated to be around 70,000 kg of fodder annually. Farmers having farms near the plantation sites were urged to be vigilant and cooperate for the conservation of the forests. A watchman was appointed to regularly monitor the forest areas. The *Samiti* also constructed *Patthar Pada* (stone bunding), *Mati Pada* (soil bunding), which helped the community to retain the seeds and improve the water content in the region which has directly benefited in raising the water table in the community wells. With the help of MGNREGA funds, the forest pond was also revived and wildlife population particularly *nilgai* in the area was seen to improve. Balvantbhai, himself, visited the sites regularly and educated the communities around about the benefits of conserving forests. Recently, the *Samiti* decided to develop natural fencing around the plantation site as well. Balvantbhai received an Appreciation Letter for Afforestation from the Forest Department in the year 2023. The proactive *Samiti* meet regularly to discuss challenges and to find solutions for better management of resources in the community. It is well-equipped with indigenous knowledge and also makes efforts to integrate it with scientific knowledge to strengthen the community Institution.



**Balvantbhai
Rupabhai
Padariya**
Siyal, Padana, Mahisagar,
Gujarat

Sanjay Dabhi, FES
(Facilitator)



Healthy Resilient Commons Through Community Stewardship: The Story Of Paylibahur

Three decades ago, the forest area near Paylibahur, Niwas Block, Mandla district, Madhya Pradesh was degraded. Over exploitation of the forests was a severe concern to the forest dependent community of Payalibahur. Community meetings were called to discuss the apathy of the forests. During which rules were established to help conserve and manage the forests of their community. The rules focussed on - green trees not being cut, and dry wood could only be collected with community permission; and stump dressing was done to encourage faster growth of the trees. It was also decided that two members (one from every household) would patrol the forest to keep a check on any violations. All non-timber forest products (NTFPs) would be collectively harvested on fixed days decided by the community. The village Kotwal was made responsible to communicate all the set norms to every member of the community. These steps helped in the regeneration of the forest thus benefiting the community.

Once the forest regenerated, the rules became more flexible, and the previous pattern of overharvesting started to reappear. The community reconvened this time with support from FES and drafted bye-laws for protection and management of the Commons. Through shramdan, gully plugs, stone outlets, farm ponds, stone dams and continuous contour trenches were constructed in the nearby forest area to reduce soil erosion in the upper areas.

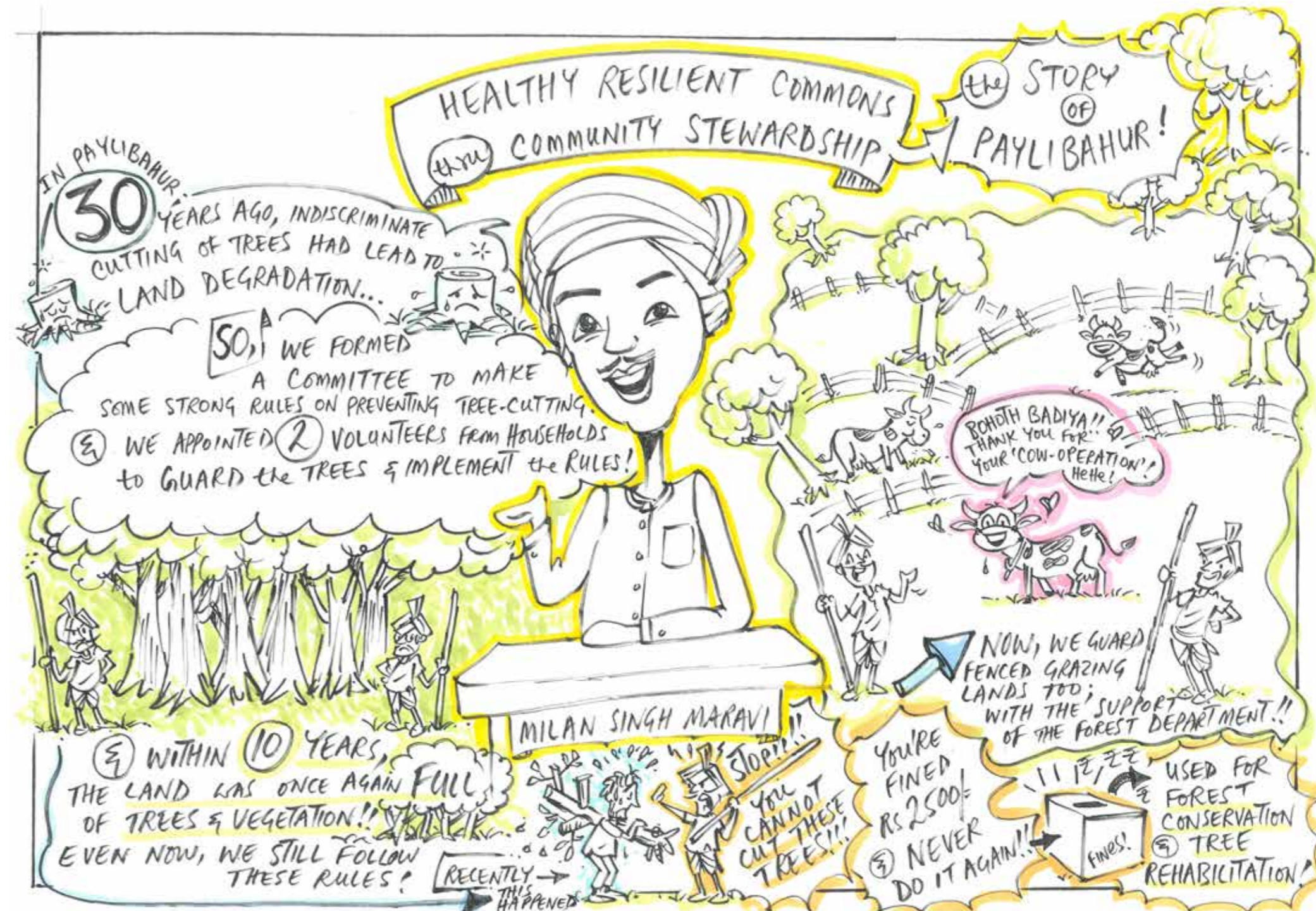
The community collectively reclaimed the encroached land and planted native tree species like mango, amla, *karanja*, *khmer*, and *mahua*. They also contributed four days of shramdan to build fences for these saplings. In partnership with the Forest Department, 74 acres of common land were fenced and converted into a managed grazing area (*Charagah*), with rules to protect the land, including fines for unauthorised grazing. This stopped livestock grazing on the common land, allowing community members to access sufficient fodder for their livestock.

In a recent community-driven effort, on World Swadeshi Day, one member from every household planted a tree on the community's common land. The community also volunteered for two days of shramdan to desilt livestock ponds during summer. Collective community action has ensured that the Paylibahur's Commons are conserved and sustainably managed, providing a model of resilient community-led stewardship.



Milan Singh Maravi
Payali Bahur, Niwas,
Mandla, Madhya Pradesh

Alok Vishnoi, FES
(Facilitator)



Champakhenda's Journey: From Forest Degradation To Conservation Triumph

Champakhenda lies in Pottangi block of Koraput District, Odisha. During the late 90's the collection of fuelwood and the practice of *podu chass* (a variation of slash and burn agriculture) had increased resulting in forest degradation, leading to the low availability of forest produce. The degradation also severely impacted the water availability in the Commons and thus affecting agricultural productivity and incomes of the community.

As the dependence on forest remained, the community members had to travel 7-8 kms to neighbouring forests to fulfil their requirements. Neighbouring communities were often hostile, women were at constant risk as they faced harassment and often the interaction escalated into petty fights. Facing these issues, the community members decided to manage their own forest resources so that all their requirements could be fulfilled within the community. A committee was constituted with the intention to protect, conserve and manage their Commons. A series of meetings were conducted to formulate the bylaws of the committee which included aspects of resource benefit sharing, measures to improve conservation like afforestation, soil and water conservation structures, amongst others. Landless families were allowed to access the Commons to collect NTFPs to support their livelihoods. During the *Chait Parab* festival, the tribals (*Chaiti* tribe) would mass hunt to celebrate the festival. But with strict norms, over the past 4 years mass hunting was completely stopped and the same was being encouraged in the neighbouring communities as well. The committee also ensured that hefty fines be levied in case of any violation to the bylaws.

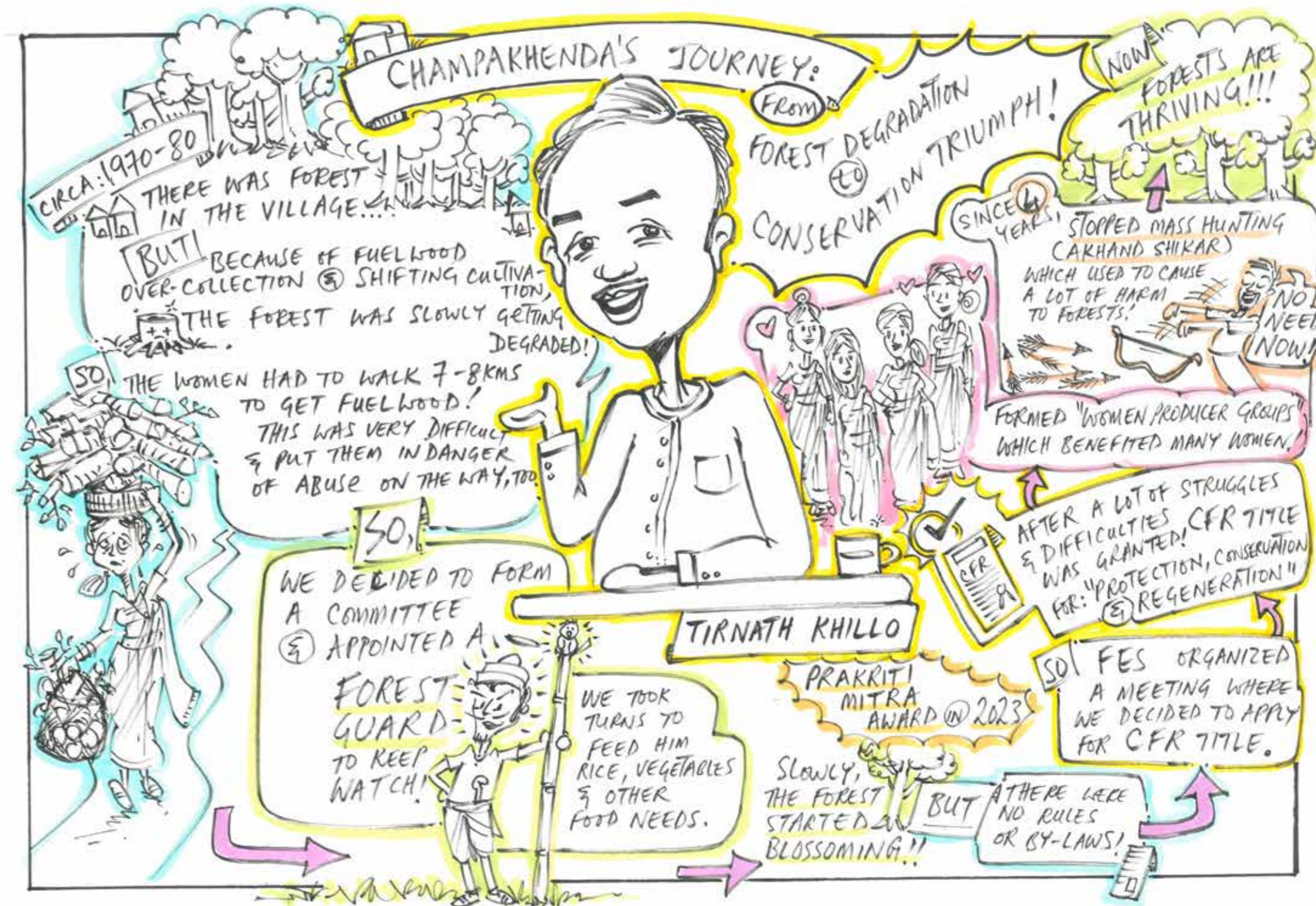
During the planning of activities to be undertaken, the committee decided that afforestation activities must be undertaken. But along with that, regular patrolling was necessary to keep a check on any encroachers in the area. A forest guard was appointed to monitor the three forest patches daily and was paid by community contributions. Each household had to contribute 4-5 kg of grains each (mostly millets) and a salary of Rs 10 was paid. Regular monitoring resulted in the gradual increase in the forest density, leading the committee to undertake the subsequent steps in the conservation process. With the assistance of the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), the community decided to apply for the Community Forest Rights (CFR) under the Forest Rights Act 2006. Active steps were taken to strengthen the village committee by strict adherence to the by-laws which had provisions for access and usage of resources for domestic and economic purposes. Implementation of all the norms were rigidly followed thus ensuring active community participation in the conservation process. The process of securing the CFR rights was very tedious. But with unending efforts by the committee, FES with support from the Collector, Champakhenda was able to secure the CFR title on their Commons in 2019. The committee also supported women producer groups, established a women's producer company and leveraged various government schemes to benefit these women groups which helped enhance their socio economic status in the community. With the abundance of resources, the community members did not need to travel to other villages to collect the forest produce.

In recognition of their efforts on conservation and overall development, the community was awarded the 'Prakruti Mitra' Award in the year 2023 from the Odisha State government. Through the concerted efforts of community and collective action, streams and water sources have rejuvenated, the density, variety of species and the biodiversity of the forest has increased which has positively supported agriculture and other livelihood in the region.



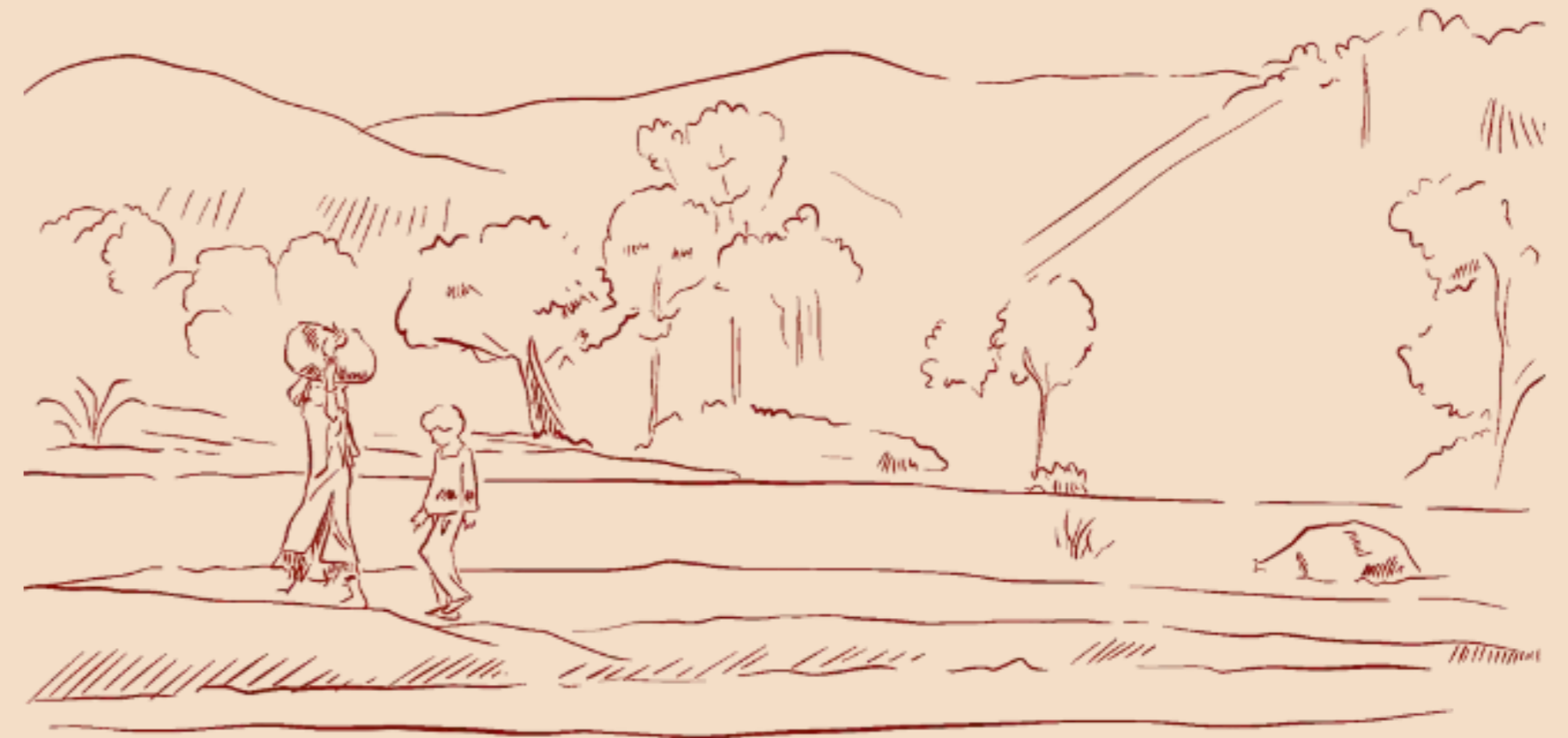
Tirnath Khillo
Champakhenda, Pottangi,
Koraput, Odisha

Krutika Priyadarshni Mohanty, FES
(Facilitator)



Struggles of Commoning

Experiences highlighting shared struggles and challenges of communities while commoning and managing resources, like inequitable accessibility, lack of proper governance conditions, and other threats that put their identity, income source and well-being at jeopardy.



The Story Of Mahkoni Village Struggle To Protect Their Forest

In the heart of Chhattisgarh, Mahkoni village of Balodabazar district stands as a beacon of community empowerment and environmental stewardship. Headed by the Saraswati Mahila Group and fuelled by the advocacy of the Dalit Adivasi Manch Sangathan, the community embarked on a journey to reclaim their rights under the Forest Rights Act of 2006. In 2015, they filed community claims for 4596 acres of land.

Despite delays in receiving formal recognition, the community remained vigilant in safeguarding their ancestral lands. In September 2018, when there were attempts to encroach their common resources the women's group halted the illegal logging and protected their livelihoods.

The incident underscored a larger issue pursuing Mahkoni: the struggle for forest rights and food security. For generations, the forest has been an integral part to the community's life and well being, providing sustenance through resources like mahua, tendu leaves, and honey. However, indiscriminate logging threatened to disrupt this delicate balance. Negotiations with Forest Department officials led to the sequestration of logging equipment and a temporary halt to deforestation activities. Guided by the principles of participatory democracy, the community, led by women leaders, convened a Gram Sabha to deliberate on the matter and plan their course of action.

Their perseverance bore fruit when a delegation of Forest Department officials, including senior officers, expressed regret for their lapses and the community reclaimed agency over their land. The seized wood was redistributed among the community, symbolising a triumph of resilience over adversity.

The story of the Mahkoni community serves as a testament to the power of collective action in the face of struggles. By asserting their rights, the community not only safeguarded their livelihoods but also upheld their duty as custodians of their forests.



Rambha Bai

Mahkoni, Balodabazar,
Chhattisgarh

Koushalya Chauhan,
Sajag (Facilitator)



Resilience Prevails: Totadihi's Struggle and Triumph in Forest Conservation

Duryodhan Gadmajhi is a member of a 40-household village by the name of Totadihi in Banspal Block, Keonjhar district, Odisha. He is a ward member and has also played a significant role in protecting the local forests. The members of the community are heavily dependent on the forests as they practise *Podu Chash* or shifting cultivation during the monsoon season. They also collect minor forest produce (MFP) like *Kendu*, *Char*, *Mahua*, etc from the forests. However, over time they noticed a significant decline in the supply of MFP and the water flow in the local stream. Community level discussions resulted in the members deciding that MFP collection was the sustainable option for them to conserve their forest resources and not *Podu Chash*, which often led to forest fires. Following this shifting cultivation was brought to a halt in the village.

The community members established bylaws to ensure the protection of the forests and also a mechanism to ensure equal distribution of MFP among the members of the community. They also formulated groups of three to carry out a local watch and ward system called *Thengapalli*.

Although shifting cultivation had been stopped within the traditional boundary of Totadihi, neighbouring communities still continued to practise the same, which posed a threat to the adjoining forest areas. When attempts to reason and raise awareness failed, the community in Totadihi blocked the road, thus restricting their access to the main town. This ensured that local communities were made more aware of the situation.

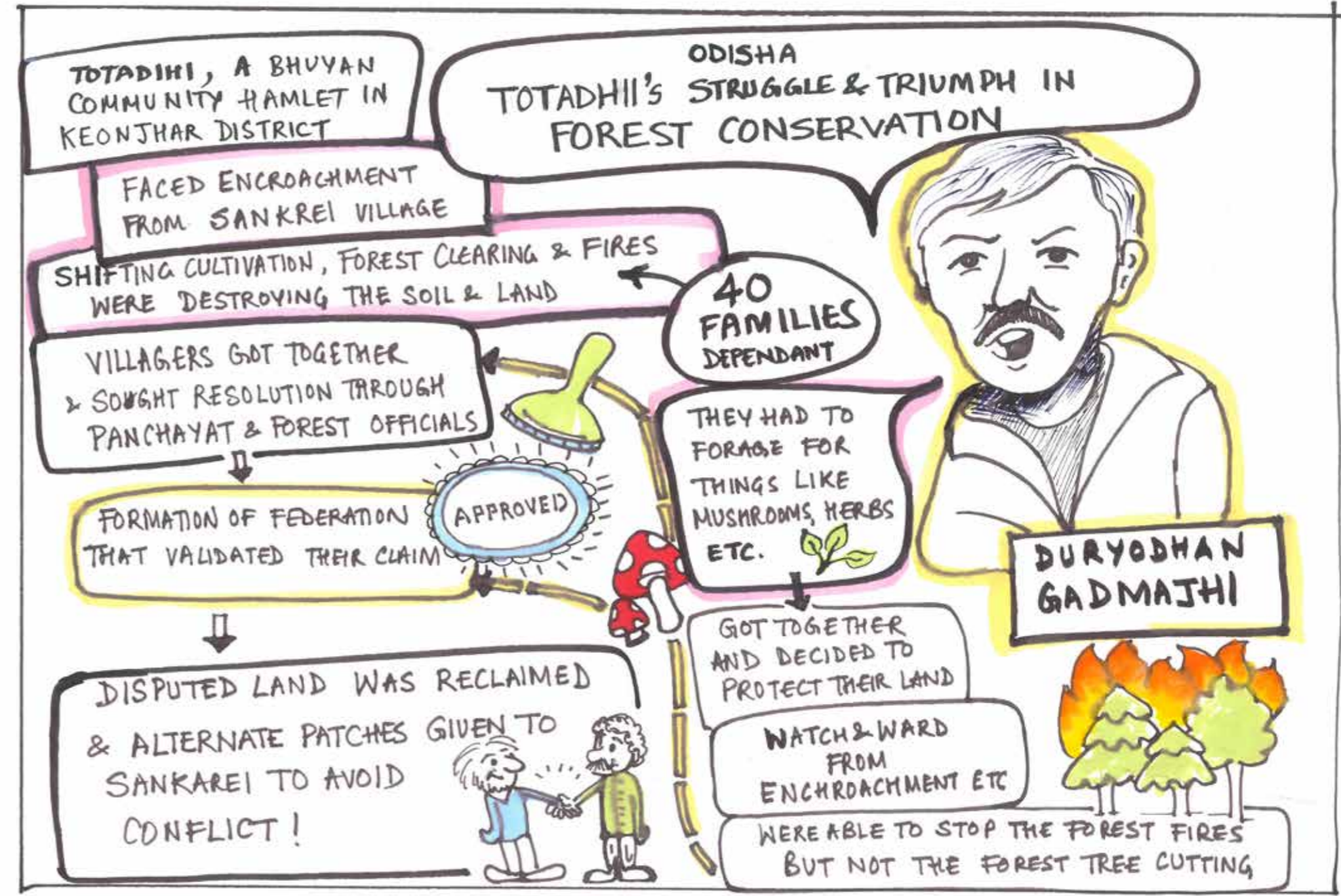
They also took assistance from the Forest Department to facilitate discussions with other stakeholders to encourage conservation in the area. Following this, a federation was formed to leverage support from multi-level stakeholders for natural resource management in the region.

Shifting cultivation practices had left 69 acres of land barren and unproductive. The community members took part in a planting exercise and planted 13,000 saplings of local species like Mango, Guava, and *Hareda* in this area thereby rejuvenating this barren land. Totadihi showcases a tale of triumph for the community in protecting their forests.



Duryodhan Gadmajhi
Totadihi, Banspal,
Keonjhar, Odisha

Saswatik Tripathy,
FES (Facilitator)



Struggle Of Communities In Asserting Their Rights, Challenging Displacement, And Advocating For Implementation Of The Forest Rights Act

The Achanakmar Tiger Reserve was established in 1984 and consisted of 25 settlements within its core area. Unfortunately, from 1984 to 2009 the Government began cutting down traditional tree species such as Sal, Saja, Beeja, and Bamboo causing significant damage to the forests. After the construction of a major development project, six settlements belonging to the Baiga tribal community were relocated without proper approval from the Gram Sabha and in violation of the Forest Rights Act. The remaining nine settlements in the core area were not considered for displacement until 2012. In 2012, the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve which was previously in Bilaspur District, was moved to Mungeli District. As a result of the relocation, the 19 settlements were displaced.

Following this, the Forest Department launched a disciplinary campaign to force the early relocation of 19 communities from the core area. Punitive actions were taken, which affected the livelihood, education, health, and culture of the Baiga and Gond tribes living in those regions. In December 2019, the DFO halted all government development programmes in the 19 settlements. Additionally, restricted movement of local community members was implemented causing great inconvenience to all. Despite discussions with the District Magistrate and Forest Division Officer, with the assistance of local public representatives, no success was achieved. The compensation given by the Government to the Baiga tribals of the six displaced communities in the past was inadequate.

In the year 2021, a monthly initiative was taken to raise awareness about the Forest Rights Act and Gram Sabhas in all the communities. During a meeting, a movement was started to demand a village institution in every community and regularly conduct Gram Sabhas to ensure the implementation of the Forest Rights Act. Gram Sabhas in all the communities were conducted, with active participation, thereby exercising their legal rights under Sections 4(2) and 4(5) of the Forest Rights Act. As a result, people decided to form an organisation named ATR Sangharsh Samiti, to address the displacement and rights of the communities in the ATR core area.

In January 2022, with the required quorum, ten Gram Sabhas in the core area passed Section 3(1) of the Community Forest Resource Rights and Farm Nistar Rights within the traditional limits of the All Rights Act. Following the proper implementation process of SDLC and DLC, on August 8, 2022, in DLC Mungeli, the Honourable Chief Minister granted Community Forest Resource Rights to four settlements in the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve core area. Thus, enabling the communities to use the forest produce to sustain their livelihoods. This marked a new phase in the movement towards community conservation efforts in the region.



Dilharan Tekam
Achanakmar Tiger Reserve
Area, Bilaspur District,
Chhattisgarh

Simanchal Achary,
ATR Sangharsh
Samiti (Facilitator)





Prem Lal Baiga & Jagat Ram Baiga
Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi, Chhattisgarh

Reena Ramteke/
Chandra Pratap Singh, FES (Facilitator)

Recognition of Forest Rights: A Case Study of Bagha Community in Chhattisgarh

The Baiga community resides in the Satpura Maikal mountain ranges of Central India. Referred to as the *Dhartiputra*, or 'sons of the soil', the Baigas have a deep connection to their land. This ancient tribe is divided into various sub-castes such as *Bijwar*, *Bharotiya*, *Narotiya*, and others. According to the 2011 census, the Baiga population in Chhattisgarh is 89,744 with 6,483 residing in the Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi District.

The Baigas have encountered significant challenges in securing their rights to their traditional lands. The Forest Rights Act of 2006, specifically Section 3(1)(e), guarantees habitat rights to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) such as the Baigas. However, the process of acknowledging these rights has been filled with obstacles. To effectively implement habitat rights, an exploratory study was conducted across Baiga settlements on various aspects of the Baiga community. This study entailed understanding the traditional residential boundaries and the community's reliance on surrounding forests and natural resources. The study uncovered that the Baiga community was dispersed across 54 settlements in 19 villages within 13 Gram Panchayats in the Gaurela Development Block.

The Baiga community is deeply rooted in its cultural heritage. They follow a unique social structure with roles like *Samarath*, *Diwan*, *Mukdadam*, and *Kotwar*, who help maintain village policies and social order. Tattooing is a significant cultural practice, especially for women, who believe that tattoos will be carried into the next generation. The Baigas also have a unique system of clans (Gotra), each associated with specific symbols like animals, birds, or trees, which they protect to maintain ecological balance. They rely heavily on forests for their livelihood and healthcare. They use wild herbs to treat various ailments, such as *Coria* bark for stomach aches and *Hadasanghari* for broken limbs. Their intimate knowledge of the forest ecosystem underscores their integral relationship with the natural world.

A significant consultative meeting took place at *Chuktipani Bazardand* with the Baiga leaders to gain a thorough understanding of the Baiga habitat and to facilitate the process of securing habitat rights. Special Gram Sabhas and Forest Rights Committees were conducted in 19 Baiga Para/Tola (hamlets) during which committee functionaries were selected to streamline the process. The Baiga community in Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi presented a detailed action plan at the District Level Forest Rights Committee meeting on April 11, 2003. The Tribal Development Department and local organisations like Nav Nirman Chetna Manch supported the process by providing continuous training and technical support to the Baiga community.

The community's journey towards recognition of their habitat rights is a testament to their resilience and deep connection to their land. While the process is ongoing, the efforts of the Tribal Development Department, local organisations, and the Baiga leaders themselves have laid a strong foundation for securing these rights.



Community's Struggle for Sustainable Forest Management

The community of Kadech, represented by the *Van Suraksha evam Prabandhan Samiti*, has made significant strides in pastureland and forest conservation. Situated in Rajasthan's Udaipur district, Kadech has approximately 951 acres of forest land designated as a protected area and an additional 123 acres set aside for grazing. The community relies on this land for resources and grazing, with over 370 families and 1,110 animals depending on it for livelihood support.

Historically, the forest in Kadech was densely populated with diverse tree species, bamboo, medicinal plants, and a thriving wildlife population. However, extensive deforestation occurred between the 1960s and 1970s, primarily due to the Forest Department's wood exploitation for coal production. During this period, traditional community conservation and management practices weakened, leading to degradation from open grazing and wood sales. By the mid 90s, the forest was severely depleted. In 2000, the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) collaborated with the community to restore the forest. With FES's technical and financial assistance, a Forest Management Committee was established under the forest department's authorisation, empowering the committee to manage the forest sustainably.

The community adopted several sustainable practices to protect and rejuvenate the forest. Two watchmen were appointed and paid collectively by the community. All families contributed labour annually for common lands boundary maintenance. These voluntary efforts, known as *shramdan*, involved each household sending two members to work on the forest boundary for 7-10 days. Furthermore, fines were imposed to discourage grazing within the protected zones, and the community regularly monitored the forest to prevent unauthorised activities. The sustainable practices included restrictions on harvesting green parts of the plants, and a percentage of wild fruits were left in the forest to support local wildlife.

The outcomes of these conservation efforts have been significant. The forest area has a Community Forest Rights (CFR) designation, and its governance model has drawn national and international interest from NGOs and governmental agencies. Ecological improvements include increased Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) production, a rise in wildlife population, and the restoration of year-round water flow in local streams, reflecting the forest's revitalised health. In addition to conservation, the community maintains extensive knowledge of herbal remedies for livestock. Traditional plant-based treatments address issues such as bone diseases, scars, mouth infections, constipation, venomous bites, and infertility. For example, plants like *Gemsi Baam* and *Pitubel* aid in treating bone ailments, while *Ber* and *Khakra* bark mixtures help relieve constipation. The use of these remedies not only sustain animal health but also reinforces the community's reliance on local resources.

The collective actions of Kadech's community, led by the *Van Suraksha evam Prabandhan Samiti*, demonstrate a well-rounded approach to pastureland conservation. Their work has supported the local ecosystem's resilience and benefited hundreds of families who depend on these lands for livestock grazing and resources, embodying a sustainable model for community-based environmental management.



Chandra Prakash Garasiya

Kadech, Gogunda, Udaipur, Rajasthan

Shreya Sharma and Asha Cholaviya, FES (Facilitator)



Struggle for Forest Governance

The community of Salebhat, Chhattisgarh has relied on the rich natural resources of its forests for sustenance and livelihood. Yet, the communities of Salebhat faced numerous challenges in conserving and managing these resources. Under the Forest Rights Act, Salebhat was granted 1544 acres of forest land to be protected.

The formation of the Community Forest Resource Management Committee empowered the Gram Sabha to spearhead forest management and conservation. Monthly meetings were organised, where rules were formulated and implemented with equal participation from men and women, ensuring a democratic and inclusive approach. One of the conservation efforts voluntarily taken up by community members was the creation of fire lines, a preventive measure against forest fires. *Thengapali* was revived, where villagers took turns patrolling the forest to ward off poachers and illegal loggers. The Gram Sabha planted 2,000 saplings from its own nursery where 1,720 saplings thrived, symbolising the community's dedication towards conservation.

The Gram Sabha members divided the forest area into seven manageable blocks for the ease of better resource management. Collective decisions on various aspects such as disposal areas, grazing zones, and protected regions were made, which were notified to the Sub-Divisional Officer (Revenue), neighbouring villages, the Panchayat and the Forest Department, ensuring a collaborative effort in forest management. The meticulous planning helped in balancing the needs of the community with the process of conserving the forest.

The Gram Sabha members also constructed 135 check dams in the forest to arrest soil erosion. They took legal action against poachers within their forest areas.

The Gram Sabha took over two village ponds which were earlier leased out to individual community members and promoted fish farming by adding 80 kg of fish seeds. This initiative enhanced the village's food security and showcased the synergy within the community.

Collective efforts showcase the community-led conservation efforts in Salebhat and portray it as a model for other communities in the area.



Narayan Jagat

Salebhat, Mainpur,
Gariyaband, Chattisgarh

Benipuri Goswami,
Khoj (Facilitator)



Innovative Platform tackling CFR related concerns spanning 400 sq. km.

The Vazhachal Community Forest Resource (CFR) Coordination *Sangham* serves as a pioneering platform addressing the needs and challenges of the forest-dwelling communities in the Vazhachal Forest Division of Kerala, India. Located between the Chalakkudy and Malayattur Forest Divisions, the Vazhachal Division encompasses regions home to indigenous tribes, primarily the Kadar and Malayan communities. These communities, totaling nine settlements, manage a contiguous 400 sq. km. area designated under the Community Forest Rights (CFR) Act, which grants them rights to manage and protect their forest resources. This area was the first in Kerala to be recognised under CFR provisions, receiving the titles in 2014.

The *Sangham* was created to unify the efforts of the nine tribal settlements, CFR management committees (CFRMC) and the respective *Vana Samrakshana Samithis* (VSS). This coordination body ensures sustainable use, preservation, and management of the forest resources through a consensus-based approach. Each decision requires the agreement of all Gram Sabhas, reflecting the community's deeply ingrained collective ethos. Key activities include mapping the CFR area, ecological monitoring, wildlife tracking, and managing resources for sustainable use. The community has also taken proactive measures against environmental threats, notably opposing the Athirappilly Hydroelectric Project, which posed risks to their ecosystem.

The *Sangham's* achievements are numerous and impactful. They implemented Kerala's first sustainable Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) harvesting protocol, which enables the community to generate income while conserving biodiversity. The *Sangham* also established a fishing ban during the monsoon to protect fish breeding cycles, organised summer camps to educate their youth about forest stewardship, and conducted river health assessments. They actively monitor and remove invasive plant species, enabling the natural regeneration of native flora, which bolsters the forest ecosystem.

The community's connection to the land is profound. The Kadar, traditionally hunters and gatherers, now work as forest guards and trekking guides, bridging their ancestral knowledge with contemporary conservation efforts. The Malayan, while culturally distinct, share in this stewardship, coexisting harmoniously within the forest landscape.

The Vazhachal *Sangham* exemplifies a model of indigenous-led governance that balances cultural heritage, environmental preservation, and sustainable development, serving as an inspiration for community-driven forest management across India.



Mohanan
Athirappally, Chalakkudy,
Thrissur, Kerala

Vishnu T U and Tiju C
Thomas, WWF India
(Facilitator)

Challenging Encroachment on Common Lands

Nomadic tribes initially settled on the pasture land of Banoda village, gradually constructing permanent structures that encroached upon several acres of the common land. Despite numerous attempts at an amicable resolution, the encroachers persisted, lodging false complaints against the villagers when approached by the Gram Panchayat and Block Administration.

However, through persistent collective efforts, the encroachers were eventually compelled to relinquish their claims. Both parties reached an agreement, leading to the removal of the encroachments. Subsequently, the community established the 'Banoda Balaji Charagah Vikas Samiti' to oversee the development of the pastureland. Mapping was conducted, and the community obtained necessary approvals from the Gram Panchayat, with work sanctioned under NREGS.

Reflecting on these events, Shambhulal Gurjar, rallied community members to confront the encroachers and reclaim the land. Despite facing resistance, their perseverance paid off, with the encroachers ultimately yielding to pressure from both the District Administration and the community.

Following the successful reclamation of land, the community members maintained vigilance over the land for two years, leading to the establishment of a pastureland development committee. This committee, with Shambhulal as Secretary, oversaw the implementation of various initiatives, including the construction of water harvesting structures and the planting of thousands of plants to restore the pasturelands.

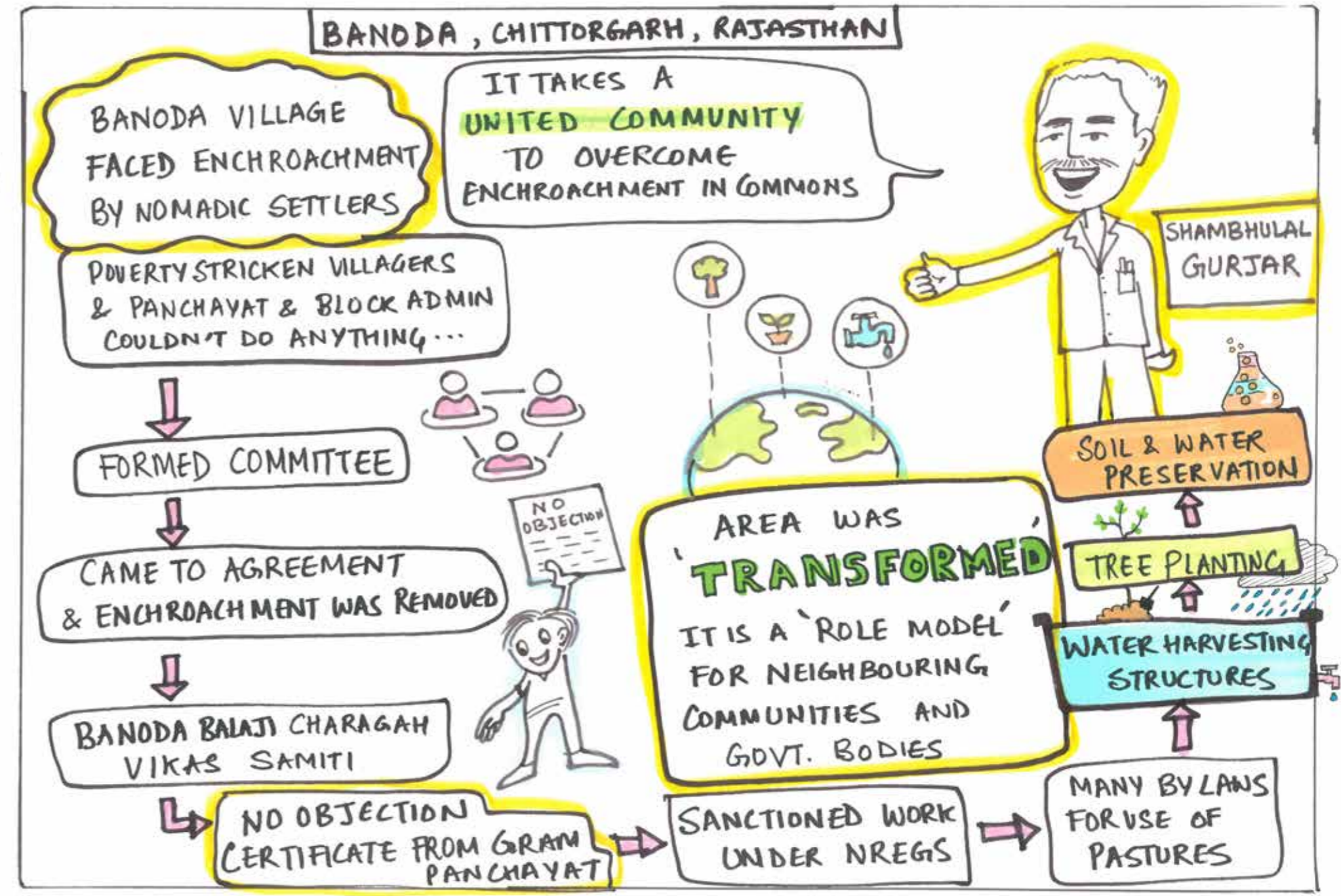
Today, the common lands boast of several water harvesting structures, stone wall fencing, and also continuous contour trenches that enhance rainwater retention and replenish the water table. Sustainable management practices, governed by community-made bylaws, ensure the effective utilisation of the common lands. A dedicated guard provides year-round surveillance of the Commons thereby ensuring no encroachments in the area.

The exemplary efforts of Shambhulal Gurjar and the Banoda Balaji Charagah Vikas Samiti were recognized on Independence Day 2023 by the Sub Divisional Magistrate, underscoring the village's newfound identity as a model for soil and water conservation in the Begun area. This recognition has not only inspired neighbouring villages and organisations but has also garnered appreciation from Government representatives for the remarkable work undertaken by the community led village institution.



Shambhulal Gurjar
Banoda, Begun,
Chittorgarh, Rajasthan

Satyam Ojha, FES
(Facilitator)



Preserving Coastal Commons: Women's Initiatives in Ramanathapuram

The coastal commons of Tamil Nadu's Ramanathapuram district, especially those along the fishing villages of Olaikudai, Thanneer Ootru, Morpanai, and Karanagdu, play a vital role in the lives of local fishing communities. Although people often recognize rivers and plains as Commons, fewer understand that coastal regions like the beaches and marine spaces also form essential Community Commons. However, these spaces face increasing encroachment due to urban expansion, private industries, and unsustainable coastal development.

A collective of twelve educated women from the fishing communities, came together to protect the Coastal Commons which are essential for their livelihoods and culture. Living near the Palk Bay coast, these women witnessed how increasingly these Commons were being targeted by commercial interests and private industries. Supported by Dakshin Foundation, a marine and coastal conservation NGO, they gained insights into the importance of Coastal Commons, customary land rights, and Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) policies. The training workshops empowered them to understand their legal rights and enabled them to take concrete actions to protect their Commons.

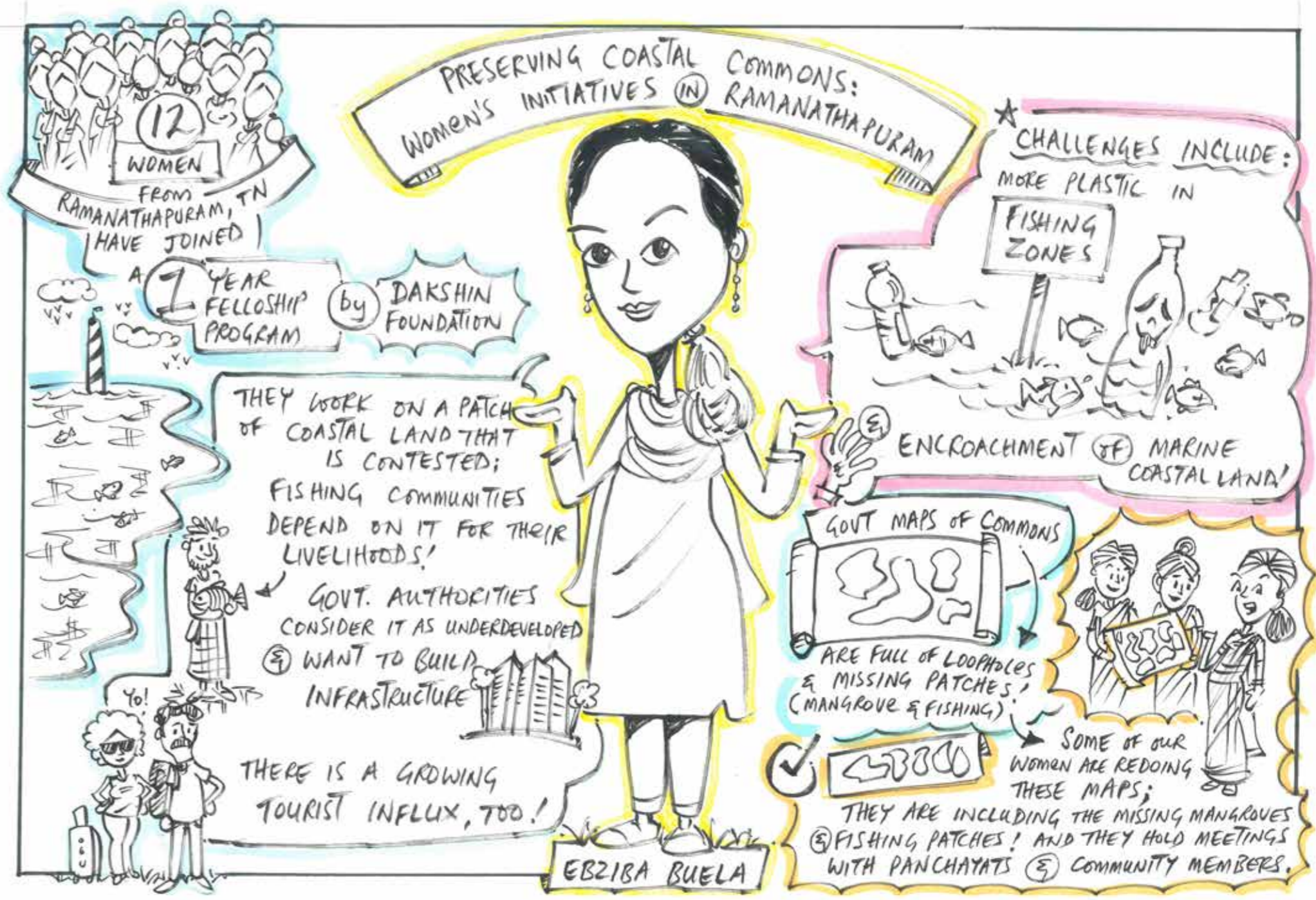
One of their primary initiatives has been engaging with local governance bodies, including village and panchayat leaders and community organisations like the East Coast Fishermen's Movement. Together, they aim to develop strategies that prioritise their rights and help to resist the pressures of coastal development that could jeopardise their lands. Through counter-mapping exercises with CRZ maps, the collective aims to secure official recognition for their community lands, showcasing the critical role these Commons play in the communities.

The collective action extends to participatory mapping of the Coastal Commons, ensuring that the physical spaces vital to small-scale fishing communities are protected from further encroachment. The process enables them to document their traditional uses of these areas and highlight the problems caused by coastal encroachments. The collective hopes that through their concerted efforts, they are able to not only preserve their Commons but also provide a sustainable framework for other communities to advocate for their coastal spaces. The goal of the Collective is to present their study findings and experiences to highlight the indispensable role Coastal Commons play for small-scale fishing communities and advocate for responsible, community-centred coastal governance.



Ebziba Buela
Karanagad, Morpanai,
Thanneer ootru,
Olaikuda, Rameswaram,
Thiruvadanaai,
Ramanathapuram, Tamil
Nadu

Thisam Mahsana,
Dakshin Foundation
(Facilitator)



Preserving Pasture Paradise

In the village of Nandwa, nestled in the Devgarh block of Rajasthan, an inspiring story of determination and unity unfolded. The community with the assistance of *Charagah Vikas Samiti*, Nandwa and the Foundation for Ecological Security, embarked on a mission to restore their pasture land, an essential part of the local land ecology.

The trouble began during the election season, a time when land grabbers often take advantage of the political chaos to encroach upon common lands. In Nandwa, influential individuals preferred to convert the pasture into residential plots, dismissing its ecological and communal significance.

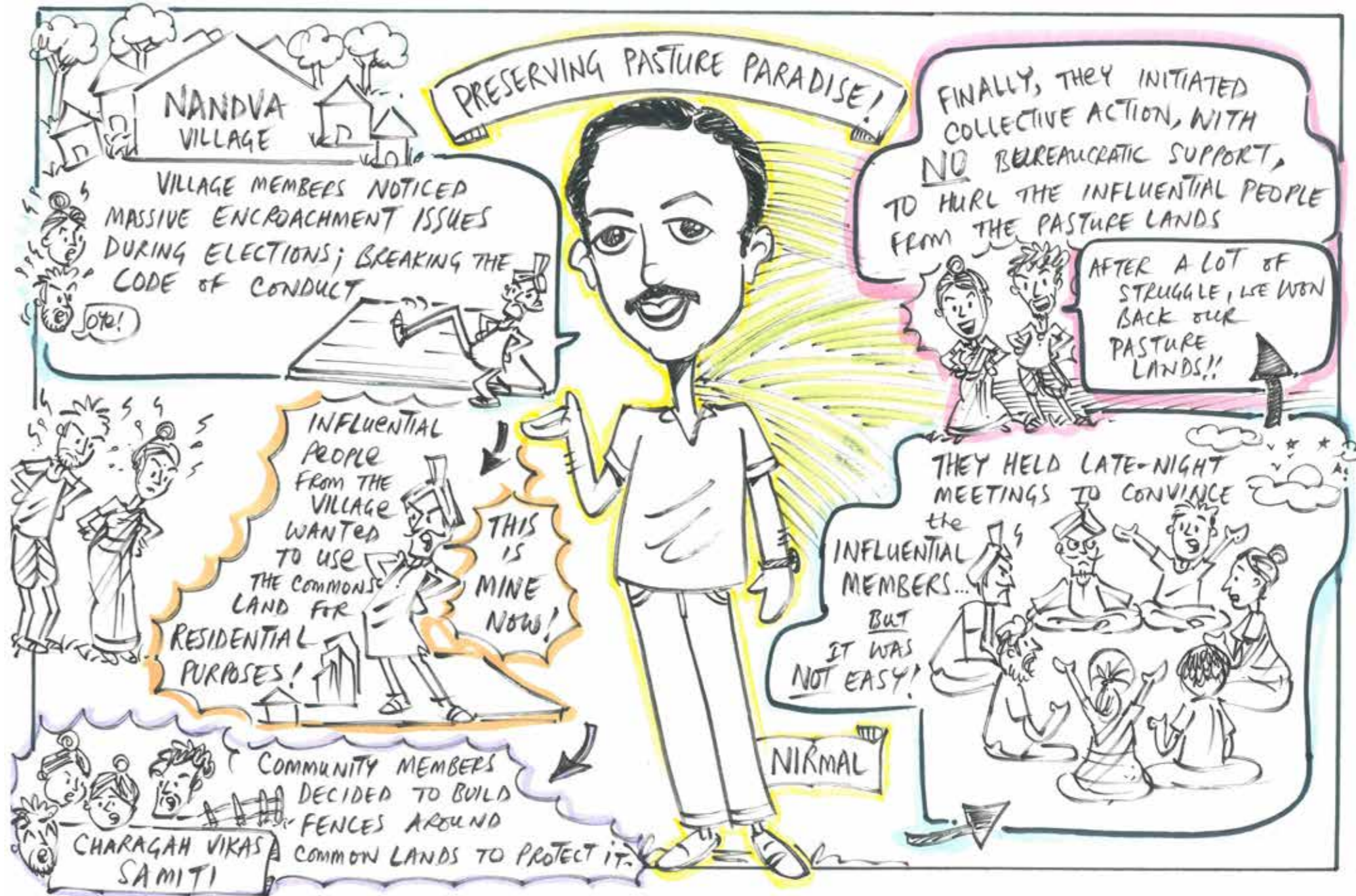
Despite the challenges, the community members working closely with CVS Nandwa, remained steadfast. They envisioned a thriving pasture land that would benefit everyone. With the help of the FES team, they organised a meeting, inviting all stakeholders to discuss the issue. The discussions were vibrant, and for once, free from bureaucratic interference. Most attendees supported the idea of preserving the pasture. Their cooperative spirit triumphed over personal agendas. The *Samiti* decided to first demarcate the common lands by building stone bunds and boundaries around the Commons. But, at first, some young troublemakers tried to vandalise the land when the bunding activity began. However, the community stood firm. The work is presently being undertaken and ensuring that proper accountability of the land is determined.

This journey was a testament to the community's resilience and unity. By working together, they successfully protected a shared resource, ensuring its benefits for future generations. Today, the pasture stands as a symbol of Nandwa's commitment to ecology and community welfare, a victory not just over encroachment, but for sustainable living.



Nirmal
Nandwa, Devgarh,
Rajsamand, Rajasthan

Bhudha Singh, FES
(Facilitator)



Community's Endless Effort to Safeguard Commons

The narrative unfolds in B Kadirepalli, a village nestled within Chowdepalli Mandal, situated in the Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh State. Prabhakar G spearheaded the efforts in his community and vividly recounts their journey towards safeguarding the community's rights over their village's shared resources.

B Kadirepalli boasts of an expansive hill land spanning 255 acres, adorned with lush forests, serving as a precious community asset. However, given the strong political influence in Chittoor district, the perpetual spectre of mining activities and encroachment loomed over these Commons. They faced the threat of granite mining encroaching upon their community land. Illegal mines dotted the landscape, not only harming their environment but also the neglected pits posed a threat to the children with many succumbing to injuries in the community.

Determined to protect their land, the villagers sought assistance and found support from the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES). Prabhakar learned about the Prohibitory Order Book (POB), a legal measure to safeguard their common resources and helped the other members of the community to take the appropriate measures to protect their Commons.

They approached the Mandal Revenue Officer (MRO) to secure their land within the POB. Despite initial setbacks, they persisted and in 2021 they registered their common property in the POB.

Recognizing the need for further protection, they engaged with the Gram Panchayat (GP) to register their land officially. They became one of the forerunners in the district to have their Commons registered in both the POB and the GP asset register.

Their success inspired neighbouring communities to take similar steps to safeguard their resources. Through perseverance and collaboration, the community members of B Kadirepalli reclaimed their land and secured their future. Their story is a testament of collective action in the face of adversity.



G. Prabhakar
B Kadirepalli, Chowdepalli,
Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh

M Rani Reddy, FES
(Facilitator)



Vrishabadhri Hill: A Struggle for Survival Against Gravel Crushers

Vrishabadhri Hill, situated in Devarayasamudra Village Panchayat in Mulbagal Taluk, Kolar District, spans approximately 1,400 acres. A monolithic rock, it serves as the water source for over 25 lakes. The livelihoods of the surrounding communities hinge on this hill, as it is predominantly a rice-growing area.

Unfortunately, the tranquil setting changed in 2013 with the commencement of a gravel crusher. Later, the district administration designated the area as a safe zone for mining, leading to the establishment of around seven crushers. Once a picturesque landscape, the region now grappled with dust and noise.

This led the members of the community to mobilise and prevent more land from being taken away by crushers. Despite several pleas to the Panchayats, they did not see any positive impact on banning the quarries. Soon, the community members formed a Village Institution (VI) to better manage their common lands. Through the VI, the community filed a case with the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Karnataka State High Court. Campaigns were undertaken to create awareness among the people about the importance of their natural resources.

Age-old community practices of conducting prayers and other cultural activities were revived, improving the participation from the women and youth of the village. The committee also conducted a Nature camp where they actively engaged with youngsters to encourage the protection of the hillock.

These collective efforts have led the communities to actively take part in the conservation efforts of the area. Endangered species like the Kolar Leaf Nosed Bat are now protected. Several initiatives spearheaded by women and youth are helping to protect these common resources in the area.



Ramesh K
Devarayasamudra,
Mulbagal, Kolar, Karnataka

Partha, Parisara
Hitharakshana
Samithi (Facilitator)



Legal Resolve and Community Resilience: Nagalapura's Grazing Land Champion

Nagalapura is located in Devadurga taluk of Raichur district, Karnataka. With a total grazing area (*gomalas*) of 396.57 acres, Nagalapura's expanse of Commons helped to support the community and livestock of the area. However, in reality the situation was much different. Certain individuals in the community encroached the grazing lands and cultivated on it. This limited the access for the landless agricultural labourers and for those who depended on the *gomalas* for grazing livestock on the Commons. In response to this situation, Hanumantharao Patil decided to take action to remove the encroachments on the *gomalas*.

The community of Nagalapura, united in their efforts to address the encroachment. They collectively submitted a memorandum to the Tahsildar of Devadurga taluk, urging the authorities to take action and remove the illegal encroachments.

In response to the memorandum, the revenue department promptly took action. Officials visited the *gomala* to inspect the situation and check the land documents. The farmers who had illegally cultivated the land raised a dispute with the officials. However, a few days later, the revenue department issued strict instructions to the encroachers, prohibiting them from continuing their cultivation. Despite initial resistance from the encroachers, the department successfully reclaimed the grazing lands and gradually cleared all encroachments.

Once the land was cleared, the community, with the support of the Gram Panchayat, decided to develop the reclaimed land. They identified and planned to undertake various works under MGNREGA. After obtaining approval from the Gram Sabha, they began the work of restoring the land. The first step was to measure and mark the boundaries of the grazing area to prevent future encroachments. Bio-fences were constructed to demarcate the area.

In the next phase, the community, with the help of the technical staff, dug continuous contour trenches to help arrest soil erosion. Over a period of 20 days, more than 300 man-days of work were generated, thus supporting the labour in the community. They also collaborated with other departments to carry out natural resource management activities, such as grass cultivation, plantation of horticulture species, and forestry farming. Within a short span, the previously encroached land was transformed into a thriving grassland that provided ample fodder for the community.

The community of Nagalapura, along with neighbouring communities, expressed their gratitude to the Tahsildar and other government line departments for ensuring that the encroachments be removed promptly and restoration of the Commons be undertaken.



Rajesab
Nagalapura, Devadurga,
Raichur, Karnataka

Khadar Basha
(Facilitator)



Commons and Livelihoods

Initiatives that protect water, forests and lands, help protect and sustain livelihoods. But they also embody traditions of collective management and shared realities that foster social cohesion, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability between Commons and livelihoods.



Forest to Fortune: Empowering Women through Handmade Crafts

Susila Hansa, a resident of Badibahal village, Paikmal block of Bargarh district, Odisha is the sole earning member of her family. Her husband left her 30 years ago, and the responsibility of her two toddlers fell solely on her. Being a landless woman, she was dependent on daily wages for her livelihood and she migrated to Andhra Pradesh to work in the brick kilns. After a year, Susila returned to her village, but her financial situation was pitiful forcing her children to beg for food.

Susila was determined to improve her family's conditions and started to explore her own skills. She started to make cups and plates from Sal (*Shorea robusta*) and Siali leaves (*Bauhinia vahlii*).

Along with the help of a development NGO MASS (Manav Adhikar Seva Samiti), located in Bargarh district, Susila started to market her produce, creating a sustainable income for her family. With the increase in demand, all members of her family started to engage in the business and were able to generate a per day revenue of Rs 500-600. The change in the financial conditions of Susila, inspired other women in the community to undertake the leaf and cup making activity as well. With a team of 20 members from marginalised families, they were able to produce more and significantly increase the supply in the nearby market.

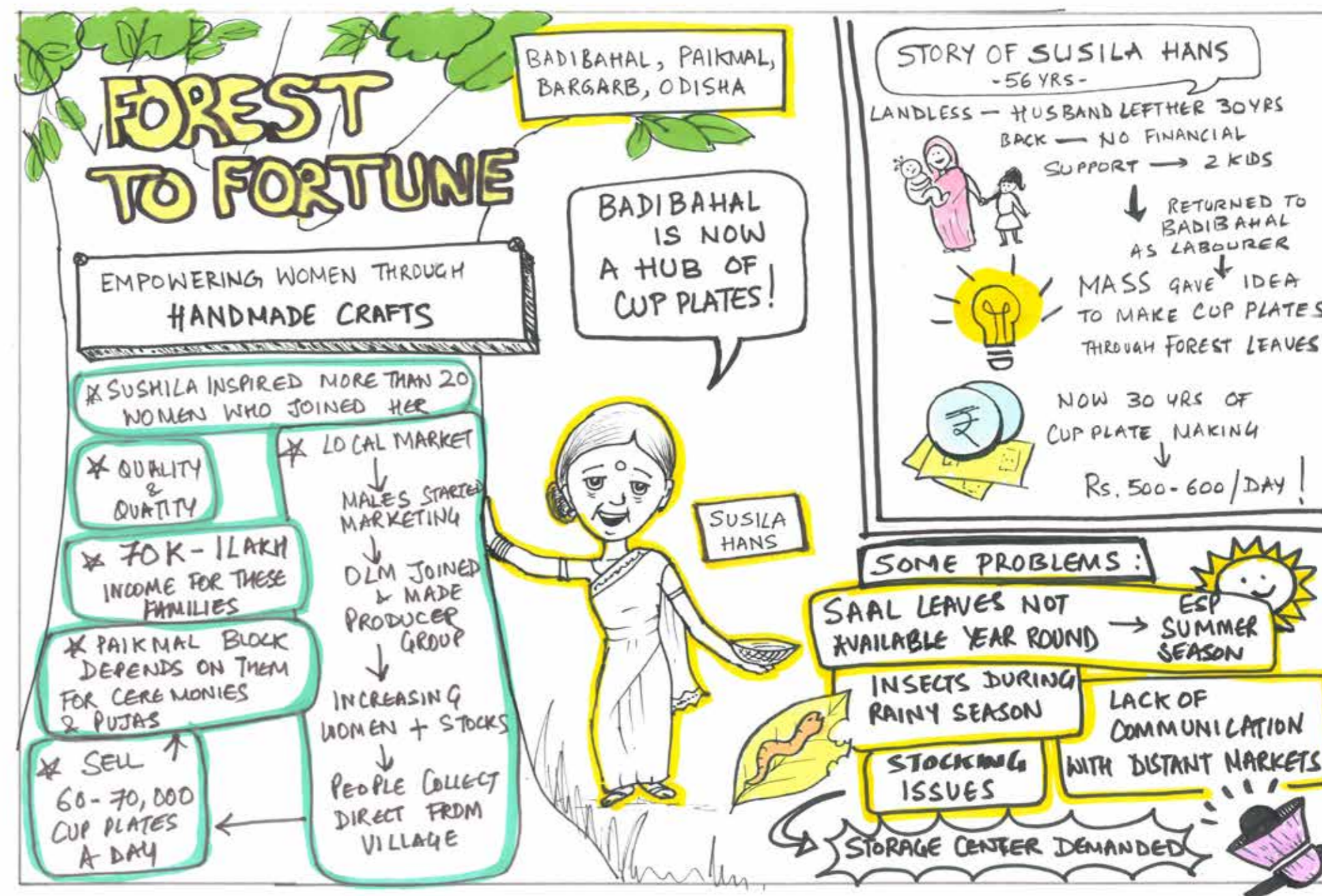
The team at MASS were able to create sustainable market linkages with other neighbouring communities and towns. Badibahal was recognised as the hub for selling these cups and plates. MASS was also able to connect Susila and her team with Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society (ORMAS) and the Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM) for government procurement and marketing of produce, thereby increasing their income to almost Rs. 70,000 - 1,00,000 per year. The 20 member group was converted into a producer group thus increasing the market scope for the group.

With market linkages and a systematic mechanism created, the group faced certain restraints to upscale their business. Raw materials like Sal leaves were not available throughout the year in the forests especially in summer where the demand is the maximum but supply is the least. Seasonal changes affected the forest produce like insect infestation, thereby reducing the supply of leaves for the business. Insufficient government infrastructure like storehouses or godowns to store the excess stock of the plates and cups was also a problem to expand the business. Poor transport facilities from the village to the main market hindered the transportation of finished goods. These concerns need to be addressed in a viable way so as to cater to the marginalised women of the community and improve their livelihoods sustainably.



Susila Hansa
Badibahal, Paikmal,
Bargarh, Odisha

Adikanda Biswal,
MASS (Facilitator)



Glimpses From Jharkhand - Local Governance Resulting To Strengthening Livelihood Opportunities

In the heart of Jharkhand's Chainpur Block, Gumla district, lies the village of Barwenagar, where Joseph Xalxo serves as the Gram Pradhan. With deep association for his community's connection to the land, Joseph emphasises on, "Humar Jungle, Humar Adhikar," (our forests our rights) underscoring the importance of forest governance.

For generations, the forests surrounding Barwenagar have been a vital source of livelihood for the community. Joseph articulates a profound understanding of their significance, stating, "What is an Adivasi without their *jal, jungle, and zameen*?" This sentiment encapsulates the intrinsic relationship between the community and their natural resources.

Recognizing the evolving dynamics of their environment, Joseph highlights the pressing need to nurture and protect these forests. The Gram Sabha, as a cornerstone of local democracy, plays a pivotal role in this effort. Joseph counts on how the community has established firm rules regarding forest use, emphasising that any extraction of forest produce must receive the Gram Sabha's permission. This collective decision making process is non-negotiable and serves to safeguard their resources against any exploitation.

He shares specific guidelines set forth by the Gram Sabha, which reflect a commitment to sustainable practices. For instance, any use of wood for weddings or construction requires prior approval and a fee paid to the Gram Sabha. Furthermore, the community has instituted strict regulations concerning forest fires. If a fire is spotted, it must be reported immediately, and any intentional act of setting a fire incurs a fine of 1,000 rupees. These measures not only streamline forest governance but also reinforce the authority and integrity of the Gram Sabha as an institution.

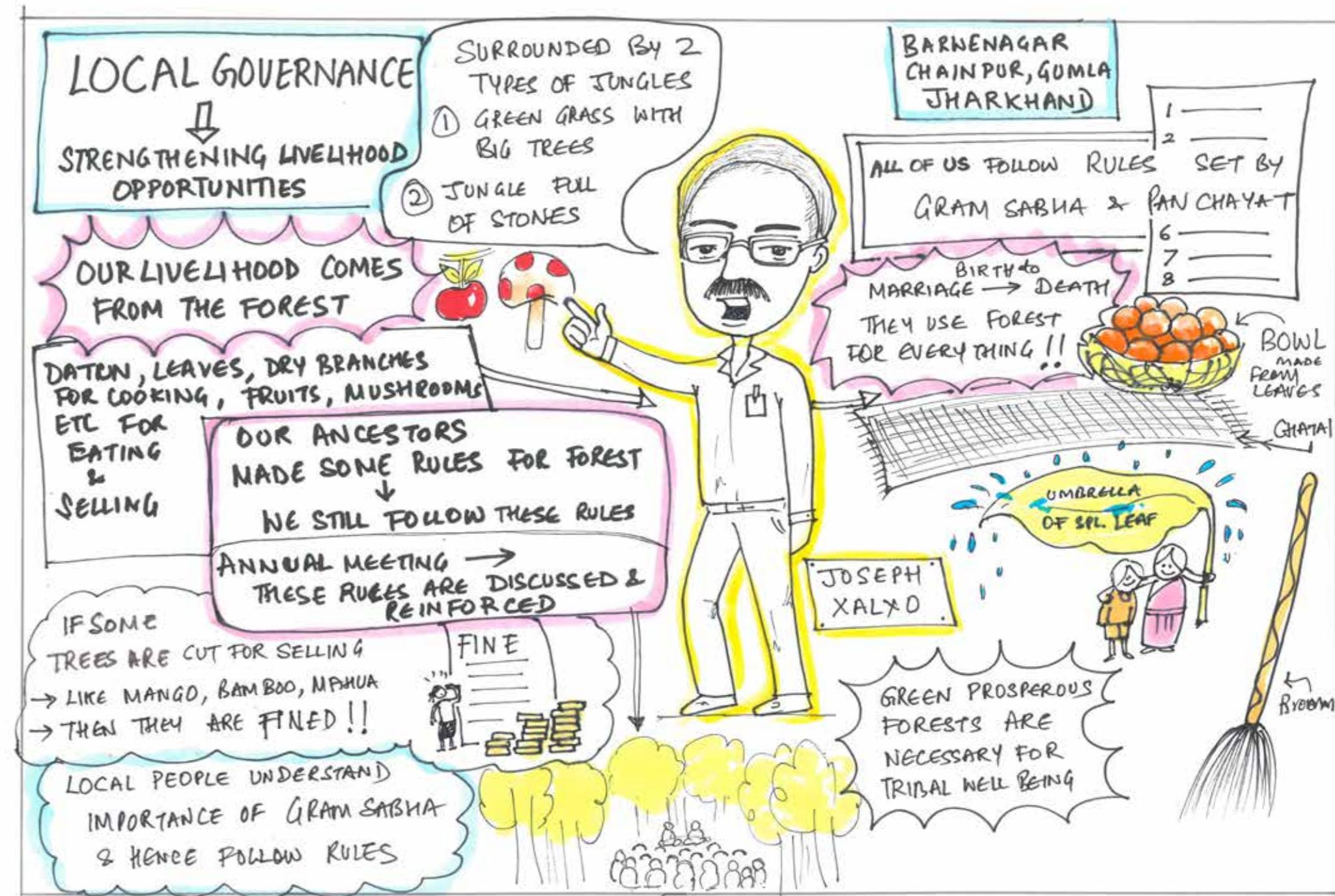
With the government's new initiative to provide Forest Rights Act (FRA) community titles, Joseph expresses a sense of hope for Barwenagar. He envisions a future where the community can collectivise their forest resources for the greater good. Despite the abundance of *Mahua* and *Sakhua*, community members often sell these products at minimal prices, individually. He believes that through collectivisation, the community can secure fairer prices, ensuring that the benefits of their natural resources are shared equitably.

Ultimately, Joseph's aspirations extend beyond economic gain. He believes that with full rights over their forests, the community can restore and rejuvenate the natural environment that sustains them. His story reflects a powerful narrative of empowerment, resilience, and a collective commitment to protect the rich heritage of Barwenagar's forests for generations to come.



Joseph Xalxo
Barwenagar, Chainpur,
Gumla, Jharkhand

Dheeraj Daniel Horo,
PHIA Foundation
(Facilitator)



From Ecological Threat to Livelihood Saviour

This is the story of a community's journey from scarcity-fueled migration to self-reliance and abundance. The community of Baja Nadila relies on agriculture, animal husbandry and forest produce for their livelihoods. However, faced with an acute shortage of good quality fodder, the community saw an increased outbound migration in recent years. Deforestation and depleted grazing lands made the community members come together to plan out certain strategies to help revive their Commons. The Van Panchayat, supported by the women of the community who are organised into various SHGs, launched a programme to improve fodder growth in collaboration with the Himmotthan Society in 2016. Through this initiative, the community came together to plant high-nutrition grasses like Napier (*Pennisetum purpureum*) and Auns grass on 37 acres across the degraded lands. The people collectively evolved norms to ensure that the grass could grow without being over-extracted. They also contributed 100 rupees per household to ensure continuous guardianship of the Commons.

Over the years, the fodder availability increased to over 1,02,200 kg annually, providing each household with 2,920 kg of fodder. With sufficient fodder, community members could return to cattle rearing, producing surplus milk that contributed to an improved household income as well as better nutritional intake. The availability of local resources helped reduce the time and labour spent by the women in gathering fodder and fuelwood, giving them more time to focus on additional economic activities.

The crux of the collective action undertaken by the community has been the feeling of community ownership that was reinforced through structured self-governance mechanisms among them, enabled by effective leadership. The community has been capacitating itself in conserving water resources, aiming to reduce soil erosion, and understanding the Commons and agricultural relationship better. This initiative also prompted them to undertake awareness and implementation drives for vaccination of their livestock thereby ensuring cattle health for resilient livelihoods. Additionally, the community established a nursery, planting grass and tree species of local importance. This comprehensive model not only helped them protect their shared resources but also fostered resilience among them through shared responsibilities and a renewed focus on reviving traditional livelihoods. The initiative has also drawn praise from local officials, presenting to them a case for supporting and strengthening sustainable practices that preserve both livelihoods and the local ecosystem.



Rajendra Singh Koshyari
Baja Nadila, Bageshwar, Uttarakhand

Bhuwan Pant,
Himmotthan Society
(Facilitator)



Community Forestry and Livelihood: A Story from Nepal

Deep in the hills of Bagmati, Nepal, the Rani Community Forest boasts of lush, dense forest area which is home to more than 5000 community members. This community forest was established in 1986 and covers 331 acres of land. The Rani Community Forest caters to diverse wildlife and also the needs of the communities of the region. A robust committee of 13 people, 8 of them women, overlook the management of the community forest. Monthly meetings are conducted to discuss plans and budgets for Forest. And once a year, everyone in the community comes together to make a plan both financial as well as ecological for the year ahead. Close to 85% of the entire community attends every general body meeting in the community reflecting the active participation in conservation. The income from the conservation efforts on the Community Forest have led to establishment of a community fund which supports several community initiatives.

With conservation efforts spanning over three decades, the local biodiversity is remarkable especially with the spotting of wildlife like leopards, peacocks, deer, pangolins, foxes, monkeys, and porcupines, among others. Dense growth of tree species like sal, *sisau*, and *asna* trees dot the community forest. The primary responsibility of the committee is to promote afforestation and also sustainably manage the forest resources. Several plantation drives have been taken up by the community actively to help promote better growth in the Forest. Under the conservation efforts, Pangolin (a threatened wildlife species) is being protected and the increase in sightings is witness to these efforts. Forest fires are controlled with fire control lines created in the area by the active participation of the community.

Apart from conservation of the forests, the committee, which has 2 appointed staff (Secretary and forest guard), also undertakes a series of other initiatives to help the community. Support to women groups in terms of seed money and financial lending has been regularly taken up with support close to 40 lakh given to 5 different women groups. Livelihoods of more than 125 women have been supported with the community fund established in the Rani Community Forest. The committee actively supports the education of underprivileged children in the community with educational scholarships to pursue higher education. It also provides funds for the establishment of biogas plants for the community members to promote sustainable methods in the area. Poor and elderly members are supported with the health related programme with almost a lakh of funds disbursed already to the needy members. Funds to develop infrastructure like roads, bridges, water harvesting structures, and construction of houses are also provided from the community fund.

Eco Tourism is the latest initiative taken up by the Rani Community Forest committee. Annually more than 30-35 other community forests visit the location to learn from the experiences of the Community Forest. A nominal fee is charged per visit and also arrangements for stay are being developed to encourage ecotourism in the community. The remarkable work done by the Rani Community Forest Committee has resulted in the winning of several awards and prizes. It has been recognized 3 times at the national level, once at the provincial level and more than 10 times at the district level.

The active community participation is the reason for the Rani Community Forest to not only conserve and manage their Commons but also help to promote sustainable development in the region. It has been an inspiration to many communities around the world.



Bhimsen
7 Blocks, Makawanpur, Nepal





Balsingh Kodape & Birja Bai
Umariya Mal, Bichhia,
Mandla, Madhya Pradesh

Dinesh Washnik, FES
(Facilitator)

Cultivating Sustainability: Journey From Agriculture To Afforestation

Balsingh Kodape, a resident of Umariya Mal in Bichhia Block, Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh, lives a life closely connected to the land. His village, located about 25 kilometres south of Kanha National Park, consists of 80 *adivasi* (Gond) households, with agriculture and collection of NTFP serving as the primary sources of livelihood. Balsingh owns 3 acres of land, cultivating crops on 2 acres while the remaining 1 acre is unsuitable for farming due to the rocky terrain. Rice is the main crop grown during the kharif season. Due to the lack of irrigation facilities, farming during the *rabi* season is not possible.

In earlier times, the forest surrounding Umariya Mal was rich and accessible, but over the years, the forest cover has receded. Now, community members travel 2 to 3 kilometres to gather forest resources, a journey that also brings the risk of encounters with wild animals. Faced with these challenges, Balsingh had an idea of creating a forest on his own land.

In 2013, the Village Environment Committee was formed with the support of FES, and by 2014-15, discussions about afforestation gained momentum. Inspired by these discussions, Balsingh decided to plant trees on his 1 acre plot. With support from the committee, he chose a variety of local species like *Khair*, Bamboo, *Amla*, Mahua, and Mango and planted them during the rainy months of July and August.

Today, Balsingh's land covers a small forest with 414 trees, including 170 *Khair*, 145 Bamboo, 80 *Amla*, 15 Mango, and 4 Mahua trees. The forest not only provides fruits and flowers but also serves as a haven for birds, which help control pests in his crops. By reducing his dependence on chemical pesticides, this natural system benefits both his crops and the environment. Earlier he would rely on the Commons to meet the requirements of his agricultural fields. But now with the plantation on his land, all his requirements are met by it and he does not need to venture out to the Forests. Also the soil moisture content has significantly increased due to the vegetation, thereby helping his agricultural output and thus his income.

Balsingh's journey toward self reliance stands as a powerful example for his community. His efforts have inspired others to plant trees on their own land, highlighting the benefits of individual afforestation for income generation and sustainable living. He hopes to spread the advantages of this process to other communities as well. His forest, once a dream, has become a vital part of his livelihood and possibilities of ecological restoration on private land.



Revitalising Rural Livelihoods: A Pastureland Triumph in Kalibhi-Badisari, Rajasthan

Kalibhit, a small village in the Kevalpura Gram Panchayat under the jurisdiction of Panchayat Samiti Badisadri in Chittorgarh district, Rajasthan is primarily inhabited by the Meena tribes. Situated approximately 40 km away from the district headquarters, the community boasts a modest population of around 200 individuals of the same tribe. The livelihood of Kalibhit's community revolves around labour intensive activities, small-scale animal husbandry, rainfed agriculture, and the gathering of minor forest produce from the nearby forests.

The remote location of Kalibhit, depleting forest resources pose a significant challenge for the community's survival. Exacerbated by the absence of alternative employment opportunities both labour work and animal husbandry have emerged as major hurdles for the community. With the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the area, it became their sole beacon of hope. However, for the past decade, with no MGNREGA projects being initiated, the community has had no means of employment.

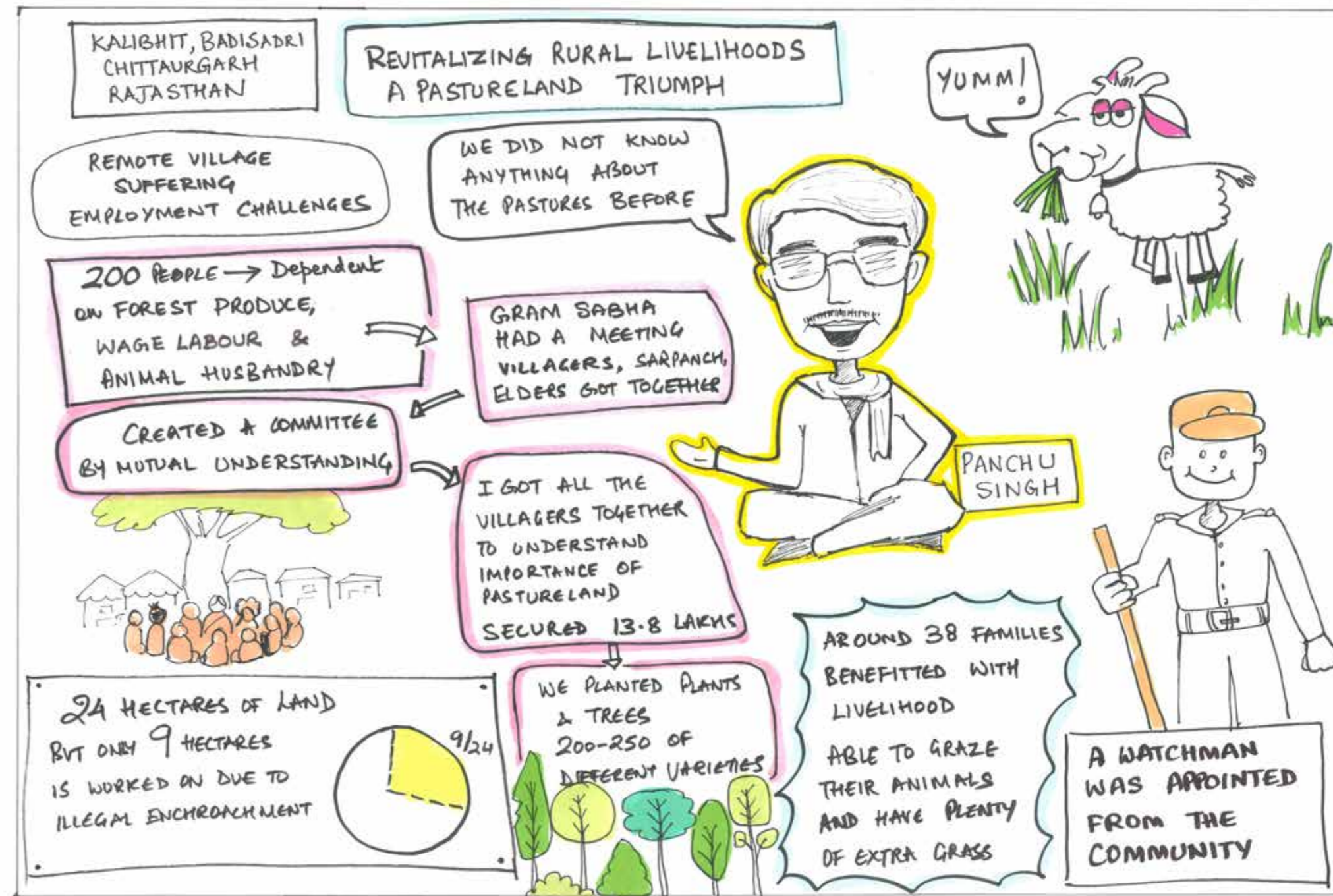
Recognising this pressing issue, Rameshwar Lal Meena, an extension worker in the Panchayat, reached out to community youth leaders Panchu Singh and Rajendra Meghwal. Together, they deliberated on a plan to leverage the provisions of MGNREGA to develop the community's pasture lands. In 2020, Panchu Singh rallied the entire community to form a committee, as per the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act 1996 Rule 170 (1), and devised a comprehensive plan for land and water conservation. Securing a sanction of Rs. 13.80 lakh from the district MGNREGA department, they commenced work on the common land.

This initiative provided direct employment opportunities to approximately 38 families in the community, with each family earning between Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 17,000. Over time, the land saw an increase in fodder, enabling the community to graze their animals and collect grass during the rainy season. Presently, the community has appointed a watchman to oversee the pasture land, with continuous monitoring efforts undertaken by the community. This initiative has proven invaluable for the villagers, enabling sustainable animal husbandry practices and ensuring a steady supply of fodder. Panchu Singh says, "If someone shows us a path in the interest of the village, then we are ready to follow it at any cost."



Panchu Singh
Kalibhit, Badi Sadri,
Chittorgarh, Rajasthan

Girdhari Lal Verma,
FES (Facilitator)



Resilient Transformation: Jhabla Watershed Project

The Jhabla watershed project, located in the Girwa block of Udaipur, Rajasthan, was started to address water resource challenges in a region characterised by rugged terrain and steep slopes. Implemented under the Indo-German Watershed Development Project of NABARD, in partnership with Seva Mandir, the project conducted assessments on water balance, groundwater utilisation, and interventions for climate resilience within the Jhabla watershed. This area exemplified the challenges prevalent across the Indian Peninsula, particularly in regions like the Western Ghats and Aravalli Hills.

The topography of the region, with its undulating terrain and sparse vegetation, made farming fields highly vulnerable to extreme precipitation. The project aimed to transform the watershed from a highly degraded state to a moderately degraded one by implementing soil and water conservation measures (SWC) and drainage line treatments (DLT). These strategies aimed to increase water-holding capacity, reduce runoff, and enhance livelihood sustainability. Techniques focused on slope reduction and SWC to improve moisture levels in different land types, including stony waste, sloping agriculture, and stream beds.

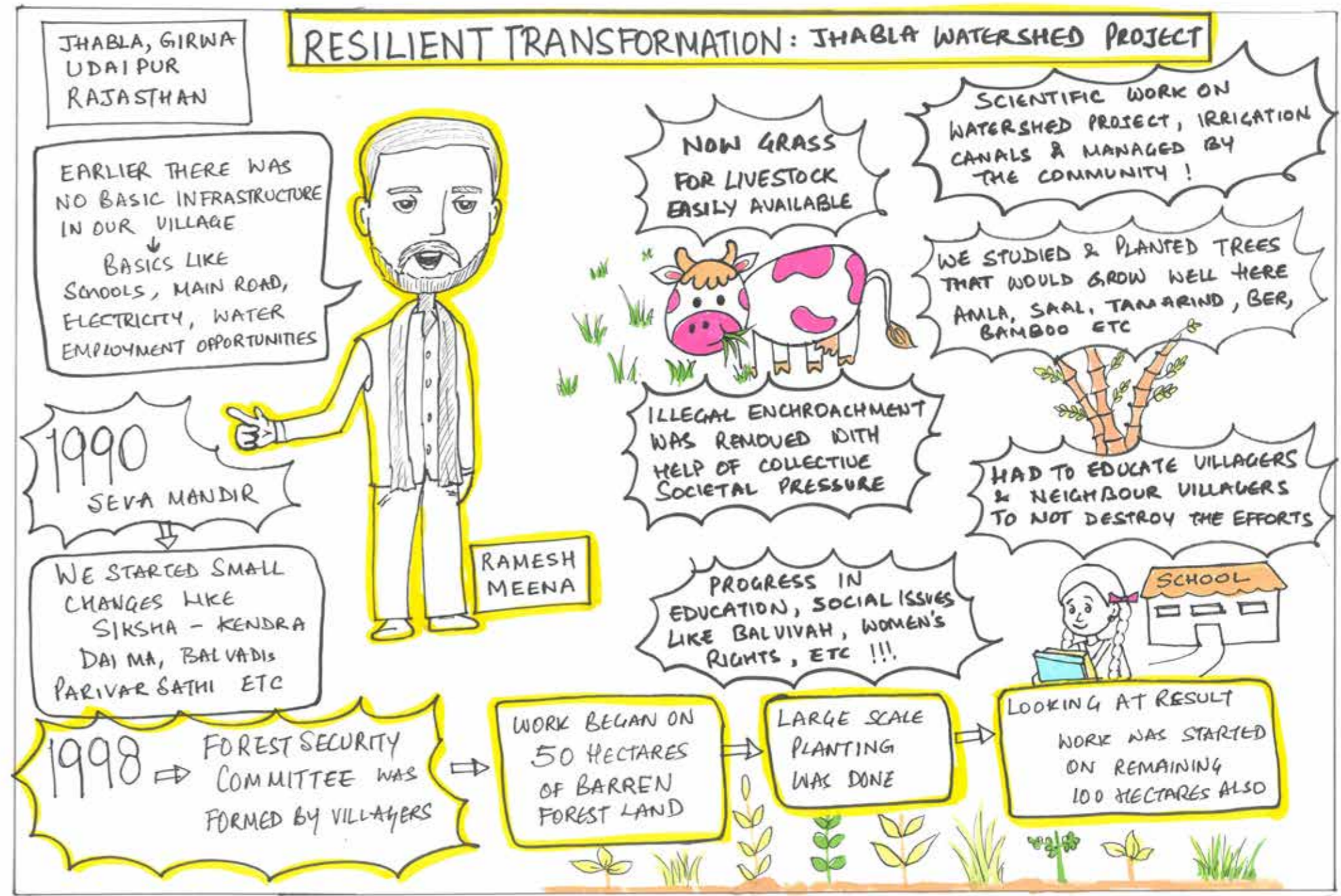
Given the prevalence of rainfed farming, particularly on moderate to steep slopes, the vulnerability to climate change was significant. Project interventions targeted erosion and soil depth issues, while resilience-building measures like step-cultivation and agroforestry were recommended, however acknowledging that their effects may take time to materialise. Encouraging a shift from monoculture to mixed cropping was proposed to mitigate risks from weather extremes and market fluctuations.

To adapt to precipitation variations, mixed cropping combinations and exploring short-duration fish farming in valley wells were suggested to enhance water resource management and livelihood sustainability. The project highlighted the importance of a comprehensive approach to watershed development, integrating scientific insights, community involvement, and sustainable land and water management practices. The holistic approach not only improved livelihoods but also demonstrated effective common resource management in the face of climate-induced challenges.



Ramesh Meena
Jhabla, Girwa, Udaipur, Rajasthan

Taruna Rao, Seva Mandir (Facilitator)



Seeding Success: Gogunda's Grass Seed Initiative

After dedicating several days of hard work, community members from the regions of Gogunda, Sayara, and Jhadol celebrated a notable achievement in 2023-24. Their efforts resulted in the successful harvest of over 10,000 kilograms of grass seeds in 2 years, with a market value of Rs. 224 per kilogram. This abundant yield came from various locations within these blocks, including Kharediya, Tegda, Chitrawas, Kadech, Phalasiya, Goran, Jhadol, and more. The area spanned 1421 acres across private plots and common lands. A total of 72 individuals, including 64 women and 8 men, participated in this initiative, displaying remarkable dedication and teamwork.

This accomplishment marked the end of two years of detailed discussions on the importance of grass seeds. The community achieved three times the seed collection compared to the previous year, a testament of the commitment of over 50 Self-Help Groups (SHGs), two Federations, and more than 100 Village Institutions (VIs) involved in this initiative. The work has set a foundation for sustainable resource collection while addressing challenges such as limited land holdings and rainfed agriculture, characteristic of the hilly terrain in the Aravalli ranges. The region's steep slopes make agriculture difficult, prompting residents to engage in mixed livelihood activities that include livestock rearing.

The initiative is part of broader short term and long term goals to support livelihoods, promote local seed demand, and restore degraded common lands in ecosystems like those in Asind, Mandalgarh, and Bhilwara. In the short term, it aims to create a reliable supply and demand chain for seeds within the community, while in the long term, the goal is to establish a platform where SHGs, VIs, and Federations can work together to distribute seeds. This dynamic business model is intended to strengthen SHGs economically and foster ecological benefits, including combating soil erosion. The seasonal cycle for grass seed harvesting involves closing off the plots after the monsoons to allow the grass to rejuvenate. Following Diwali, in November or December, fodder is harvested, and the top portion containing seeds is separated. After drying for a couple of days, the seeds are packed for storage. Special care is taken during handling to avoid injury from sharp thorns on the grass seeds.

This process contributes to the community's commitment to the conservation of common lands. It encourages a sustainable connection between the community's economic, social, and ecological goals, reinforcing the importance of common resources in their collective mindset. Restoration through grass seeding holds significant potential for improving pasture land quality. The palatable grasses that are native to the ecology are beneficial for livestock health. When introduced to areas dominated by unpalatable species, these local grasses help improve pasture quality, supporting a resilient fodder base.

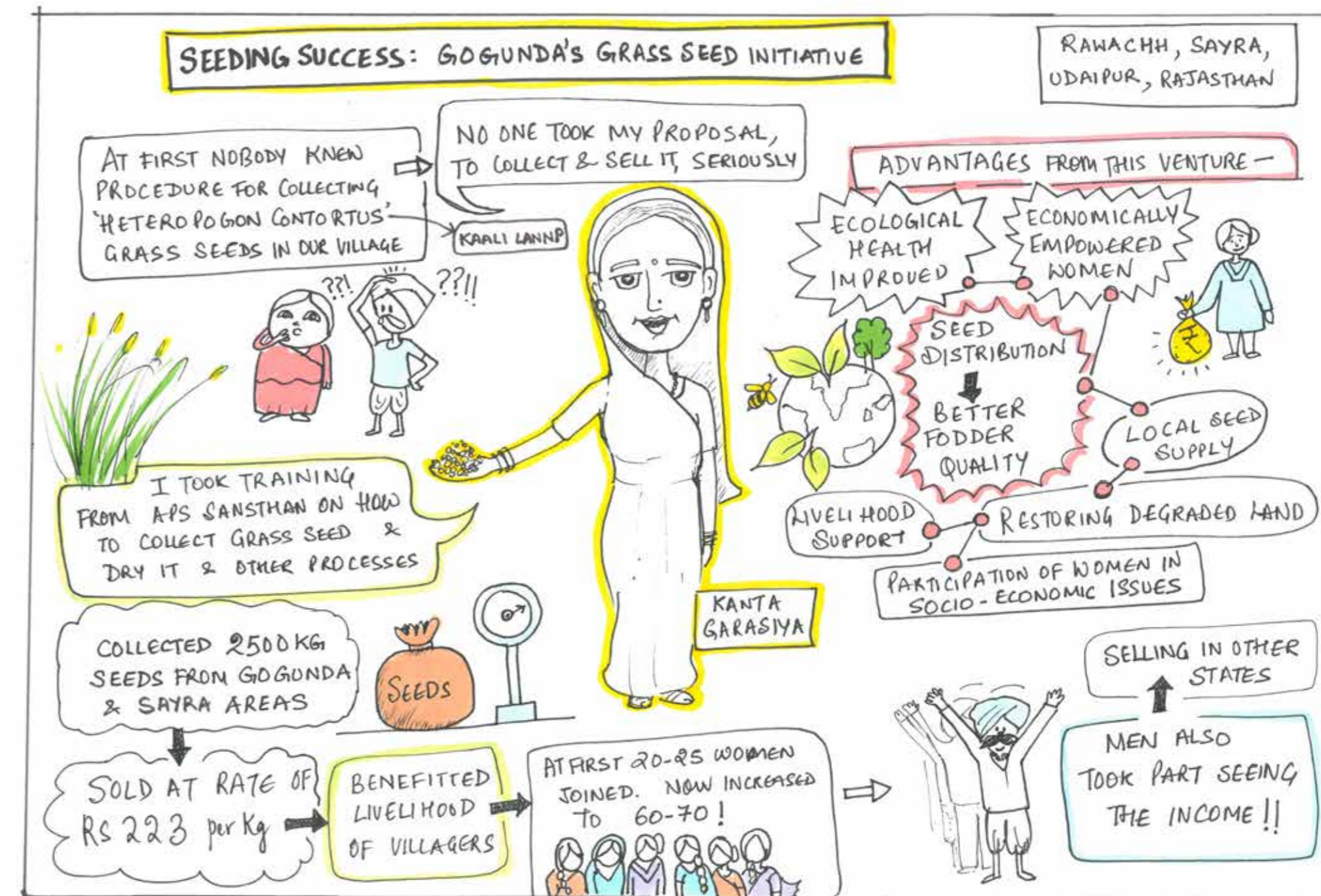
The community also organised training sessions facilitated by Dr. Satish Sharma and Anil Sarsavan. These sessions, attended by SHG members and other community representatives, focused on the importance of seed collection, proper harvesting methods, and safety precautions. The response was overwhelming, with over 2,000 kilograms of seeds gathered within a month in the first year. This initiative highlighted how collaborative conservation and restoration efforts, centred around grassroots participation, can contribute to the sustainable management of common lands while simultaneously enhancing livelihoods.



Kanta Garasiya

Rawachh, Sayra, Udaipur,
Rajasthan

Asha Cholaviya and
Santoshi Joshi, FES
(Facilitator)



Restoring Gomalas For Strengthening Livestock Livelihoods

In Karnataka's Davanagere district, Harlali village located in Honnali Taluk, hosts approximately 3,783 residents and 898 cattle, covering an area of 23 acres and 36 *guntas*. Farmers used to cultivate crops like ragi and pulses in this area. But it was predominantly a grazing/*gomala* land. Due to encroachment by farmers for agriculture there was a decline in grazing land. Focus shifted from livestock rearing to agriculture thus creating a shortage of fodder for livestock. As a result, the productivity of the land decreased.

Keeping this in mind, and the need to improve the health of the grazing lands, FES began to have discussions on forming community level institutions to govern the *gomala* lands. A GPAS (Gram Parisara Abhivridhi Samiti/ Village environment protection committee) was constituted to monitor the grazing lands. The committee also discussed using the MGNREGA programme to help restore and rejuvenate the grazing lands of the community. Through consultations and engagement with the community, they were able to create awareness on the benefits of protecting Commons, its importance to livelihood and health which resonated with the villagers.

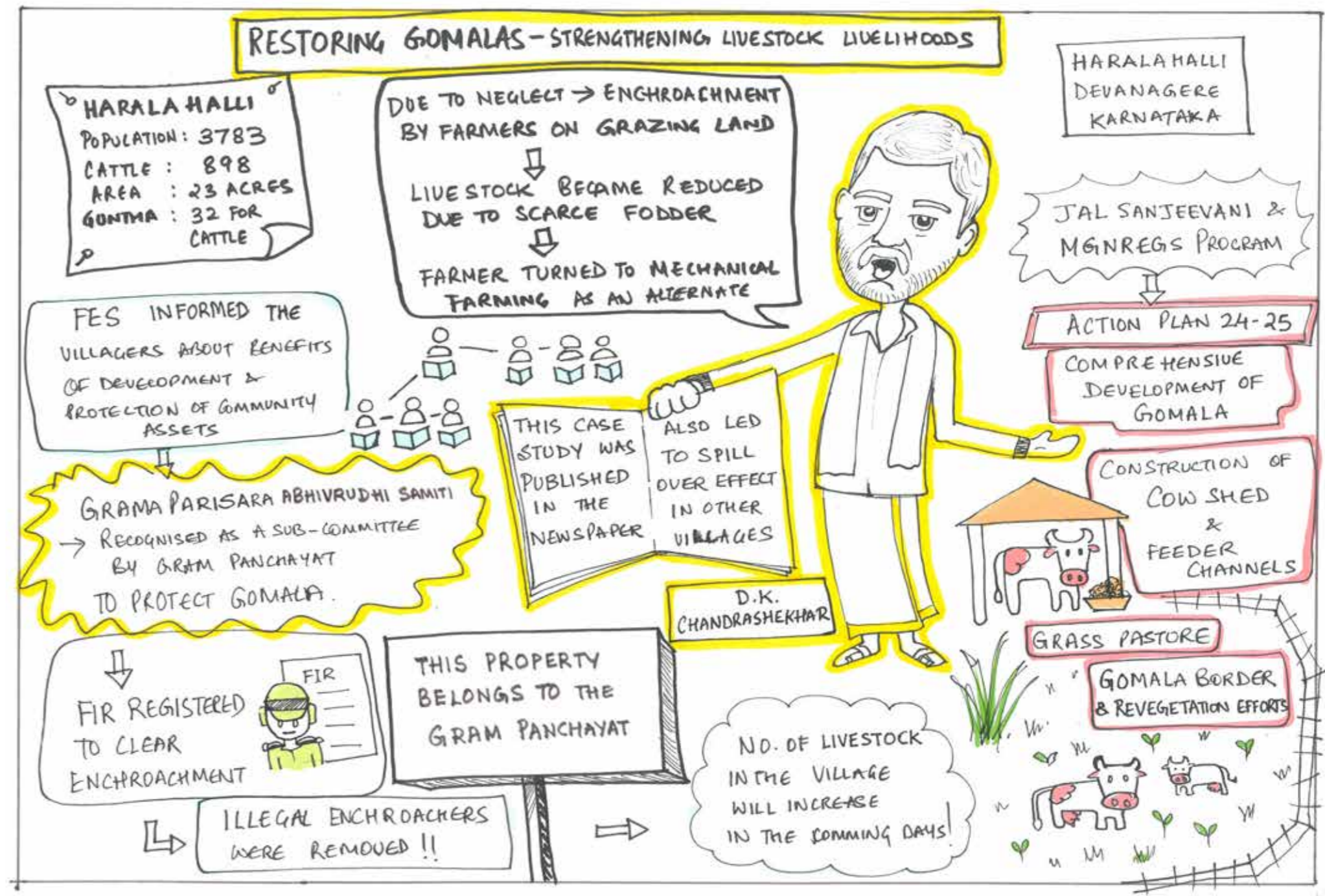
With an aim to protect their Commons, the community came together to remove all encroachment on the land, through legal mechanisms of filing an FIR and ensuring that the encroachers are evicted from their Commons. Soon, the committee began to engage in various activities that aimed at restoring the *gomalas* such as building cattle ponds, desilting the feeder channels, plantation drives and creating a boundary of the common land.

This has allowed the community to take ownership of the Commons and have actively worked towards protecting their pasture lands from encroachment and degradation. With constant engagement with the Grama Panchayats and other local governance bodies, they aim to protect and preserve their grazing land, ensuring security of livelihood.



D K Chandrashekhara
Harlali, Honnali,
Davanagere, Karnataka

Prakash Lambi, FES
(Facilitator)



Renewing Commons: Gangamma's Revival of Chinnamanahalli's Grazing Lands

Chinnammanahalli in Pavagada taluk, Tumakuru district, Karnataka, with 500 families having a population of 1,350 members. Pavagada taluk is commonly referred to as *Baradabeedu*, meaning facing drought conditions for many years. With an average annual rainfall of 450-500mm, most farmers grow groundnuts and the farmlands yield only one crop annually as they are dependent on rainfed agriculture alone. Needless to say, the community faces a lot of hardships due to the drought-like situation in the region. In Chinnammanahalli, there are about 50 acres of grazing land for the livestock for daily fodder. The main livelihoods in the community are agriculture and dairy farming. Due to the drought, 26 families from the community migrated to Bengaluru in search of work. Drinking water for livestock was only available for two to three months each year, with the water situation becoming critical during the summer. Gangamma, a member of the community's *Stree Shakti* Group (SHG), began discussing the water issue with her group members. With her leadership, they organised discussions with the community and highlighted the severity of the water crisis. They approached the gram panchayat, seeking assistance who suggested that natural resource development projects could be implemented under MGNREGA.

The community decided that 100 days of employment could not only help address the water problem but also provide a livelihood for the wage seekers. The community constructed trenches in the *gomala* (common grazing land) to increase the water retention and restrict soil erosion during the rainy season thus ensuring water availability for the livestock. With guidance from the executive officers, the forest department planted saplings along the trench bunds, and the animal husbandry department distributed grass seeds, enhancing fodder availability.

Changes Observed in Chinnammanahalli

The migrant families who had left the community have returned, resuming agricultural work and participating in common land development activities.

- Children from these families have resumed their education after returning.
- Approximately 3,000 trenches have been constructed, improving the water retention in local ponds.
- The water level in open wells and borewells around common lands has improved
- Even in the summer, water is now available in borewells, alleviating drinking water issues
- Increased soil moisture on the hillocks has led to the growth of saplings and shrubs, enhancing biodiversity
- The efforts have strengthened relations between the community, the gram panchayat, and other departments
- A platform has been created for the community to undertake future collective initiatives.

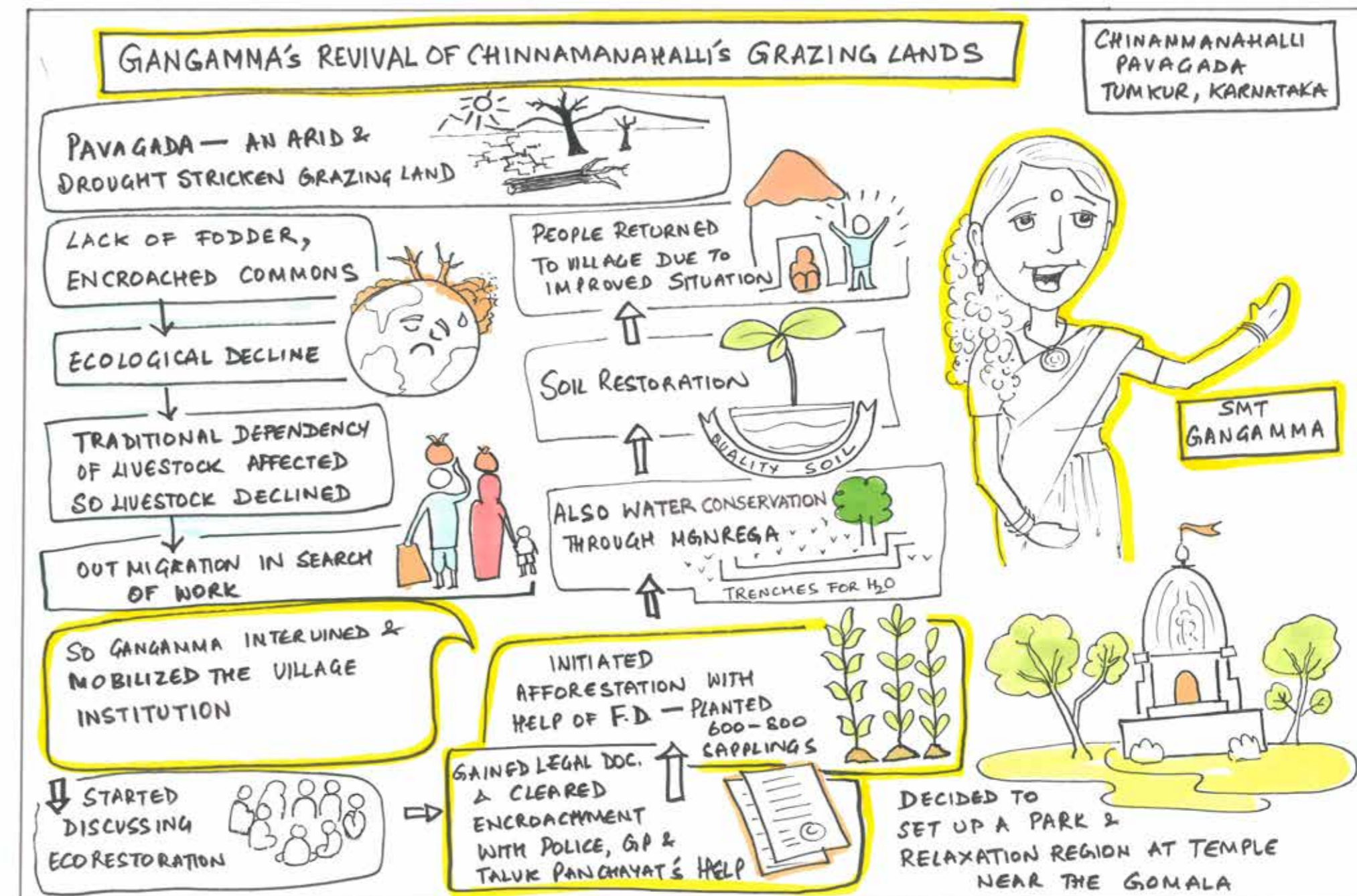
In the coming days, there are plans to fully develop the *gomala* area under the Gomala Sub-plan of the Jala Sanjeevini Scheme, with the panchayat aiming to make it a reliable fodder source for livestock. The leadership shown by Gangamma has trickled down to not only her community but also neighbouring communities inspired by these results, have started adopting similar practices.



Gangamma

Chinnammanahalli,
Pavagada, Tumakuru,
Karnataka

Somakumara, FES
(Facilitator)



A Village's Triumph In Commons Conservation And Water Security

This is the story of Lahan Mowada village in the Yavatmal district of Maharashtra, which faced severe water scarcity during the drought of 2013-14. The collective efforts of the community, led by the members of the 'Nisarga Vyavasthapan Samiti,' serve as a testament to their success. Mamta Dhurve and Pramod Gedam recounted how the community through their efforts successfully addressed water scarcity with the restoration and construction of water harvesting structures in the region.

With almost 1109 acres of forest lands, community members, especially women are dependent on the forests for Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) like Mahua, *Tendupatta*, and *Chironji* which help to complement their livelihoods. In 2013-14, the community faced a severe water crisis. Community members came together to discuss possible ways to help solve this situation and improve the groundwater levels of the area. The Gram Sabhas led to the formation of the Nisarga Vyavasthapan Samiti, which proposed initiatives to tackle water scarcity. These recommendations were submitted to their Gram Panchayat for inclusion in the shelf of works under MGNREGA. Water harvesting structures like Continuous Contour Trenches (CCTs) Check dams for better water percolation to recharge the groundwater were part of the proposed activities. In the consecutive work plans, the work was undertaken through MGNREGA. Apart from government supported programmes, the community also donated funds and participated in renovating a check dam of the area. As a result of these water harvesting activities, the groundwater level improved, and the community which faced water scarcity in 2013-14, saw a remarkable change in their resources.

In 2015, to scale up the work, the Foundation for Ecological Security provided technical assistance, including Well Monitoring Tools, Composite Landscape Assessment and Restoration Tools (CLART), and Common Land Mapping Tool (CLM), to the communities. These tools helped the communities to understand, manage and conserve their resources better. The initiative spearheaded by a women's collective with active community participation is commendable and acts as an example for Natural resource management in the region.



Sangita Parchake

Motha Mowada,
Ghatanjali, Yavatmal,
Maharashtra

Mohini Kamble, FES
(Facilitator)



Reviving Ganga Sani Banda Chalimi: A Community's Triumph

Primarily, agrarian communities, members of the Bandrevu Gram Panchayat, Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh, were also pastoralists who relied on the Commons to support their livestock. The communities of Kanekuntalli, Kethireedypalli, Dattenayak Thanda, traditionally grazed their cattle in the vicinity of the Sadhukonda hill range. Thimmaraju, a committee member of the Kanekuntapalli community institution, narrates the experience of his pastoralist community to revive the local water pond in the area.

The pastoralists would graze their cattle on the Sadhukonda hills, but were often forced to migrate to other areas in search of water for their livestock. They would spend several months away from their village tending to their cattle. This was due to the absence of a perennial water source in proximity to their village. Summer months were cumbersome and difficult for both livestock as well as community members as the distance from the Commons, the terrain and weather was extreme.

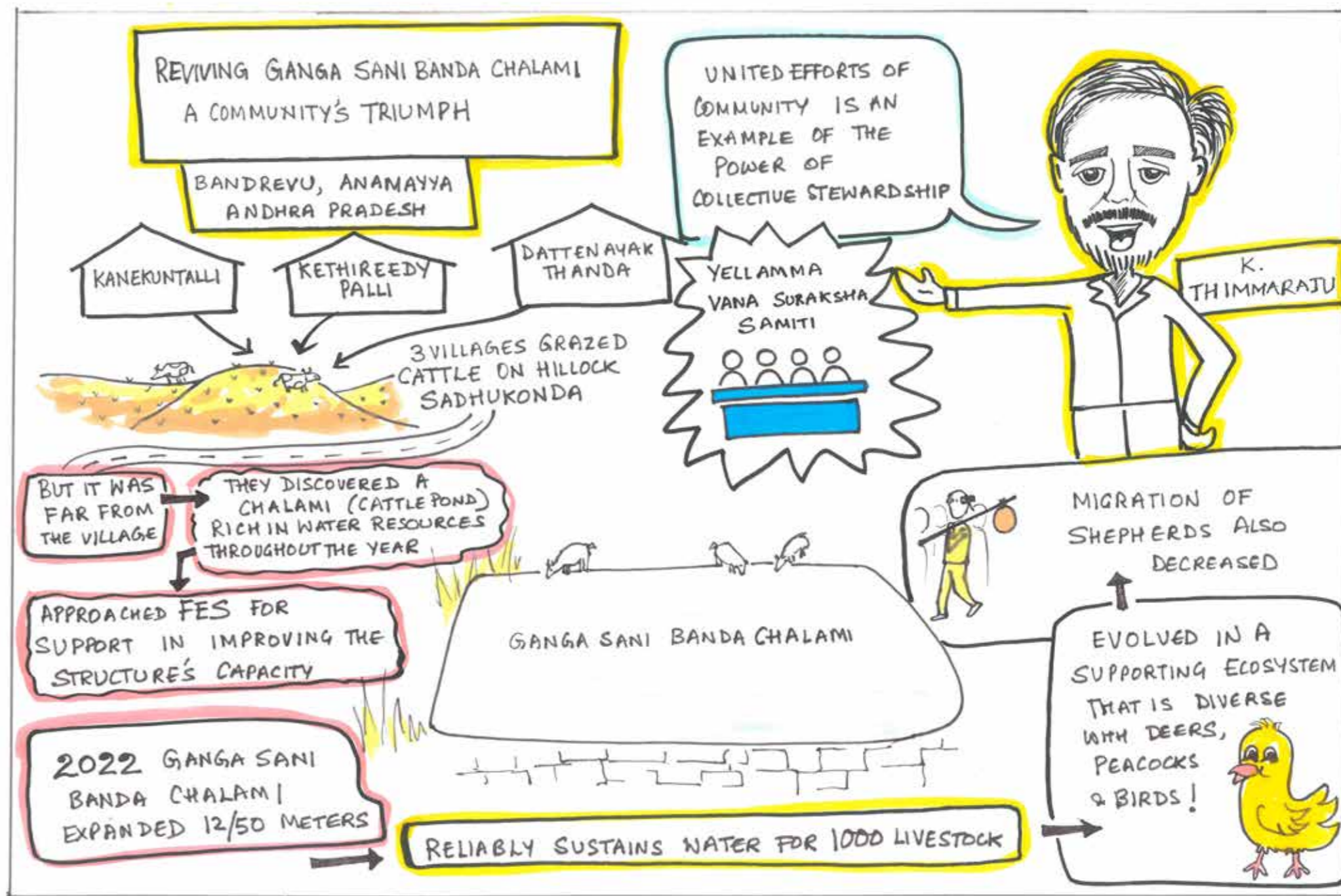
Community level discussions resulted in them identifying the traditional water sources in the area. The Village Institution decided to revive *Ganga Sani Banda Chalami*, a traditional water pond, in 2022. With community efforts and support from FES, the *Chalami* was revived. Earlier the pond could only accommodate a couple of cattle at a time, but subsequently, with the renovation of the cattle pond the diameter of the pond increased from 12 to 50 metres, and it now carries sufficient supply of water all year round. The significant impact of the cattle pond can be seen in the community. In addition to giving more than a thousand livestock access to water throughout the year, the *Chalami* has also developed into a vibrant ecosystem that is home to a variety of wild animals and birds, including deer, peacocks, forest sheep, among others. Development of the *Chalami* also helped to reduce the migration rate among the community members of Kanekuntalli.

The combined efforts of the communities of Dattenayak Thanda, Kanekuntapalli and Kethireedypalli not only alleviated the water shortage faced by the community but also established and managed an essential resource for animals and birds, showcasing the power of communal stewardship and collective action in making the best use of resources for an extended period.



Thimmaraju
Bandrevu, Thamballapalle,
Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh

V Prasanna Latha,
FES (Facilitator)



Bamboo Triumph: A Tale of Sustainable Transformation in Patrungi Village, Jharkhand

In the heart of Champa Panchayat, within the Mahuadanr block of Latehar district, Jharkhand lies the small tribal village of Patrungi, primarily inhabited by the Oraon community. Traditionally reliant on subsistence agriculture, the community have also fostered a system that generates income through the harvesting of local forest resources. Central to this collective economy is a rich bamboo forest spanning over 60 acres of community land, overseen by a dedicated committee of 15 members. This successful venture is a journey that began 25 years ago.

Marianus Tigga, a 66-year-old resident of Patrungi, recalls the early days of transformation with pride. "This all started in the year 1994-95," he reflects. At that time, the forest wastelands outside the village were overrun with lantana and other invasive shrubs. Marianus realised that this invasive weed would not help his community. He envisioned a brighter future for his community and proposed utilising these neglected patches of land. Though his idea was met with enthusiasm, no one stepped forward to take action. But he took the initiative to plant bamboo himself, despite facing mockery from his peers.

Driven by his passion and commitment, he involved local children, taking them along after school to assist with his bamboo cultivation efforts. For a couple of years, he persevered slowly but surely transforming the landscape. His dedication did not go unnoticed; the community began to witness the visible signs of change as bamboo seedlings took root.

The turning point came in 1998 during a pivotal Gram Sabha. Inspired by Marianus' vision, the community collectively decided to transform the forest wasteland into a thriving bamboo forest. They established rules and regulations to protect this newfound resource, forming a committee responsible for safeguarding the bamboo from grazing animals, theft, and other threats.

Today, Patrungi has a flourishing bamboo patch, which is taken care of by the village committee. The community's success has yielded tangible benefits: they have purchased a tent, utensils, chairs, and a table for their Gram Sabhas, and they utilise the additional income from bamboo sales to support other village initiatives.

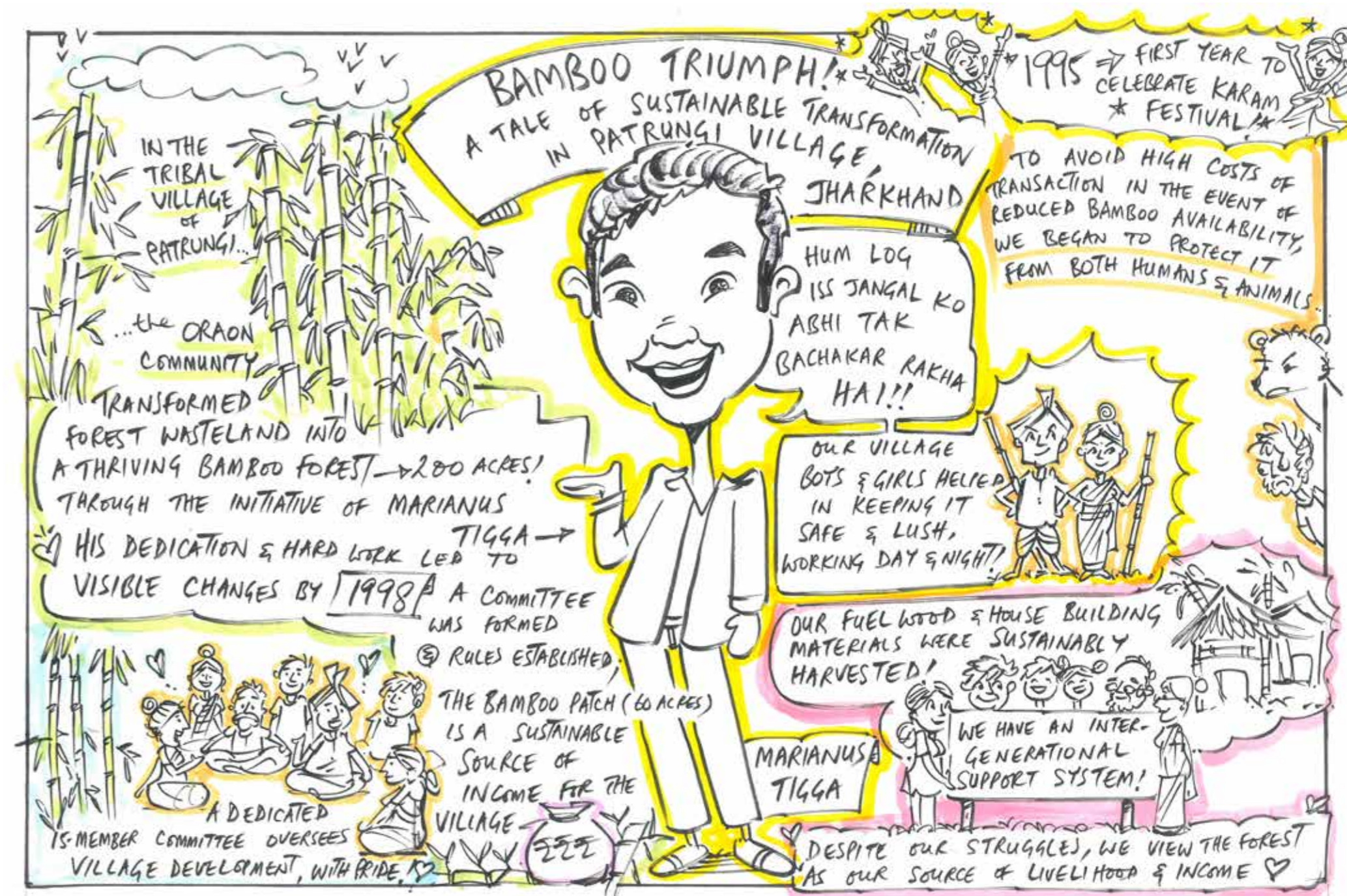
During the community conference, Marianus' sentiment was clear and he said "Yes, we are proud that we have nurtured this bamboo patch and will continue to do so." His journey to a community leader tells the power of collective action in resource management. The story is the testament of strength of community bonds and the transformative potential of sustainable resource management.



Marianus Tigga

Patrungi, Champa,
Mahuadanr, Latehar,
Jharkhand

Dheeraj Daniel Horo,
PHIA Foundation
(Facilitator)



Sustainable Ecosystem Restoration In The Eastern Ghats: Community Led Strategies

Venkata Ramana from Eguvaboyapalle, Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh shares the experiences of his community with the Commons. Primarily an agrarian and pastoralist community, the members were dependent on the Commons to fulfil their needs.

The communities regularly harvested the *boda* grass (*Cymbopogon*) from the Commons to cater to their livestock and to build their thatched houses. However, after 1987 with the introduction of several government schemes promoting the construction of *pucca* houses, easy maintenance of pucca houses, and improved accessibility to alternative building materials, the harvesting of the *boda* grass drastically reduced. Due to this, the prevalence of the *boda* grass increased significantly. Unpalatable grasses increased thus reducing the fodder and tree biodiversity and biomass of the Commons. Community members saw the increase in malnutrition in livestock, decrease in availability of timber and medicinal herbs. Apart from this, the incidents of fire also increased due to the spread of these grasses in the Commons.

To understand this change in the ecosystems on the Commons, a detailed study was conducted over 2 years in Chittoor and Anantapur District covering 136 villages including 28 village institutions in the year 2019. Sample field sites were identified against the majority of the Commons and monitored by 47 representatives to quantify the herbaceous biomass, tree seedlings and the growth rate of existing tree saplings. The study compared three distinct management treatments based on the combination of fire instances and *boda* grass. The detailed study involved several stakeholders in the process from community members, to government functionaries, scientists, herbarium experts amongst others.

After the detailed monitoring, the CAFA treatment demonstrated a significant increase in the palatable grasses and biomass diversity on the Commons. An increase of 16 fodder species was documented in the experiential plot where CAFA treatment was undertaken. A significant jump from 150 tree seedlings to 400 seedlings was observed thus determining an enhanced growth in the native tree seedlings on the Commons. An accelerated growth rate of the tree seedlings was documented as well in the Study due to the CAFA treatment.

The study emphasises on the effectiveness of collaborative approaches in addressing ecological challenges. It talks largely about how these common resources need to be managed and not merely controlled with the crucial role of the scientists, community-governed village institutions, and governmental and non governmental agencies operating within socio-ecological systems.



Venkata Ramana
Eguvaboyapalle,
Thamballapalle, Chittoor,
Andhra Pradesh

Saneesh CS,
Helmholtz Centre
for Environmental
Research, Leipzig
(Facilitator)

Sustainable Ecosystem Restoration IN THE EASTERN GHATS! Community-Led Strategies

IMAGINE A SITUATION WHERE YOU DO NOT HAVE WOOD FOR FUEL, FURNITURE AND NO GRASSES FOR THATCHING OR FODDER! THIS INTERVENTION & INITIATIVE BEGAN IN SUCH A CONTEXT!

THE TALL GRASSES CALLED BODHAGADDI [CYMBOPOGON] WERE EARLIER USED FOR THATCHING IN THE VILLAGES. BETWEEN 1989 & 2019, THERE WAS A SHIFT TOWARDS CONCRETE HOUSES IN THE VILLAGE, AS PART OF DIFFERENT HOUSING SCHEMES... THIS REDUCED THE DEMAND & USE OF BODHAGADDI. SOON ENOUGH, OUR COMMON LANDS WERE FILLED WITH THESE GRASSES SINCE THEY COULD NOT BE CONSUMED AS FODDER EITHER! THEIR INCREASED GROWTH, ALONG WITH OTHER UNPALATABLE GRASSES, INCREASED FIRE INCIDENTS & REDUCED THE DIVERSITY OF FODDER & LOCAL TREE SPECIES.

AS SHEPHERDS, OUR LIVESTOCK NEED MORE FODDER VARIETIES! WITH THESE GRASSES TAKING UP SPACE, THERE'S NO FODDER, TIMBER & MEDICINAL PLANTS AVAILABLE!!

WHAT WE DISCOVERED

- ★ SITES WHERE BODHAGADDI & FIRE WERE CONTROLLED WITNESSED A STELLAR INCREASE IN FODDER & NATIVE TREE SPECIES GROWTH!
- ★ LIVESTOCK HEALTH IMPROVED & SO DID THE COMMUNITY'S INCOME.₹₹₹.

THE EXPERIMENT:

3 TYPES OF PLOTS - WITH VARIATIONS OF BODHA & FIRE CONTROL

HOWEVER... BOTH FIRE AND BODHA GADDI ARE NOT TO BE PERMANANTLY REMOVED FROM THE ECOSYSTEM! THE ESSENCE LIES IN CONTROLLING THEM THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION!♥

THIS TIMELY ACTION AIDED ABOUT 60 VARIETIES OF FODDER TO THRIVE!!

VENKATA RAMANA

SANEESH CS

IN 2019, 126 VILLAGES CAME TOGETHER TO REMOVE BODHAGADDI FROM COMMON LANDS THROUGH AN EXPERIMENT & MONITORED THEM CLOSELY.



**Ajoy Rupini &
Binoy Debbarma**
Khamtingbari/Bilaikang,
Tripura

Mansee Bal Barghava,
Monami Bhattacharya
& Proshakha Maitra,
Youth for Integration
Trust/W4W Foundation
(Facilitator)

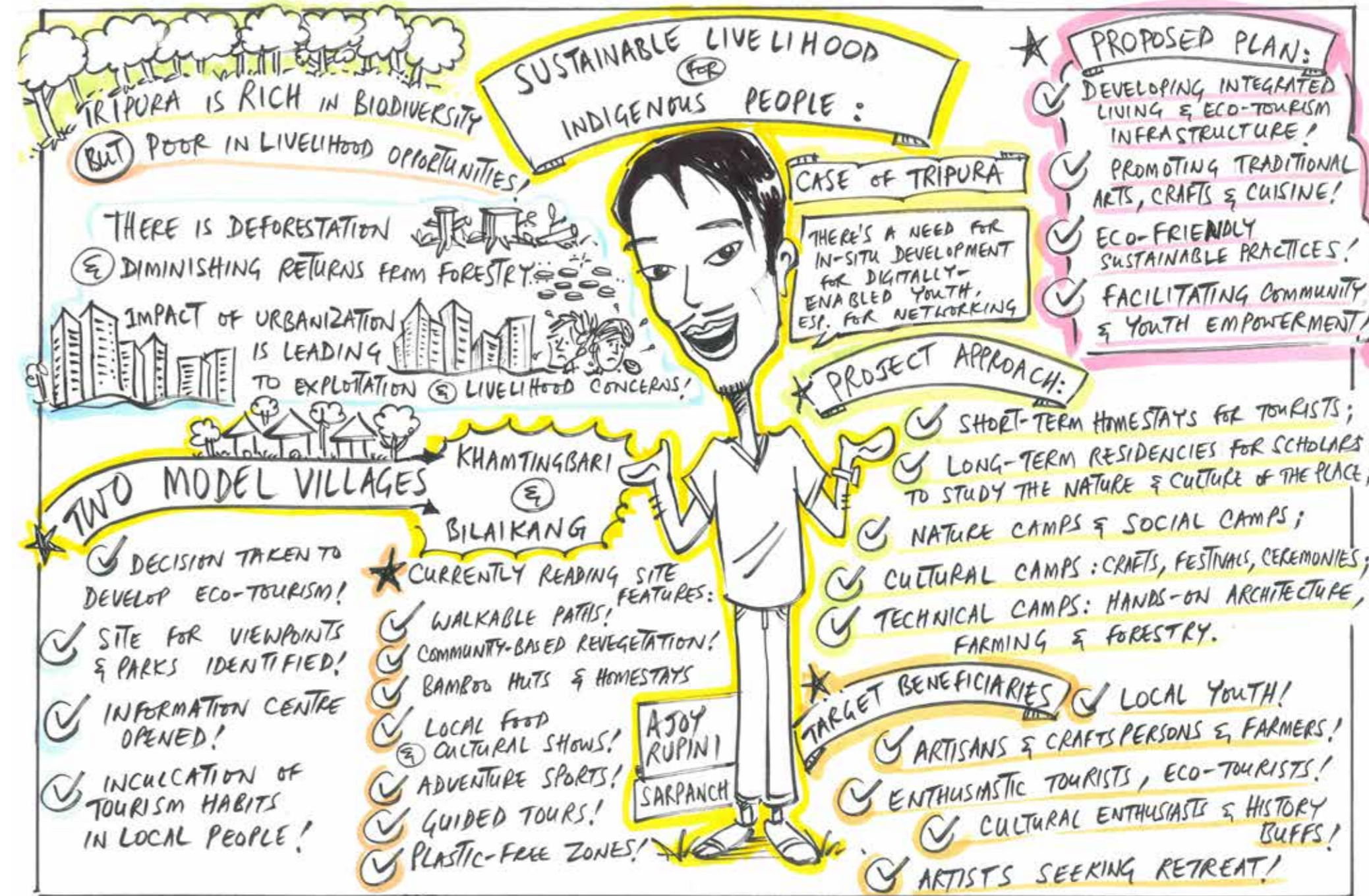
Sustainable Livelihood for Indigenous People: A Case from Tripura

In the mountainous, forested villages of Khamtingbari and Bilaikang in Tripura, biodiversity flourishes, yet life remains challenging, with communities having limited livelihood opportunities. To combat this, the communities, with the support of the W4W Foundation, are spearheading a transformative initiative. The project focuses on developing integrated living and tourism infrastructure to provide sustainable livelihoods, especially for the youth.

As aspirations shift and many seek opportunities in urban areas, this initiative aims to create local employment through eco-friendly homestays, encouraging the youth to remain in their communities. The homestays, enriched by promoting local arts, crafts, and cuisine, offer tourists a unique experience while preserving the community's rich cultural heritage. By blending traditional hospitality with responsible tourism, the community fosters pride in their indigenous identity.

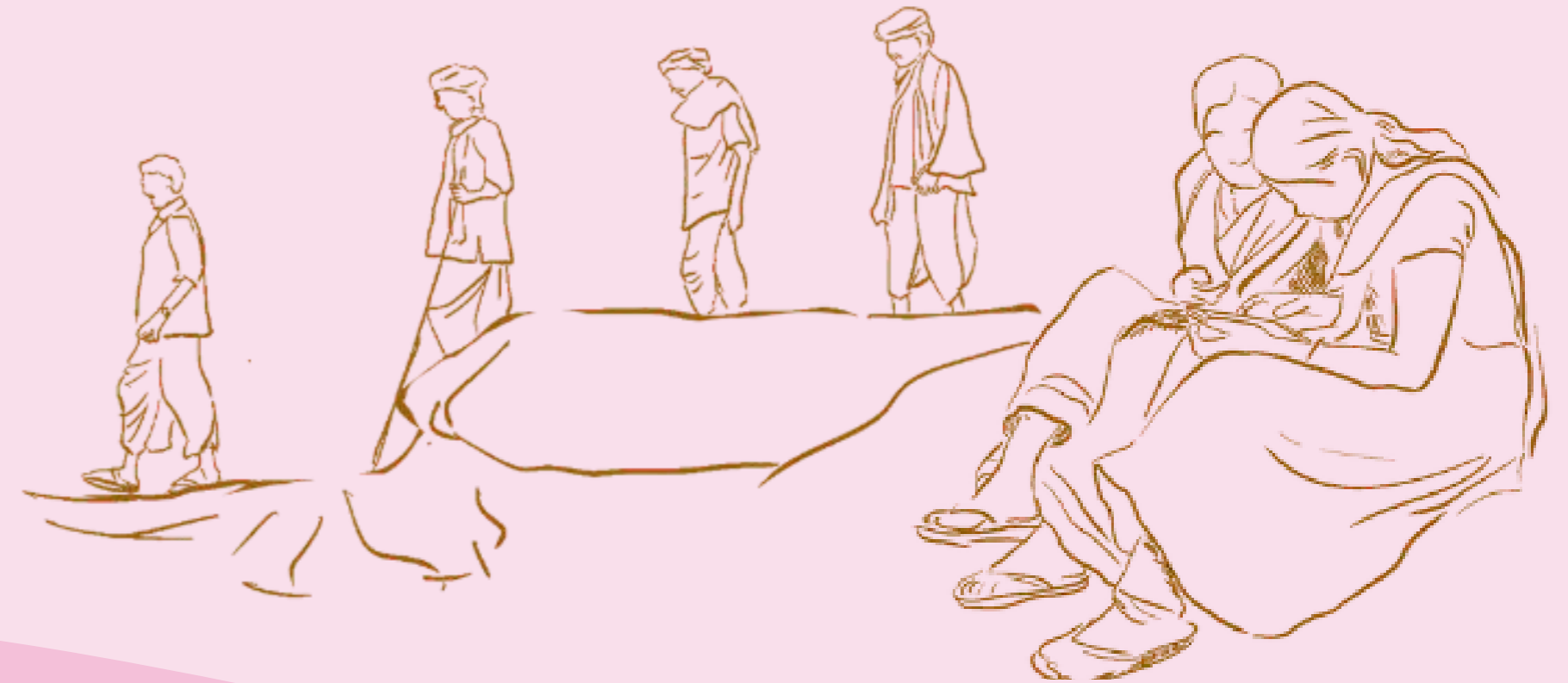
In addition to short term stays, the initiative includes long term scholar residencies that connect visitors with the region's natural and cultural richness. Through nature camps and cultural immersion, participants explore local languages, crafts, farming, and traditional ceremonies. Technical camps also impart knowledge on vernacular architecture and sustainable forestry practices, enriching the community's understanding of their environment.

The initiative has not only created in-situ livelihoods for youth, artists, and farmers but has also boosted their confidence, deepened their connection with their roots, and strengthened ecological conservation efforts. By empowering the community to take pride in their heritage and engage in sustainable practices, this project ensures a resilient future where people and nature thrive together.



Commons and Gender

Coming together of initiatives that enhance accessibility of resources to both men and women for governing their Commons equitably, including those that look beyond the binary concept of gender.



Engaging Women In Grassland Conservation: A Case From Gujarat

Kujan Kalotara is a researcher who is involved in biodiversity conservation with a developmental organisation in Surendranagar, Gujarat. Hailing from the *Rabari (Maldhari)* pastoralist community in Gujarat, she has been able to interact with other pastoralists, especially women in the region and understand their problems and issues. As a researcher, her core area of work is to understand the connection of the pastoralist women with natural resources, especially the grasslands. She documents the women's knowledge, experiences with their ecosystems, to help other practitioners in the area.

Kujan's research shows that *Maldharis* (the *Ghumantu* community) during migration travel with their cattle/small ruminants in search of fodder and water. During this, the women encounter several hardships. But over the years they have weaved coping mechanisms and developed knowledge to manage these circumstances.

Kujan also highlights how women's knowledge is often overlooked in conservation programmes. Such practices reinforce power hierarchies and biases and most importantly, important perspectives from women on Commons are left out. Gender equity is definitely hampered but also the management of Commons has a partial approach.

During her interaction with other women, she faced certain challenges to document the entire process. Young women were often overshadowed by the elders in the community causing them to restrain from sharing their experiences. Women seldom participated in the group meetings as they were burdened with other chores and responsibilities. Being a treasure house of wisdom, many women never acknowledged their expertise and did not share their experiences. However, keeping Kujan's family background and lineage (*daughter of social worker Hajabhai*) in perspective, she was able to establish rapport easily with the other women in the community.

Kujan emphasises that it is crucial to understand the different perspectives that women have on grasslands related to wildlife, biodiversity, and conservation. To meaningfully include women in the conservation programmes, she says that women's time and creation of free unbiased spaces must be accounted for so that they can contribute to the programme rather than just being beneficiaries. Her work has surely helped to bridge gaps in the region and allow women to voice their concerns, opinions and experiences more freely.



Kujan Kalotara

Reshamiya, Chotil,
Surendranagar, Gujarat

Manya Singh,
Sahjeevan (Facilitator)



Guardians of the Sacred Forest: A Tale of Vigilance and Unity

Sulachana Juanga is a resident of the Jantari village of Gonasika Gram Panchayat, Keonjhar District, Odisha and belongs to the Juanga PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group). The Juangas consider the Forest Commons as sacred and commit to protect it as their own mother. They are heavily dependent on the forests for their produce and are seen foraging for mushrooms and other minor forest produce. Almost 15-20 varieties of mushrooms and NTFP like *Tulo*, *Shorgi* flower amongst others are collected. They believe that forest produce is pure and healthy as it is free from harmful chemical pesticides, thus actively including these products in their lifestyle.

However, the Juangas faced encroachment issues in their Commons by neighbouring communities of Baksibarigaon. Assessing the issue, Sulachana spearheaded the discussions and initiated action towards these issues and how they were affecting their Commons. Under her leadership as President, a committee of 12 women, who belonged to different Self-Help Groups, came forward to organise a community level meeting to raise awareness on the degradation of the Commons. A forest conservation committee at the Gram Panchayat level was constituted where Sulachana was appointed as Secretary.

The committee was able to encourage the neighbouring communities to help in the conservation process of the Commons. The *thengapalli* system (traditional watch and ward systems) was revived where women played a pivotal role in forest guarding. The roads that were used by the outsiders to enter the forest were also guarded by the women and eventually led to a robust system of protecting the forests. Penalties were also levied on repeated offenders. Bylaws specified that only dry trees could be taken by the community members. However, instances of trespassing by wood mafias were seen. The committee sought assistance from the Forest Department to handle these delinquents.

Forest fires were another threat to the local forests. Regular awareness drives conducted by the committee and establishment of proper rules and regulations for the same helped to control the incidents to a large extent. A system of prompt outreach to the Forest Department and active participation of community members in the event of such fires helped to tackle the incidence of these fires.

Sulachana Juanga recounted the role played by Juang Development Agency in supporting off-farm activities like goat rearing and on farm support along with the MGNREGA job opportunities and loans from the Government. These opportunities acted as a source to supplement their livelihood systems. It also acted as a strategy to reduce the excessive dependence on forests, thereby allowing the Commons to recover and regenerate.



Sulachana Juanga
Jantari, Banspal, Keonjhar, Odisha

Saswatik Tripathy,
FES (Facilitator)





**Vaishali and
Bhawani Shankar**

Madhopur, Jalimpura,
Sangod, Kota, Rajasthan

Umesh Paliwal, FES
(Facilitator)

A Woman Sarpanch's Efforts Towards Ensuring Livelihood Security

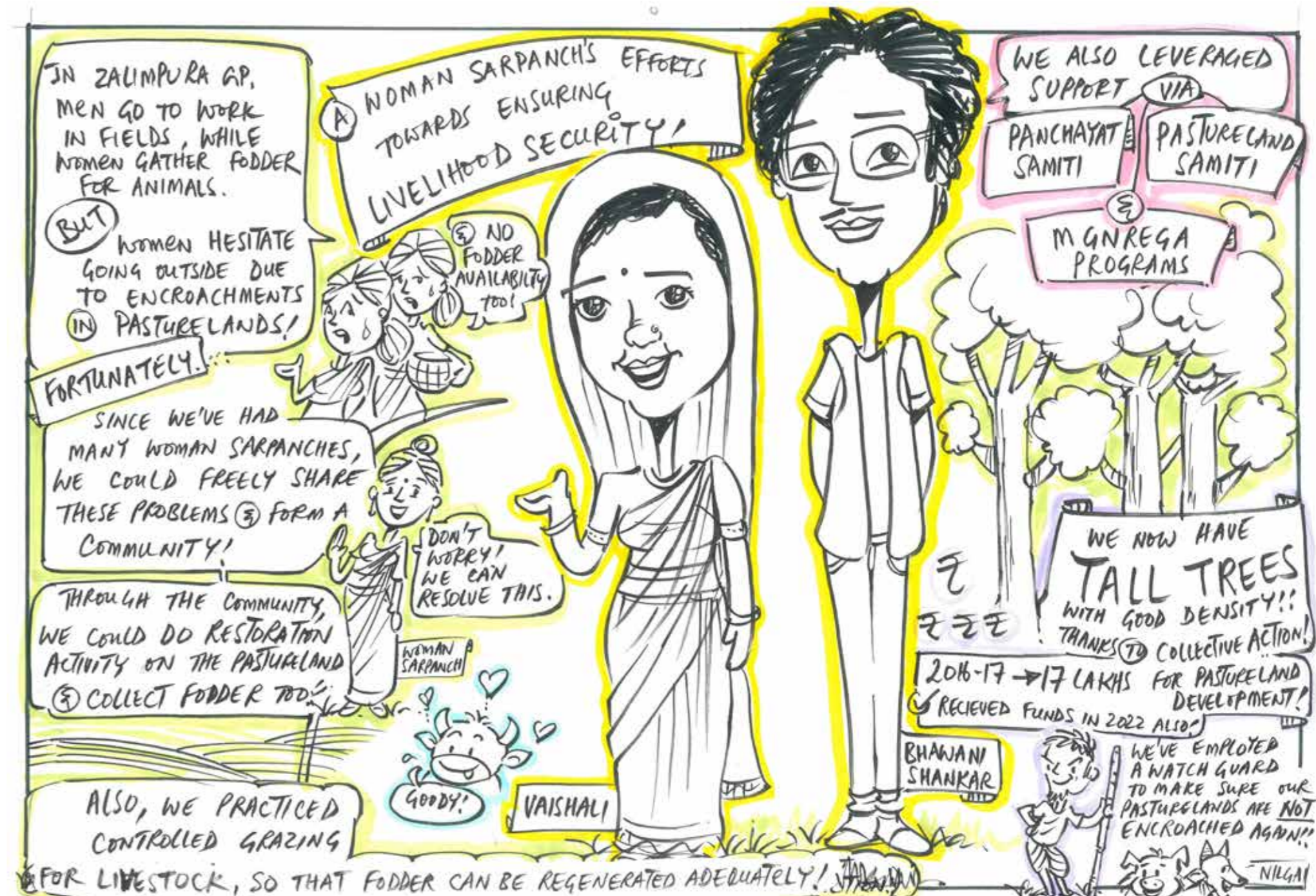
Madhopur village is located in Jalimpura Gram Panchayat, Kota district of Rajasthan, about 60 kilometres away from Kota city. The community consists of approximately 150 families, with a majority of them belonging to the Rajput community, while only two families of Brahmins and Bairwas each. The primary occupation is agriculture and animal husbandry.

The village has around 43 acres of grazing land. Along with the household chores, women also contribute to animal care and farming. The men engage in factory work and farming.

Since 2008, Madhopur has seen a female representative to lead their Gram Panchayat as Sarpanch. Encroachment on the grazing lands led to difficulties for women to access the Commons. In 2016, the women shared their grievances and presented their demands during a meeting to the Panchayat President Manbhar Devi. Following this, the 43 acres of grazing lands were set free of encroachment. Gradually, the land was protected, and fencing and revegetation work were undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Today, the Neem and Khejadi trees on Commons offer adequate fodder for the village's livestock.

In 2023, a Charagah Vikas Samiti was formed in the community, aiming to strengthen the Common land protection efforts. The committee along with the proactive community recently opposed open grazing for the cattle located at the newly established cattle shelter. However, with negotiations in the community, they allowed the shelter owners to collect fodder for the cattle from the Commons instead of free grazing.

With the proper management of the Commons, the fodder requirements of the community are fulfilled for 7 to 8 months by the common grazing lands. These efforts led by the Sarpanch have helped address the concerns of the women and empower them resulting in positive changes like better access to fodder near their homes thereby saving time for fodder collection. The protected grazing land provides shelter for other wild animals also like Nilgai, wild boar, deer etc. The community acknowledges the role of the woman Sarpanch in the efforts for common land development.



Anjna Markam - A Champion in Advocating for CFR

"Forest resources are essential for us, but we weren't aware how important forest land is for us." says Anjna Markam.

Anjna Markam's commitment to advocating for Community Forest Rights (CFR) in Katanga Mal, Bichhiya Tehsil of Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh is truly remarkable. Her active involvement in Mahila Sabha and dedication to empower her community highlights her focus on women's issues and forest conservation within the community.

Over the past five years, Anjna advocated the importance of CFR to the community through the *Paryavaran Samiti* and FES. She also successfully convinced the women and elders of the community to secure their rights over their forest land. She navigated through the complex CFR claim process in multiple communities highlighting her rapport with different stakeholders of the region. She successfully completed the CFR claim process in Sarhi, Katanga Mal, and Katanga Rayat communities.

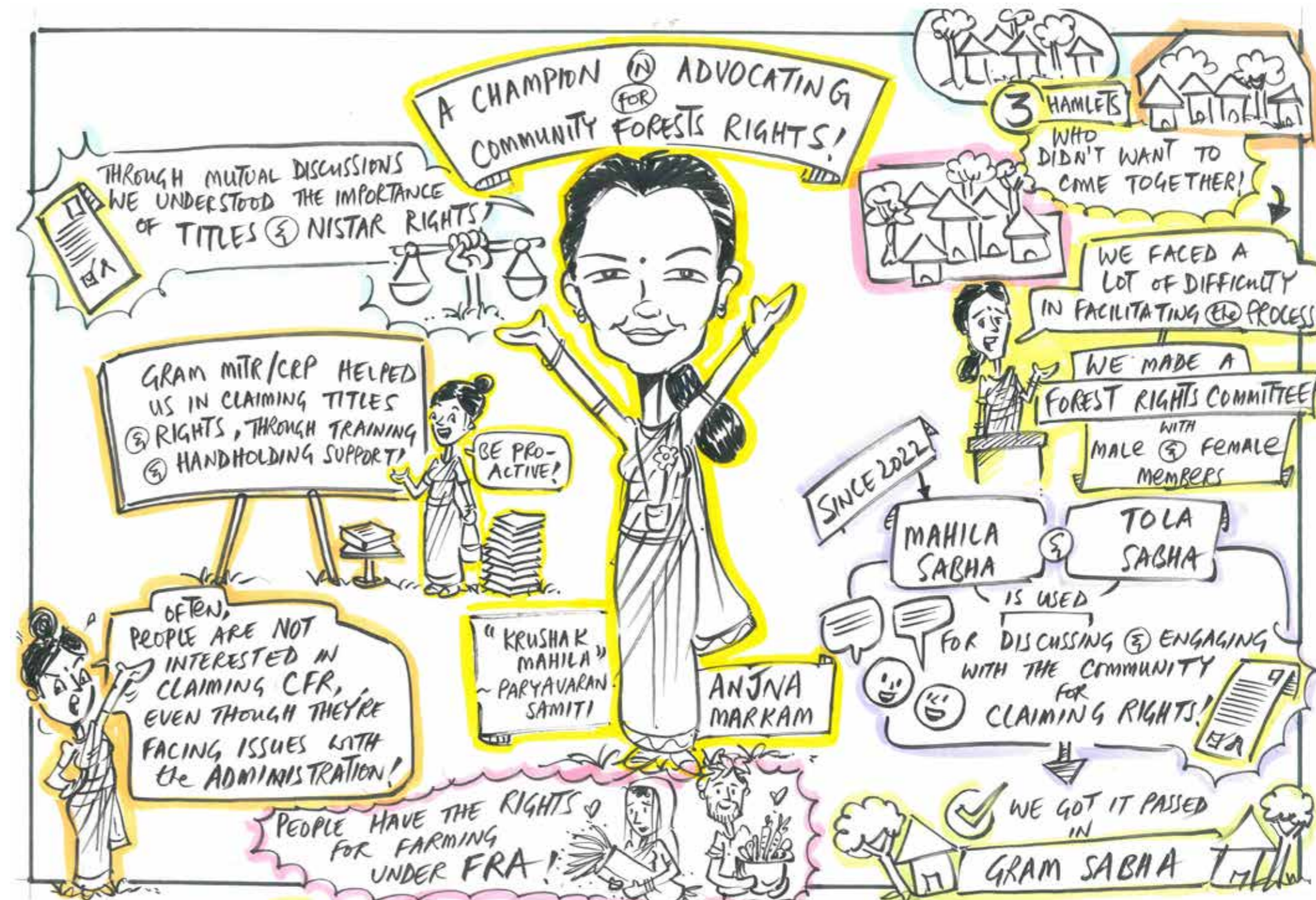
Anjna faced a number of challenges in mobilising the members of the neighbouring communities. Foremost being that most members were not literate to understand the complexities of securing tenurial rights over the forests. Explanation of forest boundaries and ensuring that the collection of fuelwood and other NTFPs to not be done in areas under the jurisdiction of the Forest Department was another challenge for her. Conduct of meetings due to insufficient quorum created an obstacle for Anjna. However, she did not lose hope and continued her efforts with the support of five other women in mobilising everyone at the community level. The community came together to draft the action plan, following which the *Paryavaran Samiti* (forest rights committee) also helped them in the mapping exercises on the Common lands. After this exercise, the *Samiti* also filled up forms for the CFR claim and submitted them in the Gram Sabha. Anjna spearheaded the process and was able to successfully alliance with all members of the community.



Anjna Markam

Katanga Mal, Bichhiya,
Mandla, Madhya Pradesh

Keertan Baghel, FES
(Facilitator)





Damor Jasiben Somabhai and Dindor Savitaben Chimanbai
Bhanasimal, Santrampur, Mahisagar, Gujarat

Rinkal N Taviyad,
FES (Facilitator)

Empowering Women in Bhanasimal: The Saga of Shiva Shakti Farmers Society

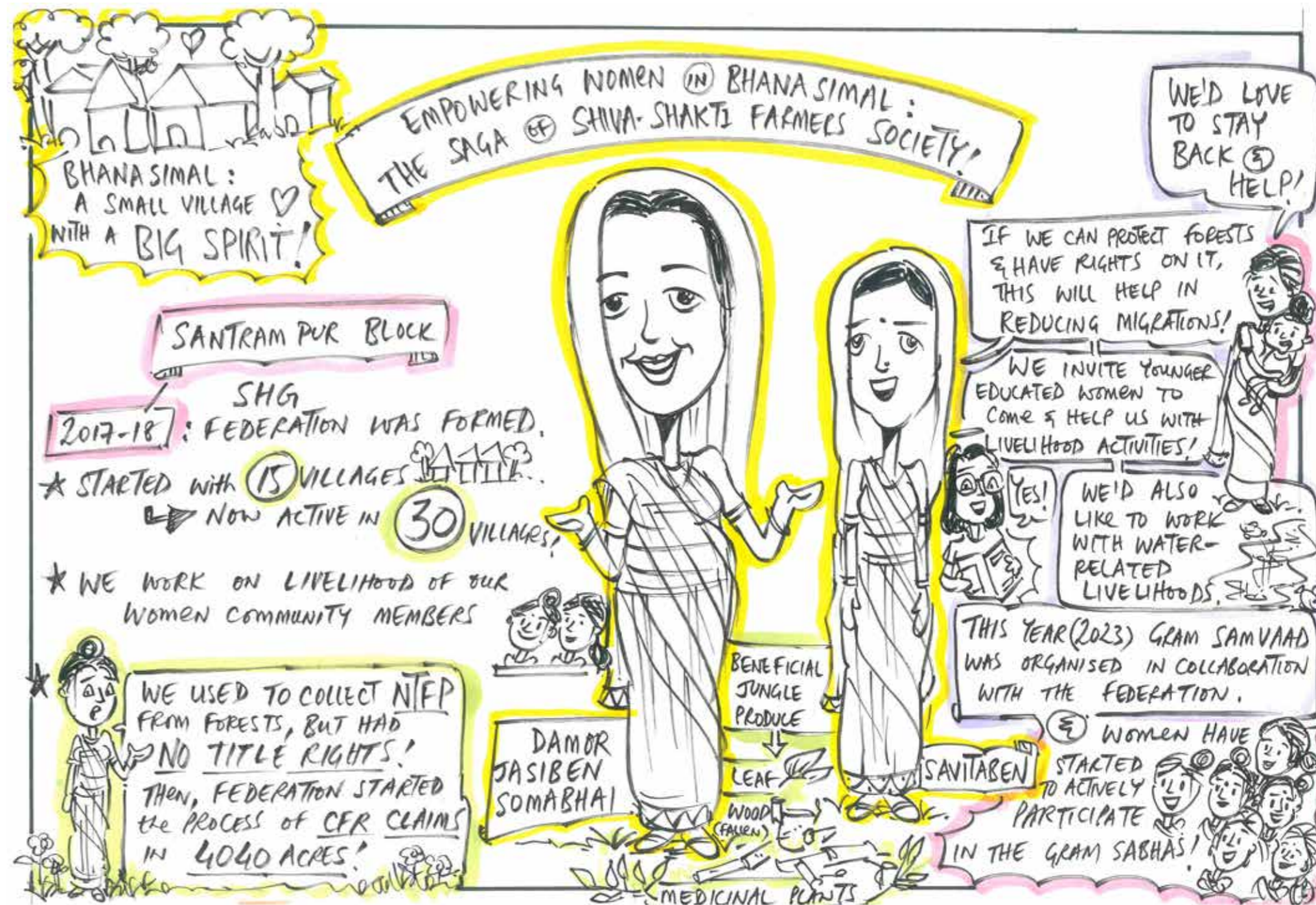
Since the year 2018, Jasiben has been actively involved with the women's federation to empower the women of her community. The Federation, which was formally registered in 2020, aims to support, provide opportunities and resources for its members. At present, the Federation boasts of 522 women members from 20 different villages in the Santrampur Taluka, Mahisagar District in Gujarat. This federation plays a crucial role in devising and implementing livelihood plans that benefit a total of 35 communities in the region.

To enhance leadership and participation, Jasiben formed groups of 11 women in each village, to create a supportive network that nurtured collaboration and shared learning. Recognizing the economic challenges faced by the women, she facilitated easier access to loans through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) thereby empowering them to start or expand their entrepreneurial ventures. The Federation also implemented programmes aimed at improving agricultural practices. These initiatives focused on the development of improved seeds and the establishment of vegetable gardens, vital for increasing food production and generating income.

During the Gram Samvad programme, Jasiben emphasised the importance of strengthening the women's organisation by having discussions and sharing experiences among members. Under her leadership, a comprehensive campaign to advocate for collective land rights was launched across 11 villages in Santrampur. This involved meticulous preparation and documentation of land files for 4,048 acres, which were presented and honoured at the Gram Samvad 2023 programme. Government officials, including the Cabinet Minister responsible for Tribal Development, Primary, Secondary, and Senior Education, were present to recognise the efforts made by the Federation.

Jasiben regards that regular participation in meetings, *mahila sabhas* (women's assemblies), and *gram sabhas* (village councils) will ensure better awareness and development of women. She encourages community members to explore and utilise forest resources such as *Timrupan*, *Gundar*, *Lac*, *Khakhra paan* as a source of livelihood.

Through these efforts, Jasiben and the women's federation are working diligently to create a more equitable and empowered environment for women in Santrampur taluk.



Story of Dolon Gorai: A Changemaker in Bankura, West Bengal

Dolon Gorai, a pioneering entrepreneur and livestock helper from Kalpathar in Bankura district, West Bengal, is a beacon of hope for her community. Known for her work in advocating gender-inclusivity and natural resource governance, Dolon's story showcases the transformative power of women-led initiatives in addressing community challenges. This arid region, suffered by severe water scarcity and limited agricultural productivity beyond paddy cultivation, relies heavily on pastoral lands, which often face degradation. Dolon's journey began with the support of the CSR initiative of ICICI Foundation, leading her to emerge as a gender catalyst in her village. For over a decade, she and the women of her community worked to revive traditional practices in animal husbandry, significantly reducing livestock mortality rates and improving pastoral land management. Recognising the need for empowerment, Dolon extended her efforts across five villages in Kalpathar and three tribal zones in Bankura, promoting financial independence among women by enhancing their understanding of savings and banking.

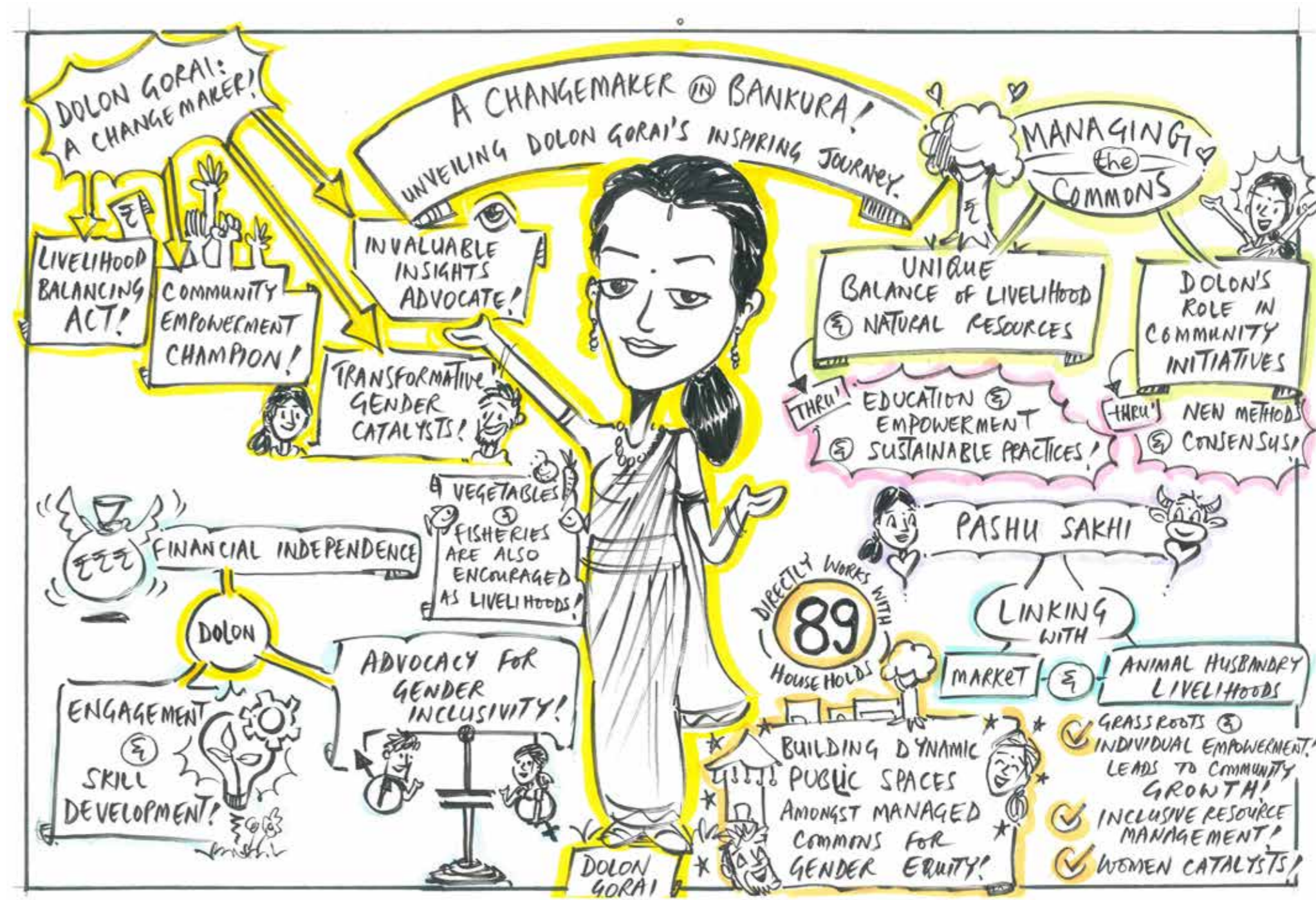
Amid developmental pressures, such as road and railway projects threatening the eucalyptus forests of Bankura, Dolon and her community actively advocated for the protection of their natural resources. Their consensus-driven approach fostered a sense of ownership and sustainability among the community. Dolon's coordination with *Pashu Sakhis* (animal friends), women trained in vaccinating livestock and managing pastoral resources, has further strengthened the community's capacity to safeguard livelihoods and reduce animal mortality. Beyond natural resource management, Dolon emphasised on engaging with government officials, facilitating marketplace access, and empowering women-headed households to improve their efficiency and income. Her efforts exemplify a unique balance of livelihood enhancement and resource sustainability, making her a role model in gender-inclusive governance.

This story highlights how recognising women's roles can drive meaningful, community-driven change. Her work offers valuable insights into integrating gender perspectives within the management of Commons, inspiring broader societal transformation.



Dolon Gorai
Kalpathar, Bankura, West Bengal

Tannishtha Das and Saran S, TISS
(Facilitator)



Jammulamma's Journey Towards Becoming 'The Best Farmer'

Jammulamma, a tribal woman leader, resides in the remote village of Chintapaka, Alluri Sitharama Raju district, Andhra Pradesh. At the young age of 12, Jammulamma was married off and during the time she experienced several financial difficulties as she had very limited access to resources. She found it difficult to support her family with a measly income.

Jammulamma started natural farming, cultivating medicinal plants and harvesting non-timber forest products (NTFPs). She also became an active member of the Self-help group (SHG) and worked with the Kovel Foundation. Through these efforts she was able to earn a livelihood and provide for her family.

Keeping her experiences in mind, she realised that other *adivasi* women too find it difficult to support their families. She helped the women in her community to adopt sustainable agricultural practices and formed a Farmers Producers Organisation (FPO) called 'Adavithalli Girijana Mahila MACS Limited' with 11 women. These women would collect NTFP from the common lands and help support their livelihoods. The FPO has progressively grown to 486 members now.

'Adavithalli Girijana Mahila MACS Limited' was able to reach external agencies who purchased the NTFP products from them. The average annual income generated from the sales amounted to 25 lakhs rupees. Every employed member of the FPO was guaranteed a return of 50,000 rupees for their work in the FPO.

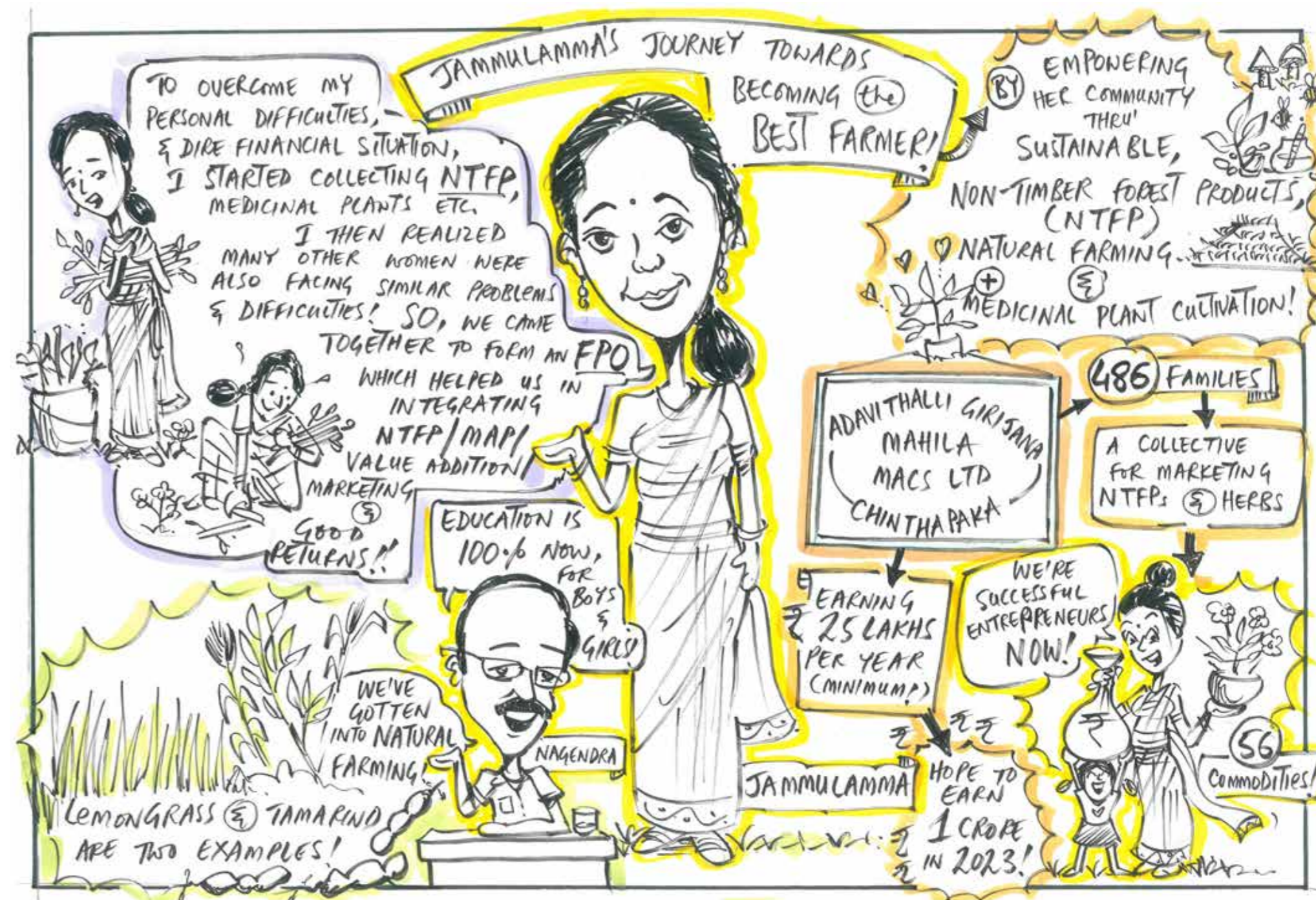
Jammulamma was able to convert the tribal women to progressive entrepreneurs by selling NTFPs and herbs. She was named 'Giri devi - The Best Farmer' by the Andhra Pradesh State Government for her leadership in the SHG movement and her advocacy of sustainable farming practices.



Jammulamma

Chintapaka, Ananthagiri,
Alluri Sita Rama Raju,
Andhra Pradesh

Nagendra Prasad
Parla, Kovel
Foundation (Facilitator)



Paving The Way: Nidiya Bai Marko's Trailblazing Leadership In Tikariya Village

Nidiya Bai Marko, a prominent leader from Tikariya village in Mandla district, Madhya Pradesh, has emerged as a powerful voice for the community and an inspiring figure in women's leadership. As President of the Gram Paryavaran Samiti Tikariya which was formed with the support of FES in 2016, Nidiya Bai actively engaged with the community and other stakeholders in the area. Her initiative to deepen the community pond with the active participation of the community members, resulted in a significant improvement in the water harvesting capacity of the pond. This also increased the availability of water for the community for an additional five months.

Recognising the other needs of the community, Nidiya Bai addressed irrigation and road issues, by bringing these concerns to the Mahila and Gram Sabha of her community. Her leadership spurred the Gram Panchayat to build a road-cum-stop dam at Gadidan Nala, benefiting twelve farmers who could now cultivate a second crop (wheat and gram) across 25 acres, greatly supporting local livelihoods. She also motivated the community members to build a Nala through shramdan, thereby connecting the dam and the village pond and improving water availability in the village. In a landmark achievement, Nidiya Bai was then elected Sarpanch, making her the village's first female leader in over 15 years.

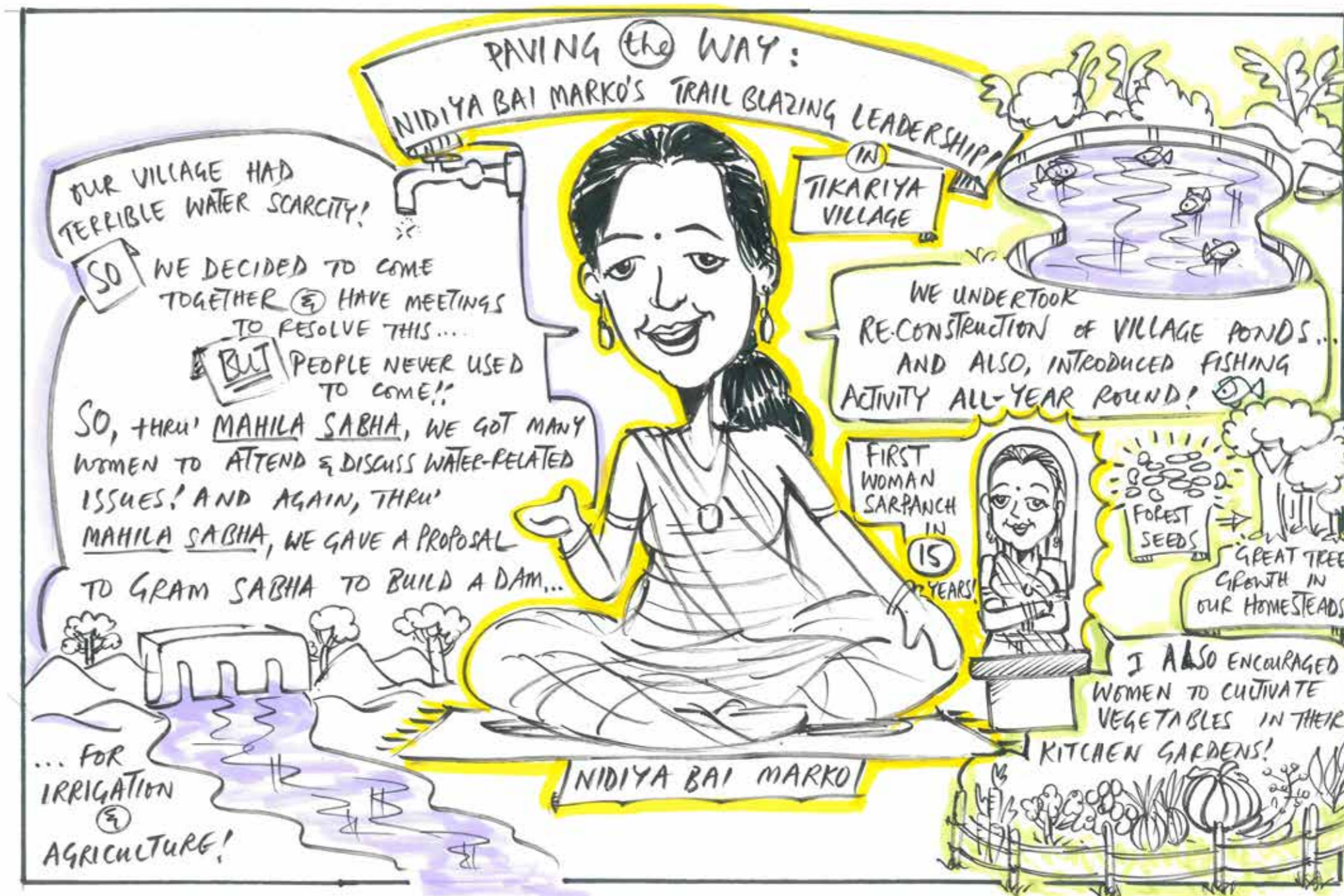
As the current Sarpanch of Padariya Panchayat, Nidiya Bai continues to champion community conservation efforts and women's empowerment. She has encouraged women of the community to establish kitchen gardens to meet nutritional needs instead of completely relying on the markets. Also educated them on financial independence through bank account ownership thereby enabling them to have control over their earnings unlike before. Her efforts have empowered women to express their needs in Mahila and Gram Sabhas, leading more women to speak up in open forums.

Nidiya Bai's leadership marks a new chapter of resilience and empowerment for Tikariya, fostering a culture of inclusion and active participation among women.



Nidiya Bai Marko
Tikariya, Bichhiya, Mandla,
Madhya Pradesh

Kailash Das Sonwani,
FES (Facilitator)



A Ward Panch's Effort towards Restoring Commons

Meva Devi Bhil, a resident of Khara village in the Pindwara block of Sirohi district, Rajasthan, embodies resilience and determination. Meva Devi lost her mother at a young age and had to shoulder familial responsibilities early on. Her education was limited to class 5 and she was married at 14. She faced further challenges when her husband passed away young. Social customs restricted her from working outside the household, deepening her struggles.

Her desire to challenge these norms and contribute to society drove her to file a nomination for the position of Ward Panch during the 2020 Panchayat Raj elections. Supported by the Jan Chetna Sansthan in Abu Road, she attended training sessions that equipped her with knowledge about eligibility, rights, and responsibilities of a Ward Panch.

After winning the election by a margin of over 80 votes, Meva Devi prioritised issues often overlooked in the community. Her primary focus areas included pasture development, employment generation and empowering the community. Recognising the dire need for grazing land development, she initiated a series of meetings with the community. She collaborated with organisations like the FES, Bhilwara, and Jan Chetna Sansthan to gain expertise on pasture development. She also helped to form a Pasture Development Committee with unanimous support from the community. Meva Devi was able to propose and incorporate several pasture development activities such as bunding, water self-reliance works, and tree plantations into the Gram Panchayat Development Plan. Meva Devi navigated the bureaucratic hurdles to ensure the successful implementation of projects.

Meva Devi also focussed her efforts in employment generation for the community. She ensured that job cards under MGNREGA were issued to as many eligible community members as possible. She educated workers on their rights under MGNREGA to ensure fair wages and to enable workers to complete 125 days of employment to avail additional benefits under the Act. With her efforts, there was a steady increase in employment opportunities and improved wage systems in Khara village. Meva Devi's initiative to advocate for financial self-reliance through pasture development helped to empower the community. The fodder grown in these pastures supports local cattle rearers, reducing fodder scarcity and encouraging animal husbandry as a viable livelihood thanks to the availability of fodder through developed pastures.

Meva Devi overcame societal restrictions and gender biases to participate in public life. She facilitated an enhanced participation in governance and the inclusion of marginalised sections especially women in community level decision-making processes.

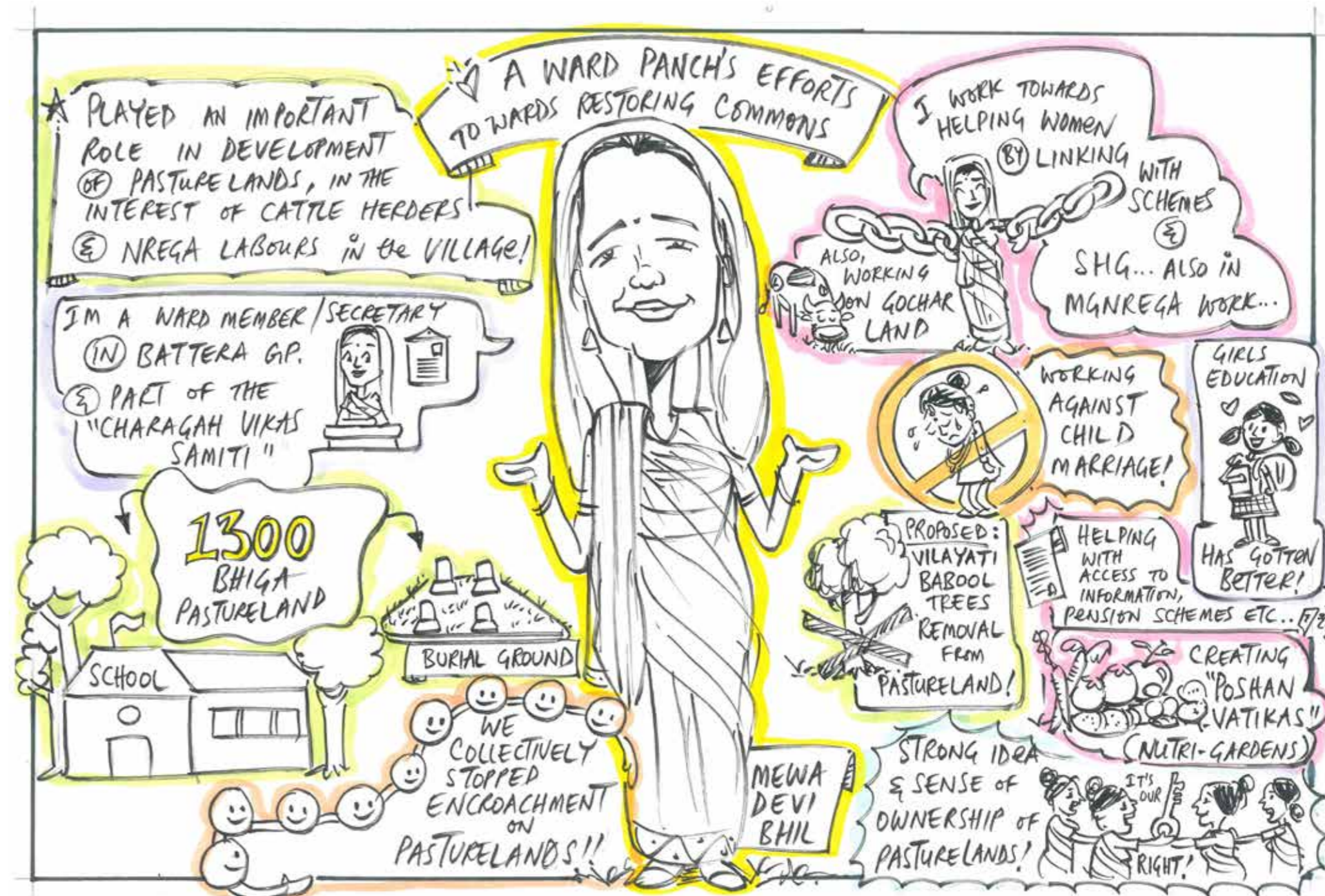
Meva Devi Bhil's journey from a marginalised individual to a leader has inspired transformative change in the Khara community. Her efforts highlight the importance of empowering women in rural governance, emphasising the potential for grassroots leaders to address local issues effectively. Through her unwavering dedication, she has not only improved the quality of life for her community but also set a precedent for inclusive and sustainable community development.



Meva Devi Bhil

Khara, Pindwara, Sirohi,
Rajasthan

Pushpa Jha, Jan
Chetna Sansthan
(Facilitator)



Commons and Culture

Case studies that help us understand the production and evolution of cultural expression in a region. It highlights the collective ownership and preservation of cultural heritage through traditional systems in the community.



Use of Traditional Knowledge against Lumpy Virus

Pastoralism, the way of living of the pastoralist communities, is not just about cattle keeping, it is a lot about knowing the entire ecosystem associated with pastoralism which includes grazing pathways, knowledge about the shrubs, trees, and medicinal plants on the pathway routes, knowhow about their seasons of availability, usage, and recipes for curbing the illnesses and diseases among the cattle.

Any outbreak of disease among the cattle is always worrisome to the pastoralist. Pastoralism is not only the source of sustenance to them but it is the way of living, the ecosystem that they have weaved in, to sustain themselves and their surroundings. The year 2021 observed an outbreak of Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) especially among the cattle of Saurashtra region of Gujarat. Union Cabinet Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, GoI and Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Parshottam Rupala reported a staggering death toll of 1,84,447 cattle due to LSD nationwide during the 2022-23 period. Being a fatal disease, it bore the risk of cattle life, thus loss of sustenance to the pastoralists. Simultaneously, goat pastoralists were grappling with a foot and mouth disease outbreak, placing immense strain on the veterinary and medical personnel of the Animal Husbandry Department in Gujarat. The state machinery was not equipped to provide immediate healthcare support and immunisation to the infected cattle. In response to this situation, Sahjeevan and SEVA (Sustainable Agriculture Environmental Voluntary Action) NGOs came together to revive the traditional ethnoveterinary practices among pastoralists in Chotila and Dhrangadhra talukas of the Surendranagar District, Gujarat.

Pastoralists have historically relied on plant-based medicinal remedies harvested from the Commons. They sourced plants like Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), Tulsi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*), Labru (*Aloe vera*), Awal (*Senna auriculata*), and Nagarvelna (*Piper betle*) from surrounding common lands. The leaves were blended with spices such as *jeera*, coriander, and *methi*, mixed with wheat flour to form round balls or *Laddus*. The recipe is known to boost immunity among the cattle. The elders organised training sessions with the youth and women. The recipes received wide dissemination among the community. Cattle were fed with these ayurvedic *Laddus* thrice a day for five to six days. The cattle receiving these remedies exhibited better resilience to the disease and demonstrated improved immunity.

This case study of Gujarat is a perfect example to observe the revival of pastoralist knowledge systems on the usage of medicinal plants to boost cattle immunity to control the disease. The knowledge and experience surely helps to build a sustainable system that can be passed onto the future generations.



Suresh Kuvadiya

Devgadh, Sayla,
Surendranagar, Gujarat

Malaika Mathew
Chawla, Sahjeevan
(Facilitator)



Nagvanshi Gond Tribe's Symbiosis with Nature

The Nagvanshi Gond tribe, with its rich cultural heritage rooted in the Shivenath river region, exemplifies a profound connection with nature. Among its traditions, the annual *Teej* festival stands out as a vibrant celebration of livelihood, worship, and community bonding. At the heart of this cultural tapestry lies *Angadev*, the revered deity symbolising the essence of the Nagvanshi Gond community. The *Teej* festival serves as a connection of tradition and spirituality, encompassing diverse rituals that honour the natural world and its bounty.

Preceding the *Hareli* festival is the customary '*Savana*', where villagers offer *haridi* oil to safeguard against disease and ensure the community's well-being. Throughout the *Hareli* festivities, offerings of wild root vegetables and newly harvested crops are made to *Ishta*, the revered deity, underscoring the tribe's reverence for nature's abundance.

During the festival, various rituals unfold, each imbued with symbolic significance and reverence for nature. *Amavasya* night (no moon night) witnesses prayers for a bountiful harvest, accompanied by the worship of earthen bulls and spirited *Hulki* dances invoking the powers of nature.

Dev Dussehra marks the beginning of consuming vine fruits after *tarpan*, underscoring the tribe's harmonious relationship with the land.

The tribe's reverence for nature extends beyond festivals, permeating daily life and livelihood practices. Before commencing any work, rituals are performed to honour the elements and seek protection from diseases. Traditional forest medicines are embraced for their health benefits, further deepening the community's bond with the natural world.

Moreover, the Nagvanshi Gond community's marriage traditions exemplify their intrinsic connection with nature. During weddings, trees and plants are revered as deities, symbolising the couple's commitment to nurturing and preserving the environment. This profound relationship underscores the tribe's ethos of sustainability and coexistence with nature.

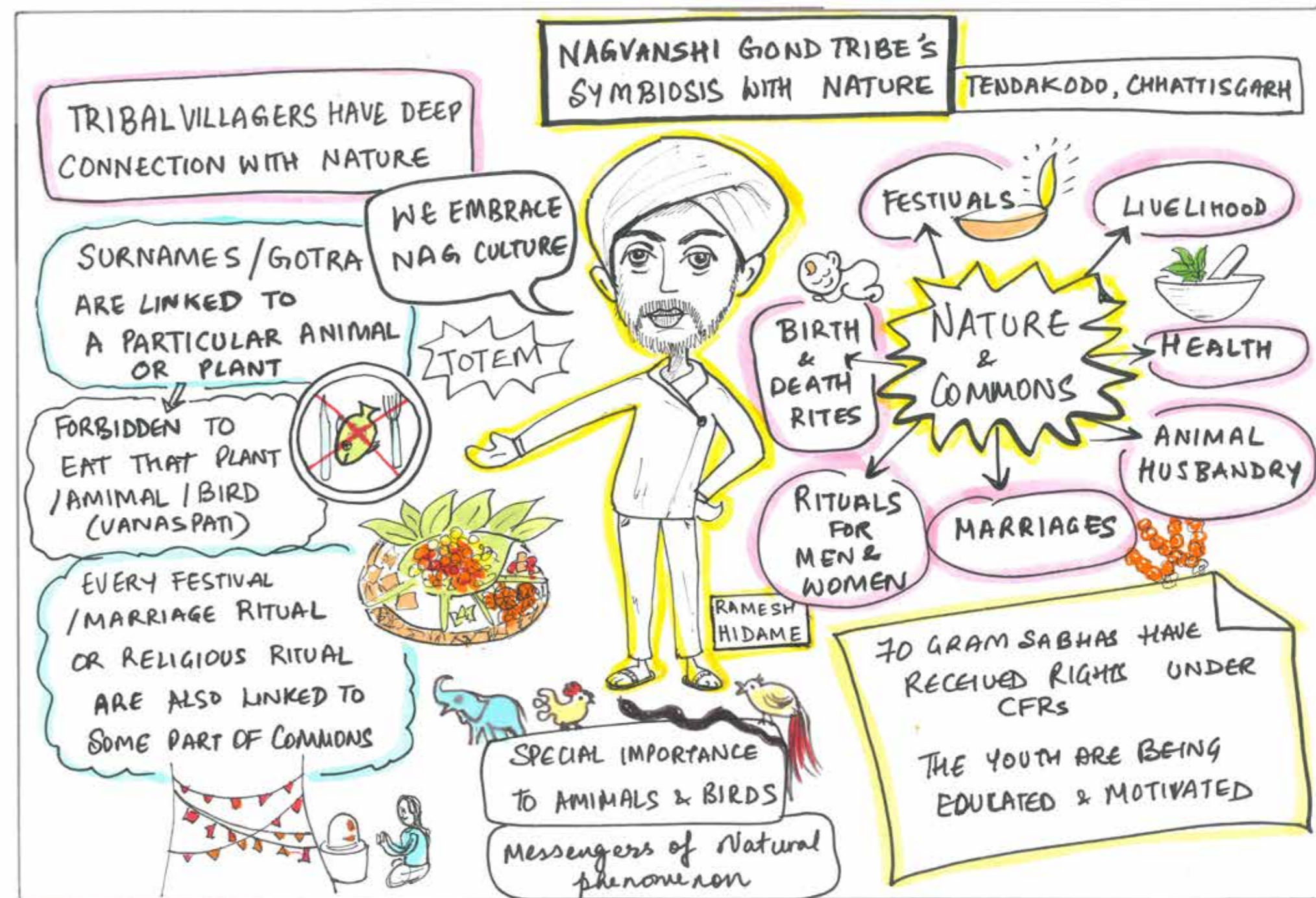
In essence, the Nagvanshi Gond tribe symbolises a harmonious synergy between tradition, spirituality, and environmental stewardship. As they continue to navigate modern challenges, their commitment to preserving ancestral practices and advocating for community forest rights remains steadfast. Through their timeless rituals and unwavering reverence for nature, the Nagvanshi Gond community stands as a beacon of resilience and cultural richness in an ever-changing world.



Ramesh Hidame

Tendakodo, Mohla,
Mohla Manpur Chowki,
Chhattisgarh

Rajendra Kumar
Netam, Nagvanshi
Gond Samaj Sikshan
Awam Social
Welfare Society
(Facilitator)



Seed Festival: Cultural Reflections of Past and Present

The *Beej* festival holds a profound significance in the tribal community, tracing back to the very origins of agriculture among humans. It honours the sacred act of sowing the first seed, an event that heralded the dawn of farming for mankind. Rooted in tradition and steeped in reverence, this festival has been passed down through generations within the Nag Gotra family, symbolising the unity and heritage of the community.

The Nag Gotra family played a pivotal role in governing the community, upholding ancient customs and traditions that predate even the reign of the Kakatiya dynasty kings. This festival, deeply ingrained in the fabric of the community, serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of the past, echoing through the present day. As the community gathers to celebrate, they honour their ancestors and pay homage to Mother Nature, recognizing her as the ultimate provider and sustainer of life.

The *Beej* festival unfolds in a series of rituals and ceremonies, each imbued with profound meaning and significance. Spanning across different areas and *Parganas*, the festival unites people from diverse backgrounds in a shared celebration of agricultural abundance and communal harmony. Preparations commence days in advance, as the community comes together to pay homage to their *Pargana Devi Devta Gaduri*, seeking blessings for a bountiful harvest.

On the eve of the festival, seeds are ceremoniously extracted and placed at the site, a symbol of the community's collective aspirations for prosperity. The following morning, amidst a sense of anticipation and reverence, community members converge at the field to sow the seeds under the guidance of a respected elder. Each clan participates in the ritual, symbolising unity and cooperation in the pursuit of shared goals.

The community gathers for a feast, where traditional delicacies are shared and enjoyed in a spirit of companionship. Following ancient customs, members seek permission from the forest gods before embarking on a symbolic hunting expedition, a gesture of respect towards nature's bounty. Upon their return, they are greeted with songs of triumph and adorned with flowers, marking the culmination of the festival's festivities.

In times of uncertainty and change, the *Beej* festival serves as a beacon of resilience and cultural continuity, reaffirming the community's bond with the land and its traditions. As they come together to celebrate the cycle of life and growth, villagers honour the timeless wisdom of their ancestors, finding solace and strength in the rhythms of nature. Through the *Beej* festival, they forge connections that transcend generations, weaving a tapestry of heritage and hope for the future.



Sonehondar Nag

Bodoras, Chhindgarh,
Sukma, Chattisgarh

Santosh Kumar
Usendi, NSSS
(Facilitator)



Remahla And Its Story Of Cultural Dependence

Remahla village is located in the northern hilly region of Surguja approximately 45 kilometres from Ambikapur city in Chhattisgarh. The mixed community of Remahla lead a simple yet community-centric lifestyle. Fairs and markets are pivotal locales where communities come together, fostering a spirit of shared joy and mutual support. Culturally rich, Remahla is a mosaic of Gonds, Iranis, Raziars, Bargaras, Manjharas, Pando's, and predominantly Haidyas. The hilly areas surrounding the village are home to Pahari Korwa tribes, residing in houses they construct themselves, sustaining their lives with resources from the nearby forests. In the agricultural sector, Remahla plays a crucial role, with villagers cultivating crops such as paddy, maize, pigeon pea, tomato, and aloe vera to earn their livelihoods.

The village, surrounded by lush hilly landscapes, boasts a rich variety of flora and fauna, including wild boars, monkeys, elephants, deer, and peacocks. Botanical treasures like mahua, banyan, tendu, jamun, custard apple, mango, wild bamboo, curry, amla, fulfil various needs, from daily essentials to ritualistic practices.

Notably, specific trees are used during significant life events such as marriage, birth, and death. Despite its abundance of resources, Remahla faces a significant shortage in water.

Chaupal Gramin Vikas Prashikshan Evam Shodh Kendra, situated in Ambikapur, conducted a Gram Sabha in Remahla to address water conservation. The meeting emphasised the necessity of constructing barriers to control water flow and raise awareness about sustainable water practices. The community through the MGNREGS constructed 100 dabris (ponds) in the area. They also leveraged funds in the Gram Panchayat to carry out activities like vermi compost, bio gas, livestock sheds, etc that helped develop the community. With the continued efforts of stakeholders, the community members of the Remahla Panchayat gained the forest rights to protect and conserve approximately 1983 acres of forest land. The multi actor platform that was established to help manage these resources formulated bylaws and norms during the Gram Sabha. The community actively came forward to participate in the conservation process. This transformative approach signifies a step towards a more conscious and resilient community in Remahla, contributing to the broader goal of sustainable development in the Surguja district.



Sevak Lakda

Remahla, Lakhanpur,
Surguja, Chhattisgarh

Shailendra Singh
Rajput, Chaupal
Gramin Vikash
Prashikshan Evam
Shodh
(Facilitator)



Commons and Food

Commons are the stepping stones to providing access to food to communities. They contribute by providing fruits, vegetables, tubers, seeds, medicinal herbs, fish, meat and other minor forest products to communities. The case studies presented here shows how the web of community stewardship weaves the available resources together and underscores the importance of collective action in managing and sustaining these shared resources to ensure proper food security of one's region.



Women's Knowledge Of Edible Plants In Reshamiya's Grassland Commons

The inspiring journey of Manjuben Mansukhbhai Mori, from Reshamiya village in Gujarat, is a testament to resilience and ingenuity. Hailing from a community known for their drumming during temple celebrations, the women of this community depend heavily on the NTFP for their livelihoods. The area includes grazing commons (*gauchar*), private grasslands, reserved forests, revenue land, and government-designated wastelands.

The Commons of Reshamiya, are a vital source of seasonal wild plants and fruits like Spiny gourd (*Kankoda/ Momordica dioica*), Kaleem ali (*drimia ficus*), Fafda thor (*Opuntia ficus indica*), Kundhel (*ceropegia bulbosa*) that sustain the community. The Rawal women, with their skilled gathering techniques, preserving valuable knowledge and indigenous recipes enrich the community's culinary heritage. The women regularly partake in the *gauchar sudharan* (management of Commons) on the village Commons.

It is essential to recognize the deep ecological importance of these plants. They are not just components of our environment; they represent a rich tapestry of life that intertwines nature, culture, and valuable ecological wisdom. In an era marked by shifting climate patterns and the gradual loss of communal resources, it is vital to honour and celebrate the resilience and adaptability of communities like Reshamiya.

These communities demonstrate a profound connection to their surroundings, showcasing their ability to thrive and innovate even in the face of significant challenges. We must strive to document these traditional recipes and produce that can be passed on to the future generations.

This story serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of preserving cultural and nutritional heritage, and it underscores the significance of understanding and safeguarding the delicate balance between nature and human life.



Manjuben Mansukhbhai Mori
Reshamiya, Chotila,
Surendranagar, Gujarat

Kujan Kalotra,
Sahjeevan NGO
and Saurashtra
University
(Facilitator)



Organic Rice Revolution

Arika Radhamma, from Kondabaridi village in Andhra Pradesh, has helped change the lives of several women into budding entrepreneurs through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) which focus on organic farming. Her initiative to buy Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) paddy and sell it as organic rice has socially and economically empowered 14 tribal women in the community.

Farming is a seamless web of interactions between farmlands and other natural resources such as forests, pastures and water. The market for organic food and traditional crops is expanding. The potential of natural farming to reduce farmers' indebtedness, enhance soil health and food security, and mitigate environmental challenges is being increasingly recognised. Radhamma noticed the environmental challenges with the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. It was then that she realised that a change was required to improve the health of the community and the overall environmental health of the area.

Radhamma understood this relationship with the environment and along with the local NGO Jattu Trust, she spearheaded the Eklavya SHG, and began organic farming in 2017, using traditional, chemical-free methods. The group harvested ZBNF paddy, and then manually processed it using traditional rice-pounding methods. Alongside rice, the women also cultivated 18 different types of vegetables using natural fertilisers they produced themselves. These fertilisers were applied every 15 days to maintain good soil health. The Eklavya SHG bought the ZBNF paddy from farmers at Rs.14.50 per kg and processed it without the use of any machinery. They retained a part of the produce for personal consumption, while selling the rest at Rs. 65 per kg. The byproducts, rice bran and broken rice, were also sold, generating an additional income for the women.

Income and Expenditure:

Paddy Purchase: 3000 kg at Rs.14.50/kg = Rs. 43,500

Rice Produced: 2250 kg, sold at Rs. 65/kg = Rs. 1,46,250

Rice Bran: 600 kg, sold at Rs. 5/kg = Rs. 3,000

Broken Rice: 150 kg, sold at Rs. 18/kg = Rs. 2,700

Total Income: Rs. 1,51,950

Profit: Rs. 1,08,450 (Total Income - Expenditure)

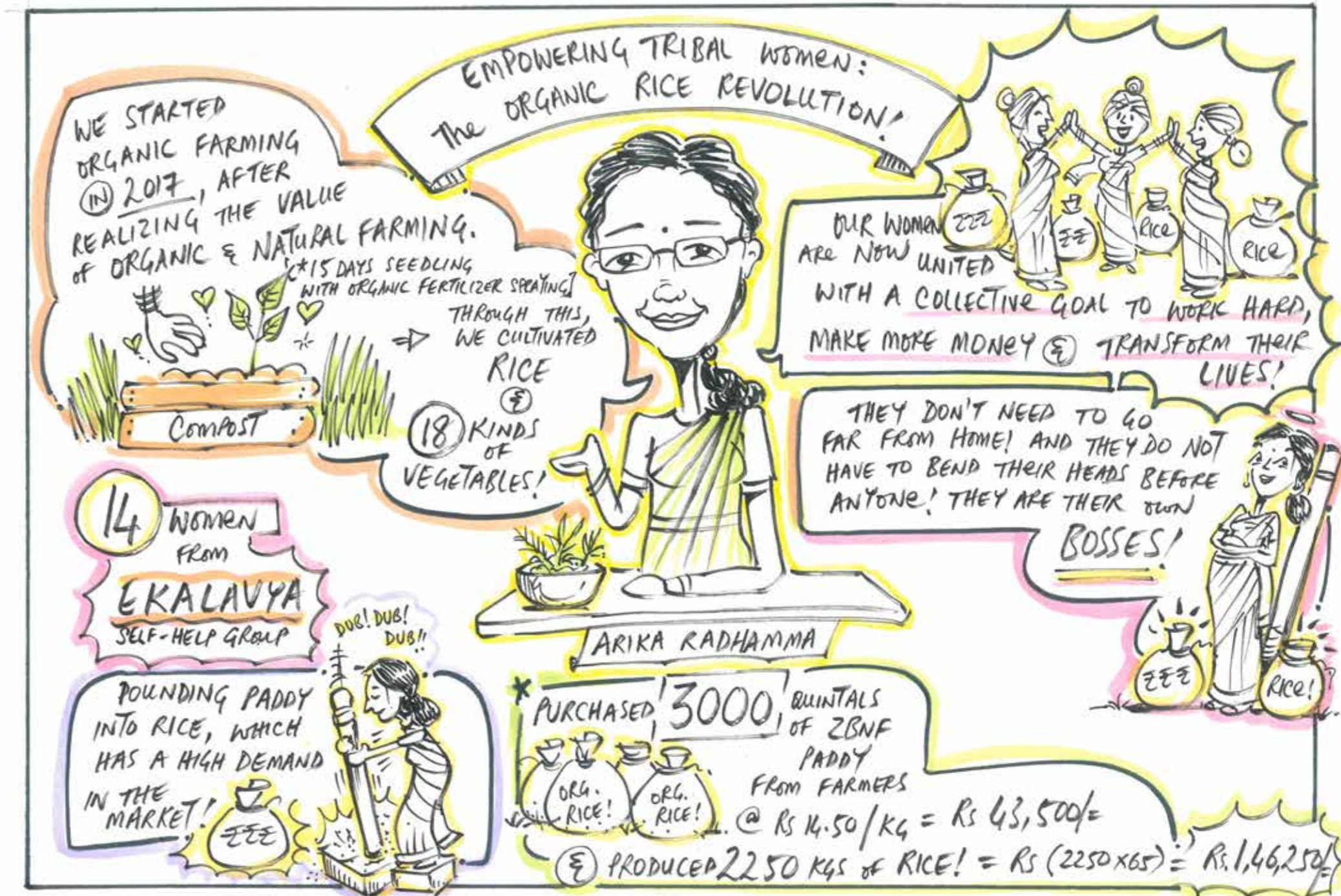
The cost benefit analysis of the Group reflects that they were able to make significant profit from the organic farming practices. Kondabaridi village has transitioned into a 'Bio-Village'. Significant improvement in the soil health of the area due to organic farming has helped increase soil fertility thus improving the environment and the overall health of the community. These chemical free and organic grown products are highly sought after in cities like Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam. Eklavya's organic rice, entirely hand-processed by these women, has received positive feedback, gradually increasing demand. The group continues to observe the benefits to the environment and community's well-being and hopes to establish better connections to expand their market reach.



Arika Radhamma

Kondabaridi, Kurupam,
Parvathipuram Manyam,
Andhra Pradesh

Ajjarapu Sireesha,
Jattu Trust (Facilitator)



Empowering Railwa Village: A Tale of Community Led Natural Farming

Ramabhai stands as a beacon of change where his dedication, resilience, and a deep-rooted love for the land cultivates hope and sustainability in the community of Railwa.

From the very inception of the village organisation in 2013, Ramabhai's commitment to agriculture, animal husbandry, and forest conservation has been commendable. His journey began with a shift towards sustainable practices in agriculture and emphasising on nurturing the land and not exploiting it. He engaged in various agricultural training programmes facilitated by local organisations to create awareness and a deeper understanding among the community.

Ramabhai transformed his farming practices. The heavy reliance on chemical fertilisers and pesticides reduced. The soil fertility improved and growth in production was seen. He engaged in spirited discussions with community members, sharing his wisdom and experiences. Gradually, these conversations rippled beyond Railwa. Community dialogues became platforms for exchanging ideas, and Ramabhai was able to reach out to the neighbouring communities.

Through the Gram Samvad program, a gathering that drew people from 70 to 80 villages in Santrampur and Kadana Talukas, Ramabhai exchanged his ideas and created awareness among the community. The local government agencies encouraged natural farming techniques, and Ramabhai became a natural farming advocate in the region. He delved into the intricacies, collaborating with institutions like Anand Agriculture University and the Atma Project. His passion caught the attention of the Atma department, which appointed him as a resource person at the District level.

He travelled across Gujarat, teaching farmers and community members the art of natural cultivation. Organic manure and bio-culture replaced synthetic chemicals. Turmeric, ginger, wheat, gram, bajra, and maize thrived under his care. He sent seeds to several community members across the State encouraging a community of environmental stewards to take the movement of natural farming forward.

In the quiet of dawn, when the fields whispered secrets, Ramabhai stood tall.

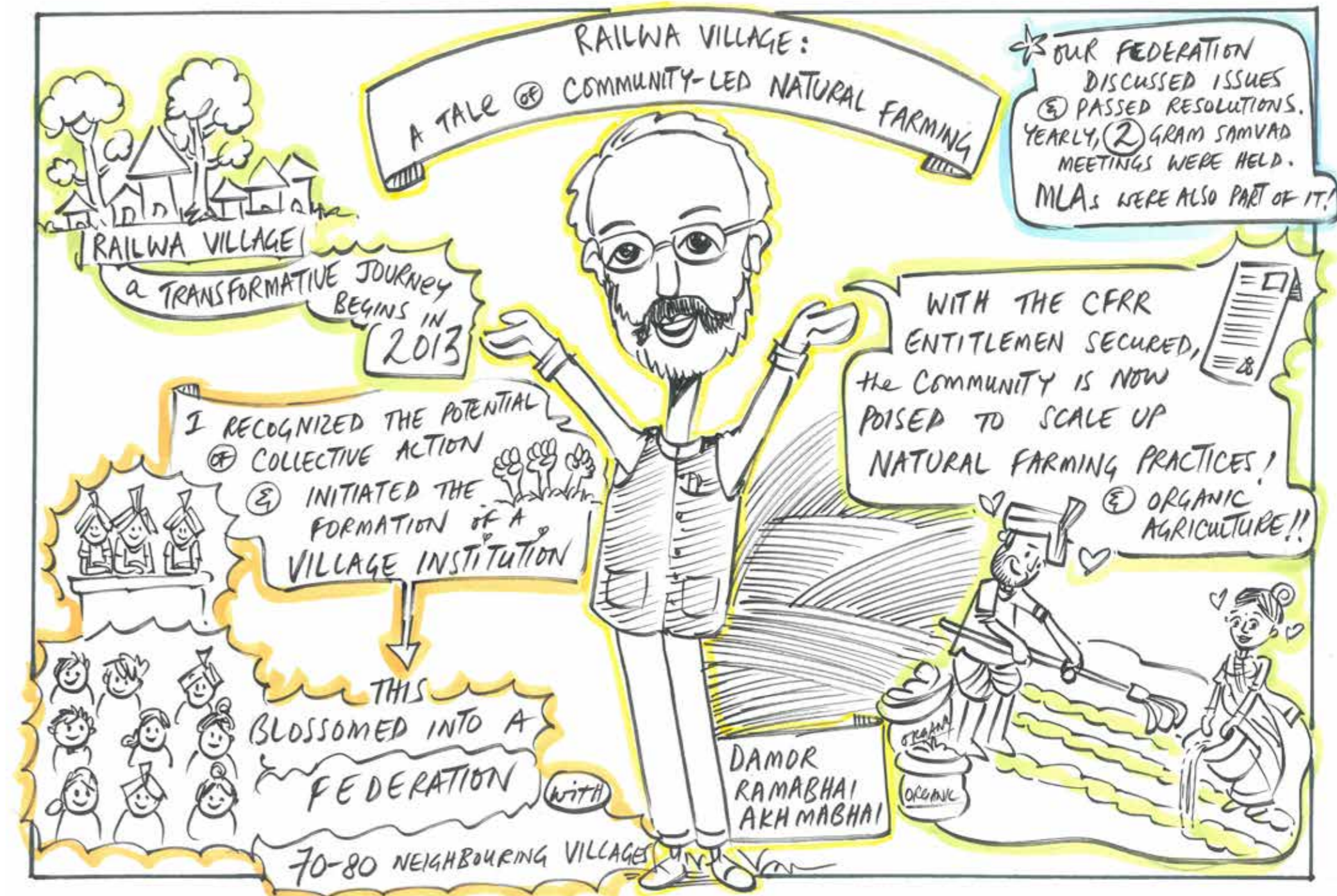
And so, Ramabhai continued to sow hope, one seed at a time.



**Damor Ramabhai
Akhmabhai**

Railwa, Kadana,
Mahisagar, Gujarat

Sanjay R Dabhi, FES
(Facilitator)



Preservation of Cultural Food Heritage

Located near Kanha National Park in Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh, the community of Batwar went through a significant journey to protect its traditional crops and improve their way of life. The community with 209 households, belong mostly to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) community. Primarily an agricultural community, collection of minor forest produce, such as Mahua flowers, *tendu* leaves, and other non-timber forest produce also help to support their livelihoods. Two decades ago, every member in the community used to grow *Kodu Kutki* (Kodo Millet or *Paspalum scrobiculatum*), a traditional millet. With the increase of crop raids by wild animals, community members reduced *Kodu Kutki* farming. This led to the invasion of aggressive plants like Wild Basil, causing difficulty in farming, fodder availability, and collection of minor forest produce like Mahua flowers in Batwar. The decline of *Kodu Kutki* farming, which was also a staple food, began to affect the diet of the community as well.

In 2019, the Gram Panchayat and the Village Environmental Committee decided to initiate land reclamation efforts in Bantwar. Agricultural lands owned by 29 community members were identified to be cleared of the invasive Wild Basil and *Kodu Kutki* farming was encouraged in the area again. In 2020, only four farmers started growing *Kodu Kutki*, but in the consecutive years several more started farming again. By 2022, 40 farmers covering 148 acres of land had started cultivating *Kodu Kutki*. This increase in farming helped bring back the traditional crop into the diet of the community. The reclamation efforts also assisted the collection of Mahua flowers and other NTFP by the community. Their income significantly improved as a result of these efforts.

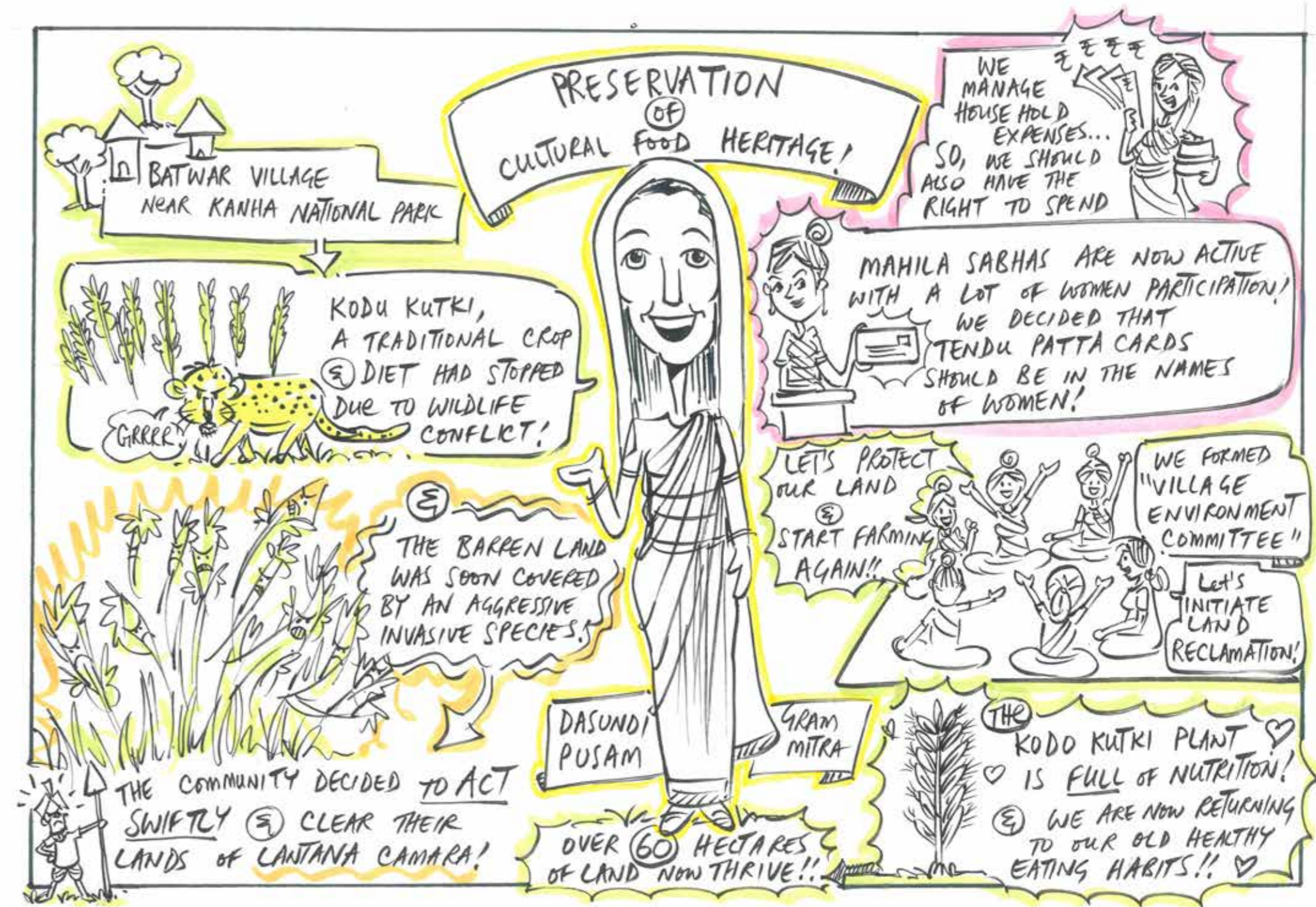
Batwar's journey of reclaiming land and reviving *Kodu Kutki* farming has positively impacted their lives and stands as an example to inspire other communities facing similar challenges.



Dasundi Pusam

Batwar, Bichiya, Mandla,
Madhya Pradesh

Ram Kumar Yadav,
FES (Facilitator)



Community Nutrition Gardens in Commons: Enhancing Nutrition, Resilience and Financial Sustainability of Rural Women

Golkheda village, located in the Pandhana Block of Khandwa in Madhya Pradesh, is a tribal community mainly dependent on agriculture and forest resources for their livelihoods. However, the community faced numerous challenges, that included limited job opportunities, food insecurity, low bargaining power, and inadequate skills and knowledge which have led to low-paying and unsafe jobs. Women, in particular, have borne the consequences of poverty and exploitation due to discrimination, increased involvement in agriculture, and disproportionate engagement in unpaid work.

In response to these challenges, the SENU (Securing Nutrition Enhancing Resilience) project, in collaboration with Harsha Trust and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), initiated the development of a Community Nutrition Garden (CNG) in Golkheda.

Through joint efforts of various stakeholders, the Self-Help Group (SHG) involved in the project held initial meetings and obtained legal permission from the Gram Panchayat to use the Common lands for the CNG. The garden, featuring indigenous and locally adapted plant species, provided a sustainable source of fresh produce for 12 families in Golkheda. The initiative transformed an unproductive land into a rich garden, yielding nutritious vegetables and fruit-bearing trees in a short period. The involvement of women in planning, designing, cultivation, and management of these nutrition gardens ensured a sustainable source of income. The SHG is also involved in managing a marketing platform called Krishi Namami Ajivika Swayam Sahayata Samiti.

The key highlights of the intervention include the engagement of the Gram Panchayat in planning and restoring common lands, capacity building of women members, and collective access to entitlements and government schemes for gender-inclusive development. Strategic alignment with MGNREGA work for the CNG's establishment provided women with steady employment for at least 15 days a month. The CNG also functions as a knowledge and resource hub for the entire community, supporting Anganwadi centres and the adoption of homestead nutrition gardens. With 53 CNGs established, engaging over 500 women in communities across Khandwa through the SENU project, the initiative's positive influence has extended to neighbouring communities as well.

Women's participation in social, economic, and political platforms has significantly improved and has also encouraged their involvement in village development plans, leading to positive behavioural changes.

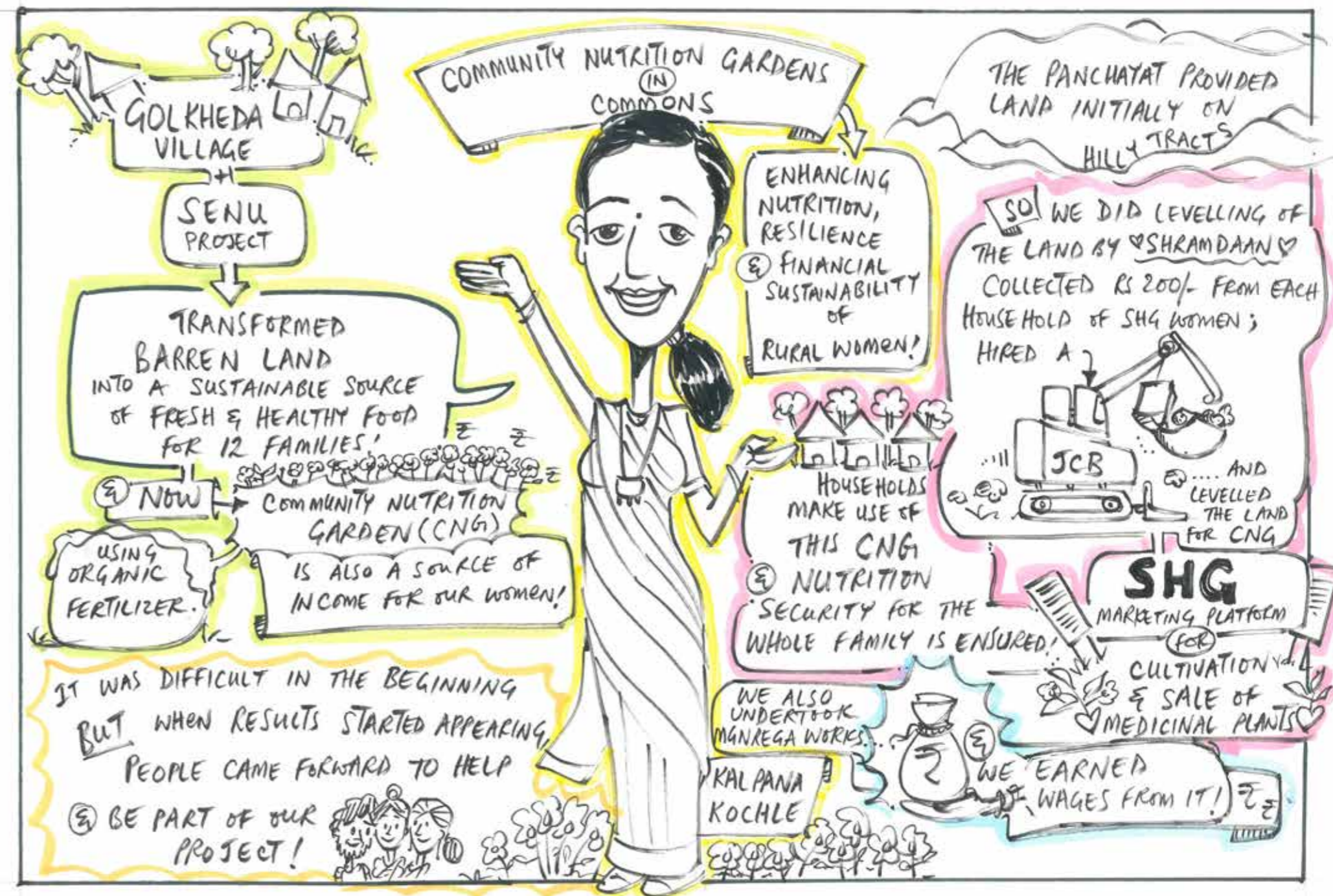


Kalpana Kochle

Golkheda, Pandhana,
Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh

Sadhma Khan,
Harsha Trust

(Facilitator)



Commons and Biodiversity

Initiatives taken around the protection and conservation of a region's diverse flora and fauna, and its other various species and habitats that sustain biodiversity



The Balancing Acts Of Ecological Restoration

Meghalaya located in the North-eastern part of India has rich biodiversity with a forest cover of 76.32% of the State's geographical area. Nonetheless, according to the forest global watch, it has lost approximately 26,687 acres of natural forest equivalent to 5.67% of CO₂ emission over the years. Meghalaya has several beautiful rivers and waterfalls. But polluted water bodies including the Umkhrah River in Shillong city is now among the top 45 most polluted rivers in the country.

When Covid-19 struck, the members of Green Tech Foundation (GTF) & Bantei Ia Ka Lawei Baphyrnai Multi-Purpose Co-operative Society realised the intensity of the pollution in the water bodies and the natural surroundings. They noted a surge in the hunting of animals during the lockdown. The members took this as an opportunity to take action to bring back what is lost and started their work as a registered society in the year 2019 having divisions across the State with the attempt to rejuvenate many dying rivers.

The GTF started with the river cleaning initiative through a trial project at Wahumkhrah using indigenous trapping point methods with the help of volunteers and the support from various groups and Village Institutions. The same model was then applied to other polluted rivers in the State. Around 750 kg - 20 ton waste was collected from these rivers out of which 50-60% of collected waste were recyclable waste which were given to the rag pickers recognised by the Foundation with the intention to support them in their livelihoods. The remaining 30-40% of the waste was disposed of at the designated dumping sites.

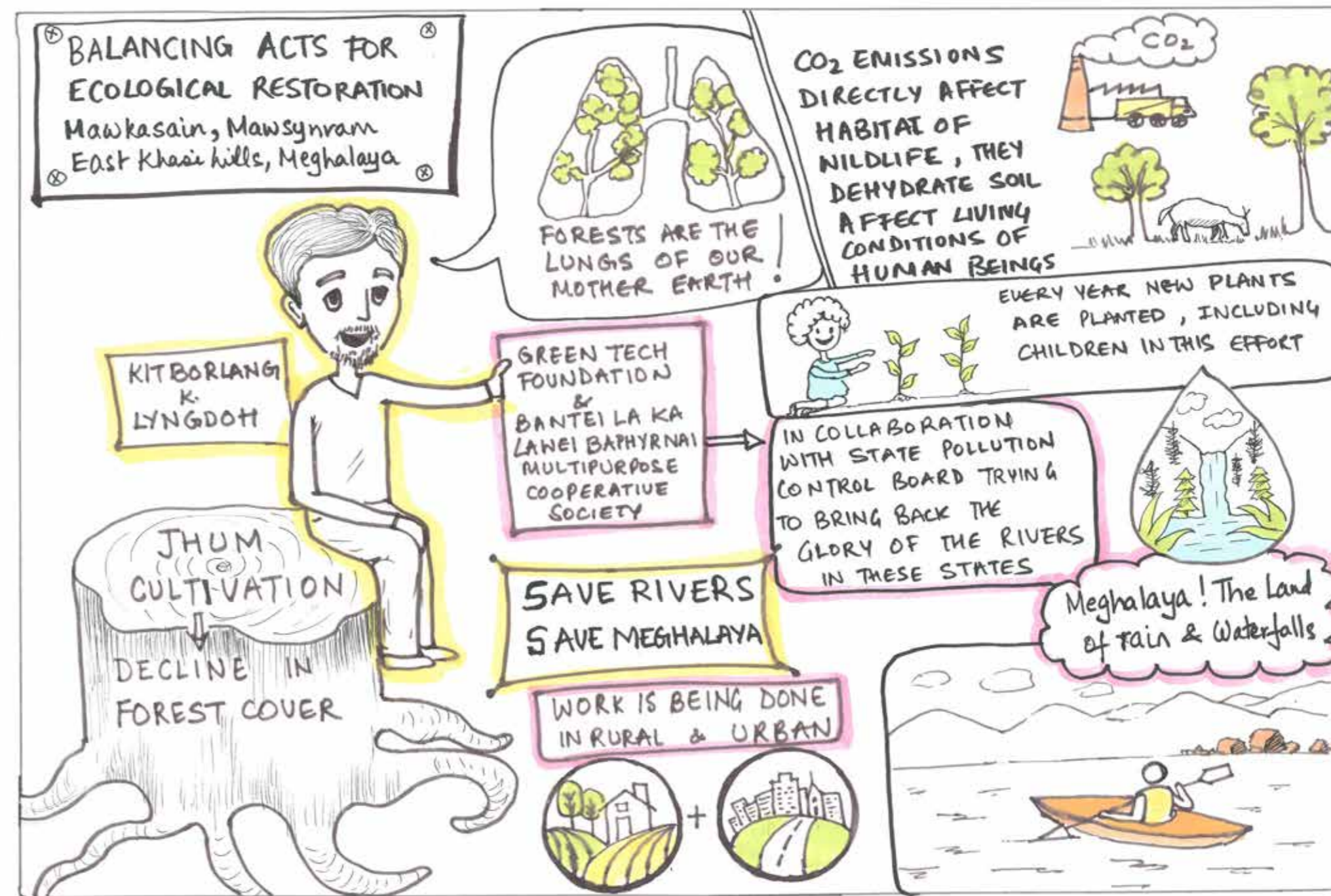
The Cooperative Society took initiatives to plant and nurture trees annually in identified areas across all the districts in the State with the help of youth and children volunteers in collaboration with various NGOs and institutions like State Bank of India. GTF in collaboration with SBI raised awareness on issues like deforestation, climate change and wildfire. The Foundation also worked on various environmental issues at the grassroot and policy level. Other activities like conducting cleanliness drives, rescue of wild animals from poachers, restoration of fauna and flora, celebration of events, amongst others were undertaken. The Foundation was also recognised by the Government of Meghalaya as one amongst the Prestigious Organisations during the Chief Minister ECC 2019.

In the coming year, they aim to increase the numbers of Indigenous Terminal Point Interceptors along the river stretch and increase the scope of work to obtain efficient results where the first six months will focus on cleaning the waste followed by sensitising the people with the support of the Village Council and other organisations.



**Kitborlang K
Lyngdoh**

Mawkasain, Mawsynram,
East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya



Converging for Better Environment, Lives and Livelihoods: The Case of MARFA

Located at Mawkyrwat sub-division in South West Khasi Hills, Meghalaya is a village called Mawthawpdah which is home to the Rilang river. Once renowned for its rich aquatic biodiversity, the river has witnessed a significant decrease due to the unregulated anthropogenic activities including detrimental fishing methods, chemical pesticides run-off from paddy fields, construction operations, and domestic waste discharge. Efforts to protect this river began in the late 1990s and early 2000s under the direction of Mestarland Lyngdoh, with only three members from three villages and later expanded to ten members, mainly fishermen. This led to the formation of the 'Rohbah-Phodjalei Mawthawpdah Fishing Association' in 2002; later called 'Mawthawpdah Area Rilang Fishing Association (MARFA)' established in 2004. It was formed with the intention to protect the aquatic life in the 10-kilometre stretch of the Rilang river, particularly the indigenous fishes like chocolate mahseer and catfish amongst others. Furthermore, conservation of the terrestrial environment is another area of interest for the Association.

MARFA faced numerous challenges in the initial five years of its existence but through the persistent involvement of the members, numerous violators were caught, against whom action was taken. The members remained steadfast in their commitment to safeguarding these aquatic creatures despite encountering difficulties from the communities. With the collaborative efforts of the federation of headmen, 'Ka Synjuk ki Rangbah shnong' along with the support of 18 Village Councils their efforts eventually showed success. The Association in the year 2012 with the approval of the land owners and the Federation of Headmen declared the Ursngikyllum natural pond as a Fish Sanctuary. Inaugurated on the 15th of October 2015, the Sanctuary laid down strict rules like prohibition of fishing to encourage breeding of the fishes. Other initiatives carried out by the Association included fishing competitions, cleaning drives in collaboration with different schools and ecotourism activities.

The Association receives support from various departments of South West Khasi Hills District in terms of tree saplings, roads and sanitation, and during celebration of events. The Association along with the Planning Department host workshops and sensitization programmes in the community. It has been awarded on numerous occasions for their efforts in conservation in 18 communities in the region.

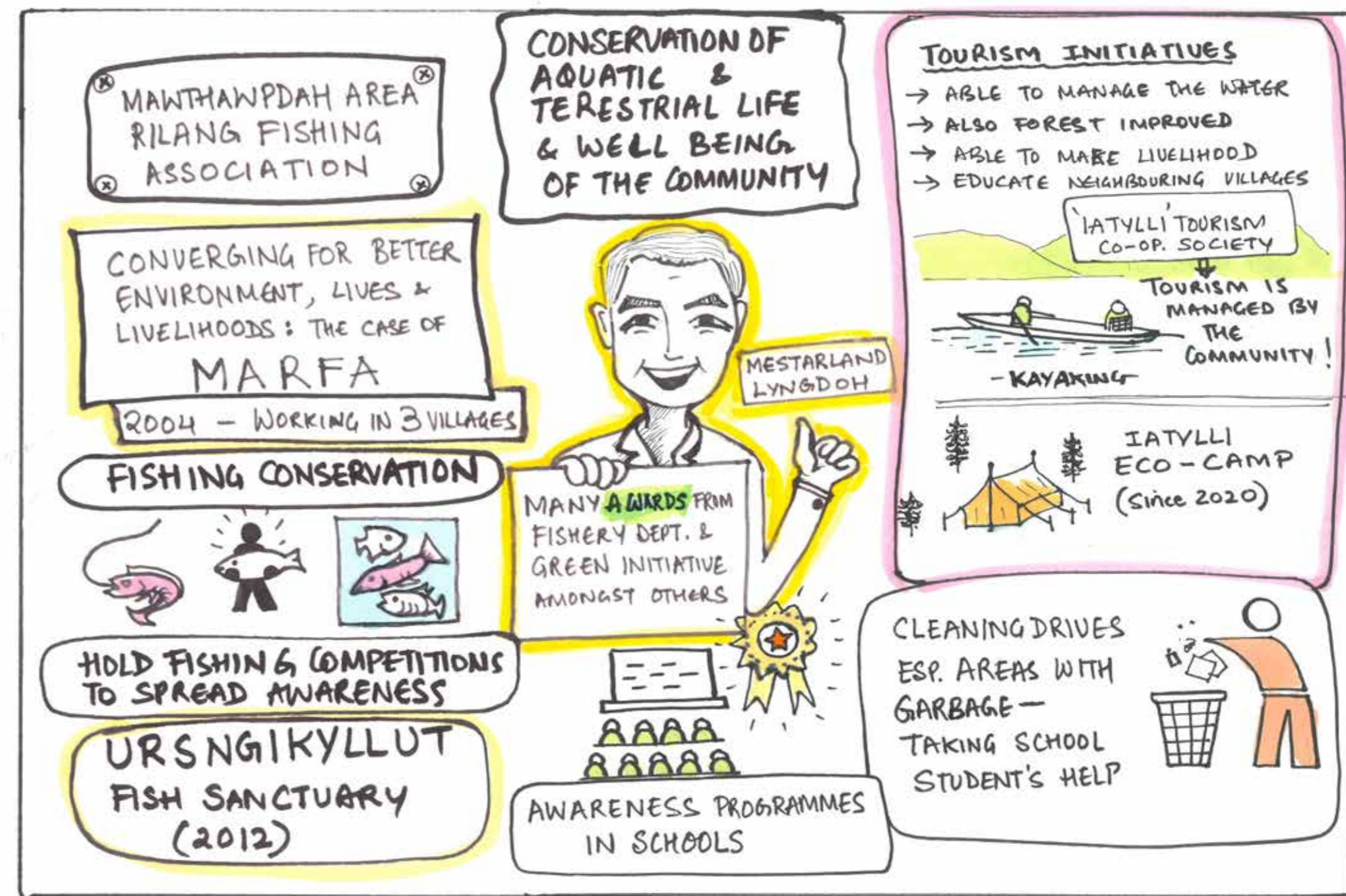
MARFA also is instrumental in managing to keep the village premises clean and neighbouring villages interested in conservation are also receiving support through training activities. This fish sanctuary is currently emerging as one of the district's top tourist spots providing a source of income and livelihood opportunities to the community and broadening the knowledge and skills of the youths. In the coming years the Association intends to extend the Fish Sanctuary to another 300 metres downstream with improved tourism infrastructure and at the same time continue conservation efforts of the wildlife and environment as a whole.



**Mestarland
Lyngdoh**

Mawkyrwat, South West
Khasi Hills, Meghalaya

Khrawbok Thongni,
Mawthawpdah
Area Rilang
Fishing Association
(MARFA) (Facilitator)



Collective Action For Securing Rights over Oran's

Khar village, nestled in the serene landscape of Mangkolemba Circle, Nagaland, faces the perennial challenge of balancing human needs with nature conservation. With a rich tapestry of biodiversity and natural resources, the community realised the importance of preserving their Commons. However, unsustainable practices like deforestation and hunting threatened the delicate ecosystem, exacerbating human-elephant conflicts and endangering species like the majestic Hornbill. Recognizing the urgency, the village council and community took proactive measures to conserve their natural heritage.

Under the stewardship of the Khar Village Council, a unique system emerged, dividing land into ten plots and regulating resource access to ensure sustainable utilisation. Regulated access to resources like firewood and timber are undertaken on these plots to prevent depletion, ensuring a nine-year gap between utilisation and conservation. Through the Community Conserved Area (CCA) Committee, the council enforced strict regulations prohibiting tree felling, hunting, and fishing in the CCA area. Offenders faced hefty fines of Rs 1,00,000, reinforcing the communities commitment to conservation. Moreover, the CCA Committee engaged in community education, fostering awareness on sustainable practices and the importance of preserving the ecosystem.

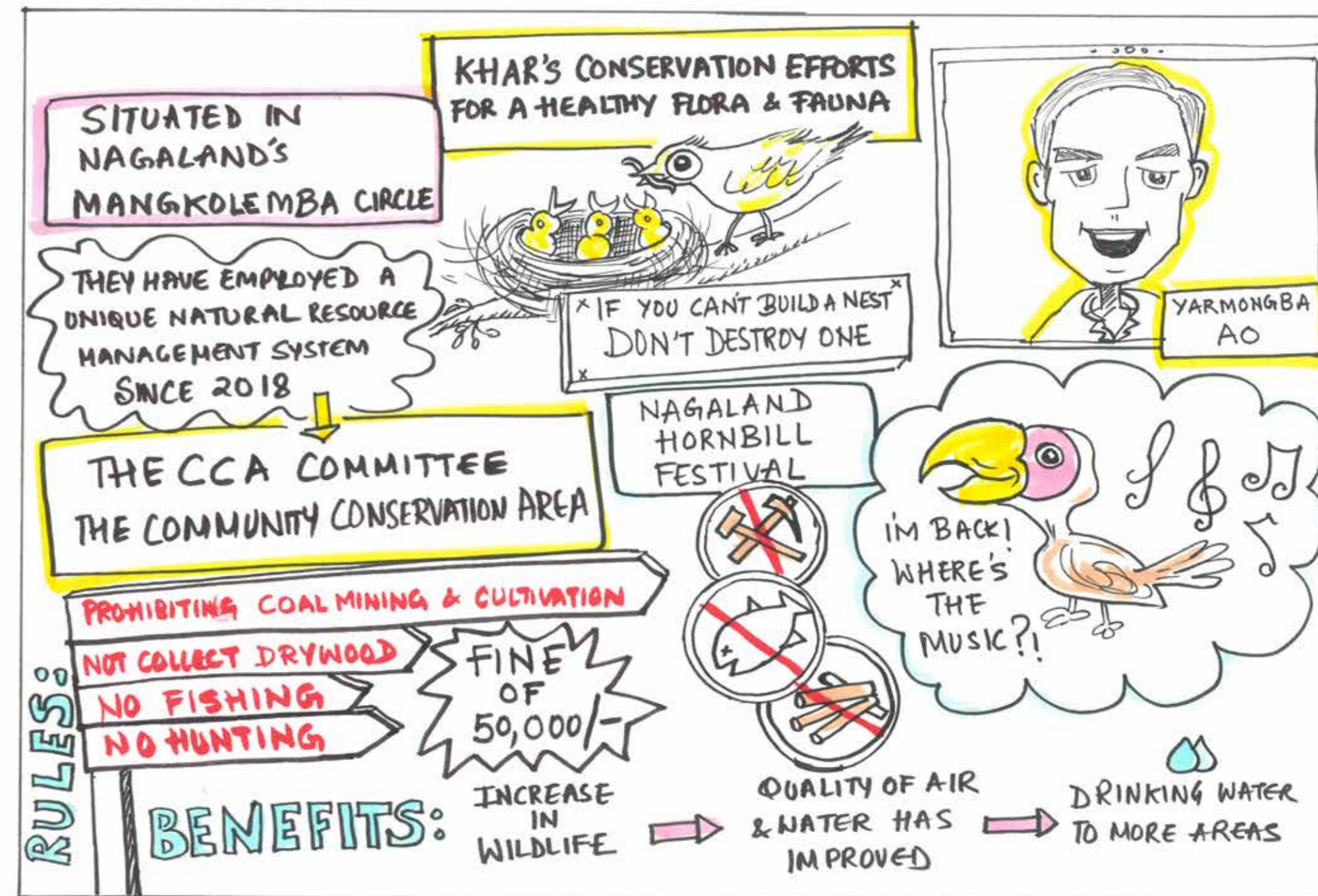
The impact of these interventions have been profound. Wildlife population have rebounded, offering hope for the return of the Hornbill. Improved water availability and micro-climate conditions have not only benefited the community but also neighbouring areas like Mangkolemba Town and Japukong range have seen a significant improvement. By expanding the CCA and partnering with initiatives like the KFW project, the community showcases effective governance and a strong commitment to environmental stewardship.

As guardians of nature's bounty, Khar community remains steadfast in their conservation efforts. Looking ahead, it aims to further enhance their CCA, implementing sustainable practices like tree planting and water conservation. Through collective action and unwavering dedication, Khar community exemplifies the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, ensuring a legacy of abundance for generations to come.



Yarmongba Ao
Khar, Mangkolemba,
Mokukchung, Nagaland

Repamongba Jamir,
FES (Facilitator)



Managing The Community Conserved Areas Towards Restoration Of Biodiversity As Commons By Sumi Naga Tribe

Tsutoho village, nestled in the Zunheboto district of Nagaland, is dominantly a Sumi Naga tribal village with a rich cultural heritage. The village was established in 1903. However, the community faced a significant challenge as the wildlife population dwindled due to excessive hunting and habitat destruction. Recognizing the importance of preserving their natural environment for future generations, the community took action to conserve their forests and wildlife. The Community Conserved Area (CCA) spanning 2,627 acres, became the focal point of their conservation efforts.

Protection of the area has been undertaken by the community for over 3 decades. However, with the increase in the degradation of the region, the Tsutoho community came together and laid down strict rules for conservation. A ban on hunting and logging in the protected areas/ 'reserve ää' was enforced. This collaborative effort involved community elders, like-minded individuals, and support from external organisations such as the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES).

The impact of these interventions was remarkable. Wildlife species such as the Blyth's Tragopan, barking deer, and the critically endangered Chinese pangolin saw a resurgence in their population. The recent relocation of Chinese pangolins to the conserved area demonstrated the community's commitment to conservation. Moreover, the discovery of the Alpine Accentor in their forests during a survey highlighted the ecological significance of Tsutoho's conservation efforts as the last known record of this bird in Nagaland was in 2011 at Mt. Saramati.

Tsutoho's conservation journey is an inspiring example of grassroots efforts yielding tangible results. Moving forward, the community aims to increase awareness and sensitise neighbouring areas to join their conservation initiatives. They also seek to boost eco-tourism in the region. By continuing their conservation efforts and promoting sustainable practices, Tsutoho Village is paving the way for a harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature.



Allo K Aomi
Zunheboto, Nagaland



Bunagaon: Towards Prosperity through CFR

Bunagaon, a tribal hamlet in Chhattisgarh, was on the verge of losing its natural environment. However, it now stands as a leader in community-led forest conservation. Before securing its Community Forest Rights, the community faced severe challenges like frequent forest fires, deforestation caused by neighbouring villagers, and a drastic decline in wildlife. These issues not only endangered the forest but also threatened the livelihoods of the people who were dependent on it. To make matters worse, passersby polluted the common areas by dumping waste along the main road, further degrading the environment.

The turning point came in 2016 when the village council, or Gram Sabha, gained Community Forest Rights. They took action to reverse the damage and restore their ecosystem. The first step was to establish clear rules for sustainable resource use. The Gram Sabha created a register to monitor how forest resources were utilised and specific days were designated for gathering forest produce. This system prevented exploitation of the resources and allowed the forests to regenerate.

Another significant step was the revival of *thengapalli*, a traditional practice where community members especially women took turns to patrol the forest to protect it from illegal activities like poaching and logging. These combined efforts had a transformative impact. The forest, once damaged by fires and unchecked deforestation, began to flourish again. The tree canopy thickened, wildlife started returning, and water resources started flourishing. The community also revised their grazing practices to protect young plants, allowing the entire ecosystem to heal.

Chabilal Netam, a key leader in Bunagaon's transformation, explained how the blend of traditional practices and modern governance brought about this revival. He said, "We used to struggle with forest fires every year, but after gaining our forest rights and setting rules, things have improved. Now, with the *thengapalli* practice, every villager, including women, takes turns to protect the forest."

Today, Bunagaon stands as a model of successful community stewardship. Its success highlights the power of local governance, the importance of traditional practices, and the crucial role of women in environmental conservation. It proves that when communities are empowered to manage their resources, they can achieve change for both people and nature.



Chabilal Netam
Bunagaon, Kondagaon,
Chhattisgarh

Tulsi Netam, FES
(Facilitator)



Conserving Sunderbans: Community led Co-Management for Biodiversity Conservation

"The Sunderbans, the vital ecosystem in Bangladesh, confronts threats like overexploitation and habitat degradation", says Asaduzzaman Milon, a member of the Sunderbans Regional Co-Management Network. The conservation efforts in the Sunderbans are being closely monitored by the CMO Network, a coordinating body for advocacy and coordinating CMC (Community led Co-Management Committee) actions established in the year 2023. The CMO network has a General Body Committee of 20 representatives from the area. The executive committee, with 11 members, oversees the work of the CMCs below it. The CMO Network consists of 5 CMCs formed from 4 districts in the Sunderban area. Each CMC is a federation of Village Conservation Forums (VCFs) who actively take part in the conservation and management of the resources in their respective community boundaries.

Chandpai CMC has undertaken considerable efforts in the natural resource management of the area. The total area of Chandpai Community led Co-Management Committee (CMC) is 2,40,789 acres, which includes 34,968 acres of dense mangrove forests which boasts of assets, including aquatic resources such as fish, crabs, shrimps, snails, oysters, and turtles. The rich fauna includes species like deer, wild boar, tigers, squirrels, crocodiles, snakes, monkeys, porcupines, mongoose etc. The Sunderbans is also famous for various tree species including *Sundori*, *Keora*, *Gewa*, *Pashur*, *Goran*, *Golpata*, *chana/kaisya/grass*, *Hogla* leaves, and also different kinds of fruits, honey, wax, and salt. The Chandpai forest range comprises 37 Village Conservation Forums (VCFs), with approximately 8,471 families, who are heavily reliant on natural resources. The Chandpai CMC actively engages in awareness building and advocacy campaigns to combat harmful practices such as the use of poison and thin synthetic nylon fibre nets in fishing, as well as the hunting of deer and other wild animals. Collaborating closely with the Bangladesh Forest Department, CMC members (especially Village Tiger Response Team - VTRT and Community Patrol Groups - CPGs) participate in the rescue and rehabilitation of wildlife, including species like pythons, deer, tigers, and monkeys. In addition to their conservation efforts, the CMC plays a crucial role by introducing forest dependent communities to other income generating activities. This involves facilitating job placements and establishing market linkages with government and donor funded projects.

CMC members (VTRT and CPGs) rescued a python from an adjacent community and released it in the wild under the guidance of Bangladesh Forest Department officials. To maintain the range's biodiversity, the CMC together with the Bangladesh Forest Department have set conservation targets for the period of 2023 - 2030. The primary aim is to Maintain and protect the 2,40,789 acres of mangrove forests by reducing poison fishing, fingerling and crablet collection, and illegal fishing gear usage in order to sustain the productivity of the wetland ecosystem. They also focus on reducing cattle grazing in the forests significantly. Controlling tiger poaching to increase the tiger population as compared to the last camera trapping exercise is also an important target of the Committee. They are striving to control the use of illegal fishing gear in order to increase the dolphin population in the area. Finally they are initiating sustainable tourism practices and reducing plastic pollution in the Sunderbans.

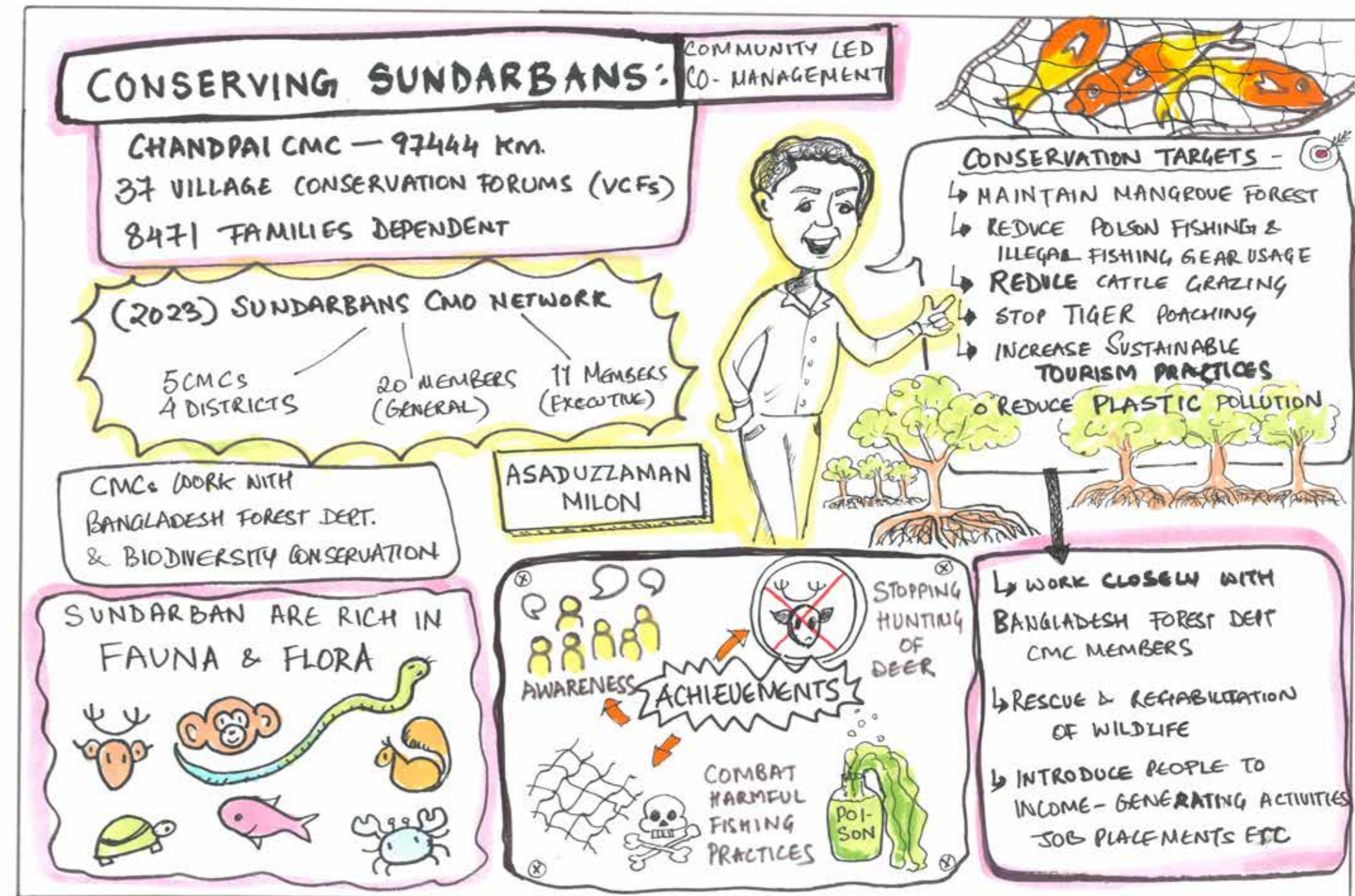
These initiatives demonstrate the positive impact of co-management on forest protection, wildlife preservation and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods in a region of paramount ecological significance.



Asaduzzaman Milon

Sarankhola, Sunderbans,
Bagerhat, Bangladesh

Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal, Arannayk Foundation
(Facilitator)



Preserving Lawachara: Community-Led Biodiversity Conservation

In Bangladesh, the invaluable natural resources found in its forests and aquatic environments are under constant threat due to the mounting pressures of a growing population. Responding to the pressure, the Greater Sylhet Co-Management (CMO) Network was formed in 2023 in ecologically critical areas in three wetlands and five protected forest areas of the northeastern region of Bangladesh. The CMO network is an advocacy body offering capacity building initiatives for equitable conservation of ecosystems with active involvement of local communities to co-manage their natural resources. They support other co-management organisations in addressing climate change disasters and mitigating the risks for the protection of the environment. Among the eight Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) encompassed by the Greater Sylhet CMO Network; the Lawachara Co-Management Committee (CMC) has been a formidable force in safeguarding the forest and biodiversity.

Lawachara National Park is a jewel in the crown of Bangladesh with its protected evergreen forests, covering 3,089 acres in Kamalganj Upazila, Moulvibazar District. Home to 460 species of flora and fauna, this forest was designated as a National Park in 1997. Communities of Lawachara CMC have forged partnerships with the Environment Development, Environment Conservation and Tree Plantation Standing Committees of Union Parishads, to promote afforestation by several tree planting initiatives in the region. Regular meetings through the Village Conservation Forums (VCF) in 35 village communities covering over 5000 members are also conducted. These serve as a precedent for other communities of the CMO network as well.

However, despite the park's ecological significance, it faces numerous challenges. The Lawachara Co-Management Committee (CMC) has established four Community Patrol Groups (CPGs) comprising 42 members (27 men and 15 women). The collaborative efforts of the Network, CPGs along with the Forest Department have resulted in the active involvement of 2,051 members from 35 Village Conservation Forums (VCFs) in conservation and biodiversity activities. This coordinated approach has led to a significant reduction in forest crimes, wildlife killings, and poaching.

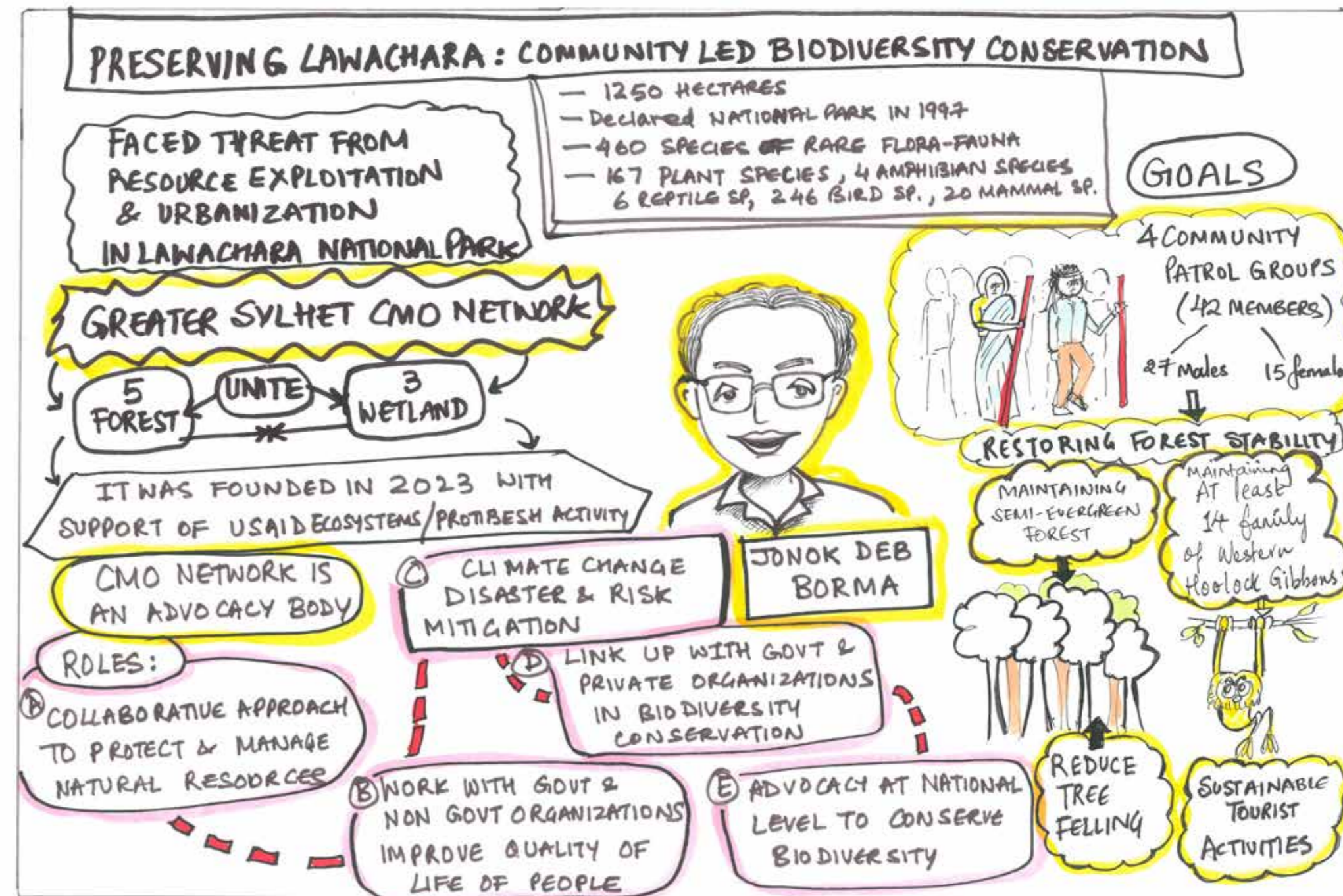
Looking ahead, the Lawachara CMC aims to conserve an area of 3,089 acres of semi-evergreen forests. With the Western Hoolock Gibbon at risk of being endangered, the CMC aims to preserve 14 families of their population. Further by 2027, they aim to stop further encroachment in the semi-evergreen forest, reduce illegal felling of trees, decrease fuelwood collection and initiate practices that promote sustainable tourism. The efforts of the Lawachara CMC exemplify the potential for a comprehensive and community-driven approach to conserve biodiversity in challenging environments.



Jonok Deb Barma

Lawachara, Sylhet CMO Network, Moulvibazar, Bangladesh

Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal, Arannayk Foundation (Facilitator)





**Sumer Singh and
Sevaram Mali**
Khetolai, Pokhran,
Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

Empowering Communities in Bird Conservation: Bridging Traditional and Scientific Knowledge for Comprehensive Monitoring

Understanding the socio-ecological system through the lens of indigenous peoples and local communities is pivotal for establishing practical conservation and well-being targets that are in line with the Convention on Biological Diversity's 2050 vision. These communities possess a wealth of traditional knowledge and ecological wisdom passed down through generations, rendering their insights into the impact of environmental changes on ecosystems invaluable.

Collaborating with local communities to study bird populations offers a unique opportunity to integrate scientific and traditional knowledge, fostering a more inclusive and holistic approach to conservation. Engaging locals in scientific endeavours such as bird mortality data collection enhances monitoring efforts, yielding more comprehensive and accurate data. This data serves not only to identify the root causes of bird mortality but also to formulate targeted management strategies grounded in evidence.

Successful bird population monitoring schemes generate data that can inform evidence-based management strategies tailored to the specific needs of both the local community and the ecosystem. However, simultaneous data collection across landscapes presents a challenge, emphasising the importance of involving local people in bird monitoring activities. Strengthening the capacity of locals to observe birds is crucial for generating a robust database essential for developing targeted management strategies aligned with conservation efforts.

One of the primary obstacles in tracking bird mortality is the rapid scavenging of carcasses by natural predators or free-ranging dogs. Hence, community involvement is essential as locals possess a better understanding of the local landscape through their interconnected networks. With the proliferation of new renewable energy projects, there has been a surge in bird mortalities, underscoring the urgent need for a comprehensive understanding of such issues and collaborative efforts to mitigate their impact on bird populations.

In conclusion, fostering collaboration with indigenous peoples and local communities is paramount for achieving effective conservation outcomes and promoting the well-being of both ecosystems and human societies. Through shared knowledge and collective action, we can address the challenges posed by environmental changes and work towards a sustainable future for all.

Sujit Narwade,
BNHS (Facilitator)



Collective Action For Securing Rights over Oran's

The people of Rajasthan's Thar Desert have lived in harmony with the Orans, sacred groves that are both ecologically vital and culturally revered, for centuries. These patches of desert greenery are a lifeline, especially in the harsh climate of Jaisalmer, supporting biodiversity, conserving water, and preventing the desert's relentless spread. To the people here, Orans are more than land, they are sacred places filled with the stories, faith, and memories of generations.

Sumer Singh Bhati, a camel herder, bird watcher and passionate environmentalist from Sawanta village, Fatehgarh Block, Rajasthan has dedicated his life to protecting these Orans. In his words, "Our ancestors have nurtured these lands with love and respect. They are not just groves; they are our heritage and home." Yet, in recent years, the community has watched with dismay as development encroached on these sacred groves, as official revenue records failed to recognize the Orans, labelling them as wastelands open for allocation to corporations or other interests. The resulting deforestation and land grabs have threatened not only the environment but also the livelihoods of those who depend on these lands. In response, the Oran team began their collective fight in 2018, rallying their community through awareness campaigns, peaceful marches, and the deeply spiritual act of *parikrama*/ circumambulation, around the threatened Orans. These symbolic journeys, often taken on foot across vast stretches of the Thar, serve as both a protest and a prayer as an appeal to the people, the government, and even the divine to preserve their sacred lands.

Over the last six months, approximately 18,570 acres of Oran land have been officially registered in the district's revenue records, securing them against further encroachment. This victory is more than a legal acknowledgement; it represents a heartfelt affirmation of their bond with the Orans. As Sumer Singh humbly puts it, "This is just the beginning. We are reclaiming not just land but our culture and our connection to nature." The struggle to protect Orans is far from over, but with each registered plot, the community grows more hopeful. The story of the Oran team is a reminder of the power of unity, tradition, and the enduring human spirit to protect and cherish what is sacred, not just for themselves but for generations yet to come.



Sumer Singh

Santa, Fatehgarh,
Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

Dimpal Kumari, FES
(Facilitator)



Community Efforts to Protect a Hill-top lake in Manipur

Hidden amidst the lush, green hills of Sadim Naga Village, lies a picturesque treasure known as Sadim Lizai. Perched atop a hill, this Lake has been a source of wonder and inspiration for generations. Lizai is translated as 'Li meaning Pot' and 'Zai meaning Lake' in Maram dialect or Pot lake. Tales about Lizai say that two warrior princes were escaping from the enemy and during that time one of the Princes, with his powers, stepped on the ground and made a huge footprint through which water splashed out of the ground. This water was able to quench the thirst of the other wounded warrior prince thus saving his life from the pursuant enemy. Even today, the shape of the Lake is like that of a footprint.

The communities residing in the vicinity of Sadim Lizai have long depended on its resources for their sustenance. The forest surrounding the Lake offers valuable resources such as timber, firewood, and non-timber forest products that are vital to the local economy. Sustainable harvesting practices, coupled with conservation efforts, have enabled the communities to strike a balance between utilising the forest's bounty and preserving it for future generations. The abundance of several snail species, fish species similar to catfish are seen in the Lake.

However, over the past decade, it was evident that due to the anthropogenic pressures the surrounding areas of Sadim Lizai have deteriorated to a great extent and have affected the water body. Deforestation and lack of afforestation programmes was one of the main challenges faced by the community. The overexploitation of the available resources was another major problem faced by the community. Encroachment of the common lands by farmers for shifting cultivation of crops like maize, mustard etc posed another major setback in the conservation efforts around the Lake. Lack of proper awareness of the community was the biggest challenge faced during the conservation efforts in the area. Also the neighbouring communities do not abide by the bylaws and expand their activities in the periphery of the Lake, thus hindering the conservation efforts of the Sadim community.

Recognizing the historical, ecological, and socio-economic significance of Sadim Lizai, concerted efforts were made to preserve and protect this natural asset by the Sadim community. In the year 2014, strict regulations on fishing and hunting were enforced by the local community. Additionally, afforestation programmes were initiated to rejuvenate the forest cover around the Lake. The conservation efforts started with a very small area of around 15 acres but today it has expanded to over 200 acres. Members have identified the abundance of mushrooms, orchids in the area that can be tapped to generate income generating opportunities for the community. Also migratory birds visit the Lake during winters, and this can be used as an opportunity to promote sustainable eco tourism activities in the area.

The efforts by the community is to ensure the harmony between human and nature, showcasing the remarkable interdependence of culture and biodiversity through sustainable practices, income generation, conservation efforts, and responsible tourism.



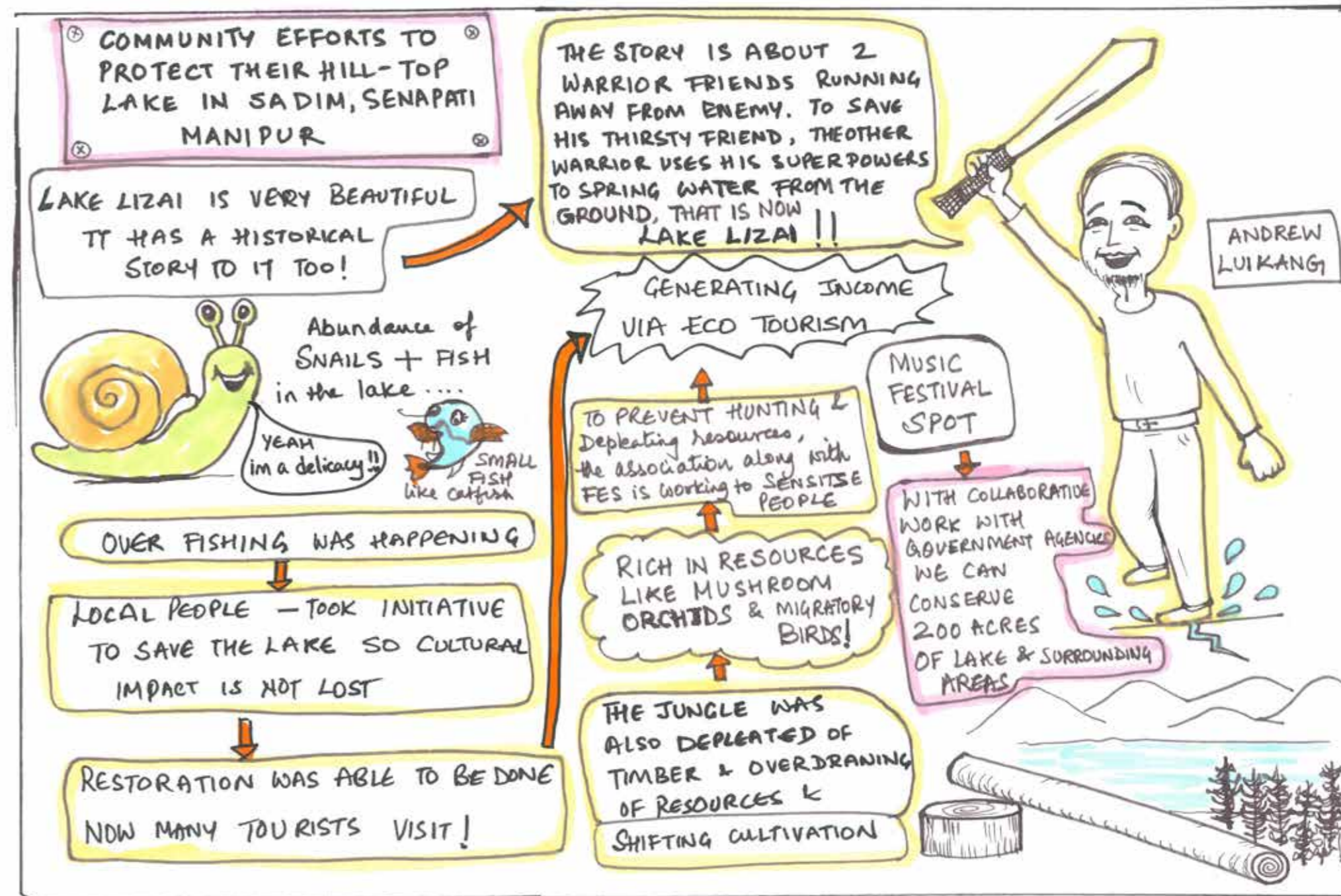
Andrew Luikang

Sadim, Mao Maram,
Senapati, Manipur

Ningduanguangliu

R Panmei, FES

(Facilitator)



Nurturing Biodiversity: Inspiring Community-Led Conservation Initiatives

In the forests of Central India, near the Kanha Tiger Reserve, lies a village called Sotiya. For generations, the communities of Sotiya have relied on the forest for food and resources. But over time, their land became less fertile, and they struggled to grow enough food.

This is when Babita Dhurwey, one of the community champions with other community members stepped in. Babita worked as a community animator with WWF-India, and her mission was to help her community grow enough healthy food while also protecting the environment. She came up with an idea to create a Nutrition Gardens, which would use sustainable farming methods to improve food security and conservation.

The people developed their barren lands into thriving gardens. They used organic farming practices like composting and mixed farming. The garden included local varieties of maize, baigani arhar (a type of lentil), and other vegetables. Babita also used a circular gardening method, which helped improve soil and reduce waste.

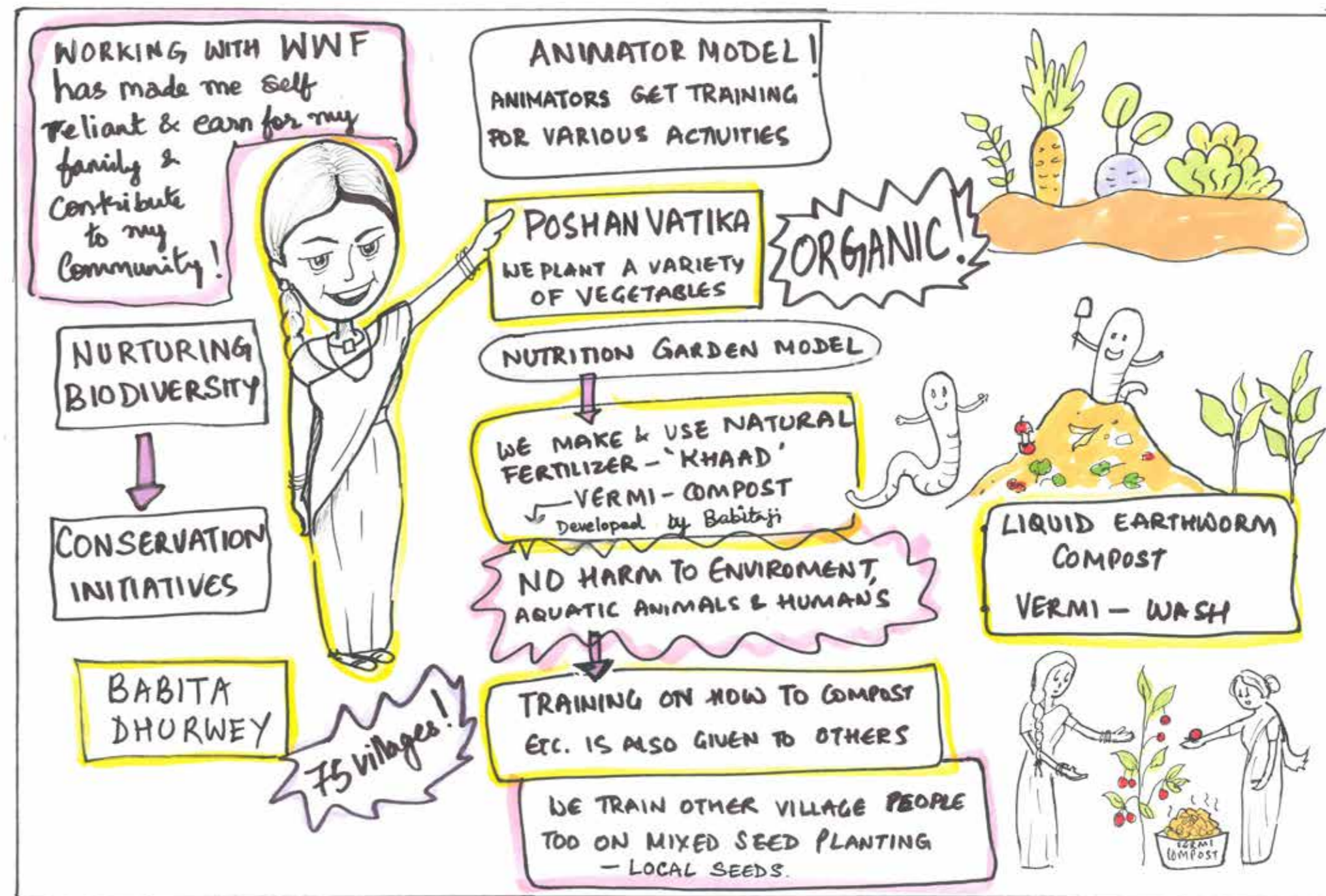
One of the most important aspects of the garden was the focus on preserving traditional seeds. The seeds that had been passed down through generations were planted and then preserved to be passed on to others to maintain the biodiversity. Babita encouraged the community to do the same. She even helped set up a seed bank, where community members could store seeds for future use, ensuring their food security for years to come.

The garden was not just a place for growing food but it became a place for learning. She invited other farmers, women's groups, and other communities to visit and learn about sustainable farming. She showed them how they could use the same methods in their own gardens, and soon many in the community began growing their own nutrition gardens.

Through her hard work and dedication, Babita inspired the community to take care of their land and resources. Nutrition gardens became an example to show how people can live in balance with nature, grow healthy food, and conserve the environment at the same time. Today, the garden is a symbol of how small actions can lead to big changes, benefiting both people and the planet.



Babita Dhurwey
Sotiya, Bichhiya, Madhya Pradesh



Bommadeverahalli's Green Graveyard Revival

Bommadeverahalli, home to about 4,500 residents, is located in the drought-prone district of Chitradurga in Karnataka. Gurulingappa, an active member of the community, was elected as a Gram Panchayat member. His proactive discussions helped him to understand the various needs of the communities. During one such discussion in Bommadeverahalli, it was brought to notice that the community did not have a designated space to honour their loved ones. The absence of a burial ground, or a graveyard for such a large community was surely a matter of concern. The members of the community believed that by having an earmarked space it would not only help to respectfully perform the last rites of the dead but also create a common green space for the community promoting local biodiversity.

Acknowledging the need, Gurulingappa mobilised the community to submit a unanimous request to the District Collector to allot land to the village of Bommadeverahalli for the purpose of cremating and honouring their loved ones. The regular follow-ups from Gurulingappa resulted in the District Collector granting INR 15 lakhs to the community under MGNREGS, and registering two acres of land in the name of the Mollakalooru Tahsildar.

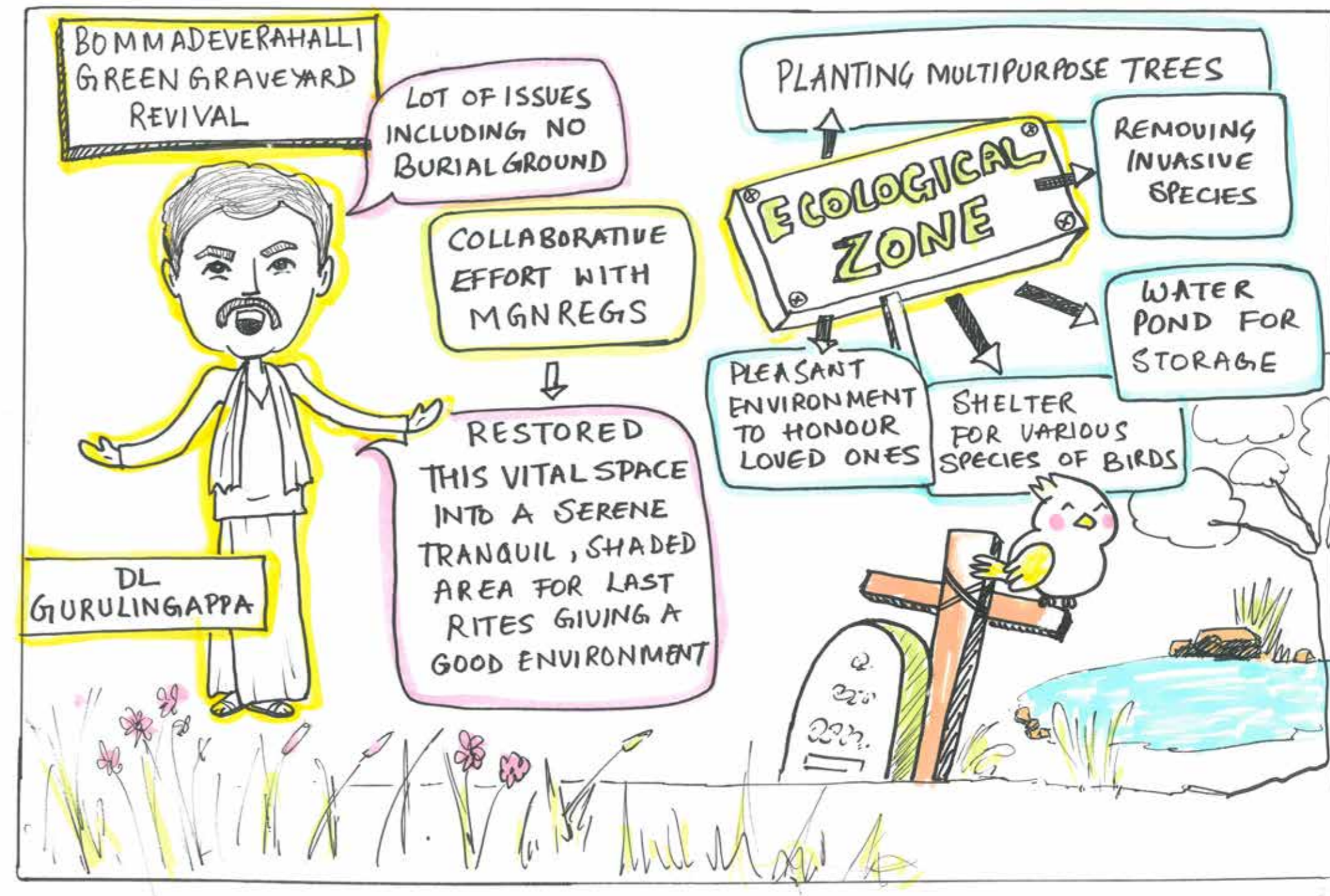
Upon obtaining the land and the grant, the Bommadeverahalli community utilised the MGNREGS to develop the common land. The community's collaborative efforts included tree planting, removal of weeds and other invasive species, and ensuring universal accessibility. Around 600 native, multi-use species were purchased by the community and planted, and a compound wall was constructed along with a water storage tank. Through this, the objective of providing fresh air, biodiversity habitat, and a pleasant environment for honouring the community's loved ones became a reality. Today, the village graveyard is not just a dream but a nurtured land that ironically bustles with life, thanks to the efforts of the Bommadeverahalli community, under the leadership of Gurulingappa.



DL Gurulingappa

Bommadeverahalli,
Molalkalmuru,
Chitradurga, Karnataka

Ramesh, FES
(Facilitator)



A Transformative Journey- Correlation of Pasture Land and Biodiversity

Namana is a Panchayat in Bundi district, Rajasthan consisting of two villages, Namana and Kishanpura. Namana has around 2,088 acres of grazing land, while Kishanpura has approximately 1253 acres. Unfortunately, these lands were neglected, leading to their degradation and encroachment.

In the year 2019-20, a Grazing Land Development Committee was formed in these communities, and the youth decided to work on the protection and development of these lands. Initially, a plan was made to develop 384 acres of land, primarily covered with invasive *Angreji Babool (Prosopis Juliflora)* trees. Additionally, around 83.5 acres of land were encroached by some families from the community, which posed a significant challenge. However, with the collective efforts of the community, Gram Panchayat and administration, encroachments were cleared. The community secured the land using the Panchayat asset register. Furthermore, cattle protection trenches were excavated around the grazing lands using CSR funds. With an approved budget of 14 lakhs under MGNREGA, land clearance and revegetation work were done on the protected land.

Moreover, additional funds amounting to around 24 lakhs were approved under other schemes of the Rural Department for activities like fencing, levelling the land, drip irrigation for plants, horticulture, and installation of solar pumps. These initiatives have significantly secured the income for locals, providing employment opportunities and ensuring better nutrition for their livestock. Collective actions on unused lands have led to improvements in biodiversity and ground water. This development further led to habitat improvement for existing and other species of birds & insects. This has also resulted in increased agricultural production. Currently, the grazing lands fulfil the fodder requirement of 150-200 households for around 3 months. The community has also developed a land development plan document which has been submitted to the Panchayat.

On the remaining 1336 acres of grazing land, a total amount of 27 lakhs have been approved for development. By leveraging various existing financial and social schemes, the community aims to safeguard and develop the grazing lands. Additionally, they focus on empowering the community through sustainable employment like through livestock development, etc among others. It has encouraged the youth to engage actively in such endeavours, contributing to the community's overall betterment.



Chandraveer Singh

Namana, Bundi, Rajasthan

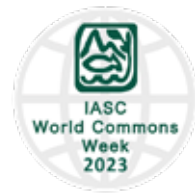
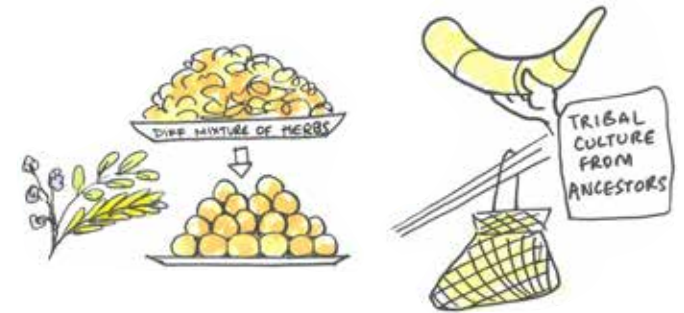
Umesh, FES
(Facilitator)

Contributing Organisations

- Arannayk Foundation
- ATR Sangharsh Samiti
- Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS)
- Chaupal Gramin Vikas
- Prashikshan Evam Shodh
- Dakshin Foundation
- Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN)
- Foundation for Ecological Security
- Gandhigram Rural Institute - Deemed to be University, Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu
- Harsha Trust
- Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, Leipzig Himmotthan Society
- Jattu trust
- Khoj
- Kovel Foundation
- MASS
- Mawthawpdah Area Rilang Fishing Association
- Nagwanshi Gond Samaj Sikshan Awam Social Welfare Society
- Nudge Foundation
- Parisara Hitharakshana Samithi
- PHIA Foundation
- Prakalpa Yogam Foundation
- Sahjeevan NGO
- Saurashtra University
- Sajag
- Seva Mandir
- SEWAK
- SRIJAN
- Tata Institute of Social Sciences
- WWF India
- Youth for Integration Trust/WforW Jan Chetna Sansthan



Plant based Medicines harvested from Commons



FOUNDATION FOR ECOLOGICAL SECURITY
On behalf of the Coalition of Partners, as part of the
Promise of Commons initiative

