COMMONS TALES

Compendium of Stories

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Celebrating Community Stewardship

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Introduction

Community stewardship, rooted in generational wisdom, is essential for ensuring the sustainable governance of Commons. Nested in democratic decision-making and inclusion, this approach builds on the deep connections that communities have with their natural environments, and exemplifies the power of collective action and commoning for the well-being of all.

Organised as part of the Promise of Commons initiative, 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, the third edition of the Community Conference on Commons - Celebrating Community Stewardship, organised by a collection of civil society partners - Awakening People's Action for Rural Development (APARD), Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), Gram Vikas Navyuwak Mandal, Laporiya (GVNML), Indian Commoner (IC), PHIA Foundation, Saamaajik Prerna avam Gramin Vikas Sansthan (SPGVS), Samerth Charitable Trust, Seba Jagat, Self Employed Worker's Association Kendra (Sewak), and Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai, was held from December 4th to 6th, 2024 as a celebration which promotes sharing of knowledge and experiences around Commons.

The Community Conference featured 116 community presentations across 10 themes from Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, and Spain and from 15 states and two Union Territories of India. The themes ranged from water and land Commons' governance, biodiversity, food security, gender, culture, and struggles of commoning. The themes of the Conference were:

- Water Governance
- Governing Land Commons
- Commons and Biodiversity
- Commons-Livestock-Agriculture Connect
- Commons and Gender
- Commons and Culture
- Commons and Food Security, Subsistence and Well-being
- Struggles of Commoning
- Commons in a Landscape
- Urban Commons

The Conference operated through four parallel Zoom channels, hosting approximately 40 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.

Across the three days, more than 750 participants engaged with the stories being shared by community champions, actively interacting with them and with each other, transforming this platform into a vibrant, living platform, engaging a milieu of audiences. The 178 local, on-ground screenings, facilitated across 11 states, enabled an additional 7,000+ people (including 3,300+ women and 2,500+ youth) to participate in the conference. The conversations enriched the discussion around building resilience in the face of climate change, enhancing community rights over Commons, and scaling sustainable practices through cross-learning.

This annual virtual conference, initiated in 2022, is evolving into a key space for learning and knowledge sharing among communities, experts, academics, and practitioners, who benefit from the wealth of diverse experiences, fostering collective action for the Commons.

The Promise of Commons Initiative

Recognising the transformative potential of Commons, the Promise of Commons, a collaborative initiative, is working towards the long-term goal of reaching 350 million people, and restoring 205 million acres of Commons through community-driven action.

By building on local-level initiatives, fostering support from the government, and enhancing civic engagement, the initiative aims to challenge the status quo and shift the 50-year-old metaphor of the 'Tragedy of Commons' to the 'Promise of Commons'.

The collaborative is composed of local communities, governments, NGOs, and policy-influencing bodies such as think tanks, research institutions, media, and concerned individuals. Its work is built on local-level initiatives, fostering support from the government, and enhancing civic engagement to address the interconnected issues of environmental health, social and economic wellbeing, in rural India. Each institution brings its experience and expertise to the collaborative and aligns itself with the implementation of the Core Model.

"Commons Tales" is a publication designed to document and celebrate the rich knowledge and practices associated with Commons. It offers a unique window into various themes, presenting a compendium of community-led insights that foster a profound appreciation for how communities manage their shared resources. We hope this compilation is both engaging and informative, and we eagerly await your feedback to enhance our future work.

1 Commons in a Landscape





Collective Efforts of Bangladesh's Youth Conservation Volunteers (YCV) in Forest Landscape Restoration

Shuknachari village is situated in the Chittagong Hill District (CHT) of Bangladesh, surrounded by lush green forests. Uzzol Tanchangya, a young leader, along with 20 Youth Conservation Volunteers (YCVs), led an initiative named Enhanced Capacity of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Communities in Forest Landscape Restoration (COMPASS CHT-FLR). Through this initiative, the youth of Shuknachari village united to restore the degraded forest. By combining community participation, indigenous knowledge, and modern tools, Uzzol trained hundreds of youths and community members in restoration, sustainable livelihood, and biodiversity conservation.

Communities residing in the Bandarban region faced severe forest degradation due to growing teak monoculture, unplanned urbanisation, encroachment, and shifting cultivation. Communities lost most of their native species, water sources dried earlier each summer, and ecosystem services, reduced. In these circumstances, large-scale forest restoration was never considered a possibility by the villagers. Despite these challenges, Uzzol Tanchangya, with the support of YCVs, successfully restored 3,54,875 seedlings across 1,075 hectares, cultivating 97 native species. Around Shuknachari's Village Common Forest (VCF) alone, 49,814 seedlings were planted across 98 parcels, reviving degraded slopes and promoting natural regeneration. Community germplasm banks were also established under the initiative to secure native tree species and medicinal plants for future generations.



Restoration in the hilly terrain is extremely difficult, but with the help of youth and community engagement we are able to undertake restoration work."

Uzzol Tanchanga
Shuknachari, Ruangchari, Bandarban, Chattogram, Bangladesh

Beyond restoration, the COMPASS CHT-FLR initiative became a learning and empowerment hub. Uzzol Tanchangya trained YCVs, equipping them with tools and skills in the Participatory Restoration Monitoring Tool (PRMT) and GPS and leadership qualities, which supported the restoration of 127 hectares of jhum, corridors, and other riparian areas. The data collected through GPS helped in mapping the possible mosaics for restoration projects.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 6:03 minutes.

The YVCs trained 540 Forest Landscape Restoration participants in restoration techniques, maintenance, and silviculture operations, which further mentored 20 youth volunteers, and 256 participants on sustainable livelihoods. The movement expanded its scope by training 358 youths on natural resource management, climate change, gender equality and social inclusion, and prevention of gender-based violence through courtyard sessions and community dialogues.

Collective Strength, Common Wealth: The Success of Kalahandi Gram Sabha Mahasangha

The Kalahandi Gram Sabha Mahasangha (KGSM) is a federation of over 100 village councils (Gram Sabhas). Rooted in the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, the federation, guided by the leadership of Byasadev Manjhi, a resident of Pipadi village and secretary of KGSM, has been a beacon of self-governance, ecological stewardship, and social inclusion.

Byasadev Majhi has been at the forefront of this grassroots revolution. KGSM assists Gram Sabhas in asserting their rights over commons under the provisions of the FRA, 2006, with the support of Seva Niketan. KGSM started with Gram Sabha in Jamuguda village and is now operational across Kokasara, Golamunda, Junagarh, Bhawanipatna, Lanjigarh, and Madanpur Rampur blocks, with emerging activities in Jaipatna. KGSM's governance structure ensures 50% representation of women, encouraging inclusive leadership and strengthening local democracy.

Under Byasadev Manjhi's leadership, KGSM has been instrumental in guiding and amplifying its progress and impact across the Kalahandi district. KGSM has helped communities to manage 150,000 hectares of forest land using Community Forest Resource Management Plans (CFRMPs). KGSM efforts have also eliminated middlemen in the trade of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) like bamboo and tendu leaves, which generated ₹6 crores in 2024 alone, directly benefiting 9,000 women pluckers and supporting 7,000 households. KGSM has also become the first community federation in Odisha where Gram Sabhas hold their own bank accounts, and is a powerful specimen of how grassroots initiative can drive sustainable change. Going forward, the federation plans to include more Gram Sabhas, expand conservation efforts, and create more income opportunities for tribal households. KGSM aims to ensure a brighter and more sustainable future for Kalahandi by promoting gender equality and strengthening community governance.

Byasadev credits the unity among Gram Sabhas and the inclusive governance model as major reasons for KGSM's success.



When people take control of their resources, they not only improve their lives but also secure the future of their environment and families."

Byasadev Majhi
Pipadi, Barabandha, Madanpur Rampur, Kalahandi, Odisha

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:13:35 minutes.

Collaborating for Prosperity – Reviving Water and Forest Resources in Kosamba

Kosamba, alongside neighbouring villages Kotvat and Timbharva, rely heavily on the Chibota River and nearby forest areas for their needs and livelihoods. However, the degradation of these resources meant communities were faced with strained livelihoods, prompting people to migrate. They also faced acute water scarcity, which resulted in decreased agricultural productivity and increased conflicts over water usage. The declining forest resources caused human-wildlife conflict, leading to crop damage.

In 2011-12, Bharubhai Dindor, with assistance from FES, led the community to collectively take action towards these challenges. As the Secretary of Gram Vikas Mandal Kosamba and a member of the Santarampur Federation, he encouraged collective planning to address water and forest-related issues. Through collaboration with the Panchayat, Gram Vikas Mandal, and the Minor Irrigation Department, five check dams were constructed on the Chibota River, which helped conserve water and improved availability. The Gram Sabha also approved the construction of a new pond in the village forest area. Bharubhai led the site selection and got government support, which resulted in the creation of nine farm ponds in the forest. These efforts ensured water availability for wildlife within the forest, reducing their intrusion into farms. Community dialogues and GPDP (Gram Panchayat Development Plan) identified priority interventions, and leverage of MGNREGA funds helped execute them.



A visionary approach and collective action can transform challenges into opportunities, securing a brighter future for both people and the environment."

Bharubhai Akhmabhai Dindor
Kosamba, Santarampur, Mahisagar, Gujarat

The interventions brought transformative changes in the community. Through check dams and ponds, over 90 acres of farmland increased agricultural productivity. Improved forest resources reduced wildlife intrusion into farmlands, decreasing crop losses. Farmers diversified their cropping patterns and began cultivating three crops a year, boosting income and food security. Migration from the village also decreased. The participatory approach strengthened community bonds, enabling the Panchayat and Gram Vikas Mandal to work together toward sustainable development.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:27:06 minutes.

Kosamba has become a source of inspiration for students, government officers, other communities, and NGOs who visit to learn from its success story.

Simlipal Vikas Parishad: A Collective Journey Towards Forest and Rights Protection

Simlipal, located in Odisha, India, is a famous tiger reserve named after the Simul tree. Simlipal Tiger Reserve, spanning over 2,750 sq. km., is the second-largest biodiversity area in the country, mostly dominated by Sal forests. Declared a sanctuary in 1979 and later a national park, Simlipal is home to Bengal tigers, elephants, and rare flora and fauna. Nearly 90% of its inhabitants belong to tribal communities, including the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) Khadia and Mankidia.

Historically, Simlipal suffered heavy exploitation during British rule when it was used for timber revenue and royal hunting. After 1972, it came under the Tiger Project and later the National Park, which imposed several restrictions on the forest dwellers. Livelihood, health, education, and cultivation were badly affected, and many tribal families faced harassment and eviction attempts; some local people were also used by poachers and illegal loggers.

To restore harmony, Simlipal Vikas Parishad was formed, uniting three Gram Panchayats, Astakumar, Barehipani, and Gudgudia, and 45 revenue villages. With support from a local organisation working for forest rights since 2008, communities began asserting their rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. On 9 April 2015, Simlipal became the first region in India to receive titles for individual and community forest rights.

Today, every village has a Forest Management Committee that works with the Forest Department to protect wildlife, prevent forest fires, and stop illegal logging. Awareness campaigns in tribal languages, forest fire control drives, and restrictions on tree felling have strengthened conservation. Local Gram Sabhas now manage their own funds, run weekly haats, and ensure sustainable forest use, proving that when empowered, communities become the true guardians of Simlipal.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 57:47 minutes.



After the formation of the Parishad, we have a clear system. Each Gram Sabha takes its own decision about forest use and protection. We no longer depend on outsiders."

Mohanty Birua

Naana, Astakumar, Jashipur, Mayurbhanj, Odisha

Sustaining Livelihoods: The Kurkheda-Wadasa Federation's Unified Approach to Forest Resource Management

In the forest areas of Kurkheda and Wadasa in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, forests have always been central to people's lives. Families have depended on them for generations, collecting tendu leaves, bamboo, and other produce for their livelihood. But for years, the Forest Department and traders decided the prices, and local people got very little in return.

Around 2015, a few Gram Sabhas decided things had to change. They began using provisions of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and the PESA Act to claim their rights over the forests. What started with nine villages slowly grew into the Kurkheda-Wadasa Federation, now bringing together 55 Gram Sabhas.

The Federation gave villages a common platform to make decisions, plan collectively, and manage forest produce on their own terms. Each Gram Sabha sends two representatives, one of them a woman, to make sure both men and women have a say. This space has helped strengthen people's confidence and create accountability within and across villages.

One of their biggest successes has been in managing tendu leaf collection. Earlier, the income was low and irregular. Now, through collective auctions, earnings have nearly tripled. The money goes directly to Gram Sabha accounts, cutting out middlemen and ensuring transparency.

Members have also attended training and visits to learn about sustainable harvesting, record-keeping, and legal processes. Over time, these exchanges have built trust and a sense of ownership among communities. The Federation continues to grow, helping villages improve governance, build livelihoods, and ensure women's participation in leadership.



Our journey has shown us the power of unity. Together, we can protect our resources, honour our traditions, and build a future where every voice matters."

Krushana Narote

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:37:30 minutes.

Sahebdera's Journey for Sustainable Livelihood and Forest Conservation

Sahebdera's name finds its origin in the early 1900s when officers used to stay in this area, and locals often referred to it as "Saheb's"—"Dera" meaning "officers' place." By the mid-1950s, Karladunguri Hill had turned barren due to excessive extractions. The loss of greenery affected the local ecosystem, reduced livelihoods, and increased community dependence on forest resources for firewood and grazing.

In response, villagers came together and formed the Jangal Surakshya Samiti (Forest Protection Committee). Later, the Sagar Yubak Sangha (Youth Club) joined hands to strengthen conservation rules. The real change began with the creation of the Van Surakshya Samiti (VSS), which united all households for the protection and revival of Karladunguri Hill.

The VSS introduced unique practices such as Thengapali, a rotational forest patrolling system, and Muthidhana, where every family donated a handful of paddy to support forest protection. With help from the Forest Department and NGOs like SEWAK, the villagers planted banyan and pipal trees, created a natural boundary with palm seedlings, and dug cattle-proof trenches through Shramdaan (voluntary labour). Under the Odisha Forestry Sector Development Project, they planted thousands of saplings with an impressive survival rate. To reduce dependence on forests, LPG connections were provided to households, and alternative livelihoods like dairy, mushroom, and turmeric farming were promoted.

Today, Karladunguri Hill has turned into a lush green forest full of wildlife and natural beauty. Many families now earn a steady income through sustainable livelihoods. The united efforts of the villagers have strengthened community bonds, empowered women, and inspired nearby villages. Sagarpali's story is a shining example of how collective community action can restore nature and build a sustainable future.



By our collective effort, life is now sustainable."

Mukteswar Buda
Sahebdera, Masabira, Lephripara, Sundargarh, Odisha

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 2:06:36 minutes.

A Forest's Revival: Yerandi's Journey of Stewardship and Sustainability

Yerandi is a village in Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra, where people's lives are closely tied to the forest. It provides them with food, medicine, and a source of income. In 2013, the community received Community Forest Rights (CFR), but the management of the forest remained in the hands of external agencies. The plans made elsewhere did not reflect the realities or knowledge of the people who actually lived with the forest.

By 2023, the Gram Sabha decided it was time to take charge of its own forest. Under the leadership of community elder Balu Bhau Janbandhu and with the support of the Community Forest Rights Management Committee (CFRMC), the villagers prepared Yerandi's first Conservation and Management (C&M) Plan.

The process began with a Shivar Feri, a collective walk through the forest. People observed how tree cover had changed, where soil erosion was happening, and what local species were disappearing. These discussions helped them identify what actions were needed most. Through regular meetings, they agreed that protecting biodiversity, restoring the forest, and ensuring livelihood security would be their main focus.

The Gram Sabha got the plan approved by the Block and District Level Coordination Committees and linked it with government schemes for financial and technical support. Once the work started, villagers carried out soil and water conservation, forest protection, and sustainable harvesting. These efforts not only improved the forest's condition but also created local employment.

Now, the forest around Yerandi is visibly healthier. Springs have more water, more trees are growing back, and people have access to fruits, tubers, and herbs. For many, the work has also brought a sense of pride and ownership. Children are growing up seeing their elders manage the forest collectively, learning that caring for it is part of daily life.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 28:30 minutes.



This plan is more than a tool for governance; it is our bond with the forest. By taking ownership, we've not only secured livelihoods but ensured that the forest will thrive for generations to come."

Balu Janabandhu
Yerandi, Kurkheda, Gadchiroli, Maharashtra

The Forest Keepers: Indigenous Wisdom, Lasting Impact

Kampung Kiau Nuluh, a small village nestled at the foot of Mount Kinabalu, Malaysia, boasts rich diversity in flora and fauna. Inhabited by the indigenous Dusun Kiau community of Sabah, the native stewards of the local forests are largely dependent on the forest resources, hunting grounds, and agriculture for their livelihood.

However, in 1964, a substantial part of their conserved forests was marked by the government under the Kinabalu Park, depriving the community of their resources. Driven by limited resources and land disputes, the community toiled to reclaim the forests by demonstrating the efficacy of their indigenous management practices and, in the end, successfully reclaimed 1200 acres of forests. They allocated the land under the Community Forest Area and set up a People's organisation called GOMPITO, aimed at co-management and conservation of the Commons rooted in their indigenous spiritual beliefs.

Through GOMPITO, the community mapped the landscape and monitored the rivers and forest boundaries. They also imparted indigenous knowledge about nature and cultural practices. This gave rise to a consolidated Community Protocol (Protokol Komuniti) reflecting their traditional knowledge, customs, and practices like Mamason, Mamatang, Boros Puru, and Tagal Bombon for the conservation of the Commons. This protocol not only specifies their roles in the community but also outlines guidelines for external stakeholders to ensure the sustenance of the community's rights.

Over time, the community observed a decline in traditional knowledge and participation, especially from the youth, due to the loss of experts and ascent of newer religious beliefs. In response to this crisis, the members are continuously spreading awareness for their cause and have achieved larger participation from the youth. They have also initiated documentation systems to record their traditional knowledge and customs to preserve and pass them down to future generations.

The integral approach and the striving efforts of the community have been recognised by the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and have proved instrumental in conserving the forests and setting a precedence for other neighbouring communities in future.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:22:11 minutes.



"The community has been working very hard to excise out and have more control over the traditional territory, and they managed to show the government that by integrating their traditional knowledge and customs, they can take care of the forests and manage them sustainably."

Mojelle Musin
Kampung Kiau Nuluh, Kota Belud, Sabah, Malaysia

2 Water Governance, Coastal and Marine Commons





Reviving the Gonchi system in Anantapur

The age-old, community-driven water governance model called Gonchi in Anantapur district operates through a network of seepage channels and trenches, ensuring equitable distribution of water among farmers in the ayacut (command area). The *thalipiri*, a deep trench which helps the flow of water through gravitational support along with the main Gonchi channel, which transports seepage water to the ayacut helps to irrigate the farmlands across many villages. Decisions regarding water management, repairs, and regulations are collectively made by Gonchi committees, which are led by community leaders known as the *pinnapedd*a or the *gonchigaru*.

The Gonchi system faced several challenges like the breached channels, silt accumulation, and damaged culverts which have hindered water flow, reduced the irrigation capacity and affected farmers' livelihoods. Rising maintenance costs and inconsistent finance support has weakened the system. External threats, such as unauthorised bore wells and sand extraction near the channels, have further strained the system.

The Gonchi Federation undertook significant repair and desilting efforts across key channels and leveraged government schemes like MGNREGA for their maintenance. The federation strengthened social norms, banning unauthorised bore wells and sand extraction in the catchment areas. Fines were imposed on violators, which helped to undertake repair and development work. The local farmers also adopted sustainable agricultural practices such as using green manure, azolla cultivation in paddy fields, and alternate cropping patterns. These practices enhanced soil fertility and increased crop yields.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 6:52 minutes.

The revival efforts have yielded remarkable results such as improved irrigation efficiency, increased cultivated area and higher crop yields. Moving forward, the federation aims to formalise its structure to secure financial stability for future agricultural needs.



Our livestock have access to more water and better nutrition. Our agricultural produce has increased many fold with the availability of water through the year."

J. Krishnappa

Kesavapuramu, Garladinne, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh

Water wisdom transforms MP village

When Laxmi Tandiya noticed the seasonal streams dwindling to a trickle in her village, bringing mounting challenges to the community due to water scarcity, she decided to step up and do something about it. Her journey began with the implementation of *bori bandhan*, whereby earthen barriers are created as small dams to capture and retain water. This ensured water availability even in summer for agriculture, livestock, and household needs. The community then adopted measures such as building contour trenches and small pond-like structures called *jhiria*. These interventions prevent water runoff, enhance grass growth, support the roots of trees, and maintain soil moisture.

Central to these efforts is the creation of committees that foster a sense of collective responsibility, like the Gram Sabha, where men and women deliberate on strategies and pass resolutions for sustainable practices. The village also has a Mahila Sabha, where women share their perspectives about conservation efforts. The Paryavaran Samiti (Environment Committee) further spreads knowledge on sustainability practices. The practice of *shramdaan* (voluntary community labour) has also ensured reduced costs as well as fostering a sense of ownership and pride among the people.

Recognising the strain that water-intensive crops place on resources, she also promoted cultivation of resilient crops like indigenous paddy. Additionally, families were also encouraged to grow vegetables in kitchen gardens. This has helped conserve soil moisture, reduce dependency on external markets, ensure food security, and enhance nutrition.

Under Laxmi Tandiya's guidance, the village has developed and implemented rules to ensure equitable access to water resources, prioritise the needs of the local community, prohibit external exploitation, and encourage sustainable usage. Laxmi Tandiya's work has demonstrated how grassroots initiatives can address critical challenges like water scarcity.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 29:20 minutes.



The success of our efforts lies in our unity and willingness to work together. Without shramdaan, this wouldn't have been possible."

Laxmi Tandiya

Pondy, Rata, Bichhiya, Mandla, Madhya Pradesh

Restoring Krabo River in Nagaland: Community Action for Biodiversity

Changtongya village, nestled in the verdant hills of Mokokchung District, Nagaland, is defined by its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. Home to the Ao Naga tribe, the village cherishes lush forests and pristine rivers. Among these treasures stands the Krabo River, whose restoration has exemplified community-led action. Since 1993, villagers have safeguarded the river, harnessing grassroots collaboration to revive the delicate balance of nature. These efforts highlight how the collective wisdom and agency of local communities are essential in sustaining biodiversity.

Fishing and hunting traditionally sustain families in Changtongya, yet unsustainable methods like chemical use, batteries, and water pumps—once endangered the Krabo River. Population growth further pressured the local ecosystem, leading to a decline in aquatic life and threatening livelihoods. Alarmed, the community members convened a Citizen Forum Conference, passing a resolution in 1993 to protect the river. They introduced stringent regulations forbidding any activities that could harm the river ecosystem, backed by a fine of ₹50,000 for violations. Regular monitoring by volunteers and watchmen ensured compliance.

The community members also set up dam-like structures using bamboo, wood, and stones, restoring river flow and facilitating aquatic breeding grounds. This process mobilised community knowledge and participation. The results have been transformative. Indigenous fish species returned, turning Krabo into a thriving habitat. The river revitalised itself, and so did nearby waterways, sustaining local livelihoods and traditions.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 7:08 minutes.

The initiative has deepened the bond between community and nature, demonstrating the efficacy of indigenous practices alongside community drive. Changtongya's example shows that collaborative governance and reverence for commons can address ecological challenges at scale and bring forth sustainable solutions.



The Krabo River is a lifeline for both our village and the biodiversity around us. Together, we are creating a lasting legacy of care for future generations."

A. Punalumba Longkumer
Changtongya, Mokokchung, Nagaland

Reviving the Vakri Cheruvu to ensure water security

The Vakri *cheruvu* in Bailpathikonda is a water reservoir that helped the local farming community throughout the year. But over the years, neglect and lack of maintenance led to its deterioration. The reservoir not only dried up but also affected the surrounding borewells which became dysfunctional. Venkappa, member of the village committee (UVAS- *Ummadi Vanarula Abhivriddhi Samithi*) took the lead to help restore the *cheruvu* with active community support. Village discussions at regular intervals helped Venkappa to raise awareness and gather support to restore the reservoir. The restoration began with clean-up drives where community members came together to remove debris and silt that had accumulated over the years and reduced its water holding capacity. A check dam and stone bunds were built that helped to increase the water holding capacity and recharge groundwater levels of the area. Simultaneously, sustainable water conservation practices helped the community to efficiently use the available water.

Farm ponds were also constructed as part of the restoration efforts, providing additional water storage and supporting livestock needs. This initiative not only strengthened water security but also created a ripple effect, inspiring neighbouring villages to consider similar measures. The restoration efforts have shown results in the area. Dysfunctional wells were now providing reliable sources for irrigation to the community, thus improving their agricultural productivity. The biodiversity of the area has seen a noticeable impact where native species of flora and fauna are being rejuvenated. Water availability has improved the health and productivity of livestock with improved access to water and fodder Convergence of government programmes like MGNREGA, women in the community are able to secure work, improve livelihoods and contribute to the restoration efforts.



We had a water crisis in our village. Our UVAS came together and ensured that we cleaned and revived our water source."

Prabhakar Reddy
Bailpathikonda, D Kotakonda, Aspari, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:13:06 minutes.

The efforts of the village committee (UVAS) have strengthened community ownership, with villagers actively participating in the maintenance and protection of the reservoir. The committee plans to expand the conservation measures in the village and promote sustainable cropping patterns to ensure efficient resource use.

Community comes together to save the Sundarbans

The Sundarbans is the world's largest mangrove forest, sprawling over 10,277 sq. km. Recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this ecosystem supports 289 species, including the Royal Bengal Tiger. Today, the region is grappling with various challenges, including illegal exploitation of resources, habitat degradation, and shrinking biodiversity. Amid these pressures, Bangladesh got the Sundarbans Regional Co-Management Society on 13 March 2023. With the backing of the Arannayk Foundation and USAID's Ecosystems/ Protibesh Activity, the Society united five Co-Management Committees (CMCs) scattered across protected zones like Koyra-Dacope, Chandpai, and Sarankhola. And thus was born a platform where communities, organisations, and government agencies come together to protect the Sundarbans.

The Society has focused its efforts on strengthening the structures that support the people who rely on the Sundarbans. By reorganising CMCs and creating robust welfare systems, it has nurtured leadership within Co-Management Organisations (CMOs), Village Conservation Forums (VCFs), and Village Conservation Groups (VCGs). Community Patrol Groups (CPGs) and Tiger Conservation Groups have gained resources and support, including supplies worth 17 lakh BDT provided by the Bangladesh Forest Department. This partnership between government bodies and local groups has enhanced the protection of critical species and fostered trust in the co-management process.

Following these efforts, surveys and collaborations with governmental and non-governmental organisations have revealed an encouraging rise in the population of Royal Bengal Tigers. Villages dependent on the Sundarbans for resources like honey and fish have been guided toward sustainable harvesting practices. The Sundarbans Regional Co-Management Society links local organisations with the corporate sector and government bodies to create opportunities for financial stability and long-term conservation. It has collaborated with the Bangladesh Forest Department to integrate its goals into broader conservation policies. However, the journey is not without obstacles. Legal recognition remains a hurdle, and the resources needed to sustain operations are limited. Coordination between various agencies requires ongoing effort.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 10:14 minutes.



Through co-management, we are not only conserving biodiversity but also ensuring that communities thrive alongside nature."

Asaduzzaman Milon
Khulna, Bagerhat, Sathkhira & Barguna, Khulna, Bangladesh

Hail Haor: A wetland reborn

Come the monsoon and the wetland of Hail Haor gets transformed into a breathtaking expanse of water and life. Spanning 14,000 hectares, the shallow basins teem with fish, vegetation, and birdcalls. For the 200,000 people living in the vicinity, Hail Haor is a lifeline. But over the years, this lifeline had begun to fray. Once vibrant with collaborative efforts under the MACH (Management of Aquatic Ecosystems through Community Husbandry) Project, the Resource Management Organisations (RMOs) tasked with conserving Hail Haor gradually lost steam. The *beels* (seasonal and perennial wetlands) lost their guardians, and the ecological balance began to falter.

"People soon started noticing the changes," recalled Janakdeb Burma, General Secretary, Sylhet Co-Management Organisation. With dwindling fish stocks and bird habitats, and shrinking wetlands, the Commons they relied on were diminishing.

In 2022, the USAID Ecosystems/Protibesh Activity, supported by the Arannayk Foundation, began working to revitalise the RMOs. They reconnected them with regional and national Co-Management Organisation (CMO) networks. In 2023, the Hail Haor Site RMO Coordination Committee was formed with eight RMOs. The committee formally applied for the permanent transfer of 14 *beels* to the RMOs, granting communities control over their Commons once more. They developed a comprehensive strategy, inviting villagers to participate in restoring fish sanctuaries. Governance structures were strengthened, making resource management rules clear and enforceable.

The results emerged soon. Fish populations rebounded, wetlands started to recover, and communities saw their collective efforts bear fruit. The journey hasn't been without hurdles. Implementing resource management rules established by the government in 2009 remains a challenge. The growing population has added pressure to the natural resources, while systemic changes to prioritise conservation have been slow to materialise. Despite this, the committee remains optimistic. The villagers, who once watched their wetlands decline, are now active stewards of their environment.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 52:49 minutes.



We are trying our best to preserve the biodiversity of Hail Haor," said Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal, a facilitator with the committee."

Minnat Ali
Hail Haor, Sreemangal, Moulvibazar, Sylhet (Bangladesh)

Collective action against mining ensures water security for village

Venkatagiri's check dam had been a lifeline for agriculture in the region. However, the dam had gradually filled with silt, reducing the water retention capacity of the dam. The reduced availability of water for agriculture and domestic purposes adversely affected the local community.

Following this, the common lands were encroached by a mining company which attempted to start operations without approvals from the Gram Sabha. Persistent collective efforts at the panchayat, block and district level ensured that the District Collector cancelled the mining contract.

The proactive leadership and role of the UVAS (a local community-based organisation) ensured that the common resources were protected and conserved. The Venkatagiri check dam was restored through the convergence of MGNREGA funds which not only provided employment but also created community assets for the village that increased water availability which boosted crop yields and also recharged ground water in the area. Community members, including women and youth, took an active part in the desilting activities.

The success story serves as an inspiring example of how local leadership, strategic partnership, and the involvement of government schemes can empower communities to take control of their natural resources and work towards a more sustainable and resilient future.



Our common lands were being taken by the mining people. We went to the Collector telling him how important these lands are for us. He didn't help us initially."

G Ramudu
Venkatagiri, Kandanathi, Yemmigunur, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:28:56 minutes.

Collective Water Management Revives Farm in Kalyana Karnataka

Hanumanthayaraya, President of Distributary Canal Number 95 in Raichur District, has led a collective effort to strengthen water governance through community participation. The canal stretches for 11 kilometres and serves Atnur and nearby villages in Sirwar Taluk. The region receives about 600 millimetres of rainfall annually, which is often irregular. Around 150 tanks in the area can store rainwater to irrigate crops such as paddy, chilli, maize, and cotton. Farm ponds have also been set up, enabling a few farmers to use stored water during dry periods. The main challenges were soil erosion and uneven water distribution when canal flow was high. To resolve this, four village presidents convened meetings with all villagers to ensure that water reached every field. The woman also cleared silt and weeds from the canal and even constructed an access road for maintenance.

Traditionally, paddy required more water, but with guidance from ACRMWRI, farmers have adopted a new sowing method where farmers now save nearly half water which has resulted in many shifting to this approach, allowing more farmers to cultivate within available water limits. To strengthen knowledge sharing farmers formed a Farmer Water School, meeting weekly to discuss organic farming and water efficient practices. A weather station and water flow sensor now provide real time rainfall and canal data on farmer's mobile phones. Groundwater is now available at close depths, and a soil moisture device helps prevent over irrigation. With the canal restored, 150 tanks and ponds have refilled, supporting 3,000 hectares of farmland. Yields have risen to 40-50 quintals of paddy, 10-15 quintals of cotton, and 8-10 quintals of red gram per acre.



We managed the water through our collective action when the community works together, everything becomes possible." - Hanumanthaya, Atnur Gram Panchayat."

Hanumantharaya
Atnur, Sirwar, Raichur, Karnataka

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 58:58 minutes.

Empowering communities through water governance

Daginkatte village faced severe water scarcity due to which their livelihoods were affected. It was in 2009, that the women in Daginkatte came to know of MGNREGA. With support from Spoorthy, a CBO in the area, they submitted the Form 6 to their Panchayat to take up work under MGNREGA.

To discourage them from taking up the work, the Panchayat assigned the group of 20 women to take up labour intensive work of manually crushing stones in the area. This impacted the labour group with only 8 members willing to continue. But this didn't deter their spirits and they continued to push the Panchayat for more work and motivate other women to also join.

At present more than 1,480 people depend on MGNREGA work in their village. Seeing the requirement for creating community assets in the Panchayat, the annual budget under MGNREGA ranges between 30 to 40 lakh rupees. With the increase in the water harvesting structures and other soil and water conservation measures like planting of forest saplings, run off has reduced and ground water levels are better. Open wells and bore wells, which had been dry for years, now had water. Drinking water availability improved, and people could find groundwater at 300 to 400 feet, compared to 700 feet before. Cattle also had enough water and fodder to ensure better nutrition.

MGNREGA has helped communities to improve their livelihoods but it has also helped women like Veeramma to play a vital role in the conservation efforts in the village. With more than 21,000 saplings planted in the common lands, the green cover has improved and these efforts have been recognised by the President of India by awarding the Water Warrior Award in 2022 for the exemplary efforts in conservation.



I will not stop raising my voice. I want to inspire other women. One Veeramma goes, 100 Veeramma's will be born."

Veeramma

Daginkatte, Channagiri, Davangere, Karnataka

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 25:58 minutes.

Kamanoor Lake: Collective Action for Sustainable Management

Kamanooru Lake, a famous water body in Koppal Taluk, was constructed about two decades ago through the collaborative efforts of the government and the local community. Since its creation, the lake has played a significant role in enhancing groundwater levels and contributing to the recharge of several borewells in the surrounding areas. The lake is primarily used for groundwater recharge rather than direct irrigation.

According to the villagers, the formation of the lake has transformed the region into a thriving biodiversity hotspot, now home to species such as peacocks and bears. The *Grama Parisara Abhivruddhi Samiti* (Village Environment Development Committee) has taken responsibility for the lake's management and is committed to regular desilting to maintain and improve its water-holding capacity. The committee has also received a grant of ₹1.25 lakh from the MLA, and both the MP and MLA have visited and adopted the village, recognising the success of this initiative.

In addition, the lake supports fish farming, generating revenue for the Gram Panchayat and strengthening the local economy. As decided by the community, the lake's outlet has been closed to promote better groundwater recharge. Today, Kamanooru Lake continues to serve as a vital source of water for livestock, birds, and wildlife, while standing as a model of community-led natural resource management in the region.



The collective efforts of the community have not only improved the livelihoods of the people but also made Kamanooru a biodiversity hotspot."

Basappa Ayyappa Vankalakunti
Kamanoor, Lebageri, Koppal, Karnataka

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:09:03 minutes.

Jeevajala Karyapade: Community-Led Lake Rejuvenation in Sirsi

'Jeevajala Karyapade' translates to "*Living Water Task Force*" which reflects the community-led lake rejuvenation efforts in Sirsi town. Led by local initiatives neglected water bodies such as Ane Honda and Rayana Kere were revived to improve water availability for local communities.

Formed in 2017, by 200-250 members, the Jeeva Jala Task Force came together to address water shortages in the Western Ghats region. Led by Mr. Shrinivas Hebbar as president, 20 dried up lakes in and around Sirsi, including Shankara Honda, Bellakki Kere, were restored.

Shankara Honda, the birthplace of the Aghanashini River, was their pilot initiative. However, this tank had become a dumping site for the city. The task force desilted it which helped increase the depth to 20 feet which ensured around 12 to 13 feet of water even in summers. The lake now attracts local visitors and birds. Spread across 3.5 acres the Rayanna Kere was renovated to increase the retention capacity by 30 feet. The taskforce has successfully restored 20 - 25 lakes. However, one of the major threats to these tanks is the garbage carried by rainwater, which not only pollutes the water but also harms the biodiversity. The task force emphasises on collective responsibility and has appointed workers to collect garbage within a radius of 5 km of Sirsi to responsibly dispose it at the municipal waste collection centres.

Initially, the group raised funds through public contributions. But they no longer collect contributions or government funds; instead, the Task Force members contribute their own funds to support these efforts. These restoration efforts have ensured that open wells within a 5 km radius are rejuvenated. Parks and exercise equipment for the elderly have been constructed making it a frequent spot for locals. Fish have been released into all the tanks to help maintain water quality and water tankers provide free drinking water to those in need.

The Jeevajala Karyapade initiative demonstrates how community participation and local leadership can transform water management practices.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:22:13 minutes.



The Jeeva Jala Task Force involves all members in every initiative to ensure inclusive participation and collective ownership."

Shrinivas Hebbar
Sirsi, Uttara Kannada, Karnataka

Reviving Forests, Restoring Water: The Journey of Purul Village

Purul village, situated in Senapati District, Manipur, lies about 47 kilometres from the district headquarters. Inhabited by the Poumai Naga community, the village comprises three hamlets—Purul Atongba, Purul Akutpa, and Rosofii which have long supported traditional farming and forest-based livelihoods.

From 1990 to 2000, however, the landscape underwent significant change. Increased dependence on shifting cultivation and the introduction of cannabis farming led to large-scale forest clearing. Repeated fires, hunting, and unregulated extraction of timber degraded the forest severely. By the early 2000s, soil fertility declined, water sources dried up, and wildlife disappeared. Water scarcity soon became one of the village's most pressing challenges.

Recognising the crisis, the Purul Rosofii Village Council initiated a conservation programme in 2006. Community meetings helped outline clear objectives—to restore forest cover, regulate resource use, and revive local water sources. Gradually, the community agreed to control *Jhum* (shifting cultivation) and restrict cannabis cultivation. Residents were encouraged to protect native tree species, especially timber and wild fruit trees such as wild apples. In 2010, neighbouring Purul Atongba joined the conservation effort. Together, the two villages created rules to prevent hunting, tree felling, and forest fires, supported by fines for rule violations. While initial compliance was difficult, persistent community dialogue led to shared understanding and commitment. In 2022, the villages formally adopted a Community Conserved Area (CCA), and by 2024, all three hamlets—Rosofii, Akutpa, and Atongba—joined under a common Union Body to protect their forests and biodiversity.



Even the nearby villages have started to learn about conservation and we hope this unity lasts long."

R. L. Poulunii
Purul, Senapati, Manipur

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 25:44 minutes.

Strict conservation rules are now in place. A fine of ₹10,000 is levied for unauthorised tree cutting, and ₹50,000 for forest fires. Women play an active role in spreading awareness and monitoring forest use. The community's efforts have rejuvenated springs and streams, which now provide clean water for drinking and irrigation. Today, the regenerated forest also serves as a tributary to the Barak River, benefiting downstream villages. Purul's journey shows how community-led conservation rooted in shared responsibility can restore both ecosystems and livelihoods.

Water security and Livestock management: How a Pond sustains livestock population in a village in Andhra Pradesh

Nakkalavaari Kota village in Andhra Pradesh's Annamayya district is where a one-of-a-kind natural resource management action has influenced the lives of local shepherds and their livestock. In the past, due to severe water shortages in their surrounding areas, they had to travel far away (almost 6 to 8 kilometres one way) to meet their livestock's water needs since there was only one source of water in their surrounding area, called Poolabavi Chalami, which was insufficient due to overuse, leading to diseases and non-drinkable water.

P. Ramachandra, along with technical support from an external organisation, began to discuss potential solutions in their village to address their water needs. With bank financing, they began constructing a pond for their livestock's drinking and household domestic use. The construction of the pond not only reduced the distance the shepherds had to travel but also prevented predation by wild carnivores, such as bears. The pond not only served the village's needs but also provided water for local biodiversity.

Because the livestock received sufficient water and fodder, their health was maintained, leading households to earn a better income from livestock sales (up to 1,00,000 INR per year). Almost 1,500 sheep of the village are sustained by the pond. With reduced travel expenses, the households can invest time in other agricultural operations that also contribute to their income.



We used to travel almost 7 to 10 kilometres previously, which was very hard and tiresome for us, but now with the livestock pond, our travel distance is reduced and has made our life easy."

P. Ramachandra
Nakkalavarikota, Gurramvandlapalli, Thambalapalle, Annamayya, Andhra Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 49:31 minutes.

Collective action helps restore water security in Hiwardhara

Hiwardhara village faced recurring water shortages and near-drought conditions leaving the community and livestock in distress. However, through collective action and sustainable water management practices, the community transformed their circumstances into an opportunity for resilience and growth.

Pralhad Laxman Gavande mobilised the community to implement sustainable solutions to tackle recurring water crises. The village is surrounded by forests and a 4-hectare pond (*Talav*) but the degradation of these Commons forced a drought like situation in the village in 2015 which impacted their agriculture, livestock, and household water availability, threatening their livelihoods.

Reliance on traditional methods of water storage could not meet the growing demands of the community and the *talav* too had a reduced water retention capacity. Identifying the urgent need for change, the Village Institution (VI) alongwith FES undertook a comprehensive water governance strategy. The VI first initiated the perspective planning exercise with the help of tools like CLART and DET, through which they assessed their water resources and identified suitable interventions. To improve the water retention capacity, the talav was desilted which also provided employment opportunities during the off-season for local wage seekers. The nutrient-rich silt from the talav was used on the agricultural lands, which enhanced soil fertility and improved crop yields.

The community established norms to ensure equitable access to the water resources. Transparency was maintained throughout the process as budget details and implementation plans were collaboratively done. The collective efforts ensured improvement in the groundwater levels and water retention which reduced water stress during dry seasons. Farmers who used the silt reported increased crop productivity, particularly in indigenous crops like Kodo and Kutki, improving food security and income levels in the village. Off-season employment helped to address immediate livelihood concerns. Collective action ensured collective responsibility. Moving forward, the community plans to expand soil and water conservation measures to cover more agricultural land and to develop a robust wetland management framework with government support. They also are promoting indigenous cropping patterns to ensure sustainable use of resources.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:14:20 minutes.



Community-led desiltation has not only boosted water storage and soil fertility but also ensured food security for the village. This collective action proves that unity and effort can overcome even the harshest droughts."

Pralhad Laxman Gavande
Hiwardhara, Ghatanji, Maharashtra

With their revitalised Talav and strong community spirit, Hiwardhara serves as a beacon of hope, demonstrating that even in the face of adversity, collective action can create sustainable solutions.

Sustaining the Sea: The Story of Junglighat's Fishers

Junglighat, a coastal village in Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, is home to around 6,000 people. Most families migrated generations ago from Andhra Pradesh and continue to live by the sea, relying on fishing for their livelihood. For them, the ocean is not only an economic resource but also a part of their identity.

In recent years, this livelihood has faced growing threats. Overfishing, plastic pollution, and destructive fishing methods have reduced fish stock, while rising fuel prices and frequent cyclones have made fishing more difficult. Limited support from the fisheries department has forced the village to find solutions independently.

Recognising the need for sustainable management, the community began collaborating with local leaders, fisheries officials, and environmental groups. They adopted the Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) system to monitor fish populations by recording the amount of fish caught in relation to time and gear used. The data helped fishers adjust their practices to prevent overexploitation and protect marine biodiversity.

Parallel to this, the village addressed other critical needs. An RO water purifier was installed at the jetty, ensuring access to clean drinking water for all. Weekly clean-up drives, organised with local youth and supported by the Port Blair Municipal Corporation, transformed the village environment and united the community.

These coordinated efforts have yielded tangible results—healthier marine ecosystems, cleaner beaches, and improved living conditions. Fish stocks are recovering, incomes have stabilised, and community awareness about conservation has grown. Junglighat's story exemplifies how traditional knowledge, when paired with scientific approaches and collective action, can build resilience in coastal communities.

Here, every tide symbolises renewal, and every effort reflects a commitment to balance livelihoods with the health of the sea that sustains them.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 30:42 minutes.



We are working for a healthy community and sustainable fishing practices for conserving commons."

Druva Kumar

Junglighat, Port Blair, South Andaman, Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Reviving Spain's Water Heritage

In the rugged terrains of Andalusia, a millennium-old tradition of water management is being revitalised to tackle modern challenges. These Traditional and Historical Irrigation Systems (T&HIS), dating to the ninth century, are intricate networks that reflect the deep connection between communities and their ecosystems. Once the lifeblood of agricultural and ecological prosperity, they are being brought back into focus through research, community collaboration, and a commitment to sustainability.

"*We study the relationship between the local communities and ecosystems, especially through their traditional irrigation systems,*" says Sergio Couto, a researcher at MEMO Lab, the Biocultural Laboratory of Archaeology at the University of Granada. These systems offer a model for sustainable water management by increasing water availability, regulating ecosystems, and preventing disasters like floods and wildfires. They are also critical tools for mitigating climate impacts, as they sequester carbon, maintain biodiversity, and support green infrastructure.

Governance is a cornerstone of these systems. Communities traditionally managed water democratically, ensuring fairness and sustainability. However, these values have been overshadowed by challenges like rural depopulation, insufficient policy support, and water grabbing by powerful stakeholders. Issues like dwindling rainfall, rising temperatures, and a lack of recognition in modern governance frameworks further exacerbate the situation. MEMOLab is now engaging local communities to identify shared goals and revitalise governance structures.

One innovative method involves creating stewardship agreements between the University of Granada and local irrigation communities, ensuring that traditional ecological knowledge is integrated into governance. Participatory management plans are developed, not just at the local level but also at broader scales like river basins to balance water use among upstream and downstream communities. Local communities are central to the governance process, making decisions that balance ecological sustainability with social equity. Volunteering exercises bring people together to restore irrigation channels, document traditional practices, and pass on ancestral knowledge to younger generations.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 44:17 minutes.



This is not just about irrigation; it's about the deep connections between people and the environment and how we can learn from these ancient practices to address challenges."

Sergio Couto
Granada, Andalucía, Spain

How this Gujarat village ensured water security

Until the 1990s, Chhotaudepur region was characterised by primitive agricultural practices and challenging landscapes, including hilly terrains and scattered forest patches. Heavy rains caused the surface water to flow away, impairing agricultural productivity. That was when the Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT) initiated a watershed development programme.

Ramesh Rathva, a community leader, played a pivotal role in implementing these efforts. According to him, only a single crop could be grown here earlier, leading to unemployment, poor health, lack of education for children, and insufficient food availability. Nearly 80% of the population migrated during the other two seasons to work as labourers. Another issue was the dolomite mines, which remained unused after extraction, accumulating rainwater and underground water. However, the community lacked the knowledge to utilise this water effectively.

As part of the watershed development programme, check dams were constructed to retain runoff water, and stone bunds were built to prevent soil erosion, level hilly lands and conserve rainwater. These interventions, implemented over 13,000 hectares of land across 42 villages, increased agricultural area and groundwater levels.

Subsequently, joint wells were constructed, where groups of five farmers shared a well and irrigation equipment for farming. With access to year-round water, they moved from cultivating a single monsoon crop of maize to growing a variety of crops, including cotton, soybean, watermelon, and vegetables. The community also drew support from corporate social responsibility programmes to develop a model to use water from the dolomite mines for irrigation, benefitting 104 farmers across 53 hectares.



Hilly terrains and scattered forests were once obstacles; today, they are the foundation of sustainable farming."

Krithika Sundaram
Chiliyavant, Chhotaudepur, Gujarat

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:32:08 minutes.

Use of technological tools like satellite imagery and ground data mapping combined scientific data with indigenous knowledge. Women have played a significant role in decision-making. These efforts have brought improved health, better education for children, and sufficient food availability. Ramesh Rathva also promotes natural farming practices like using organic fertilisers, vermicompost, and cattle manure, which have enriched soil and boosted crop productivity.

Lakshadweep's lack of formal institutions —keeping fisheries at the edge

Agatti, Kadmat, and Kavaratti are three islands from Lakshadweep, an archipelago in, Indian Ocean. The islands have seen a rapid change in fishing patterns due to exposure to the global reef fish market.

Rajeswari, a part of the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), Bangalore, has been working in Lakshadweep for over 5 years. She shared how life on an island is defined by its natural boundary and everything seen, used, and experienced is shaped by nature's limits & gifts. But at present, reef fishing in Lakshadweep is emerging as a threat to the natural balance.

People on the island are mostly dependent on natural resources for their livelihood, and fishing is one of the main occupations of the community. Historically, reef fishing was not commercially harvested on the island; however, everything changed between 2010 and 2011 when collector boats started coming to the island to collect reef fish. This shift led many locals to move away from tuna fishing to reef fishing.

Reef fish act like a wall that protects islands from strong winds and waves. Rapid reef fishing for short-term economic goals not only puts islands on the verge of danger, additionally it also impacts climate change.

With the help of NCF, the community living on Bitra Island tried banning reef fishing during the breeding period; however, the communities from other islands continued fishing. Since it's a common water resource, the community from Bitra had to step back. Lack of local institutions and traditional systems to monitor, regulate for sustainable management of natural resources is the key reason. Organisations like NCF are trying to strengthen the existing institutions. Community engagement, recognition, and revival of traditional practices can help address this issue of reef fishing in Lakshadweep. It can further open a space for dialogue about sustainable re-fishing practices.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:03:42 minutes.



It's not an example of community engagement, but this is an example of what is happening with Commons in the absence of strong institutions."

Rajeswari B. T.
Pathirappally,Ambalappuzha, Alappuzha, Kerala

3 Struggles of Commoning





Protecting the Commons: Kurwahi's Stand Against Mining

Rajkumari Maravi from Kurwahi in Mandla district represented the struggle of her community to safeguard their Commons against mining. In 2022–23, a dolomite mining company approached the farmers of the village with an offer to buy their land and sought a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Sarpanch to access both private and Common land that sustained much of the village's lifestyle and economy. Initially, some villagers viewed the proposal as a chance for both income and jobs. Before any further deal could be struck, the issue was taken up by the Mahila Sabha and the Gram Pariyavaran Samiti (GPS), formed with the support of FES, for thorough discussion.

The resistance was led by the women of the community, taking valuable lessons from nearby Bavartal village, where mining had caused not only dust pollution but also declining crop yields, water scarcity, and respiratory ailments. They feared similar losses to Kurwahi's forests, grazing lands, and non-timber forest product (NTFP) resources. Rajkumari stressed that agriculture could provide sustainable livelihoods without harming the environment for profits.

The women organised a Maha Mahila Sabha, after which the matter went to the Gram Sabha under the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA). Company representatives attended, offering compensation, but the villagers stood firm and passed a resolution refusing the NOC, both now and in the future. Multiple Gram Sabha meetings reaffirmed this stand, and despite repeated approaches, offers, and pleas by the company, Kurwahi remained united.

Rajkumari elatedly shared that Kurwahi's action inspired Bavartal villagers to resist mining as well, although with their NOC granted earlier, operations had already begun, leaving just 12 households there that could resist mining. Kurwahi's story nonetheless becomes a testament to how women's leadership, community unity, and informed decision-making can protect the commons and secure ecological futures as an example for the rest to follow.



Once the land is damaged by mining, it cannot be restored."

Rajkumari Maravi
Kurwahi, Katajar, Bichhiya, Mandla, Madhya Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 54:29 minutes.

From Struggle to Stewardship: Restoring Diggi's Commons

Diggi village in Malpura Block, Tonk district, Rajasthan, has a vast grazing land of approximately 2,100 bigha shared with neighbouring villages. Over the years, encroachments have reduced this common land, adversely affecting families dependent on livestock and agriculture.

Recognising the importance of protecting their commons, Madan Singh, along with other community members, established the Charagah Vikas Samiti (CVS). Their initial recourse was legal action; however, a complaint filed with the High Court remained inactive for over two years. They refiled through another lawyer, resulting in a High Court order directing the District Collector to act. Implementation was assigned to the Tehsildar of Malpura.

Progress was slow. The Tehsildar refused to provide funds for clearing the land, and the Panchayat also declined to contribute financial assistance. In response, the community pooled their own resources to begin clearing work. The Tehsildar completed approximately 60% of the clearance but then halted. Frustrated, CVS escalated the matter—organising protests, documenting issues through videos, and re-filing complaints against the District Collector. The case is ongoing in Jaipur High Court.

Challenges persist, including lack of proper Naksha (survey) sheets from the 1962 land settlement, complicating land mapping. CVS and Panchayat members petitioned the state government for support, but only partial progress was made by external agencies. Despite these hurdles, CVS remains determined.

The committee keeps the issue visible among all levels of administration and has even communicated directly with the President of India. Madan Singh and his team continue with unwavering hope that their efforts will succeed. Upon success, they plan to collaborate with the Forest Department to restore the grazing land by planting local grass seedlings and undertaking watershed development to ensure water availability and fodder supply.

Madan Singh's story is one of determination, collective will, and community stewardship of the commons.



If we are able to remove encroachment, it will benefit our livestock, our land, and our community."

Madan Singh
Diggi, Malpura, Tonk, Rajasthan

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 40:41 minutes.

The Struggle for Forest Community Rights in Silpahari

Silpahari Gram Panchayat, situated in the Marwahi Block of Gourella-Pendra-Marwahi district, Chhattisgarh, is surrounded by dense forests and rivers. This region, with the largest forest cover in the block, is rich in forest produce, medicinal herbs, and timber. However, extensive sand extraction from its rivers has caused environmental degradation, threatening ecological balance and local livelihoods.

For generations, the community has actively worked to protect their natural resources—water, forests, and land. In January 2023, momentum built for legal recognition of their Forest Community Rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA). A core committee was formed to oversee the claim process, ensuring proper documentation and community representation.

Using GPS technology, the community mapped out a total of 5,417.7 hectares to confirm traditional village boundaries. The claim was formally submitted in July 2023. Despite fulfilling all procedural requirements, Silpahari residents have yet to receive official recognition and a Forest Community Rights certificate. While awaiting approval, the community faces ongoing challenges including encroachment and illegal sand mining. Tractors extract sand from rivers, disrupting water flow and causing soil erosion. Despite the villagers' resistance, these activities frequently resume, deepening environmental damage and community distress.

In response, the community holds regular meetings to develop forest protection strategies. On Sundays, men and women jointly patrol the forest; other days see a small dedicated team monitoring activities secretly. Legal complaints have prompted crackdowns but sustained enforcement remains elusive.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:13:04 minutes.

Silpahari's ongoing struggle reflects the resilience and commitment of forest-dependent communities. Formal recognition is seen as vital to enforce conservation, prevent illegal activities, and regulate sustainable resource use. The community's fight is also one to preserve cultural heritage and secure livelihoods for future generations.



We are protectos of nature. Our livelihood is connected with the forest. It is also important to protect animals and birds."

Vishal Wakre
Silphari, Marawahi, Gaurela, Chhattisgarh

Puppaladoddi struggles to get their Commons back

Home to 166 households with a population of 486, most of the residents of Puppaladoddi belong to the Backward Community, and their livelihoods are deeply connected to agriculture and natural resources.

However, their way of life was threatened when a mine owner leased a nearby hillock to extract granite slabs. The hillock not only had economic significance but it also held spiritual and cultural significance, as it housed two temples, Anjaneya Swamy and Peddamma Avva. As mining activities began, the villagers feared for their sacred spaces, water sources, health of communities and overall ecological health of the area.

The community approached the policemen and Tahsildar of Aspari Mandal with their concerns, but political might and vested interests of the mine owner left the community helpless in this situation. But the community was determined to save their land. Through the UVAS committee (village level committee to protect Commons) and FES, they approached the District Collector of Kurnool. A formal request was submitted to stop the mining operations in Puppaladoddi and also a request to enter the common lands into the Prohibitory Order Book (POB) under the Gram Panchayat.

Recognising the seriousness of the issue, the District Collector took swift action. He directed the Mines and Geology Department to halt all mining activities in the area. The department promptly implemented the order, and mining operations were officially stopped, securing the hillock and its resources. This story highlights the power of collective action in protecting natural resources. Through the efforts the community not only preserved the temples but also ensured that the Commons catered to the needs of the community. Water harvesting structures to ensure water conservation and help ground water recharge are taken up in the Commons.

The focus of the community remains on sustainable resource management which ensures the future generations continue to benefit from the Commons. Their efforts serve as an inspiration for other villages facing similar challenges.



Our land is our identity, and by protecting it, we safeguard our future."

Ramajulenuyulu
Puppaladoddi, Khyruppala, Aspari Mandal, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:47:25 minutes.

From Encroachment to Empowerment: The Story of Ecological Renewal in Dobda

Dobda village, in Rajasthan's Jhalawar district, spans 846 hectares and is home to 1,334 residents across 275 households. Despite an annual rainfall of nearly 950 mm, water scarcity was a persistent challenge. By February each year, the wells would run dry, forcing people and livestock to rely on limited water sources. Agriculture and livestock rearing, the mainstay of livelihoods, suffered, and migration became common. By 2020, 40 hectares of grazing land had been encroached, decreasing pasture and deepening drought.

The turning point came after the 2020 panchayat elections, with Vishnu Bai elected as Sarpanch. Her husband, Govind Singh, bringing 18 years of experience in natural resource management, inspired the community to take action. Their efforts led to reclaiming 40 hectares of encroached pastureland over a four-month legal process, supported by the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) and District Collector. With guidance and support, the village formed the Charagah Vikas Samiti for systematic planning and development of the pastureland. Leveraging government schemes like MGNREGA, the community built contour trenches, check dams, ponds, and gabion structures, creating local employment, recharging groundwater, and restoring degraded land.

By 2021, the Panchayat secured compensation for the reclaimed land and planted local grass varieties, supported by the Chief Minister's Plantation Campaign. In 2022–2023, further fencing and grassland development secured the full 40 hectares. Wells now hold water year-round, and seasonal agriculture is revitalised, reducing migration and improving livestock health. Govind Singh reflects, *"Slow but sure efforts can bring transformation. We are proof that communities can revive their environment."* Active involvement of women and youth strengthened the ecological recovery, supporting multiple Sustainable Development Goals like clean water, climate action, and land restoration. The success in Dobda was celebrated in local media as a model of community-led land reclamation.



Through this struggle, we want to say that if we can do it, anyone can, because we too are fighting for our land while living in the same conditions."

Govind Singh
Dobda, Dag, Jhalawar, Rajasthan

Future goals involve sustainable pasture management and water conservation. Govind envisions a future where each household becomes a guardian of the commons, demonstrating that collective action can restore both land and dignity.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 11:06 minutes.

Empowering Change: Journey to Transfer Udani Gram Panchayat

Home to tribal communities, Udani in Gumla district was severely threatened by illegal logging. Scarcity of water for domestic and irrigation use was a major problem in the village. Lack of awareness, collective will, poor government support, migration led to reduced community participation in Udani and not many came forward to even attend Gram Sabha meetings.

Mukhiya, David Minz took up the initiative to collectively lead the action towards village development. He worked closely with civil society organisations (CSOs) to organise regular Gram Sabha meetings to discuss and develop a comprehensive village development plan with a focus on agriculture and common resource management. With improved farming techniques, eight farmers started growing pears on eight acres of land, and 22 farmers received support for mango plantations, which helped increase their income. Water management improved irrigation, drinking water and also pisciculture helped to improve food security and livelihood support. Regular monitoring helped to control illegal felling and leverage of various government schemes helped to develop them better. Awareness on child immunisation, education, and livelihoods was given at regular intervals.

The governance system was strengthened with the Gram Panchayat office functioning four days a week, which helped communities to approach the GP whenever required. Meetings of the Gram Panchayat Executive Committee (GPEC) and Coordination Committee (GPCC) were held regularly to ensure better planning and accountability. Increased involvement of the community helped to create a sense of ownership and accountability. Along with the pisciculture project, sustainable farming techniques helped to improve their income. Migration reduced, and awareness about health and education improved as more members used the government scheme for the same. Conservation efforts have reduced illegal logging in the forests. Under David's guidance, the village has achieved significant progress. Over the next two years, they will focus on making Udani a hub for fisheries, improving MGNREGA implementation, and providing all services through the Gram Panchayat. Plans for skill training and a five-year vision document will further support development.



Common resources tie the community together."

David Minz

Udani, Dumari, Gumla, Jharkhand

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:39:44 minutes.

Kanta Waghmare and the Fight for Commons in Varsai Pada

In the lush green land of Raigad, Maharashtra, the people of Varsai Pada, especially its women, are fighting to protect their true generational wealth: their land, forests, and water.

Kanta Waghmare, a grassroots leader from the *Adivasi* community, voiced their story of resistance against the Balganga Dam project. Varsai Pada had secured 263 hectares of Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights under the Forest Rights Act, even this secured land is now under the threat of submergence due to the dam project.

This recognition in the first place was the result of years of struggle and documentation, which gave the villagers a legal right to manage, protect, and access the forest resources that have sustained their lives for generations. But soon after securing these hard-won rights, came a major setback.

The forest land, homes, and lineage that it carries were all at risk. The injustice of it all is such that the state neither consulted the community nor gave any alternate land or rehabilitation support.

The government, paying no heed to this, went ahead with the dam construction work. Their demands and pleas went unheard. Political pressure often proves effective when ecological and humanitarian concerns are not. So, as a response, the community decided to boycott the parliamentary elections.

Kanta not only shed light on Varsai Pada's struggle but also highlighted the broader question of what it means to recognise community forest rights in the face of large infrastructure projects. The community continues to resist, holding on to the belief that their forest is not just land but is their livelihood, culture, and identity.



After our community forest was recognised, we got information about a dam construction project which would submerge our entire hamlet."

Kanta Waghmare
Varsai Pada, Varsai, Pen, Raichur, Karnataka

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 57:20 minutes.

Gramdani villages in Jaisalmer: Protecting Commons from Solar Company Acquisition

Home to tribal communities, Udani in Gumla district was severely threatened by illegal logging. Scarcity of water for domestic and irrigation use was a major problem in the village. Lack of awareness, collective will, poor government support, migration led to reduced community participation in Udani and not many came forward to even attend Gram Sabha meetings. Mukhiya, David Minz took up the initiative to collectively lead the action towards village development. He worked closely with civil society organisations (CSOs) to organise regular Gram Sabha meetings to discuss and develop a comprehensive village development plan with a focus on agriculture and common resource management. With improved farming techniques, eight farmers started growing pears on eight acres of land, and 22 farmers received support for mango plantations, which helped increase their income. Water management improved irrigation, drinking water and also pisciculture helped to improve food security and livelihood support. Regular monitoring helped to control illegal felling and leverage of various government schemes helped to develop them better. Awareness on child immunisation, education, and livelihoods was given at regular intervals.

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Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 29:16 minutes.



If companies take this land, it will block natural water flows and destroy our grazing patterns and livelihood systems."

Prema Ram

Lanela, Mokla, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

The Enduring Fight for Himtasar's Shared Resources

Himtasar, a village in the Bikaner district that holds 884 bighas of Common land, was once safeguarded by elders through community rules but in recent decades has faced numerous threats. Kishan Kumar Ji and his fellow villagers shared their long struggle to reclaim encroached pastureland.

Kishan Kumar ji has been fighting since 2014 for the ponds and shamlat land under the Gram Panchayat Ridmalsar. The fight, however, started even earlier. Villagers like Bhojsingh Raoj and others had raised their voices in 2012–13, filing complaints with the Patwari and local officials. But action was slow, and in the meantime, some farmers had turned pastureland into private fields, built houses, and dug tube wells, adding to the problems.

Determined not to give up, the villagers organised themselves. They submitted petitions to the district collector and involved institutions like the Human Rights Commission and Lokayukt. The use of legal tools, including Right to Information (RTI) applications, helped bring clarity on the extent of encroachments.

In 2022, a Charagah Vikas Samiti (Pasture Development Committee) was formed in Himtasar under the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Rules, supported by FES. This formal body provided the community with a stronger platform. Notices were issued to encroachers, and partial evictions took place. Yet, as the villagers emphasised, the struggle is far from over, as the poor often suffer. Despite these challenges, unity has been the community's strength. Elder Mahboob Ali Ji and other Panchayat leaders have guided the younger generation, while youth like Virendra Singh and Rameshwar Lal have taken active roles in gathering information, filing applications, and keeping the fight alive. Today, officials are again surveying the land, and the community remains hopeful that their Commons will be freed.

Himtasar's story shows how communities, armed with patience, knowledge, and collective resolve, continue to defend the Commons that sustain their livelihoods and dignity.



The biggest support is from my village, this struggle is long, but with unity, we will succeed."

Kishan Kumar & Virendra Singh
Himtasar, Raisar, Bikaner, Rajasthan

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 28:29 minutes.

Toda's journey of reclaiming its Commons

Durga Shankar Ji, Ward Panch of Toda village in Salumber district, Rajasthan, shared how together they revived their degraded pastureland. The Commons of Toda, once encroached and neglected, are now beginning to regenerate through collective effort and local leadership.

He traced the beginning of this journey to an exposure visit in 2022. With the help of the Water Department, he went to Piplantri village. He saw how the Sarpanch, Shyam Sunder Paliwal, had removed encroachments and planted fruit and medicinal plants. After three days of staying there, he envisioned a similar development in his village.

On returning home, he took the idea to his Gram Panchayat and spoke to the Sarpanch, the Panch members, and the Patwari. Together, they cleared the encroachments and made a plan for the plantation. With everyone's cooperation, fruit-bearing, shade-giving, and medicinal trees were planted. Within a year, the plantation began to show results. Now mango trees are giving fruit. Natural grasses have also grown, which serve as fodder for cows and buffalo. People have taken this as an opportunity to start making pickles, aloe vera juice, and herbal products, providing employment opportunities for many families.

The work was supported by government schemes and local institutions. A tender was floated for the development of 20 hectares out of the 135 hectares of common pasture, and the land was fenced for protection. Plans for a village nursery are underway. Women's participation, too, was encouraged through exposure visits where they were oriented with the process of making rudraksha malas and aloe vera face wash. Today, a Charagah Vikas Samiti has been formed to continue this work, ensuring the regeneration of Commons rooted in the community, and Commoning is a way out of struggles.



If it can happen in one village, then why not in ours? With everyone's cooperation, it is possible."

Durga Shankar Garg
Toda, Salumbar, Rajasthan

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:24:57 minutes.

Call to save pastureland from encroachment

In Velangari village of Sirohi district in Rajasthan, there is a large pastureland of over 1,800 bigha. This land has been an important common resource for the villagers for generations. People used it for grazing their cattle and for other community needs.

Over the past few years, the size of the pastureland has been shrinking. The main reason is encroachment, as people have been occupying and using the land for private purposes. Now, most of the pastureland is estimated to have been encroached upon.

Despite complaints lodged by the villagers with the local authorities, no action was taken to remove the encroachments. Realising the gravity of the situation, Ishwar Ji and other villagers came together and formed a committee, which they named the Charagah Vikas Samiti (Pastureland Development Committee), with the aim of protecting the land and taking collective action. The committee also wrote a formal letter to the District Collector, explaining the issue and urging the administration to take steps to recover the land. The matter gained attention when local news channels covered the issue, bringing it to the public eye.

In response, some of the encroachers came forward to vacate the land they had grabbed. The District Collector formed an official committee, which conducted a survey of the pastureland and prepared a report confirming the extent of encroachment. Following this, legal notices were sent to some of the encroachers, asking them to vacate the land. However, the situation wasn't fully resolved.

Unfazed by these challenges, the community remains united to raise its voices, insisting on reclaiming the pastureland for community use. Their struggle represents not just a fight for land, but a fight for their rights, their livelihood, and their future.



We will keep making efforts for the development of the pastureland and ensure that all the encroachments are removed."

Ishwar Ji
Velangari, Sirohi, Rajasthan

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 09:35 minutes.

Collective Action Brings Justice to Chhipadohar

Mahua, an important forest produce, plays a big role in the culture and economy of Chhipadohar and the surrounding villages. In June 2024, the Forest Department seized about 20 kilograms of mahua from 20-25 persons in the area. This illegal act hurt the livelihoods of the community and caused great anger. The issue was first raised during a Gram Sabha meeting in Juruhar village. News of the unfair collection spread quickly to nearby villages like Harinamar, Ker, Chungaru, Kuchila, Baridohar, and Barichattan. For the villagers, the seizure of Mahua was not just about the loss of a product but also about losing control over their natural resources.

Led by the Gram Sabha of Chhipadohar and the United Gram Sabha Platform, the villagers organised a large protest in July 2024, at the Chhipadohar Forest Department office. Hundreds of people surrounded the office, demanding the return of their mahua and asking for accountability for the incident. At first, the Forest Department denied the accusations, calling them false. However, the unity and determination of the villagers forced the department to admit their mistake. They agreed to return the mahua through the Gram Sabha. By July 2024, the produce was returned, marking a big victory for the community. This showed how local governance and collective action could solve major issues and protect community resources.

This collective action strengthened the faith of the community in the Gram Sabha who decided to set up a monitoring system through regular meetings to protect their resources. The Gram Sabha also conducted a series of awareness programmes on legal rights and forest conservation. They also worked with nearby villages to build a network of support, creating a united front against common challenges.



To get our rights, struggles are evident."

Makaldev Singh

Chhipadohar, Barwadih, Latahar, Jharkhand

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 29:47 minutes.

Looking ahead, the Gram Sabha plans to strengthen ties with other local councils and develop strategies for managing resources sustainably. Their goal is to use their collective strength, build cooperation among villages, and push for policies that support tribal rights and forest conservation.

Collective action to guard the Commons

Ramajineyulu of Bhudala village, encourages his community to collectively protect the Commons. At 45, Ramaji uses smart farming methods to sustainably grow diverse crops. But apart from sustainable agriculture, Ramaji took swift action in his village. Bhudala village was faced with an encroachment issue of the adjoining common land. Ramaji saw that this was a serious issue and collectively brought the community together to protect their shared land.

They first mapped out the common lands to identify the boundaries and ascertain the extent of encroachment. Following which, they complained to the local authorities to take action. But with the lack of any action, they approached the higher officials and even went to court to fight the case. Even though the case is still ongoing, things are looking good for the villagers. The struggle has been real and the community is collectively fighting towards it.

Ramaji didn't stop there. He went for a special programme at the state secretariat to meet the tahsildar to stop the land grabbing. Despite facing death threats, Ramaji stayed strong. The community collectively worked on other issues like road construction and deforestation. With help from organisations like GKVK and FES, they took steps to prevent more land from being taken.

The villagers' hard work has had a significant impact. They successfully raised awareness and gained support from local authorities. By protecting the common land, they ensure continued access to their farmlands, which is vital for their livelihoods. The community has become more united and resilient. Coverage of their efforts has been done in local press media. Ramaji's leadership has also motivated neighbouring villages to take similar steps.



Our unity and dedication have transformed this land into a sanctuary for all."

Ramajineyulu
Bhudala, Devaramalluru, Sidlaghatta, Chikkaballapura, Karnataka

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 59:07 minutes.

The community is planning to undertake several planting drives to improve the biodiversity of the region. They believe that if they protect their land, they would protect their future as well.

Striving towards Collective Autonomy: Reclaiming the Bamboo Plantation of Khirdi

In the remote hills of the Khirdi village of Rajura taluka, the Gond Adivasi community has exemplified collective autonomy by securing the rights to manage and benefit from their own forests.

Raghunath Gedam, a member of Khirdi's Community Forest Rights Management Committee (CFRMC), talked about how the community secured Community Forest Rights (CFR) under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, and later formed a CFRMC in 2015. The community depended on forest resources, particularly bamboo. However, these resources that were controlled by the Forest Department were sold to private contractors. The Forest Department permitted outsiders to get the timber, while the locals would only get subsistence wages for their labour, and all the profit went to the contractors. A turning point came in 2023, when the community, through sustained coordination and strategic planning and extensive engagement with multiple government departments, including Forest, Panchayat, Revenue, and Rural Development, secured permission to harvest and sell bamboo independently. The process was arduous and time-consuming but transformative.

But sweet were the fruits of a hard-earned victory. "We finally got the work order to harvest bamboo. For the first time, we transported and sold the timber by ourselves," Raghunath said proudly while expressing how transformative the results of the struggle were. The bamboo, transported using bullock carts, was estimated to be worth almost ₹9 lakhs, which is a remarkable sum for a village that had no control over its forest produce. This way, resources could be multiplied and used without disturbing the environment.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:27:19 minutes.

This shift has done much more than merely generate income. It revived confidence in the community's own ability to govern and re-established their long-standing bond with the Commons, and when communities are entrusted with their forests, they do not merely protect them, they restore, sustain, and reimagine them as sources of livelihood and dignity.



The Gram Sabha now manages sustainable harvests, such as cutting only mature bamboo and ensuring regrowth."

Raghunath Gedam
Khirdi, Rajura, Chandrapur, Maharashtra

Gaunighasa Villages Unite to Restore Forest

Gaunighasa has a 25 hectare forest that supports four nearby villages. People depend on this forest for firewood, fodder, and other daily needs. Over time, excessive extraction of wood and trees and the practice of *podu* (slash-and-burn farming) damaged the forest. The soil degraded, plants and animals started disappearing, and villagers also faced conflicts with the forest officials over land use. The forest began to fade, putting the livelihoods of many families at risk.

At this time, Ranjulata Mahanta, president of the Forest Rights Committee (FRC), encouraged all four villages to come together. She explained that the forest is vital for everyone's survival and must be protected collectively. A joint forest committee was formed with members from each village. This committee made simple rules such as limiting firewood collection, controlling grazing, and stopping illegal extraction. Regular village meetings were held to discuss problems, find solutions, and maintain unity. One of the strongest steps they took was rotational patrolling. Every day, four villagers walked through the forest to ensure no one harmed it. This created awareness, responsibility, and ownership among all.

The community also received training from field experts on forest laws and sustainable harvesting. With this knowledge, they prepared and submitted a Community Forest Rights (CFR) claim to gain legal rights to manage their forest. The forest has begun to recover. Trees and biodiversity are growing again. Villagers now collect non-timber products like mahua, amla, bahada, karanja, and jhuna sustainably. Women are actively involved and have gained leadership and confidence. Conflicts have reduced, and cooperation has increased.



Earlier, we were losing our forest day by day. Now, by working together, we have learned to protect it and secure our future."

Ranjulata Mahanta
Gaunighasa, Harichandanpur, Keonjhar, Odisha

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 09:07 minutes.

Collective Land and Collective Future: The Gramdan Story of Mendha Lekha

Nestled in the Gadchiroli district, Mendha Lekha is a pioneering village that has redefined self-governance through collective ownership of land. The village comprises two hamlets with a population of 480 people representing 105 families. It is one of the first villages in India to practice Gramdan, where villagers voluntarily transferred their private agricultural lands to the Gram Sabha, creating a powerful model of community-led governance.

In Maharashtra, at least 75 per cent of landowners, including absentee owners, must consent to surrender ownership of their land to the Gram Sabha, covering at least 51 per cent of village land. Mendha Lekha went a step further; 100 per cent of its residents donated their land, transferring ownership of 200 hectares originally belonging to 52 families to the Gram Sabha. The village has already become the first CFR village in India, demonstrating that collective governance of land is both practical and empowering in Gramdan.

The central leadership is the Gram Sabha, and it functions as the legal owner and the decision-making body, ensuring equitable land use, resource sharing, and income distribution. The community now prepares its own village development plans instead of depending solely on the government schemes. Their unity has inspired over twenty neighbouring villages to adopt similar practices of shared governance and collective planning. Mendha Lekha stands today as a symbol of how democratic ownership of land can foster equality, transparency, and sustainability, proving that when people govern together, prosperity follows.



When land belongs to everyone, the village grows stronger together."

Devaji Tofa
Mendha Lekha, Dhanora, Gadchiroli, Maharashtra

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 08:43 minutes.

4 Commons and Biodiversity





Rejuvenating Forests: Reclaiming Dhutka's Commons through care and collective resolve

In Dhutka village of Madhya Pradesh, just on the edge of Kanha National Park, a piece of community land once known for its medicinal herbs, grazing space, and non timber forest produce had become nearly unusable. Saraswati Maskole, a member of the Gram Paryavaran Samiti, explained how an invasive species called *lantana* had taken over the entire forest, including the herbivores' food that the forest provided. Due to this, animals started barging into agricultural land in search of food and would destroy their crops, forcing them to guard their fields all night.

She explained how this had a domino effect. The cattle had nowhere to graze. Medicinal plants disappeared. Even leafy greens for food, or herbs for cough and cold, couldn't be found anymore. Change began in 2014 with the support of the FES, when a village level committee was formed. In 2017, the community decided to take matters into their own hands rather than wait for outside help. Through *shramdan*, they cleared almost eight hectares of land.

Together, they removed the *lantana* and planted native species like Mahua, Amla, Arjun, Saja, and Char during festivals like *Hariyali Amavasya* and *Van Mahotsav*. A trench was dug to protect saplings from cattle. The committee put together byelaws such as collecting only dry wood and forbidding outsiders to collect any forest resources to ensure sustainable harvesting of forest produce. The community took turns to keep watch over this land, ensuring the rules were followed.



No outsiders did this. We cleaned the land ourselves."

Saraswati Maskole
Dhutka, Katajar, Bichhiya, Mandla, Madhya Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 6:10 minutes.

As the forest regenerated, so did life. Birds returned. Medicinal plants reappeared. The land once again provides leafy greens, tubers, fuel wood, and tendu leaves. This, therefore, becomes more than just a story about removing weeds. Rather, it became a story of shared efforts and community stewardship in reviving their forest. Dhutka's people have restored not just ecology, but autonomy, and hope.

Collective efforts to protect their Commons in Meghalaya

The Khartein village has a total population of 299 and 37 households. Umkrem village has a total population of 1,033 with 164 households.

In the early 1900s, the Khartein and Umkrem villages were biodiversity hotspots in the Western parts of Meghalaya. However, over the past two decades, overexploitation and massive deforestation and shifting cultivation, has led to the loss of habitat of many endemic and threatened species which has led to the decrease in biodiversity.

In the present scenario, the clan is taking the steps in conserving the flora and fauna, and are integrating traditional knowledge and indigenous practices in the conservation efforts where they have converted the land into sacred forest and people are not allowed to enter the forest. In 2023, they formed the Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) and adopted laws on prohibition of hunting of wild animals, forest fire and cutting down of trees in large quantities. They also have yearly plans to help the restoration process. Regular planting and seedball efforts are undertaken every year. If a person cuts a tree for personal use, he/she is required to plant 5 saplings in its place.

Presently with the efforts of the committee, communities are more aware and vigilant about their Commons. Convergence of various schemes and programmes help them to sustain their conservation efforts.



Massive deforestation had happened and the situation was such that even a rat wouldn't survive in this habitat."

Fleming Lyngdoh
Khartein and Umkrem, Mawthadraishan, Eastern West Khasi Hills, Meghalaya

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 7:08 minutes.

Villagers Resolve and Preserve Forest Resources

Rongo is a small village located in the dense forests of Raidih Panchayat, about 11 kilometers from Manoharpur Block in West Singhbhum district. The forest has always been an essential part of the villagers' lives, providing food and fuel. For many years, the villagers lived in harmony with the forest, but over time, human activities started to harm the environment, creating serious problems for the community.

Uncontrolled cutting of trees and hunting of wild animals caused the forest to shrink. This also led to the loss of water sources and habitats for wildlife. Forest fires during the Mahua-picking season added to the problem, destroying young plants, rare herbs, and birds that nested on the ground. The village mud road was unusable during the monsoons thus creating difficulties for the community to reach the markets.

In 2015, the community came together where the elders shared stories of how rich the forest used to be. The Forest Rights Committee was formed where men and women came together to take action. To stop forest fires, they began patrolling the forest in turns and cleared the forest borders to ensure that forest fires could be reduced. These efforts reduced the incidence of fires and also protected the biodiversity of the area. Four ponds were dug in the forest to cater to the needs of the animals, especially during dry seasons. Hunting was strictly banned, with heavy penalties on defaulters. The forest boundaries were mapped and earmarked to prevent encroachment and assist conservation efforts.

Under the leadership of Luther Cherowa, the community also pooled in their efforts to fix the mud road and improve connectivity. The community efforts ensured that the forests and water sources were restored, indigenous plants preserved, biodiversity revived and the overall ecosystem thrived.



If we don't act now, our children will only read about this forest in books."

Luther Cherowa
Ronga, Mahahorpur, West Singhbhum, Jharkhand

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 44:05 minutes.

The community through their forest committee are preparing to claim their community forest rights as having legal recognition will help them protect and sustain the forests from outsiders. The committee will also focus on educating the youth by not only passing down the traditional knowledge but also involving them actively in the conservation process.

Our Seeds, Our Strength

In Barmer district, western Rajasthan, Bhera Ram Ji, Hakkam Singh, and their community have quietly nurtured a green revolution in the desert. In a region where drought is frequent and the land harsh, community members have come together to restore native vegetation, conserve local seeds, and protect grazing lands that sustain both livestock and livelihoods.

Bhera Ram Ji, a senior teacher and environmentalist, shared how he planted 50 saplings at Dhola Akoda as he believed this work is sacred and should be nurtured. What began as a small act in 1999 grew into a lifelong commitment. When he joined as a teacher in 2002, he devoted his first salary to environmental work, and each year since, he continues to spend a month's earnings on planting and seed conservation.

Hakkam Singh has worked alongside Bhera Ram Ji to link schools, village committees, and families. Together, they organise planting and awareness rides, and educational activities that involve the entire village. Women also contribute by collecting seeds, preparing saplings, and teaching children about the process. Children engage through school competitions and festivals, while households nurture saplings in their households.

During the monsoon villagers plant saplings and native seeds such as khejri, kummat, and jal in schools, homes, and grazing lands. They also protect grazing lands from commercial use, revive species affected by disease, and reduce harmful chemicals sage in agriculture.

Over 25 years, more than 4,62,000 plants have been planted, 27,200 bird watering stations installed, and hundreds of injured wild animals rescued. Bhera Ram Ji stresses on how people should be made aware and encouraged to take up more. It is not an individual achievement but shared responsibility towards our land.

The story of Barmer's community shows that Commons thrive through persistent attention, local knowledge, and collective action.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 24:46 minutes.



During my student life, near the scenic site of Dhola Akada, I planted 50 saplings to save lives. After that, I felt this was sacred work and should continue."

Bhera Ram ji

Indroi, Ramsar, Barmer, Rajasthan

Hill Mynah Sanctuary: A village journey to conservation

The warm climate in Umpung village attracts many seasonal and migratory birds. The community would build nests from palm leaves and bamboo, and place them in the high trees to attract Hill Mynas (State bird) during the mating season in January. But once the eggs hatched they would sell the young ones in the local market and even smuggle them to Bangladesh at exorbitant rates. Continuous felling resulted in the loss of the natural habitat, thereby the numbers of birds reduced alarmingly.

The community was slowly realising the loss of these birds and decided to take up bird counts to understand the present census. In 2015, Dr. Ashok of Thailand from the International Conservation Service visited their village and spoke of the conservation process of these seasonal birds, especially the Hill Myna. A committee was formed to lead the process but was unable to gather enough community support during the first couple of years. From 2017, the active role of the committee was seen which engaged in meaningful discussions about sustainable practices and the harmful impact of certain traditional customs. Stringent rules of poaching and hunting alongwith fines ranging from Rs 3000-5000 were framed which helped the conservation process in the village. With government support, traditional nests were continued to be made to provide safe breeding sites for the birds rather than for trade.

Conservation efforts have helped increase the Hill Myna population by almost 60% and it is wonderful to hear the sounds through the village, especially from March to May. Regular bird counts help to keep a census check of the bird population in the region. The committee aims to connect with other bird-watching communities to promote ecotourism.

The committee also plays an active role in the conservation of the river sanctuary 'Friends of Umngi River'. The focus of conservation efforts is to preserve the Golden Mahseer and Chocolate Mahseer species.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 26:35 minutes.



"The conservation was supported by the youth and women groups. They would help in hanging the nests in the highest branches of trees so the birds can lay eggs and hatch there and also patrol the area during the breeding season."

Walesson Khardewsaw
Umpung, Ranikor, South West Khasi Hills, Meghalaya

Mandargiri: A Community's Journey to Restore and Protect the Forest

Mandargiri is spread over 1,400 acres of land and is just 5 km from Angul Sadar. This forest is rich in biodiversity, waterfalls and also has religious significance. The nearby villages, including Rugudiapada, are home to tribal and farming communities who depend on the forest for their daily needs.

Before the 1980s, Mandargiri faced severe degradation due to uncontrolled logging, overgrazing, and lack of awareness. The forest lost its greenery, wildlife decreased, and water became scarce. Illegal timber extraction by outsiders worsened the situation. Without unity and leadership, the villagers struggled to protect their forest. Change began when nine nearby villages joined hands in the 1980s to save Mandargiri. They started collecting Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) and fodder sustainably, avoiding the felling of green trees. With support from a local NGO a representative committee was formed, marking a turning point. Awareness campaigns, cycle rallies, and regular meetings helped spread the message of conservation.

Over the years, the community revived the forest, planted thousands of trees, and reduced illegal activities through collective monitoring. In 2024, Rugudiapada received the *Prakrutimitra Award* from the Government of Odisha, recognising decades of dedication. Mandargiri is now a biodiversity hotspot again. Even though farmers now face difficulties due to the elephants, people remain dedicated to coexistence and conservation.



The award gave us pride, recognition and reminded us that collectively we can achieve anything."

Muralidhar Behera
Rugudiapada, Badkera, Angul, Odisha

Mandargiri stands as an example of how faith, unity, and sustainable action can bring life back to a dying forest, a living symbol of resilience and community spirit.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:02:19 minutes.

Guardians of Gram Aranya Pradesha

In the heart of Devarayasamudra village, Kolar district, a remarkable transformation has taken place. The community has turned a once neglected piece of land into a thriving sanctuary known as *Gram Aranya Pradesha* or the village forest commons. This story showcases their journey of resilience, unity, and dedication to preserving their natural heritage. The area, spread across Survey No. 117 and 118 covering about 50 acres, was once barren after the felling of Nilgiri trees in 2017. The Panchayat and Forest Department jointly auctioned the felled trees and utilised the proceeds for community development and ecological restoration and planted mango trees, medicinal herbs, and native species to revive the land. To ensure protection, the villagers fenced the area and appointed Ramesh, a local resident, as caretaker. His honorarium is paid by the Panchayat, symbolising a sustainable community led protection model. This initiative has turned Grama Aranya Pradesha into a haven for wildlife deer, rabbits, and birds now roam freely.

The villagers also celebrate the *Kerehabba* (tank festival), reinforcing their emotional and cultural connection to the land. The festival brings together all residents to honour the Commons they have nurtured. The spirit of conservation extended further when the villagers, with the support of the Forest Department successfully halted mining near Hanumanahalli caves protecting the rare Kolar leaf nosed bat's habitat from destruction. Today, Gram Aranya Pradesha stands as a living example of community stewardship, ecological balance, and shared responsibility. The initiative has improved biodiversity, restored pride among villagers, and inspired neighbouring Panchayats to replicate this model.



Through collective effort, we protected our land and revived our forests."

Subramani

Devarayasamudra, Hanumanahalli, Mulbagal, Kolar, Karnataka

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:05 minutes.

Guardians of Suusamyr: Balancing Nature, Tradition, and Community

The Suusamyr Valley in central Kyrgyzstan is a high-altitude landscape rich in biodiversity, traditional crafts, and pastoral livelihoods. Home to alpine meadows and rare wildlife, the valley depends on responsible land use to maintain its ecological balance. When overuse and declining biodiversity began to threaten its fragile ecosystem, the community of Suusamyr responded collectively.

Led by Ainagul Muratalieva, a local leader and conservation advocate, community members have combined traditional ecological knowledge with modern tools like GIS mapping and camera traps. Within a few years, these efforts have increased native plant diversity by 25% and improved the population of key species such as the Himalayan griffon vulture and marmots by 15%. Ainagul's projects have united the community around shared goals, emphasising the importance of cultural and ecological preservation. Women and youth play vital roles in Suusamyr's conservation initiatives. Women, who form nearly 70% of participants, lead replanting through community nurseries, manage small-scale processing units, and conduct environmental education in schools. This work has deepened their financial independence and strengthened collective stewardship. Youth under 35 assist in monitoring pasture health and developing rotational grazing plans to prevent overuse of highland pastures.

Beyond ecological restoration, Ainagul champions social initiatives that support women's empowerment and youth leadership. She has mobilised programmes addressing issues such as violence against women, health awareness, and nutrition. Participation in agricultural fairs has linked Suusamyr's traditionally crafted and organic products to broader markets, creating new livelihood opportunities.

The story of Suusamyr is a testament to how local action, guided by shared responsibility and rooted in cultural wisdom, can restore ecosystems while improving community well-being.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:18:01 minutes.



The life of communities in Suusamyr valley is deeply rooted in pastoralism, and traditional skills, traditional craft skills and traditional agriculture."

Ainagul Muratalieva
Suusamyr kl, Chui, Kyrgyzstan

5 Commons for Food Security, Subsistence and Well-being





Women of Singhpur: Nurturing change through Natural Farming

Singhpur is a small village in the Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh. Farming is the main source of livelihood here, and people grow paddy, wheat, pulses, maize, and oilseeds. Over the years, like many other villages, farmers in Singhpur began using chemical fertilisers and pesticides. This increased their expenses and slowly affected the soil and their health.

To change this, the Prakrutik Sansadhan Prabandhan Samiti was formed in 2008. The Samiti started working on jal, jungle, jameen (water, forest, and land) and encouraged villagers to return to natural farming. Through regular meetings and training, people began learning how to prepare organic fertilisers and pest control solutions using things available in the village itself.

Among the active members, Neelam Dhurve, a farmer from Singhpur, has been playing an important role. She organised Mahila Sabha meetings in different hamlets, where women farmers come together to share their experiences and learn new practices. They prepare *Dravajeevamrit, Ghanjeevamrit, Neemastra,* and *Agniastra* using cow dung, cow urine, jaggery, lime, and local leaves. These are used to keep the soil healthy and protect crops without using chemicals.

Women also do Pre-Monsoon Dry Sowing (PMDS) by making seed balls in May. This helps improve soil fertility and provides green fodder for animals before the rains. Every year in June and July, they organise a seed fair before the sowing season. Farmers bring different varieties of local seeds, display them, and exchange them with others. This helps conserve indigenous seeds and keeps traditional farming knowledge alive.

Today, about 350 farmers from Singhpur and nearby villages are part of this effort. Their work shows how collective action, led by women, can strengthen food security, reduce farming costs, and keep the soil and land healthy for future generations.



If the sowing is not done on time, hybrid seeds tend to fail—but our local seeds adapt to the moisture and still grow well."

Neelam Dhurve
Singpur, Niwas, Mandla, Madhya Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 50:45 minutes.

Baiga Community's Path to Self Reliance

The Baiga community belongs to the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). Earlier, they lived in Bodai Village, where they were traditionally connected to forests and nature. Due to mining activities and livelihood challenges, the community had to relocate to a new place, Indaripura. When they first arrived in Indaripura, the village lacked even basic facilities such as proper roads, electricity, and water. Life was difficult, and the community struggled to adjust to the new environment. Slowly, over time, development began to reach the village. The village was later included in the local Gram Panchayat, which brought more attention to the residents' needs.

Recognising the severe problem of water scarcity, the Panchayat supported the community by constructing a pond covering approx 3 acres. This helped to some extent. But with limited local opportunities, many villagers had to migrate to nearby cities in search of daily wage labour.

After seeing these challenges, the community decided to take matters into their own hands; they chose to practice Pisciculture in the pond using their traditional knowledge. This not only provided them with an income source but also ensured food security for their families to some extent. Under the leadership of Mohan ji, the community organised a meeting where everyone participated and took a common decision to start fish farming. The initiative was a success. To sustain and expand this effort, they formed a formal committee called *Baiga Yuwa Mistya Palan* (Baiga Youth Fish Farming Group). The committee leased the pond for 10 years, opened a bank account to manage funds, and also benefited from the government schemes. The community members received training from NABARD on pisciculture techniques, which helped improve their productivity and income.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at minutes.

Now the Baiga community of Indaripura has set an example of how traditional knowledge, community participation, and institutional support can transform challenges into opportunities. Through their collective effort, they have created sustainable livelihoods.



Our collective action led to words for our community's well-being."

Sundari Bai Baiga

Indraipura, Durjanpur, Borla, Kabirdham, Chhattisgarh

How a pipeline helped in ensuring food, water and livelihood security

Chandranna is the sarpanch of the Palledoddi village situated in the Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. Due to the region's drought-prone conditions, people have been facing resource scarcity and heat stress, with water scarcity a major problem, especially during the peak summer months. Water was previously sourced from Venkatapuram, 200 kilometres away, for drinking and domestic use.

To address the problem of resource scarcity, the village members formed a committee to protect and restore common land by entering it into the Prohibitory Order Book (POB), ensuring that it cannot be diverted or allocated for any other purpose. After this, the people under the leadership of Chandranna leveraged the government's MGNREGA scheme to restore their commons by planting native fruit trees (such as Custard Apple), which have economic and ecological value. Currently, single-woman-led households manage the sale and economics of these fruits in the market at 100-150 INR per fruit, based on the fruit's size.

With financial support from a CSR and technical support from an external organisation, they built a pipeline that brings water to their house, serving their drinking, domestic, and restoration needs. The committee has also established clear and strict rules and regulations for the management, protection, misuse, and damage of the commons. This committee formation is at the core of the village's success in becoming self-sufficient. Hence, the committee was able to adapt to the prevailing challenges by adopting various strategies, including legal (registering land in POB), technical (pipeline construction), and social (committee formation), which led them to success. Each strategy provided a specific protection/support mechanism, which ensured that the restoration work could be carried out successfully.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:22:07 minutes.



"In the past, we had to go more than 200 kilometres to get water for our use, but now, with the pipeline construction, we get water at our house, which has made our life very easy and also helped us restore our lands."

Chandranna
Palledoddi, Palledoddi, Devanakonda, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh

Shepherds Reviving Commons in Chakralla

In the semi-arid landscapes of Chakralla village, Kurnool district, Rangayya and his fellow shepherds rely on sheep and goats for their livelihood. Situated in the Pattikonda block, one of Andhra Pradesh's most drought-prone regions, they often faced severe fodder and water scarcity, compounded by heat stress during harsh summers. These challenges led to livestock losses and declining incomes, threatening their very way of life.

Determined to change this, Rangayya and a group of shepherds, with technical support from an external organisation, undertook the restoration of their village commons. They dug ponds in the nearby hills for their grazing livestock and built water retention and recharge structures to enhance water availability throughout the year.

To diversify income, they planted custard apple trees, a native, drought-tolerant species that requires minimal care and fetches good prices during festivals like Dussehra. A village committee was formed to manage the initiative, oversee restoration activities, and enforce rules on custard apple harvesting, ensuring benefits remained within the community.

Through soil conservation practices like mulching and trenching, they also encouraged the growth of native grasses and shrubs, improving fodder availability and soil fertility. Over time, biodiversity flourished—and the restored landscape began to sustain not just livestock but also honeybees, providing an additional source of seasonal income.

Today, the combination of livestock rearing, custard apple cultivation, and honey production forms a resilient livelihood system. It strengthens both the ecological balance and social fabric of the community. For Rangayya and his peers, this collective effort has not only revived the commons but also restored their confidence, dignity, and economic stability, proving that cooperation and ecological wisdom can thrive even in the driest lands.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:07:10 minutes.



We used to face acute fodder and water scarcity, which led to various kinds of stress, but after investing our time and energy in restoring and managing our commons, the produce and services from these commons have given us a lot of economic, ecological, and aesthetic benefits."

B. Rangayya
Chakralla, Pattikonda, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh

Bringing Pastures Back to Life: Drawing Inspiration from Pech ki Bavri

Pech ki Bavri Gram Panchayat in Bundi district, Rajasthan, consists of 12 villages. The panchayat has around 30.7 hectares of pastureland, which is a lifeline for the local community. Most villagers here depend on farming and cattle rearing, while many migrate to bigger cities for employment. However, the panchayat faced serious challenges, including encroachment on pastureland, scarcity of water due to water-intensive paddy cultivation, and lack of fodder for cattle.

To address these issues, the villagers formed a committee named *Charagah Vikas Samiti* (Pastureland Development Committee). Many villagers joined this committee to protect and revive their common land. With collective effort, they planted trees on half of the pastureland, over 15 hectares, and took strict measures to prevent further encroachment.

Within a few years, the community began to witness visible results. The groundwater level in wells began to rise, and the availability of grass for cattle improved significantly. These positive changes motivated the people of Pech ki Bavri to think beyond their own panchayat. Inspired by their success, they have now decided to spread awareness and work with neighbouring panchayats so that others can also protect and revive their pasturelands.

This story of Pech ki Bavri shows how collective action and community-led institutions like the Charagah Vikas Samiti can restore natural resources, strengthen livelihoods, and inspire change across villages.



We have protected our pastureland, and we can have others to protect their's too."

Seema Meena

Pech ki Bavri, Hindoli, Bundi, Rajasthan

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 30:01 minutes.

Forest Stewardship Transforms Kotnapani: A Gond Community's Prosperity Story

Kotnapani is a small Gond village perched on a mountain in the Pandaria block, Kabirdham district, in Chhattisgarh, where farming is difficult and yields are low. But instead of leaving their land, the 22 families of the village chose to depend on their forest. *"Three generations of my family have lived here. Farming was never enough, and when we tried to settle elsewhere, quarrels forced us back. That is when we decided to protect our forest and look after the trees,"* recalled Dharmu Singh.

For the past 23 years, the community has followed strict norms for harvesting non-timber forest produce (NTFPs). *Chironji*, their most valuable forest product, is harvested only after seeds mature. In 2001, a trader offered only ₹15 per kilo for immature seeds instead of ₹30. *"If we waited 15 days, we would get double the price. From that day, we all decided to harvest only after maturity,"* Dharmu ji shared. Today, each family sells 8–10 quintals of *chironji* annually, earning up to ₹2–3 lakh. Traders pay them ₹200 per kilo, far higher than neighbouring villages, for their sustainable practices.

The forest also provides *tendu, jamun, mahua, ber* and other fruits, ensuring food security. *"Even those who don't own trees get their share, because the forest belongs to all of us,"* villagers affirmed. Alongside income, they have invested in dignity. "Earlier, no one wanted to marry their daughters here. Today, good marriage proposals come. Every house has a motorbike, and some even bought tractors from *chironji* income," said Prem Singh with pride.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 36:08 minutes.

The community has also transformed socially by renouncing alcohol and meat. *"There are no quarrels, no police cases. We solve disputes among ourselves. Women and men together guard the forest; we don't need outsiders,"* Prem Singh explained. Kotnapani's story is one of ordinary families shaping extraordinary change. By protecting their commons, they secured food, income, peace, and respect.



With unity, we protected the forest. With the forest, we protected our future."

Dharmu Singh
Kotnapani, Amania, Pandaria, Kabirdham, Chhattisgarh

Development of Commons leads to the promotion of a sustainable village

Sukhadhare village, in Mandya District has around 180 households where livestock rearing is a major source of livelihood for the community. With almost 120 acres of common land and four tanks, livestock rearing is supported by the Commons.

The community has formed the Grama Parisara Abhivruddhi Mattu Nirvahana Samiti (Village Environment Development and Management Committee), which has been recognised as a sub-committee responsible for governing and managing the common resources in the village. It has also mapped the common land using the CLM application and entered the details in the Gram Panchayat Asset Register in the Gram Panchayat.

With the vision of transforming it into a sustainable village, elders, leaders, youth, and women came together to develop a five-year village development plan that includes interventions such as tank desiltation, afforestation, and common land development, which would support groundwater recharge, increased water availability, and better harvests. Encroachment on common lands was removed as well. The village has approximately 150 crossbred cows, 500 sheep, 300 goats, and 1,000 chickens. The dairy cooperative society produces around 800 litres of milk each day. To help the community improve their livelihoods and strengthen the local economy, the community plans to develop fodder crops, tree fodder, and even azolla cultivation to ensure sufficient feed for their livestock. The committee has also invested in setting up a biogas plant. They are also encouraging farmers to take up organic farming, and to support this, vermicompost, slurry from the biogas plant, and other inputs are used.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:25:17 minutes.

The resources for implementing this plan are being mobilised through the MGNREGA and other government schemes and programmes. The collective efforts have made Sukhadhare a model village, with other communities learning from their experiences.



Our vision is to make Sukhadhare a model village, and we are now heading in that direction through the collective actions of the community, which has been guided by the GPANS committee."

S. N. Lakshminarayana
Sukhadare, Bogadi, Nagamangala, Mandya, Karnataka

Dhobei's Journey: Empowering the Community through Fair Trade and Women's Leadership

Dhobei village, located in the forest region of Nuapada district in Odisha, is home to 86 Gond tribal families. The community's life is closely connected to the forests. Their primary livelihood comes from collecting Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) such as Mahua flowers, Amla, and Kendu leaves. These resources have supported their families for generations and have shaped their traditions, culture, and daily life for many years; the villagers faced severe challenges due to market exploitation. Middlemen controlled the prices and decided how much the community would receive for their hard work. Mahua flowers, which serve as one of their most important income sources, were bought at a very low rate of Rs. 20 per kilogram. Even though the villagers worked tirelessly, their income remained insufficient. This situation weakened their sense of ownership over the forests that they had protected and cared for over generations.

A major change came when the villagers united under the Forest Rights Committee (FRC) and the *Maa Bangibuten Farmer Producer Organisation* (FPO). This initiative was more than just forming groups; it was an effort to reclaim their rights and rebuild their dignity. Through collective action, they introduced a system of group-based collection and selling of forest produce. By doing this, they eliminated the middlemen and negotiated a fairer price of Rs. 30 per kilogram for Mahua flowers. This 50 per cent increase brought new hope and motivation to the community.

Women played a central role in this change. They took active responsibility in procurement, management, and decision-making. Their involvement strengthened community unity. Now, Dhobei village stands as an example of how collective effort, fair trade practices, and sustainable forest management can transform lives. The community now looks forward to expanding its produce collection, ensuring continued prosperity and a protected forest for future generations.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 53:35 minutes.



Earlier we got very low prices for Mahua. Now, after selling through the FPO, we are earning better. Our lives have started to improve."

Huleswar Majhi

Dhobei, Bhaisadani, Boden, Nuapada, Odisha

Kantakoli's Journey: Women-Led Action Secures Water Security

Kantakoli is a small hamlet in the hills of Odisha's Kendujhar district. It is home to 80 Juanga families, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). The people here live close to nature, growing crops, collecting forest produce, and depending on rain for their fields. Life here is simple and peaceful, but the villagers have also faced many challenges over the years, especially due to the drying of their groundwater caused by nearby mining activities. After that, every morning, the women walk long distances, carrying heavy pots from distant streams. Many times, they had to dig small pits, called *chuas*, to collect water. Children often fall sick with diarrhoea and typhoid. It wasn't just about water; it was about dignity, health, and survival.

Seeing the seriousness of the issue, Saraswati Naik, a panchayat resource person from an NGO, brought the women together. She encouraged them to speak up in the *Mahila Sabha* and share their pain. Together, they took the issue to the *Gram Sabha*, and when that didn't bring results, they went straight to the block office and even the district collector. Their courage and unity moved the officials into action. Soon, a new tube well was provided to them under the *Basudha Scheme*, and clean water flowed into every home.

Today, the women of Kantakoli no longer walk for water. Their children are healthier, their days more peaceful, and their confidence stronger than ever. They now take active roles in village decisions and inspire neighbouring communities to stand together for change. Their story reminds us that real change begins when ordinary people, especially women, decide to act not with power or wealth, but with unity and determination.



Before the new tube well came, we walked for hours to fetch water from faraway streams. Now, clean water is available in our village, and our children are healthier. We feel proud that our voices brought this change."

Saraswati Naik
Kantakoli, Tala Champei, Banspal, Kendujhar, Odisha

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 18:12 minutes.

From Chemicals to Sustainability: Murli Village's Organic Farming Revolution

Murli village in Ghatanji block has long depended on farming, but years of chemical-based agriculture had pushed the soil and water to their limits. Rising cultivation costs and declining returns made it clear to many farmers that the old methods were no longer working. During discussions in the village, farmers repeatedly pointed out how chemical inputs had increased their expenses without improving profits, and how the land had gradually lost its strength. This collective frustration became the starting point for exploring organic farming.

The shift began with a group of 20 farmers under the Jaivik Aghadi initiative. With support from FES, they were introduced to practical, low-cost techniques such as *Dashparni, Jivamrut,* and *Andark*. Demonstrations and field visits helped farmers understand how natural inputs could restore soil health and reduce dependency on external inputs. Some farmers explained how chemical cultivation of cotton was costing ₹30,000–35,000 per acre while profits remained low. This pushed them to try organic horticulture, leading to the plantation of 500 Kesar mango saplings on two acres. Others shared how using farmyard manure, cow dung, and vermicompost had brought visible improvements, better soil texture, the return of earthworms, and healthier fields.

Examples from the village showed that organic practices significantly reduced input costs. In cotton and soybeans, farmers reported lower expenditure and better-quality produce that received good rates in local markets. The reduced use of chemicals also improved water conditions and created safer farming environments. Although not all 20 farmers continued the journey, a committed group of five has remained active. They support each other by sharing materials, visiting each other's fields, and discussing challenges. Their consistent efforts have created interest among other villagers, and plans are underway to involve more farmers and strengthen training on organic methods. The message from Murli's farmers is that when soil health improves, farming becomes both viable and sustainable.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 29:28 minutes.



We realised that when we stop depending on chemicals, the land starts recovering. That has given us confidence to continue."

Santosh Ajabrao Gofane
Murli, Ghatanji, Yavatmal, Maharashtra

Empowering Communities through Traditional Farming: The Story of Chandravati Singh

In Medra village of Kusmi block, Sidhi district, Madhya Pradesh, a collective effort is underway to revive and protect indigenous seeds. Located in the buffer zone of the Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve, the area is home to a largely tribal farming community that depends on forests and local agriculture for sustenance. For more than two decades, villagers, especially women farmers, have been working with Gram Sudhar Samiti to strengthen local livelihoods and promote sustainable farming. Among them, Chandravati Singh, 48, has played a key role in bringing farmers together and leading discussions on the importance of traditional seeds.

By 2018, the group realised that indigenous varieties were fast disappearing as more people shifted to hybrid seeds. They began tracing local seed sources, exchanging knowledge among neighbouring panchayats, and collecting seeds that were once common in their fields. After several meetings and field visits, the farmers established a community seed bank, managed collectively with support from Chandravati and other local leaders.

The seed bank now conserves local varieties of kodo, kutki, sama, maize, sorghum, millets, paddy, wheat, mustard, sesame, and vegetables like bottle gourd, chilli, and brinjal. Seeds are stored in earthen pots and shared through a *"seed-for-seed"* system, where farmers borrow seeds for cultivation and return double after harvest. This cycle has helped expand the diversity of indigenous seeds in the area.

The community also practices natural farming, using local preparations like *Bijamrit, Dravajeevamrit,* and *Ghanjeevamrit* for soil and pest management. Today, around 350 farmers from Medra and nearby villages are part of this effort, linking traditional knowledge with ecological farming. Their collective action is an example of how local cooperation can sustain both people and the environment.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 04:34 minutes.



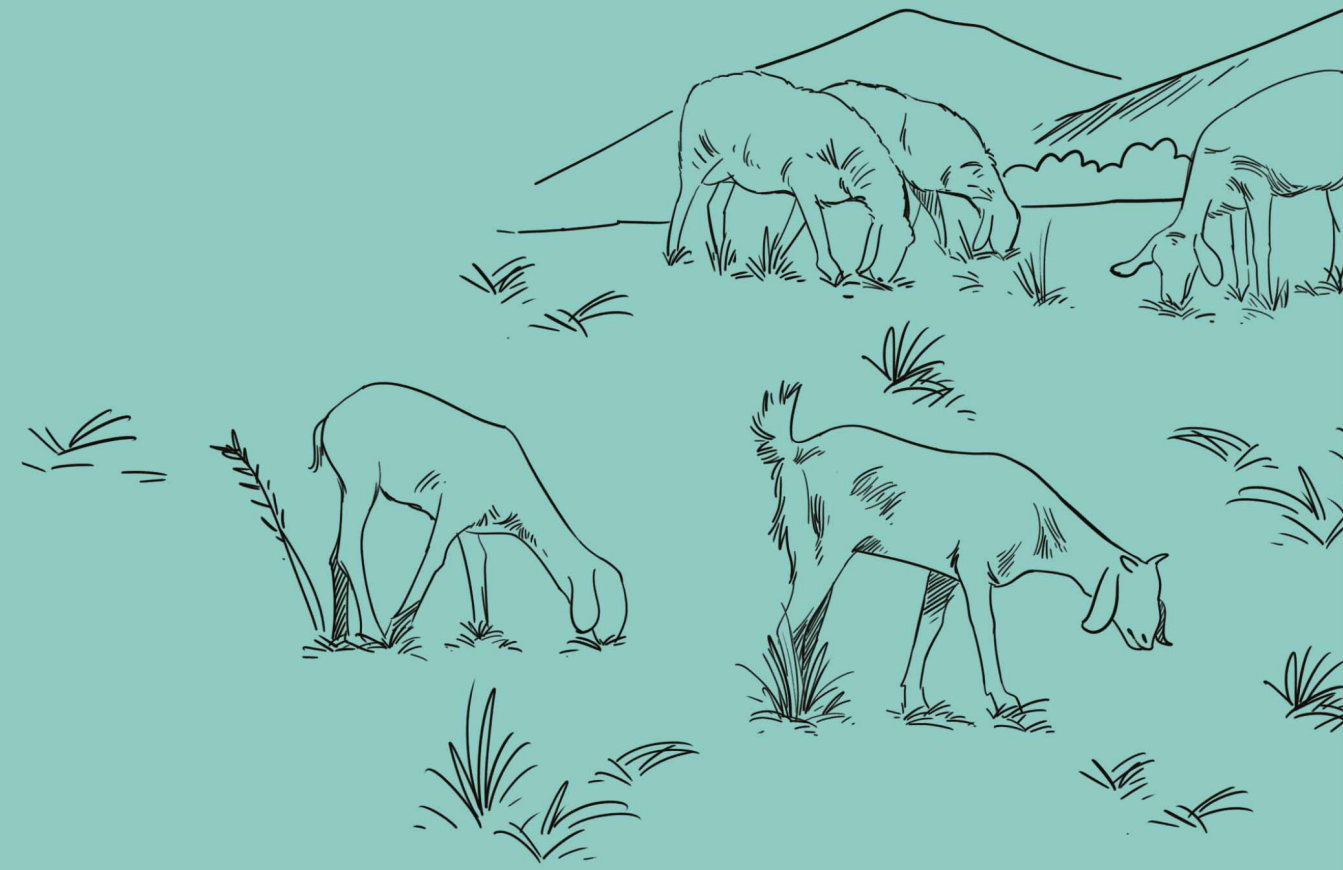
If there are no animals left, we will not be able to do organic farming. "

Chandravati Singh

Medra, Kushmi, Shidhi, Madhya Pradesh



6 Commons-Livestock-Agriculture connect





A Harmonious Connection: How Community, Forest, and Farming Thrive Together

In a quiet village surrounded by lush forests, Pinki Panariya has inspired her community to create a sustainable way of life where people, livestock, and farming all benefit from the health of their commons. The village recognises its forest as a lifeline—not merely a source of wood and fodder, but critical to daily needs.

Pinki mobilised the community through Gram Sabhas and women's meetings to protect the forest and use it responsibly. Villagers spread seed balls of local grasses to ensure ample fodder, supporting livestock health and producing organic manure. The forest also provides leaves for natural pesticides, water for crops, and biodiversity that supports the ecosystem. Maintaining lakes, rivers, and waterfalls and careful tree selection are now integral to village routines.

On her farm, Pinki uses only organic inputs. Vermicompost from livestock manure and natural pest control made from leaves such as karanji, akone, dhatura, and papaya rejuvenate the soil and nurture long-term fertility. Homemade solutions—like *Dashparni*, *Bijamrit*, *Drava-Jiv-Amrit*, and *Ghan-Jiv-Amrit*—lower costs while keeping crops healthy and productive.

This harmonious cycle means livestock graze on rich fodder, yielding high-quality milk and manure for both diets and farms. As environmental stewards, villagers take responsibility for the forest's future, ensuring it continues to thrive for generations.



The forest gives us everything we need—fodder, water, and the knowledge to farm sustainably. We owe it our care and respect."

Pinki Panariya
Khukasar, Rata, Bichhiya, Mandla, Madhya Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:01:30 minutes.

Pinki's approach challenges modern ideas about agriculture and food. *"Real, natural fruits show signs of the forest—sometimes imperfect, but always grown with care,"* she says. The community aims to expand tree planting, refine organic methods, and involve more people, proving that when nature is cared for, it returns the favour.

An Adivasi Family's Journey towards Sustainable Agriculture

Before adopting integrated organic farming, Laxman and Jamnabai owned very little land and relied mainly on daily wage labour. Following the land reforms of the late 1980s, they received land from the government, which enabled them to begin farming as a livelihood. Initially, they practised chemical-based agriculture but over time realised that despite higher yields, it caused long-term harm to the soil, environment, and their own well-being.

Gradually, they shifted to organic intercropping, cultivating mango, paddy, red gram, pulses, and vegetables such as chilli, brinjal, and tomato. They built stone bunds to control soil erosion and integrated livestock into their system. Chemical fertilisers were replaced with *Jeevamrutham*, a nutrient-rich bio-fertiliser made from fermented livestock dung and natural ingredients. For pest control, they used bio-pesticides prepared from fermented neem and other local plants, achieving similar results without chemical inputs.

Dung from their ten cattle supports both farming and a biogas plant, which provides clean cooking fuel. The animals are fed crop residues and graze on nearby commons, completing a circular system that minimises costs and maximises returns.

Today, Laxman and Jamnabai earn ₹1–1.2 lakh from mangoes and additional income from other crops, demonstrating how diversification and organic integration can create sustainable rural livelihoods.



We used to struggle with low income and couldn't afford to provide proper education for our children, but with adopting this integrated approach, we are able to get a good profit and save money every year."

Tekam Laxmana d Jamnabai
Kolamguda/GR-nagar, Danthapalli, Utnoor, Adilabad, Telangana

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:26: 50 minutes.

Community-based Grazing and Land Restoration – Story of Pipliya Village

The transformation of Pipliya village in Rajasthan's Jhalawar district stands as a powerful example of community-led ecological restoration. Initiated in 2019 under the leadership of Sarpanch and community leader Raghuveer Singh, the movement united villagers to restore degraded pastures and strengthen social cohesion.

Supported by MGNREGA and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, the restoration involved fencing, land levelling, trenching, and the planting of over 1,200 native saplings. Species such as Tamarind, Peepal, Jamun, Mahua, Amla, and various grasses transformed a barren pasture into a thriving grazing land. This revival enhanced soil fertility, water retention, biodiversity, and provided fodder, fruits, and medicinal plants, addressing both ecological and livelihood needs. To nurture social connection, community-driven practices were introduced. Villagers marked the birth of a girl child, birthdays, and festivals such as Raksha Bandhan by planting trees and caring for them. The annual Vanmohatsav (tree planting festival) became a focal point of participation and ownership. These symbolic and inclusive acts strengthened the community's bond with its grazing lands.

Inspired by his visit to Piplantri village, a well-known model for community-based restoration in Rajasthan, Raghuveer Singh applied similar learnings in Pipliya. The outcomes were transformative—fodder availability increased, livestock depredation on crops reduced, and livestock-based livelihoods stabilised. A community *Goshala* (cow shed) was established to shelter abandoned cattle and prevent crop damage. Beyond ecological and economic gains, the initiative elevated the status of the girl child, promoted gender inclusion, and contributed to climate resilience through carbon sequestration. Pipliya's success now attracts sarpanches from neighbouring villages keen to replicate its approach. The initiative directly advances Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Health and Well-being), 5 (Gender Equality), 13 (Climate Action), and 15 (Life on Land).



We are not just restoring the grazing lands for fodder species but also enriching them with local medicinal plants for human and livestock, which is benefiting the village community."

Raghuveer Singh
Pipliya, Dabla Bhoj, Jhalawar, Rajasthan

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 10:11 minutes.

Commons and Livestock Health: The importance of local ethno-veterinary practices for livestock healthcare

In Rekkalakondapalli village of Andhra Pradesh's Annamaya district, Gangadhara, a livestock keeper, tends to his 60 Nellore sheep and 15 indigenous goats. Like nearly 40 families in his village, his livelihood depends largely on livestock, with a small share of agriculture. Their herds graze freely on the village commons, which are the lifeline for fodder and pasture.

For Gangadhara, livestock are more than an income source—they are a form of security and resilience. Sheep and goats provide dung for fields, meat for markets, and a safety net in tough times. In 2023, one shepherd in the village sold 35 sheep, earning ₹1.5 lakh, demonstrating the economic value of this traditional system. Earlier, livestock pens were built with wooden poles sourced by cutting trees from the commons. Today, with panchayat support and external assistance, these have been replaced by chain-link enclosures, which offer safety from predators such as dogs and snakes while also preventing tree felling.

Health care once posed another challenge. During the monsoon months, when diseases like fever, cough, Foot and Mouth Disease, and lumpy skin infections were common, access to veterinary medicines was limited and expensive. Drawing from traditional knowledge, Gangadhara relies on ethno-veterinary remedies made from locally available ingredients—turmeric, ginger, jaggery, pepper, neem, and custard apple leaves. These natural treatments, including preventive healthcare and disease or health issue-specific remedies, have reduced costs and improved livestock health.



We do not always need costly medicines from the market for our livestock. We can manage the common ailments and manage the overall health of our livestock by adopting these simple practices."

Gangadhara
Rekkalakondapalli, C Gollapalli, Thambalapalle, Annamaya, Andhra Pradesh

To secure water for their animals, the community also constructed ponds, ensuring sustenance in their dry landscape. Through a thoughtful blend of mobile grazing, water conservation, and traditional healing, Gangadhara and his community have built a resilient, self-reliant system—rooted in nature, culture, and collective wisdom.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:58:01 minutes.

Sustainable forest commons and rural livelihoods in Devarapalli, Andhra Pradesh

Over 25 years, Laxmi Narayana and Masthanamma have transformed a single cow-marriage gift into a thriving livestock-rearing community with more than 100 cattle and goats. Ethical and natural rearing was followed, where free grazing helped the livestock to increase their health and also enriched the Commons. Animals basked in the sun and nourished themselves on the abundant forest grass. Water for the livestock was sourced from forest ponds, ensuring minimal human interference while maintaining their well-being. This method not only kept the animals healthy but also contributed significantly to the environment. They also ensured that most of the milk produced was given to the calves and only the surplus was taken for consumption. This ensured the robust development of calves while maintaining the overall health of the herd.

The economic model followed reflects sustainability. Organic manure harvested bi-annually serves as the primary income source and also promotes organic farming practices in the community. Supplementary income is occasionally earned through the sale of surplus cattle, primarily bulls, ensuring the herd remains healthy and well-managed.

Collectively, community members undertake conservation efforts like preventing forest fires, reviving forest ponds, and stopping unmonitored tree felling.

Laxmi Narayana and Masthanamma's journey exemplifies how sustainable animal husbandry can balance economic prosperity, ecological health, and animal welfare. By integrating traditional knowledge with ethical and sustainable practices, they have demonstrated that it is possible to create systems where human needs and natural processes complement one another.



If we look after and respect our animals, they will also respect and care for us."

Laxmi Narayana
Devarapalli, Polathalavandlapalli, Talapula, Sri Satya Sai, Andhra Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 10:25 minutes.

Livestock in Agriculture: A farmer's perspective on Organic Farming

In the heart of Panna, Madhya Pradesh, lives Niranjan, a farmer who transformed his family's fortunes through dedication and ecological wisdom. Nine years ago, Niranjan and his father survived on daily wage labour and rickshaw pulling, even though they owned five acres of land. The land lay barren, simply because they didn't know how to farm.

Everything changed when Niranjan began learning about government agriculture schemes and decided to cultivate his land. Guided by the gram panchayat and local social workers, he started practising organic, multi-cropping agriculture—a method that demanded more labour but promised healthier soil and safer food. Through MGNREGA, he built ponds and wells, ensuring reliable water for his fields.

Over time, Niranjan designed a circular farming system that integrated livestock and agriculture. His farm now includes poultry, cattle, and inland fisheries, creating a network of interdependent cycles. Crop residues feed the animals and fish, while their dung and urine are converted into *jeevamrutham*, a potent organic fertiliser that nourishes the soil. The poultry, besides providing eggs and meat, also control pests naturally.

This integrated approach reduced Niranjan's dependence on chemical fertilisers and markets, cutting costs and increasing resilience. He now earns ₹400–₹500 daily from eggs and additional income from poultry sales. 20 litres of milk per day from cattle brings steady returns, ensuring economic stability even in times of crop loss.

For Niranjan, organic farming is not just a practice—it is empowerment. By relying on his own resources rather than external markets, he has achieved financial security, ecological balance, and better health. Today, he shares his knowledge with other farmers through trainings and exposure visits, and his model is celebrated locally as the "ATM—Any Time Money" model for its consistent cash flow and sustainability.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 57:02 minutes.



Without livestock, organic farming is not possible. I practice organic farming by integrating duck and fowl rearing, inland fisheries and cattle in agriculture and have multiple sources of income that make it profitable. It is a natural process, and if we understand it and get it into our practices, we will benefit immensely."

Niranjan Mandal

Udki village, Ahirgwan, Panna, Madhya Pradesh

Farming with the Herd: Barha's Journey to Debt-Free Agriculture

On the Vindhya plateau of Madhya Pradesh's Satna district, the Barha village has long depended on farming and forest produce. In recent years, the spread of chemical agriculture has caught farmers in a vicious cycle of buying urea, DAP, and pesticides on credit, then repaying debts even in bad harvest years.

Shobhnath Ji, a community leader influenced by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's ideas, began working with the *Gram Sudhar Samiti* to find a way out of this debt trap. In 2021–22, he mobilised community members to integrate animal husbandry with natural farming, cutting costs and restoring soil health.

A key step in this was the creation of a community gaushala for stray cattle. Instead of roaming the roads or dying in forests, these animals can now provide dung and urine for *Jeevamrit*, *Ghan Jeevamrit*, *Bakramrit*, and natural pesticides like *Neemastra* and *Brahmastra* whilst being fed and taken care of. Farmers prepare these at near-zero cost, replacing expensive and non-sustainable chemicals. ***"When we farm with our animals,"*** Shobhnath ji says***, "we grow more than crops; it's like growing freedom from debt and dependence."***

Shobhnath ji also highlighted the importance of forests that sustain many local families. Species like *harra, bahera, amla, mahua,* and *char* were disappearing in these forests, leading to a loss of indigenous vegetation. Without waiting for government help, the community came together, collected seeds, raised saplings, and planted them on common and fallow lands, thus securing both ecology and livelihood for the future.



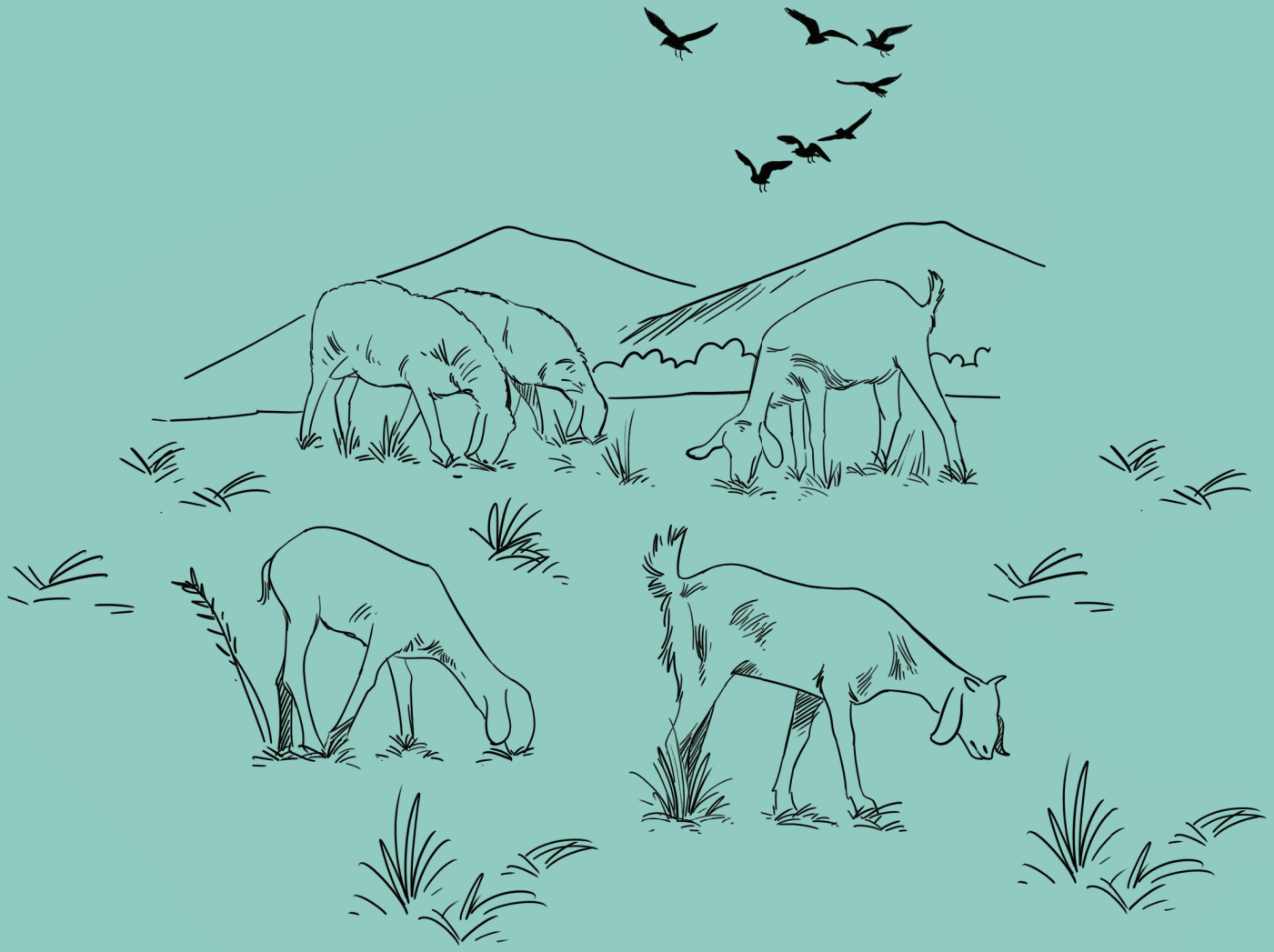
Farming without livestock is farming without life."

Shobhnath Satnami
Baraha, Majhgawan, Satna, Madhya Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

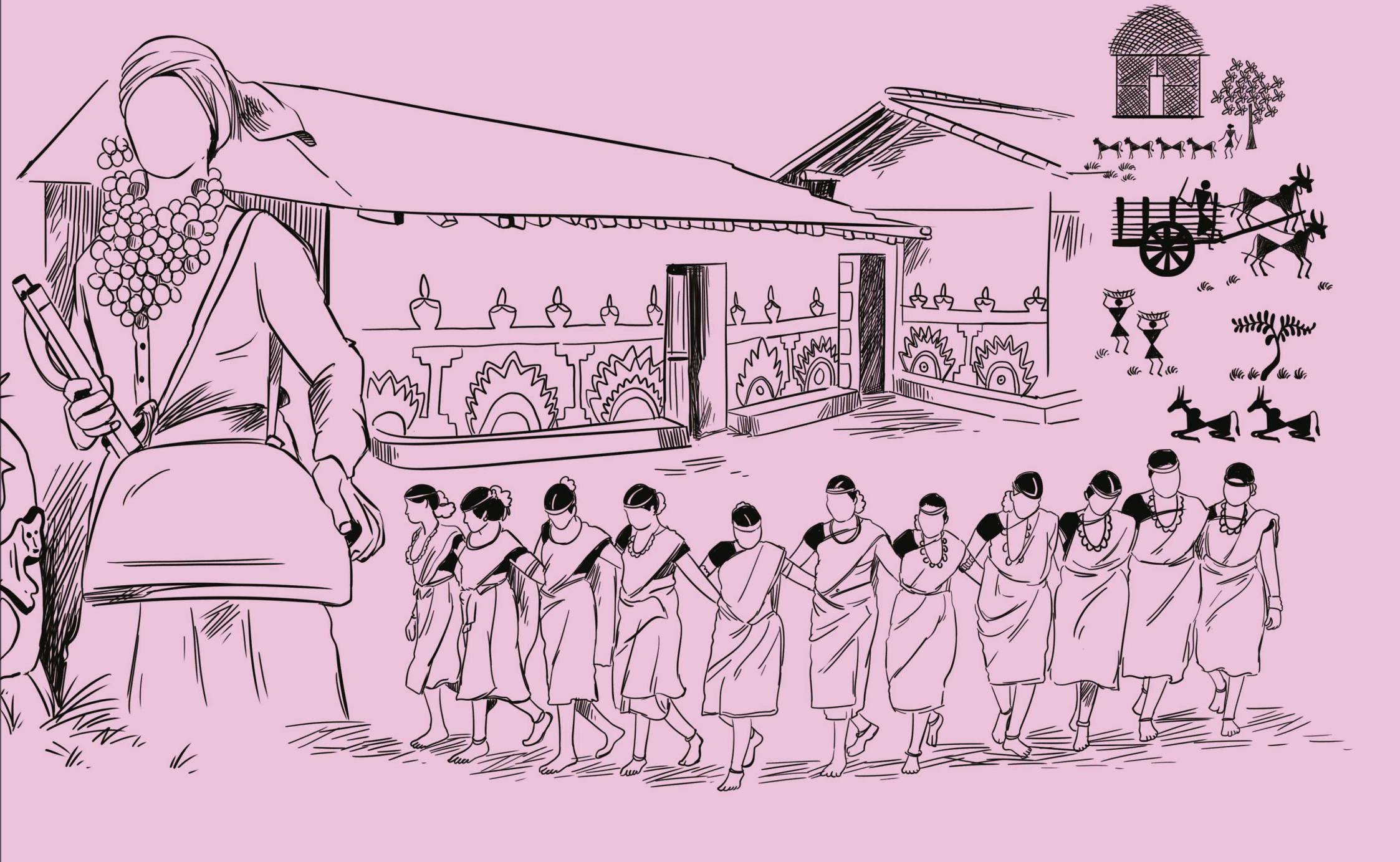
The community speaker's segment begins at 10:25 minutes.

Through Bio-Resource Centres and seed banks, farmers are now learning to make their own farm inputs and even store native seeds of millets, pulses, and vegetables. This preserves climate-resilient crops like kodo and kutki, while reducing dependence on hybrids, and strengthens food sovereignty for the people. Thus, each cow, seed, and sapling becomes a part of a larger promise. A promise that when resources are raised and cared for by its people, they will continue to feed and nourish them.



7 Commons and Culture





Grazing Culture of the Nand Gavali Pastoral Community

The Nand Gavali community is a pastoral group known for its deep connection with grazing lands and the surrounding environment. Their culture of grazing is closely tied to their way of life and the health of their landscape. At the heart of this tradition is the *Bhaldev* festival, observed in the month of Bhadrapada (August), which marks the start of the grazing season. It coincides with the time when pastures and forests are at their greenest, and grasses have the highest nutritional value for livestock.

But the Nand Gavali Community in villages like Chandani, Danapur, and Malegaon in Maharashtra are now facing growing challenges due to the depletion of commons like grazing lands, water sources, and forest cover. Overuse, changing weather, and land degradation have made it harder for them to maintain their herds and their traditional way of life. To cope with this, the Nand Gavalis have relied on their traditional knowledge to bring more systematic grazing and storage practices into place.

A key part of their system is compartment-based grazing, where land is divided into smaller parts for rotational use. This prevents overgrazing and allows grasses to regenerate. The *Bhaldev* festival marks when the grazing begins, after the grasses have matured and set seeds. Some parts are left untouched to store fodder for the dry season. During the summer, the community migrates to the Wardha River area, where they exchange cattle dung for crop residues with local farmers, a relationship that benefits both sides.

This approach has helped prevent land degradation, sustain grass species, and strengthen ties with nearby farmers. The Nand Gavali way of managing grazing shows how traditional practices can support both livelihoods and the environment in changing times.



The community follows the compartment system which allows every pasture land to rejuvenate. A symbiotic relationship is maintained between the livestock and communities."

Rushikesh Kalokar
Talegaon, Arvi, Wardha, Maharashtra

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 46:39 minutes.

Jadesil: A Story of Tradition and Conservation

In the villages of Tolegre and Nokatgre, South Garo Hills, Meghalaya, the Chibe River has always been central to community life—providing water, food, and deep cultural meaning. Over time, unsustainable practices such as overfishing and attractant oils threatened the river's biodiversity and the well-being of those dependent on it.

A legend from 1825 anchors local culture: Jade, a woman deeply bound to the river, chose not to leave her home despite the dangers. Her sacrifice in its waters inspired villagers to name the river Jadesil—a memorial of devotion and enduring stewardship.

For many years, the lack of clear governance allowed the river's health to decline. Recognising the urgency, in 2015 the Tolegre Aking Nokma and Nokatgre Aking Nokma communities designated the Jadesil Fish Sanctuary as a community-conserved area. Strict rules were set: fishing was totally banned within the sanctuary, harmful oils were prohibited, and fines of ₹10,000 were introduced for violations. Supported by traditional governance, compliance was achieved, and additional rituals—sacrifices to Jadesil and the river deity—further reinforced respect for the sanctuary.

By 2018, the sanctuary was officially named Jadesil Fish Sanctuary and registered with the Toligre Rural Tourism Cooperative in 2022, paving the way for responsible eco-tourism. Visitors now pay entry fees that are reinvested for site upkeep and local facilities. Reduced fishing and alternative livelihoods have helped secure both biodiversity and family incomes.

The Jadesil model highlights how old wisdom and new approaches strengthen sustainable development. Community unity, pride and restored governance have made the sanctuary a symbol of resilience. Local rituals and the story of Jade now inspire both residents and visitors to protect natural resources as living heritage.

The villagers plan to expand eco-tourism and find new sustainable uses of resources, ensuring Jadesil continues to unite tradition, conservation, and community aspirations.



Jadesil is not just a sanctuary—it is a legacy that connects the past, present, and future in a bond of tradition and sustainability."

Alter R Marak
Tolegre and Nokatgre, Siju, South Garo Hills, Meghalaya

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 23:34 minutes.

Jhurimal: A Story of Unity and Tradition

Jhurimal is a village in Lephripara Block of Sundargarh district, Odisha. It has 160 families and a total population is approx 700, where about 50% are tribal families. People of different caste societies live together peacefully, showing unity in diversity.

The village is blessed with rich natural resources. Around 55 hectare forest supports the community throughout the year. Jhurimal also has four community ponds that help in daily use and farming. Through *Shramadan* and with the support of the NGOs, the villagers developed a medicinal garden, a fruit orchard, and a memory garden. These spaces reflect their affection towords nature and collective effort. The challenges came when mining activities increased around the village. Youth started getting influenced by outside habits, especially alcohol, which created misunderstandings and weakened unity in community.

To rebuild harmony, the villagers revived the tradition of Collective *Nuakhai*. For the last 12 years, this festival has helped them come together, strengthen relationships, and celebrate their shared identity. *Nuakhai* is the famous harvest festival of Western Odisha. The new rice is first offered to the village deity and ancestors before eating. In Jhurimal, this festival is celebrated together by all families and even neighbouring villagers. Everyone sits together, eats together, and enjoys cultural programs like Sankirtan, folk songs, and traditional games.

A special part of the celebration is honoring women. On this day, men serve food to women first, showing respect and gratitude. This unique collective celebration has gained recognition even abroad, with a documentary on *Jhurimal's Nuakhai* screened in Houston, USA. Jhurimal's story shows that when a community stands together, tradition becomes a powerful source of unity, pride, and hope.



Nuakhai has given us a reason to come together. No matter what problems we face, on this day we forget everything and celebrate as one."

Ghateshwar Chhura
Jhurimal, Lephripara, Sundargarh, Odisha

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 7:38 minutes.

Guardians of the Sacred Forest - Juanga Tribe

The Juanga community, who have safeguarded their forests for generations like its home. Pidho Sardar Laxmidhar Juanga, a revered elder whose knowledge is as deep as the sal tree roots, is standing among them. Forest has always served her as a child and teacher. His eyes gleam with pride, the pride of a man whose people have preserved their forests while the rest of the world has forgotten how to pay attention to nature. To the Juangas, the forest is not just a resource but *"duma"* a living ancestor. It gives them food, medicine, and shelter, but also stories and spirit. As Laxmidhar often says, *"We don't protect the forest. The forest protects us."*

This bond was once in danger. Mining and timber traders began in their green hills. Streams dried up, and wildlife disappeared. One day, when outsiders tried to cut trees near the village, Laxmidhar and the elders stood firm. "If the forest falls, we fall with it," he declared. That day, the village decided to protect their forest by rule and by heart.

Under his leadership, the community revived traditional forest rules like no tree could be cut without permission, and every family took turns patrolling. With support from the NGOs and the Forest Rights Act, the Juangas documented their forest boundaries and promoted sustainable harvesting of sal leaves, honey, and *siali* fiber. Today, their forest stands dense and green once again. Streams flow, wildlife returns, and the young learn to map and monitor their forest.



We don't own the forest, we borrow it from our children."

Laxmidhar Juanga
Gonasika, Banspal, Keonjhar, Odisha

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:34:18 minutes.

Bandrevu Gangamma Jathra : Provider and Protector of the Land

The Bandrevu Gangamma Devatha Devasthanam stands as a sacred symbol of faith and resilience, with a history that stretches back several centuries. According to village lore, Gangamma was once a woman from a nearby settlement who, after her marriage, came to live in Bandrevu. She passed away young, leaving no family to perform rituals in her memory. Later, her spirit is believed to have appeared before the villagers, blessing them and guiding them to build a temple in her honour. The shrine is said to have been constructed during the Chola dynasty, and since then, Gangamma has been revered as the protector and guardian of the land and its people.

Every year, before the harvest season, the people of Kothapalli village gather to celebrate the Gangamma Jathara — a festival of gratitude and renewal. Offerings of jaggery rice, 10–15 kilograms of Deelu, and the sacrifice of a sheep or goat are made to the goddess. Neem leaves dipped in the sacrificial blood are spread over fields, animal sheds, and water bodies, symbolising protection, fertility, and abundance.

During the British colonial period, villagers were fined for performing such rituals, yet they continued to celebrate Gangamma Jathara in defiance, turning their devotion into an act of cultural resistance. Over generations, villagers have believed that Gangamma's blessings bring good rains, healthy crops, strong livestock, and community well-being.

Beyond being a ritual, the festival unites the community — reaffirming their bond with the land and their shared identity. To this day, the Gangamma temple remains the spiritual heart of Bandrevu, where faith and folklore intertwine. Her presence continues to embody hope, protection, and prosperity, anchoring the cultural and ecological spirit of the village.



Gangamma takes care of us, our lands and our animals. She brings prosperity and provides for us during our times of need."

Naveen Kumar
Kothapalli village, Bandrevu Panchayat, Thambalapalle District, Andhra Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 57:40 minutes.

Reviving the Forest, Reviving the Future: Moti Singh's Commons Conservation Model in Madhya Pradesh

In the dry plateaus of Parsamania in the Satna district, Madhya Pradesh, Moti Singh has led a transformative community-led model that blends environmental restoration, indigenous knowledge, and the revival of rural livelihoods. His journey had humble beginnings as a volunteer with Gram Sudhar Samiti, a grassroots organisation working across Bundelkhand and other parts of Madhya Pradesh.

Moti Singh witnessed a decline in traditional agricultural practices and the use of medicinal plants. In response, he started a local seed bank to conserve over 75 indigenous crop varieties, such as millets like kodo, kutki, and sama, as well as desi paddy seeds. As farmers shifted to high yielding varieties, the traditional seeds were disappearing. The community took efforts to collect and store them in seed banks across villages with support from the elders in our community. This initiative not only reduced dependency on hybrid, chemical-intensive crops but also increased resilience to drought and helped more farmers to remain in the village year-round, reducing costs.

He further diverged to medicinal plants and forest-based livelihoods. With local elders' knowledge, he created a catalogue to conserve over 500 wild medicinal plants, including pachuriya for fever and kasur for bone injuries. He also revived handicrafts that require natural materials and reforested barren lands. Over 1,000 fruit and native trees like amla and guava were planted, generating almost ₹5,000–₹6,000 annual additional income per farmer. Later, with support from the Forest Department under the Green India Mission, Moti Singh's initiative focused on community-led efforts such as building water structures and reviving traditional pasture systems to improve soil and promote organic farming.

To strengthen local identity, he also encourages cultural gatherings and has led efforts toward eco- and tribal tourism. Through his efforts, Moti Singh has been able to create replicable models rooted in community knowledge and dignity which are inspiring many communities in and around the region.



Conservation of the environment and promotion of organic farming are absolutely essential."

Moti Singh
Amdari,Gadhaut, Uchehra, Satna, Madhya Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:47:36 minutes.

Healing herds with natural cures

Mital Lagdhirbhai Tramta, an 18-year-old girl belonging to the Rabari community, stands as a shining example of someone reviving the use of indigenous plants for livestock care. Engaged in rearing Gir cows, Jafrabadi buffaloes, and Zalawadi goats, she uses locally available plants as medicinal remedies for livestock ailments, a knowledge inherited from her family.

According to Mital Lagdhirbhai Tramta, traditional remedies are time-tested as well as effective, but face declining use due to diminishing availability of medicinal plants, lack of awareness, time-intensive nature of preparation and application, and modern preference for quick fixes. She adds that the grazing lands and forests around her village harbour numerous plants, vines, and shrubs that can be used as remedies for livestock.

Among the remedies used by Mital Lagdhirbhai Tramta are applying leaves of *vel* (a local vine) wrapped in cloth to stop bleeding from wounds, using juice from the fruit of *thor* (*Euphorbia genus*) to enhance the consistency of milk, feeding livestock powdered seeds of *kalathi* (a local legume) to restore health in cases of diarrhea and reduced appetite, and using *sarothi* (*Abrus precatorius*) to aid in calf-birth. She also advocates application of sap from *akado* (*Calotropis procera*) on the affected area to help dislodge thorns naturally, and administering the juice from *hingoriyo* (*Balanites roxburghii*) to goats to relieve fever and weakness in them. The dried fruit can also be used as soap.

However, these plants are becoming rare due to neglect, competition from invasive species like *kuwadiya* (*Senna uniflora*), and lack of replanting efforts. *Kuwadiya* spreads rapidly in grazing lands, replacing native grasses. Its pods can also injure animals, particularly their eyes. Mital Lagdhirbhai Tramta also works with local women to eradicate *kuwadiya* and create space for beneficial native species.

These challenges can be addressed by conducting awareness programmes and practical demonstrations for villagers, especially youth, she says. Also, collecting seeds of beneficial plants and undertaking replanting initiatives will have widespread impact.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 2:17:41 minutes.



If we don't preserve our medicinal plants today, we risk losing both our heritage and natural solutions for the future."

Mital Lagdhirbhai Tramta
Reshamiya, Chotila, Surendranagar, Gujarat

Engaging Children through Citizen Science and Connecting with Local Knowledge Systems and Culture

Venkateshwara has conducted wisdom walks for youth in the Ramanaik village using citizen science platforms such as Season Watch and the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). The goal was not only to have the children appreciate biodiversity but also to connect them with their elders, who possess immense knowledge of this biodiversity and its importance, such as its use in the healthcare of livestock and humans, or its cultural significance. To foster youth interest in their heritage and knowledge systems, these activities were held in the village.

Season Watch is a citizen science platform that aims to engage people with plants and appreciate the seasonal changes and their significance. GBBC seeks to engage people with birds and enjoy the immense diversity we have in our backyard. Given that the areas where the children live have rich biodiversity, the aim is to engage them with biodiversity in various ways, such as drawing, documenting, observing, and mutual sharing. There is a sense of wonder, education, and interest among the children, making the learning process more fun than a conventional approach. There is also a focus on ensuring that they learn the local names of their biodiversity, as that keeps them connected to their landscape. Season Watch has awarded this initiative in Thambalapalle the prestigious “Ficus Frenzy Challenge of the Year 2024” award.



The children learn a lot by experiencing biodiversity first-hand, documenting it through their sketches and observations. It is a wholesome experience to see this.”

B. Venkateshwara Nayak
Ramanaik Tanda, Thambalapalle, Annamayya, Andhra Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker’s segment begins at 1:08:02 minutes.

Chorus, Commons, and Coexistence

Songs, stories, and traditions sustain the relationship between Adivasi communities and their Commons in the village of Batwar in Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh, Anita Maravi, a member of the Paryavaran Samiti, has given also voice to the knowledge and values embedded in the everyday life of her community through folk songs.

Anita adds that the community depends on forest resources for their daily sustenance. From collecting *tendu* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) and *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) leaves to gathering local herbs for various uses, they depend on the forest for many things. Forest is thus an integral part of their life. The Paryavaran Samiti has helped women come together and protect these Commons. It has also encouraged them to grow local crops like *kodo* and *kutki millet* and lentils like *urad* to practise climate-resilient agriculture.

What amalgamates these practices are the songs passed down through generations, sung on every occasion, be it sowing, harvesting, weddings, or even funerals. These story-songs are part of the oral traditions that showcase compassion and strong ties with nature. One such song tells the story of a peahen that is caught by a farmer after his crop is damaged by birds. As the farmer walks to sell the bird, a passerby hears the peahen's plea and offers sweets to the farmer in exchange for its release. This act of compassion moves the farmer who then sets it free.

Such songs of empathy, harmony, and coexistence with all living beings abound in this community. The frequent community gatherings have only strengthened this tradition, says Anita Maravi. Commons thus go beyond geographical features like forests and rivers. They also contain songs and community traditions tied to the land, reinforcing the theme of Commons and culture.



Our forest is our money, it is our bank, and our life."

Anita Maravi
Batwar, Bichhiya, Mandla, Madhya Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:23:45 minutes.

Stewarding the Sacred: How Banjara Women Sustain the Commons Through Ritual and Care

In the forest-adjacent village of Shivani, the Banjara community sustains a deep relationship with the Commons. Their annual Teej festival, held in the monsoon month of Shravan, is a celebration of fertility and gratitude and a living tradition of ecological stewardship.

On the centre stage of this festival is a ritual led by young girls. They collect fertile soil from forest burrows and sow wheat seeds in it. Over eight days, they nurture the seedlings with care, song, and shared responsibility. On the ninth day, the sprouted grains are immersed in the river. The sprouts serve as nourishment for fish during the breeding season. The spirit of togetherness reflects the underlying collectivism that the Commons bring about. It's a shared sense of care, accountability, and interdependence.

Committees from five neighbouring villages come together to organise this event. Rupali, sharing her village experiences, talks about how coming together shows the strength of the community. What makes this practice more impactful is this very ethic that stems from the emotional connection we thrive on. Each girl does not merely tend to her own pot; they nurture all the seedlings together. Through this, they form an intimate bond not just with the plants but with each other, the forest, and the river.

In a world where natural resources are increasingly commodified, Shivani's Teej ritual is a testament to how cultural practices can sustain the Commons.



"Whatever the occasion, we come together." Our unity is our strength."

Rupali Ramesh Rathod
Shivani, Ghatanji, Yavatmal, Maharashtra

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:13:41 minutes.

Preserving cultural legacy through Suwa dance

In the tribal heartlands of Chhattisgarh, culture and commons intertwine in the form of the *Suwa* dance. Performed mainly by women and girls of the Gond, Baiga, and Halba communities, this community dance performance commences around Diwali and continues for several days after the festival. The word *'suwa'* means parrot, and it denotes the clay model of a parrot around which women gather in circles to dance.

Suwa nritya is a community affair, with the women gathering in groups and going from one household to the other. Children join in the traditional practice too with excitement and joy. The villagers offer them grain or small tokens as appreciation. The clay parrot, around which the dancers revolve, holds symbolic significance. It acts as a totem of a messenger, carrying the prayers and hopes of the women for loved ones living far away.

The dance performance is accompanied by various songs sung to please the deities, including Shiva and Parvati, and Ram, Sita and Lakshman. The women begin the recital after conducting prayer rituals at the site. They sing in unison, clap in beat, and wear traditional ornaments, including *ghungroo* (metal bells). Traditional musical instruments such as the *dhol* drum and hand-held wooden blocks and cymbals are also played, adding to the rhythmic ambience and fervour.

Beyond celebration, *Suwa nritya* sustains the cultural Commons of the community. It is through this dance that oral histories, values of compassion, and lessons in coexistence are passed from one generation to the next. The community's women are preserving and sharing their heritage not only through words, but through rhythm and rituals as well.



These songs tell stories of love, struggle, coexistence, and reverence for nature."

Fagni Bai & Team
Kaudiya, Piluapalli, Pithora, Mahasamund, Chhattisgarh

In times when traditional knowledge systems are fading, *Suwa nritya* is keeping them alive, through rhymes and rhythm. It is a song, dance, and story for the commons kept alive by women, season after season.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 20:26 minutes.

Traditional Knowledge and Environmental Conservation through the Cultural Practices of the Baiga Tribe

Nestled in the Maikal mountain ranges of Kabirdham District, Chhattisgarh, the Baiga community is recognised as one of India's Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Spread across the districts of Rajnandgaon, Kawardha, Mungeli, Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi, and Bilaspur, the Baigas exemplify how cultural values and traditional knowledge sustain conservation practices. Dasmi Bai Baiga and her team from Sarhapathra village embody this commitment.

The Baigas depend on forests for sustenance, collecting Non-Timber Forest Products such as honey, fruits, and medicinal herbs. Their interaction with the forest is guided by respect and restraint—taking only what is necessary and ensuring regeneration. For generations, this knowledge has been preserved through oral traditions: songs, stories, and daily practices that bind the community with its surroundings. Traditional songs like *Karma* and *Dadariya* form a medium for ecological education, cultural expression, and reflecting on how spirituality and sustainability coexist in daily life. Lyrics often express care for trees, wildlife, and rivers, reminding listeners of balance and responsibility. One such traditional song is: "*Dongri chadhe haak pare / Kon sune Ram Ware*" asking permission from birds and animals before harvesting forest produce, assuring them that the community will only take what they need and will not harm the forest. These traditions build environmental awareness and intergenerational learning within the community.

The Baigas also practise natural forms of shifting cultivation, following cycles that allow soil and vegetation to recover. By controlling grazing and using local varieties of seeds, they ensure that their agricultural activities complement rather than deplete forest ecosystems. Today, their traditional knowledge continues to guide sustainable living in a rapidly changing world. The Baigas' way of life demonstrates that conservation is not only about protecting resources but about honouring the relationships that connect people, forests, and wildlife. By recognising and strengthening such indigenous knowledge, sustainable futures can be built on wisdom that is both local and timeless.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 56:20 minutes.



When we go to the forest, we sing Karma or Dadariya songs while collecting wood or fruits. We take only as much as we need and leave the rest behind."

Dasmi Bai Baiga & Her Team
Sarhapathra, Teliyapani, Pandariya & Bodla, Kabirdham, Chhattisgarh

Rela Dance: Preserving a Cultural Heritage

In Khalari village, where life is lived in close rhythm with the land, the Gond Adivasi community nurture a relationship with nature through song, story, and dance. Symbolising the same, Rela Nritya, a traditional dance form, persists in the hearts of this community like a living memory. Moti Netam, a member of the community shared how Rela Nritya is a platform for common sharing.

The history of Rela Nritya is very old and its exact origin cannot be determined, but it is associated with the *Amaltas/cassia fistula* tree. According to community belief, the buzzing of bees and beetles on the flowers of this tree created the sound *Re re loyo rela*, which inspired the beginning of this dance.

Rela Nritya is performed throughout the life cycle of a person, at births, marriages, festivals, and even in times of death. More than a performance, Rela is a way to remember, process, and share the rhythms of life together.

The dance involves distinct costumes, instruments, movements, and language. Though rooted in the Gond community, it is practiced by all social groups in the village during festivals making it a harbinger of community spirit.

Earlier, this knowledge was passed on in a traditional learning space for youth *called gotuls.* They were educational centres where both boys and girls were trained in this art. But, today, *gotuls* are rarely seen. The responsibility has shifted to families and cultural gatherings where elders teach young people during performances. During the session, a woman accompanying Moti sang a Rela song.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 40:27 minutes.

The community elders hope that in the future, including Rela in the education system can help preserve and promote it more strongly. This story reminds us yet again that culture, like land or forest, are commons. It survives not through institutions alone, but through the care, participation, and memory of the community itself.

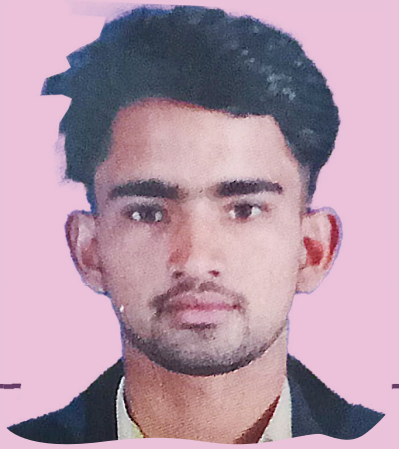


From birth to death, whatever phases of life we go through, they are sung and expressed through Rela. We are able to transfer these traditional customs to the next generation."

Santosh Markam
Khalari Village, Baderajpur, Kondagaon district, Chhattisgarh

Rooted Traditions: The Van Gujjar Community's Sela Parv and its Role in Forest Conservation

The Van Gujjars, a nomadic pastoral community, live across the foothills of the Himalayas—spanning Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. They rely on Gojri Buffaloes, an indigenous breed they nurture, for their livelihood, migrating seasonally from alpine meadows of Garhwal and Uttarkashi to the riverine plains of Khaddar and Bijnor. Their milk reaches religious centres like Rishikesh, Kedarnath, and Badrinath, sustaining both livelihoods and spiritual traditions. One of their traditions is *Sela Parv*, celebrated every monsoon. The festival focuses on regeneration; the community plants native tree species, restores pastures, and digs ponds to revive water sources. Local customs include cooking and sharing *kheer*, singing folk songs, and planting seeds from older trees. Guided by traditional ecological wisdom, the community selects trees for shade, fodder, medicine, and soil enrichment. Common species include *Gutel*, *Beheda*, *Sein*, *Rehni*, *Lusada*, *Malotus*, *Kargaal*, *Kharbat*, and *Bakli*, each valued for sustaining wildlife, livestock, and forest balance. *Gutel* seeds feed birds and aid natural regeneration, *Seer grass* supports buffalo nutrition and thrives with balanced grazing, and *Lusada* doubles as rich fodder and a shelter for wildlife.



Our festival is special because we plant only native species, and our buffaloes help in dispersing their seeds."

Mohammad Meer Hamja
Kunao Chaur, Yamkeshver, Kothar, Haridwar, Uttarakhand

Each *Sela Parv* leads to the planting of 50–100 indigenous trees, strengthening grassland and biodiversity restoration efforts across Uttarakhand. Since 2017, more than half of all planted trees have survived, and from 2021 onwards, three designated sites have become vibrant pasturelands and ecological habitats. The community has received local awards for these efforts. Yet, challenges persist. Despite the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, poor implementation restricts access to grazing lands. A 2024 Government Order (1405/UKSLSA/2024-25) from the Uttarakhand State Legal Services Authority now supports these initiatives, with involvement of the District Legal Services Authorities of Dehradun, Haridwar, Nainital, and Pauri and Panel Lawyers and Para Legal Volunteers. The state has endorsed *Sela Parv* as a model of community-based conservation, strengthening stewardship practices and ensuring conservation that is rooted in rights, respect, and reciprocity. *Sela Parv* continues as both a cultural festival and a community-driven ecological restoration effort in Uttarakhand.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 35:37 minutes.

The Tiwa Community and their Sacred Groves

The Tiwa people, known as the Sons of Nature, share a deep bond with their environment. Their festivals such as Sogra, Langkhon Puja, and Yangli celebrate the cycles of seasons and agricultural life. At the heart of their traditions are sacred groves like Bala Khongor, believed to be the abode of the forest spirit and protected through community rules passed down for generations.

When deforestation and changing land use began to threaten these sacred spaces, the Tiwa community came together in October 2024 to establish the Balakhongor Community Conserved Area (CCA). This formalised their traditional conservation efforts, ensuring stronger protection for their sacred groves and surrounding areas. Guided by the *Loro* and supported by youth groups such as *Panthai Khel*, they strengthened protection for forests and water bodies through collective decisions and traditional governance. Resource extraction is allowed only for community use and never for personal gain. These rules are made through community discussions and are updated based on the needs of the people.

In Bala Khongor, harmful activities are banned, and resources are used only for community needs. Water bodies are managed equitably, with fish offered to the forest spirit during festivals as a mark of gratitude. Annually in April, the deities are honoured through prayers and the establishment of monoliths. The community believes it is essential to worship the ancestors to seek blessings for agricultural prosperity and abundance. These practices connect faith, livelihood, and sustainability in everyday life.

Through this initiative, the Tiwa people have safeguarded biodiversity, revived cultural practices, and inspired the younger generation to value their heritage. Their belief that nature and human life are inseparable continues to guide their stewardship of the Commons.

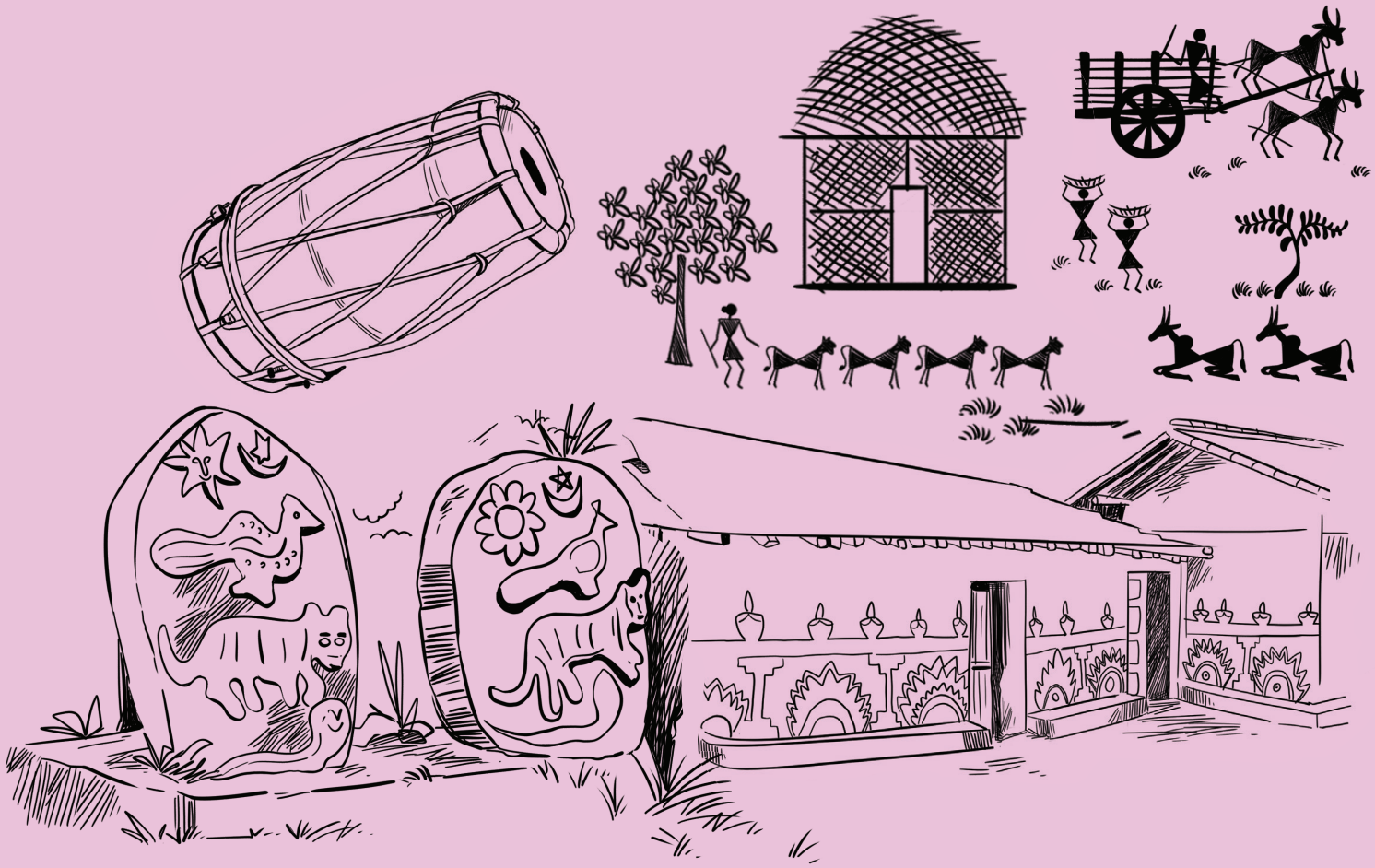


We celebrate every season with nature. By protecting nature, we protect our traditions and our future."

Shri Limshing Pumah
Umswai Lalung, Umswai, West Karbi Anglong, Assam

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 7:37 minutes.



8 Governing Land Commons





Forging a green path in Chhattisgarh

Just a few years back, Jhirnapodi village was facing challenges due to depleting natural resources. Most people remained focused only on their daily survival, with little concern for the future. Recognising this situation, the youth of the village took notice and formed the Yuva Sangathan Jhirnapodi to raise awareness about social, economic, educational, health, and environmental issues. Through regular meetings and training, they emphasised that the community's future depends on the protection and sustainable management of water, forests, and land.

Mobilising people wasn't easy. It took 3-4 months of persistent efforts to bring people together for meetings. Gradually, the community began engaging in discussions on constitutional values, the importance of the Gram Sabha, and the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas), or PESA, Act. These discussions helped build a culture of collective problem-solving within the community. Gradually, people also learned about Community Forest Rights (CFR) and the claim-filing procedure. In 2023, they marked the village boundaries, mapped natural resources, and prepared documentation to file the claim. Since the Panchayat members were initially unaware of the CFR process, workshops were organised by various civil society organisations to train the community on mapping boundaries, identifying resources, and documenting local flora and fauna, while also spreading awareness about the species under threat.

The community took several conservation measures such as prohibiting tree felling so that only dried fuelwood was used for cooking, and demarcating grazing lands. Whenever forest fires occurred, they collectively worked to extinguish them. These efforts strengthened the community's sense of ownership over their resources.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 36:36 minutes.

Over time, these actions not only secured the *mahua (Madhuca longifolia)* trees from fires but also ensured that no major conflicts emerged in the village. Even when disagreements arise now, they are resolved collectively through the Gram Sabha. Today, Jhirnapodi stands as a stronger and more self-reliant community, with both natural resources and social harmony being actively protected.



Unity and awareness is key to success."

Dharmendra Singh
Jhirnapondi, Narour, Marwahi, Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi, Chhattisgarh

Commons Against Crisis: Harja Lal Meena and the Revival of Chappriya's Pastureland

In the drought-prone region of Chappriya village, Rajasthan, community-led governance and collective action helped rejuvenate the local Commons. In the face of the severe drought of 2008, the people of Chappriya, supported by some local civil society organisations, came together and put life back into their overlooked and encroached-upon pastureland.

Through meetings, Harja Lal Meena mobilised community members to protect the grazing land. What then ensued was a long-term process of shaping the community, forming Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and later starting a village-level committee that could take democratic decisions for the Commons.

Organisations like Sahayog Sansthan and Prayatna Samiti helped the community understand the importance of natural resource governance and access to public employment schemes like MGNREGA. The community was able to build soil and water conservation structures, dig trenches, plant grasses, and restore nearly 50 per cent of the pastureland. What is commendable is the sense of responsibility being fulfilled by their commitment. From digging the land to setting up boundaries, everything was done through community effort.

Charagah Vikas Samiti, or Pasture Development Committee, was the prime resultant of this mass effort. This committee introduced new regulations to stop overgrazing and unauthorised access. Practices previously unknown, like rotational grazing and partial pasture closures, were implemented. They were also supported by on-ground monitoring efforts like informal boundary markers made of thorn bushes. Later, wage support from government schemes enabled the hiring of watchmen to protect the land, serving as an upgrade to ensure their efforts were preserved. The result is clearly visible today. What was once barren land is now covered in grass, supporting livestock and reviving biodiversity. The Commons has become a source of livelihood security and a buffer against future droughts.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 21:04 minutes.



Our grazing land had been taken over. But we decided to do something about it, we held meetings and decided to protect the land together. That is how it started."

Harja Lal Meena
Chappriya, Baleecha, Lasadiya, Salumbar, Rajasthan

Unlocking the dynamism of collectivisation

Lodh village, in eastern Jharkhand, is home to 130 families, mostly from the Nagesia and Oraon tribes. With almost 1061 hectares, the community live close to nature and are dependent for their livelihoods.

In 2008, as Gram Pradhan, Francious Kerketta wanted to protect the village's common resources. But it wasn't an easy task. Tree cutting from neighbouring villages led to rapid deforestation. Village conflicts on the ownership of the forests often hindered conservation efforts. Francious motivated the community to protect the forests as the forests prevented soil erosion, conserved water, and supported their livelihoods. Soon the community began patrolling the forest regularly and also confiscated the tools from those intending to cut the trees. The community led action resulted in the creation of the *"Jungle Bachao Samiti"* (Save the Forest Committee). This group of 15 members took responsibility for monitoring the forest and stopping illegal activities. Strict rules on forest use and to monitor the conservation process were made which included fines for disobedience, limited and regulated use of forest products like fruits and firewood, amongst others. Planting drives were regularly conducted to help the restoration efforts.

With the increase in tourism, safety and cleanliness became an issue around Lodh waterfalls. Along with the forests, the community also took up conservation measures around the Lodh waterfall. The *'Eco Vikas Samiti Lodh'* (Eco Development Committee) was formed which included 40 members who were responsible for keeping the waterfall clean and safe. With support from the Jharkhand Tourism and Forest Department, they worked to develop the area so that tourists could visit and enjoy the waterfall. They started charging a nominal parking fee to visitors which was used to improve the village's infrastructure, including building better roads to the waterfall. Many villagers also volunteered with the road construction.

To further their efforts, the community is also filing for their Community Forest Rights (CFR) over 510 hectares of forest land. This legal recognition will give them more control over managing and protecting their forest.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:26:07 minutes.



If we cut our forests, what will the wild animals eat? These forests, water and land are gifts from our ancestors."

Francious Kerketta
Lodh, Mahuadarn, Latehar, Jharkhand

Uchiyarda's efforts to revive their pastures

Once a dump yard, the 36 hectares of pasturelands of Uchiyarada village in Rajasthan are now flourishing because of the collective efforts of its community. Situated 15 km from Jodhpur city, Uchiyarada is a peri urban space home to around 1,000 families, who rely on livestock rearing. But their common grazing lands were degraded and encroached by the city development authority, JDA, for waste disposal.

In 2021, with support from FES and the ITC Mission Sunehra Kal programme, the community through awareness programmes learnt about the conservation of pastures and their rights in doing so. The *Charagah* Vikas Samiti (Pasture Development Committee) was formed in the village, where every adult was a member. The *samiti* unanimously took up the reclamation and restoration of their *Charagah* for the benefit of the community.

Even though the pastures were a community resource, the community was unable to undertake any collective effort as it was legally under the JDA jurisdiction. With persistent follow-up they managed an NOC which helped them initiate efforts under MGNREGA worth ₹33.84 lakhs in 2022. Community contributions in terms of water from private wells, fencing funds, waste removal, planting of shade and fruit-bearing trees and even native grass species like *dhaman* and *sevan* were sown in 7 hectares which helped bring a change in the landscape. The floods in 2022 washed away the initial efforts, but the community rebuilt the protective *bund* and replanted the grass. Today, the land is home to *neem*, *khejri*, *sheesham*, and other trees.

Where there was once waste, there is now greenery, fodder security for livestock, a safe playground for children, and a perennial pond. The transformation has become a model for reclaiming Commons and has drawn attention from across the region. Uchiyarada is no longer just a village, it is a symbol of what collective stewardship can achieve.



We collectively removed all the garbage and have made it a model for everyone to learn from."

Gajendra Singh
Uchiyarada village, Mandor Block, Jodhpur, Rajasthan

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 59:40 minutes.

Youth-led Protection of Pasture Commons in Dhodsar

In Rajasthan's Bikaner district, the village of Dhodsar is home to a determined community of livestock-rearing families. Among them, Sabir Khan, a young local resident, has become a leading voice in the movement to save Dhodsar's *charagah* (pasture) lands.

Sabir highlighted that more than 260 hectares of *charagah* land are officially recorded under Dhodsar Panchayat. These lands are a primary resource for over a thousand families. However, despite this formal demarcation and record, a huge portion of the pastureland had fallen prey to encroachment, scavenged by economic and political clout.

Sabir tells about a time in the past when people would be fined for cutting even one tree from the pasture, but as time passed, authorities got lax, and fencing and construction happened openly. In response, a group of youth organised themselves, forming a *Charagah Vikas Samiti* under the panchayat to protect this grazing land. Starting with collecting evidence of encroachment, they then filed objections and then engaged the *tehsildar* and *SDM*. Their efforts led them to reclaim 25 hectares of encroached *charagah* in 2022, becoming a major milestone for the community.

But their work didn't stop at this. With support from Sahayog Sansthan, the youth stated restoration efforts like planting indigenous trees, constructing water harvesting structures, and building grass stores to support livestock in drought periods. Sabir proudly shared how a once-degraded, dry patch now supports a dense green cover and is capable of grazing herds again.

Dhodsar's story stands out not only for its success in reclaiming commons but also for how youth leadership, grassroots organising, and community institutions came together to resist dispossession and invest in long-term stewardship.



Seeing our work, more villages are joining us."

Sabir Khan

Dhodha, Tharusar, Poogal, Bikaner, Rajasthan

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 33:12 minutes.

Struggle, solidarity mark the path to forest rights

Tadonar is a small Adivasi village in Narayanpur district of Chhattisgarh, with 24 households and a population of around 135 people. Since the area is surrounded by dense forests, the villagers have always depended on them for food, fuel, and livelihood, but they had no formal recognition of their rights. The idea of going to the government to claim anything was distant and seemed almost impossible, but things started to change when the community learned that the Forest Rights Act (2006) could give them a say over their forests. Slowly, through talks among elders and community members, the idea of claiming Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights began to take shape.

The villagers formed a Van Adhikar Samiti and began holding regular Gram Sabha meetings. Together, they mapped the village boundaries, marked out forests, and documented how everyone relied on trees, streams, and other common resources. Conflicts over borders, personal differences, and minimal government support slowed the process, and in a sensitive region with a strong Maoist presence, even asking for *jal, jangal, jameen* (water, forest, land) was misunderstood. Some members were also arrested and jailed.

The struggle did not stop there. With the Samiti, community members started holding Gram Sabha meetings, talking about FRA, and convincing people that rights over forests meant collective responsibility. They mapped their village boundaries, listed their resources, and documented the problems they faced. The process was difficult with conflicts over borders with neighbouring villages, personal interests within the community, and little active support from the government. Still, after a couple of years of active work, they submitted their CFR claim.

Tadonar's story is not just about legal rights; it is about a small community learning to trust each other, navigate fear and suspicion, and take care of the natural resources collectively. It shows how collective effort and unity can slowly build the control and care over the village commons.



We want to manage our forest resources with clear rules and collective responsibility."

Sundar Gota
Tadonar, Karmari, Narayanpur, Narayanpur, Chhattisgarh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:03:02 minutes.

A village's struggle for forest rights and recognition

Niwaskhar is a small Adivasi village in the core zone of Achanakmar Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh. This area has been home to the Baiga and Gond communities for generations. The forest gives them food, medicine, and livelihood, and their traditions, festivals, and culture are all linked to it. Carrying bows and arrows is part of their way of life and a symbol of protection and identity, not violence.

In 2020, during the lockdown implemented due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a struggle unfolded in the village when some community members went to the forest to collect mahua seeds, as they do every year. Their images were captured on the cameras installed by the Forest Department. Since a few of them were carrying bows and axes, they were accused of poaching by the officials. Soon, a team of forest officials arrived in the village, entered homes even when only women were inside, and behaved in sacred spaces in a culturally inappropriate manner. The raids spread fear and anger among people, prompting villagers like Rama Kumar and others to confront the officials, asking them to limit the search to only those seen in the pictures. This gave rise to a tense situation in the village, and lengthy discussions were held between both the parties.

The villagers believed the matter had settled after the discussion, but later police personnel arrived in vehicles. Cases were filed against 16 men and three women under multiple charges. This created panic in the village. People stopped their daily work and held deliberations for days. They then collected Rs 500 from each household to arrange for legal support, engaged a lawyer and managed to get bail. This experience became a turning point for the community members. They learned about the Forest Rights Act (2006) and formed the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve Sangharsh Samiti to fight collectively for their rights. After long efforts, they secured Community Forest Resource Rights over 3,314 hectares on 15 August 2023. Today, the Gram Sabha meets every month to protect and manage their forest.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:53:41 minutes.



We are committed to conserving our natural resources while preserving our traditional and cultural knowledge."

Rama Kumar

Niwaskhar, Lormi, Mungeli, Chhattisgarh

Turning the tide on soil erosion

Sarnal village, located along the banks of the Mahi River in Gujarat, has been among the 97 villages severely impacted by ravine formation caused by soil erosion. The predominantly sandy soil here erodes during rains, flows into the river, and is eventually lost to the sea, leading to degradation of both agricultural and common lands and fodder scarcity for livestock. The community, reliant on agriculture and animal husbandry, struggled to sustain itself, forcing many to migrate.

This prompted the government and local watershed committees to take action. A key role in these efforts has been played by Kiritsinh Ganpatsinh Chavda. Initial steps included the formation of Sarnal Tree Growers' Cooperative Society in 1987 by the National Tree Growers' Cooperative Federation (NTGCF). It leased 34 hectares from 117 hectares of government-owned common land in the village for afforestation. Indigenous tree species were planted after consulting the villagers. To ensure the survival of the trees, the society implemented rules and involved the community. Kiritsinh Ganpatsinh Chavda, who worked as a truck driver, initially joined the cooperative as a member. Gradually, realising the importance of land and forest conservation, he left his job to become the plantation's caretaker.

In 2009, various watershed development projects were initiated, including those under the NABARD watershed project and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). These included tree plantation; construction of check dams, gabion structures, and farm ponds; and soil and moisture conservation activities. Women played a significant role in this exercise, guarding the forest and participating in plantation drives. They lead the afforestation activities even today. The results were transformative. These measures have helped reduce land degradation, recharge the groundwater table, and enhance biodiversity. The forest now provides grass for livestock and wood for fuel. Migration for work has decreased from 80% to 20%. Enhanced agricultural productivity and livestock rearing have provided a sustainable livelihood to villagers.

Kiritsinh Ganpatsinh Chavda has so far planted and nurtured over 100,000 trees.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 25:12 minutes.



If the forest thrives, so do we."

Kiritsinh Ganpatsinh Chavda
Sukhini Muvadi, Sarnal, Galteshvar, Kheda, Gujarat

Guardians of the Hillock: Sustainable Livelihoods Through Commons Conservation

Tirupalamma and the people of Gonepotulavaripalli village have transformed their landscape and livelihoods through the restoration of village commons. In the mid-1990s, the population faced severe hardships, including water scarcity, low agricultural yields, high migration rates, and limited livelihood options. With some assistance of an external organisation, they gradually built confidence, leading to collective action for conserving their local hillocks—Erragonda, Peddanalla Gutta, and Chinna Nalla Gutta.

The community democratically formed a Village Institution (VI) to govern the commons, develop bylaws, and mobilise contributions of ₹6 per household, with labour being paid ₹5 per day. They leased and restored nearly 100 hectares through seed dibbling, native grass plantation, and removal of invasive Boda grass. Water conservation structures, such as check dams, trenches, and percolation tanks, improved soil moisture and groundwater recharge, enabling two cropping seasons and enhancing fodder availability. A watchman and rotating household patrols ensured protection from fire and encroachment.

Over time, the commons have become central to the village economy and ecology. Households now collect a range of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) such as Seethaphal, broomsticks, Kanuga seeds, Boda for housing, neem, and Tunki leaves for beedi-making (which provides a supplementary income of ₹2,000–₹5,000 per season). Agriculture, livestock productivity, and water access have all improved, and migration has declined as youth return to farm and trade. Villagers now describe their environment as cooler, greener, and more resilient.



Since the hillocks have been restored, our agriculture, fodder, and water availability have improved a lot. The weather in the village also remains cool most of the year, which I like a lot."

Tirupalamma
Gonepotulavaripallli, Musalikunta, Thambalapalle, Annamayya, Andhra Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:22:20 minutes.

Led Forest Governance through convergence with government schemes

In 2011, the Gram Sabha obtained Community Forest Rights (CFR) over 356.38 hectares. However, due to the lack of financial resources, it could not undertake forest management activities until the government resolution of 30th November 2021 allowed CFR-recognized Gram Sabhas to register as Planning and Implementing Agencies (PIAs) under MGNREGA. Following this, the Gram Sabha registered as a PIA and began conservation activities such as removing invasive species, and pruning and thinning natural vegetation—improving forest health and meeting wildlife water needs while generating local employment.

In 2023, the Gram Sabha formally applied for PIA registration through the MNREGA portal, creating institutional and bank accounts to manage project funds. Community meetings identified need-based activities within CFR lands, ensuring participatory planning and compliance with all procedures. Once registered, the Gram Sabha independently managed forestry operations, promoting biodiversity and sustainability through active forest restoration.

In collaboration with the Forest Department, grids were established for better monitoring, and ponds were constructed to provide water for wildlife. These efforts generated 19 lakh Rupees in wages, strengthened local livelihoods, and improved the ecosystem. Transparency was ensured by displaying detailed information about project budgets and man-days at work sites, fostering community trust. Though the Gram Sabha faced challenges in cost estimation and follow-up processes, it developed self-monitoring systems to track progress effectively. This initiative marked a transition from a top-down to a participatory governance model, enhancing cooperation between the community and forest authorities. Chichewada's experience showcases the transformative potential of rights-based policies and government convergence in empowering forest-dependent communities, achieving ecological restoration, livelihood generation, and institutional empowerment.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:05:06 minutes.



Using scientific tools helped us to ensure accurate activity was undertaken which helped us to create employment opportunities in our village."

Manoj Chavhan

Chichewada, Kurkheda, Gadchiroli, Maharashtra

Empowering Communities through Forest Resource Management: The Journey of Village Mundla and Karwan Tola

Through a collaborative effort between the community, and the block and district administrations, the village achieved recognition of its Community Forest Resource (CFR) title under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006. This milestone empowered the community with legal rights over forest resources, enabling sustainable management and livelihood improvement.

Despite the abundance of natural resources, villagers historically faced barriers such as limited legal access, unclear ownership, and restrictions from external authorities. The CFR title transformed this situation by granting the community greater control and authority to manage forests based on traditional knowledge and practices. Their involvement in the CFR management plan, including mixed fruit plantations, reflects a commitment to sustainable use, improved livelihoods, and reduced migration. The partnership with local administrations further strengthened coordination, ensuring that community rights and development needs were upheld. Although challenges in resource access remain, the CFR recognition has provided a strong foundation for progress in both forest conservation and economic resilience. A key step in this process was the formation of the Community Forest Resource Management Committee (CFRMC), comprising local members responsible for forest protection and sustainable use. The committee established by-laws and assigned supervisors to enforce them, preventing illegal activities and maintaining forest integrity. Efforts included removing invasive species like lantana to restore biodiversity and planting native trees. In 40 acres of CFR land, plantations of Sitafal (custard apple), Amba (mango), and Karvand (black currant) were established under an MGNREGA project worth Rupees 25 lakh, involving 11,000 plants. Additionally, a 10-acre mixed fruit plantation was created, alongside a five-year CFR Management Plan (2024–2029) featuring 1,200 bamboo plants and a planned 20-acre expansion.

Both villages exemplify how collective action, strong leadership, and community ownership foster sustainable forest management—truly conserving Jal, Jungle, and Jamin for the future.



With recognition of our rights, we have reduced migration in our village. The rules formed in the committee have made sure people are more accountable."

Pradip Shendre
Karman Tola, Chandrapur, Maharashtra

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 52:38 minutes.

Reviving jungle, water, and land in a Baiga village

From the dense forests of Dindori district in Madhya Pradesh, the story of Ujyaro Bai, who belongs to the Baiga tribal community, is one of courage that turned the tide for her people. Living in Pondi village, where streams once ran dry, she rose to protect what mattered most: her community's jungle, water, and land.

"Earlier, the water bodies where people and cattle used to bathe were the sources for drinking water as well. We suffered from illnesses," she recalled. She then started thinking about getting access to clean drinking water for the community, and decided to fight for the natural resources. Her journey wasn't without hurdles.

People opposed her and even threatened her life along with her children's. But this did not deter her. What started as a lone stand grew into a women-led movement. Together, they guarded trees, warned against fires, and stopped outsiders from destroying the forest. The results soon showed, and as much as 5,000 hectares of land has been protected over the last 10 years, with not a single tree felled in the area.

With others, she also pushed for recognition under the Forest Rights Act, helping families secure pattas for their land, and get individual forest rights. The fight for Commons became a fight for secure livelihoods and justice. Now Ujyaro Bai is recognised far and wide for her efforts.

Yet for her, the heart of the struggle remains at home. "We did not fight for ourselves alone. We fought so that future generations may drink clean water and live with the forest," she said. Her story shows that when women defend their Commons, they also defend the very future of their communities.



Now, because the forest is protected, springs flow again. Clean water reaches every household."

Ujyaro Bai
Pondi, Samnapur, Dindori, Madhya Pradesh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:30:31 minutes.

Sustaining the Kyrgyz Highlands: The Story of Ysyk-Ata's Pastures and People

Ysyk-Ata village lies high in the Kyrgyz Mountains, in Chui State, Kyrgyzstan. More than seventy percent of its residents depend on livestock for their livelihoods. The village's 12,000 hectares of grazing land support around 5,000 livestock annually. This balance is maintained through a traditional rotational system called *jailoo*, where livestock are moved through winter, summer, and reserve pastures. The rotation helps prevent overgrazing and allows the soil to recover.

However, soil erosion and overuse pose ongoing threats. In 2009, the Kyrgyz government passed the Pasture Law, empowering local communities with greater control over grazing lands. This led to the creation of Pasture User Unions (PUUs), where villagers collectively plan grazing, settle conflicts, and care for their land.

Samarbek Beksultanov, a farmer from the Syn-Tash area of Ysyk-Ata, stands out as a community leader in sustainable land management. He combines traditional knowledge with modern farming practices, growing medicinal plants such as mint, valerian, and calendula. These crops help restore soil health, reduce pressure on pastures, and provide additional income.

Samarbek has involved thirty families in his work, including elders, women, and youth. Elders share wisdom on pasture rotation and land care, while youth receive hands-on training in sustainable practices. Women participate in growing, processing, and marketing medicinal plants, which boosts their financial independence and strengthens community resilience.

Innovations like a solar-powered drying facility improve efficiency, create seasonal jobs, and demonstrate how local initiatives can protect biodiversity while enhancing livelihoods. Samarbek's efforts have improved the fertility of 0.8 hectares of land and created over 50 seasonal jobs showcasing a model of blending tradition with innovation for a sustainable future.



Effective governance of common pasture land has transformed challenges into opportunities for us, ensuring drought resilience for my community."

Samarbek Beksultanov
Ysyk-Ata, Chui, Kyrgyzstan

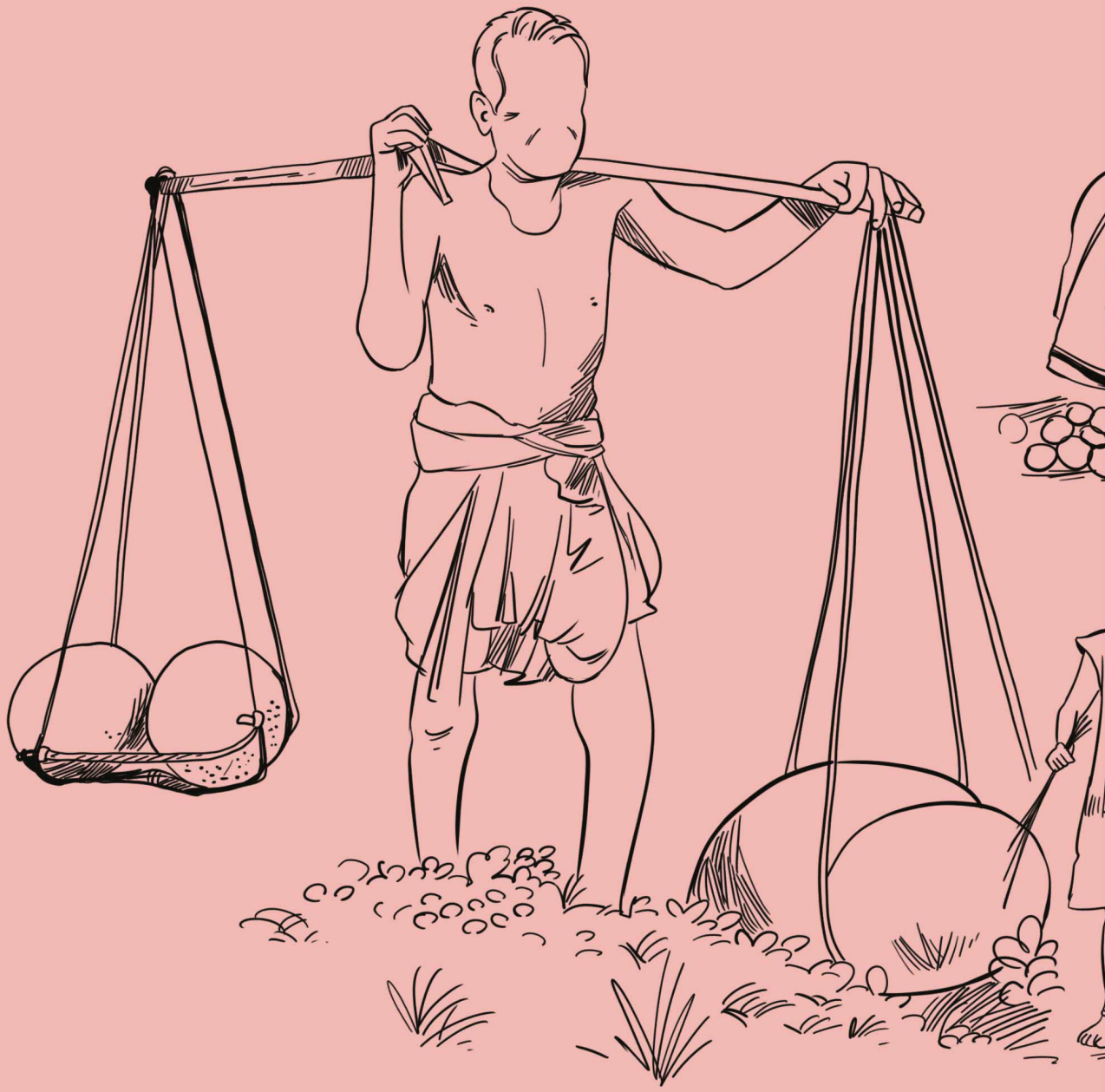
The economic benefits from selling medicinal plants has provided stable livelihoods for many families, opening new market opportunities and empowering the community. The story of Ysyk-Ata highlights the power of community action in preserving both environment and way of life—offering inspiration for other communities worldwide facing similar challenges.

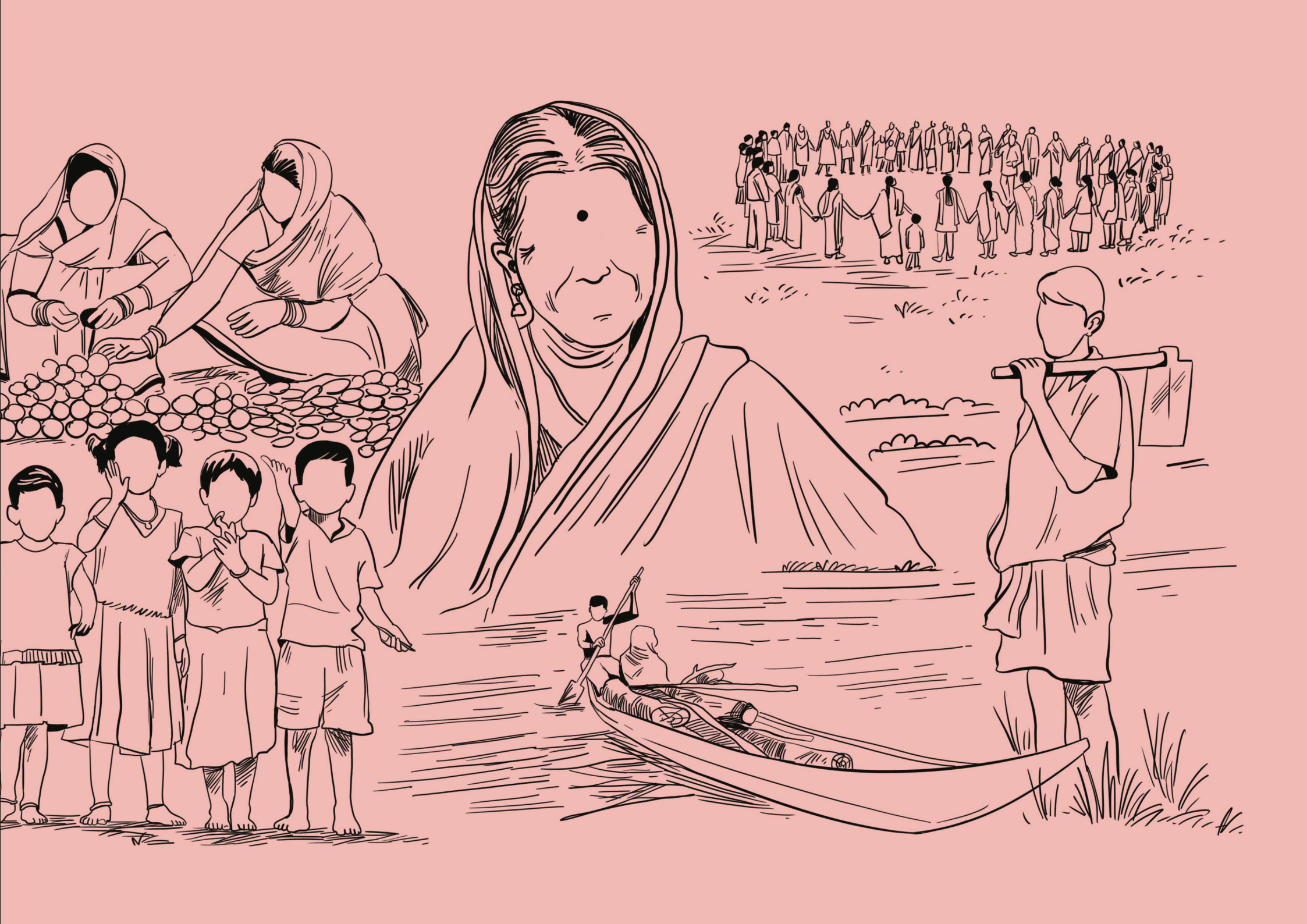
Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 07:03 minutes.



9 Commons and Gender





Sustainable Commons Conservation in Bastar: The Role of Muria Adivasi Women

The Muria Adivasi women of Bastar, in central India, exemplify how traditional ecological wisdom continues to shape sustainable living. Their deep relationship with the forests and farmlands demonstrates a form of stewardship rooted in balance, respect, and reciprocity—values passed down through generations. For the Muria women, the forest is both a livelihood source and a sacred space. They collect non-timber forest products such as mahua flowers, *tendu* leaves, and tamarind with care, ensuring regeneration for the next season. This sustainable approach supports household income while maintaining forest health. They are also the custodians of *Devgudis*, sacred groves revered as spiritual sanctuaries. By protecting these spaces from felling and hunting, they have preserved biodiversity hotspots rich in rare plant and animal species.

Their contribution extends beyond forests to agriculture. Muria women conserve indigenous seed varieties vital for agro-biodiversity and food security. They practise organic farming techniques such as intercropping, crop rotation, and the use of natural fertilisers like cattle manure and compost. These time-tested methods retain soil fertility, balance nutrients, and prevent pest outbreaks—ensuring productivity without chemical inputs.Their traditional knowledge also encompasses water and soil conservation. They build local water harvesting structures and prevent erosion on slopes, securing water supply through changing seasons. Their understanding of medicinal plants sustains healthcare autonomy for their families, while their craftwork using bamboo and clay reflects a culture that values sustainability at every step.



These women carry forward those rituals and traditions that emphasise respect and reverence towards nature."

Jyoti
Platpara pipra, Pipra, Keshkal, Kondagaon, Chhattisgarh

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 01:17:12 minutes.

Despite their crucial role, Muria women face challenges such as deforestation, encroachment, and social marginalisation. Recognising their land rights, supporting education that values indigenous knowledge, and including them in decision-making are essential steps toward empowering them. Their leadership offers valuable lessons for modern sustainability—showing that harmony with nature begins with respect for the Commons.

These women are protecting forests to enhance livelihood

Chameli Singh is among the many women committed to protecting and conserving the forests of Kapariya village. With support from civil society organisations working in the region, Chameli Singh and other women organised themselves to form the Forest Rights Committee and applied for tenure rights under the Forest Rights Act (2006), focusing on two goals: protecting and conserving the forest, and enhancing livelihood opportunities for community members through forest produce.

At first, many women felt hesitant about using mobile phones and attending online meetings. Through workshops and participation in the claim process, they grew more confident, learned to resolve technical issues, and used GPS for mapping their village's Community Forest Right (CFR) area. Now they actively participate in meetings and workshops, where they discuss the importance of forest health, quality maintenance of non-timber forest products (NTFP), plantations, the nurturing of plants, and other activities.

Every year, the group prepares fire lines during the peak summer to prevent forest fires. During the planting season, they plant local seedlings in the CFR area and help the forest regenerate. Realising the benefits of the yield from *mahua (Madhuca longifolia)*, they planted several saplings in the forest. They use green nets to harvest the flowers to ensure their quality. All the flowers are pooled and sold to traders. In 2024, the women collected around 10 quintals of *mahua* and sold them in the market. They have successfully implemented improvements in the processing of *mahua* and tamarind. Apart from *mahua*, they also harvest *harra (Terminalia chebula)*, *baheda (Terminalia bellirica)*, *sal (Shorea robusta)*, *tendu* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*), etc., and sell them in the market. Recently, the committee received Quality Assurance certificates from the forest department for the NTFPs they trade in.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:48:04 minutes.

Being a part of the Community Forest Rights Management Committee (CFRMC), these women have found belongingness and recognition, which they earlier lacked.



Being a part of the committee has brought us recognition among the village members, and they have also gained knowledge about various forest species."

Chameli Singh
Kapariya, Rokda, Manendragarh, Manendragarh-Chirmiri-Bharatpur, Chhattisgarh

Women Lead in Conserving Tribal Culture and Forestry

Vanjangi Village is home to several indigenous tribes, like the Kodu tribe, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) who have protected the Vanjangi hillock which is rich in Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) such as amla, shikakai, and medicinal herbs. Also a sacred grove, it is worshipped by the villagers.

However, the growing influx of tourists has led to environmental degradation and disrespect for sacred spaces. Addressing these issues, the local community along with the Center for People's Forestry (CPF) began to find sustainable solutions which led to the establishment of the 'Adivasi Cultural Knowledge Centre'. The centre was set up on 4.6 cents of land donated by Anganaini Shanthakumari, to serve as a space where visitors can learn about the rich cultural and ecological knowledge of the community. A set of guidelines was developed to encourage tourists to respect the sacred forest, avoid littering, and engage respectfully in the area. The centre showcases traditional crafts, arts, and foods of the Vanjangi community. Built using local materials such as mud, lime, bamboo, and grass, sourced from neighbouring villages, highlight the skill of nuanced building by the Kodus.

The Adivasi Cultural Knowledge Centre inaugurated in 2024 by the District Collector, Sri A S Dinesh Kumar, is managed by 25 Vanjangi women as a place for cultural exchange and a platform for entrepreneurship. Training programmes on forest products, millet-based food, organic farming, and even vermicomposting, are conducted here which open doors for more women entrepreneurs.

Looking ahead, the centre plans to expand its educational and training programmes, engage more tourists in meaningful ways, and further integrate sustainable practices into the local economy.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:20:43 minutes.



Our forest is not just our livelihood; it is our identity, our culture, and our home. By protecting it, we are preserving who we are for future generations."

Anganaini Shanthakumari
Vanjangi Village, Alluri Sitaram Raju, Andhra Pradesh

The Story of Gonasika's Thengapali System

Gonasika, a small village in Odisha's Keonjhar district, is surrounded by forest. This forest is the lifeline of the community, providing them with firewood, medicinal plants, and a home for wildlife, including elephants. However, the forest once faced severe threats from illegal logging and frequent forest fires. These challenges not only harmed the environment but also disturbed the social and economic balance of the village.

To protect their forest and way of life, the villagers revived an old tradition known as the *Thengapali* system, meaning "stick rotation." Under this system, every household takes turns to patrol the forest, carrying a stick (*lathi*) as a symbol of their duty. This simple yet powerful practice ensures everyone shares responsibility for the forest's protection.

The villagers also take preventive steps to avoid forest fires. They regularly sweep dry leaves and create fire breaks using brooms. No one is allowed to light fires inside the forest. Any violation, such as illegal logging or burning, is met with community action and social disapproval. These local rules, though unwritten, are respected by all.

The results have been inspiring. Forest fires have almost stopped, wildlife has returned, and the forest has become greener and healthier. The community now enjoys a stronger bond and a shared sense of pride in their conservation efforts. Now Gonasika Village stands as a model of community based forest protection. The villagers plan to combine traditional knowledge with modern practices and promote non-timber forest products for sustainable livelihoods. Their story proves that when people unite for a common cause, even simple traditions can lead to lasting change.



The forest is our life. The thengapali system isn't a chore; it's a part of who we are. We have seen the difference it has made. The forest is healthier, and we don't have to worry about fires anymore. We know we are protecting it for our children."

Subash Nayak
Gonasika, Banspal, Keonjhar, Odisha

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:48:04 minutes.

Women's Role in Managing Forests and Water in Kalahandi

Kalahandi, in southwestern Odisha, is known for its rich black soil, ideal for cotton cultivation. Yet, it has long been associated with poverty, drought, and hunger. Most residents belong to tribal communities, but much of the fertile land remains with *Gauntias* (landlords). With little access to farmland, tribal families rely mainly on forests for their livelihoods. However, rampant deforestation and development have caused severe forest loss; nearly 60 sq. km destroyed in just two years. For the forest dependent tribal families, this was very disheartening .

Amid this crisis, women from Urladani Gram Panchayat in M. Rampur block decided to take charge. Led by Sarada Majhi, a courageous and visionary tribal woman, they united their communities through Gram Sabhas and later formed a *Gram Sabha Mahasangha*, a federation of village assemblies. Supported by the local organisation SEBA JAGAT, the women introduced simple but effective forest rules like restriction on extracting of green trees, only collecting fallen branches, and promoting sustainable harvesting.

The community began mapping trees, plants, and wildlife, spreading awareness about biodiversity. Gradually, the once degraded forests began to revive again and forest produce like *sal seeds, mahua, siali leaves,* and *tubers* once again became plentiful.

Inspired by Urladani's success, nearby villages joined the movement. Together, they formed a block level federation and started collective marketing of Minor Forest Produce through *Van Dhan Vikas Kendras* (VDVKs), ensuring fair prices and steady incomes for women. Challenges such as delayed MSP payments, forest fires, and overharvesting persist, but the women remain determined. Their story shows how courage, unity, and love for nature can bring back life to Kalahandi's forests and hope to its people.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 58:07 minutes.



We women never thought our small steps could make such a big change. Today, the forest stands because we stood together."

Sarada Majhi
Jurakhaman, Urladani, M.Rampur, Kalahandi, Odisha

Overcoming Gender Barriers in Community Action

In the Golana village of Jhalawar district, Rajasthan, Padmawati Suman was a daily wage labourer in the nursery nearby. After her studies, with constant support from her family, she was able to undertake the role of a mate/worksite supervisor under MGNREGA. Even though she received backlash from other male community members, her dedicated work and efforts was recognised by all. The Gram Parivartan Samiti (GPS) formed in her village which aimed to restore the degrading Commons and replenish the green cover. Regular planting drives were conducted to help the revegetation process in the village. Padmawati wanted to scale the efforts but faced the challenge of shortage of saplings from nearby nurseries.

Padmawati introduced the stem defix method on the *rakh* (riverbank) land, using robust species like *babul* and *peepal*. Her community stepped up, and together they arranged a thorn fencing to protect the young plants from grazing animals.

The results speak for themselves; the community has a sapling survival rate of 80–100% with 97% in banyan cuttings an achievement rarely seen in the district. Her work drew praise from the District Panchayat CEO during a GP visit, who saw it as a model suitable for replication.

Padmawati's leadership is particularly significant because she is the only woman mate in the district spearheading such native species planting efforts. Her success shows how women's participation in natural resource management can strengthen Commons governance over time and inspire others to be a steward of nature.

By combining community mobilisation, innovative methods, and persistent follow-up, Padmawati has helped Golakna's Commons put down stronger roots, both literally and figuratively. Her story stands as a testament to the power of local women leaders in shaping sustainable futures.



Being a woman, many community members did not appreciate me being a mate. But my consistent efforts have been recognised even at the district level."

Padmawati Suman
Golana village, Khanpur Block, Jhalawar, Rajasthan

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:00:44 minutes.

Seeds of change

The Baiga women of Kabripathra village have risen from modest beginnings to become the driving force behind both environmental restoration and economic empowerment. Situated in the Maikal Range near Kanha Tiger Reserve, Kabripathra is home to the Baiga community, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) traditionally reliant on forest resources and agriculture for survival. Winds of change arrived here in 2021, when the Samerth Charitable Trust began supporting the village's women's Self-Help Group (SHG) through a landscape restoration programme.

The initiative aimed to establish a nursery that would nurture local forest species while fostering ecosystem restoration. Initially, the women struggled with the technicalities of nursery management, but their persistence paid off as they mastered the skills required to raise and sell plant saplings. By 2022, they had sold over 2,000 saplings, earning over Rs 41,000, with their earnings crossing Rs 59,000 the following year. Besides running the nursery, they started cultivating vegetables, turning the project into a reliable source of income and family nutrition.

This initiative did more than just restore the local ecosystem — it transformed the lives of these women. Traditionally shy and hesitant, they began participating in Gram Sabha meetings, presenting their concerns and asserting their place in the decision-making process. The Gram Panchayat, recognising their efforts, allocated land to the SHG for five years, further cementing the nursery's place in the community. The women have also started a fish farming venture, funded by their nursery earnings. Their success has rippled through nearby villages like Barhapani and Pendri. Men from Barhapani set up a small nursery too, earning Rs 20,000 in the first year, while the women of Pendri's SHG earned over Rs 55,000 by growing saplings.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 4:15 minutes.



We were earlier afraid to speak in public or take on responsibilities. But now, through this nursery work, we feel more confident. Our efforts are not only helping our families, but also the community and the land we live on."

Brihaspatin Bai
Kabripathra, Shambhupeepar, Bodla, Kabirdham, Chhattisgarh

The transformation of a tribal village through a women's collective effort

Jamuna Bhoi and Basanti Bariha, residents of Adibasi Colonypada in Piakamal Block, Bargarh District, of Odisha, is home to 68 families surrounded by farmlands, ponds, and forests. For years, farming was their main livelihood, but it often failed to meet daily needs, forcing families to depend on daily wages. Women had few opportunities to earn, leaving them financially dependent.

Recognising this, MASS NGO, with support from the block OLM office, introduced a Collective Livelihood Initiative to promote broom making as a sustainable livelihood. The community began using Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP), especially broom grass, to earn extra income. Today, 53 households in Adivasi Pada are engaged in this work, turning broom making into a symbol of empowerment. Each family produces 5 to10 brooms daily, selling them at ₹30 each to a trader who visits every week. This consistent income has brought stability to many homes. Among them, Jamuna Bhoi stands out as a success story. Managing her household and work, she crafts nine brooms daily, earning about ₹8,100 per month. With this income, she covers her family's healthcare needs and saves ₹3,000 monthly for her children. Jamuna proudly says, *"I no longer depend on loans. My earnings give me confidence and peace of mind."* Similarly, Basanti Bariha and her mother prepare ten brooms a day, earning ₹9,000 per month. Their earnings helped repay a ₹4,000 SHG loan and cover family expenses. Basanti shares, *"Earlier, we borrowed to survive. Now, we earn and save."*

The initiative has not only improved incomes but also strengthened women's voices and ensured sustainable forest use. These women have proven that small scale, forest-based livelihoods can bring big changes in rural lives.



We depend on the forest to take care of our loved ones. The forest takes care of us."

Basanti Bariha
Adibasi Colonypada, Kechhodadar, Piakamal, Bargarh, Odisha

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 43:36 minutes.

When vision and action Come Together

Savita Rawal is an example of how determination can make dreams come true. She faced numerous challenges from a young age, and had to shoulder additional responsibilities when her husband passed away. Undeterred by the challenges, she wished to lead her community, particularly the women and girls, toward a better future.

In 2020, she decided to run for the Sarpanch position, and won with a considerable margin of 1,500 votes. As the Sarpanch, one of her major achievements was the provision of clean drinking water. The village had long suffered from fluoride-contaminated water, leading to several health issues. Savita Rawal made it her mission to ensure that her community had access to safe water. Through the joint efforts of the community and her leadership, two canals were constructed under the Amrit Mahotsav initiative to supply drinking water to the village. Savita Rawal also oversaw the plantation of 1,800 saplings on grazing lands with an aim to conserve water and protect the environment. The work was carried out under the MGNREGA scheme, where trenches were dug to store rainwater, benefiting the community's livestock and supporting local farmers.

She has also been deeply invested in improving education in her village, and worked towards upgrading the local school so that girls could study up to the 12th class. Her actions included giving a memorandum to the District Education Officer and inspecting schools to ensure maximum enrollment of girls.

Under her guidance, the community also implements various social security programmes, sets up nutrition gardens, and launches plantation drives. She firmly believes in collaborating with both men and women to solve issues. She seeks the cooperation of various officials to address the Gram Panchayat's problems, submitting applications and holding meetings to ensure timely resolution of issues.

Savita Rawal's story is not just about her personal journey from hardship to leadership; it is also a testament to the power of community involvement, perseverance, and the belief in a brighter future for all.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 52:34 minutes.



I believe in taking everyone along on the journey to securing a better future, be it supporters or opponents."

Savita Rawal

Vetera, Pindwara, Sirohi, Rajasthan

From Chipaiput to Sipaiput: A Legacy of Protection

Sipaiput, a tribal village under Maliput Gram Panchayat in Pottangi block of Koraput district, Odisha, is home to around 600 people in 120 households. Most villagers belong to the Dora and other Adivasi communities. The village was earlier known as *Chipaiput*, named after a local story about a tiger that once roamed nearby. Later, when *Sipahis* (soldiers) began halting there during their journeys, the name changed to *Sipaiput* in their memory.

Once surrounded by dense forests, the village faced large-scale deforestation around 1970. To save their forest, the villagers first hired guards and paid them with food grains. When that system failed, they started the traditional *Thengapali* practice: a stick rotated from one household to another, assigning each family to guard the forest in turn. This continued successfully from 2000 to 2012. Later, one poor family was given the permanent duty of protection, supported by the community until 2016.

Through these collective efforts, Sipaiput's forest flourished again. The villagers also work closely with groups like Dora Mahasangha, Serubandha Surakhya Samiti, Kuwi Samaja, and Kamar Samaj, and they actively coordinate with government departments to address issues of forest, land, and water. A major challenge for Sipaiput is the threat of mining. The community strongly opposes mining activities, fearing forest loss and displacement. They have organised peaceful protests, raising slogans like "*Do not enter our forest go back, NALCO*!"

Their unity and dedication led to the recognition of *Community Forest Rights* over 259 hectares in 2020. For their outstanding conservation work, Sipaiput villagers were also honoured with the *Prakruti Mitra Award* and a cash prize of ₹20,000.



Our forest gives us food and life. We protect it like our own home and will never allow anyone to destroy it. "

Moti Khora
Sipaiput, Maliput, Pottangi, Koraput, Odisha

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 28:31 minutes.

Empowering Women in Community Forest Management and Sustainable Livelihoods

Odisha is blessed with rich forest cover, these forests have been the main source of food and income for tribal and rural communities, especially women. They depend on Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) like kendu leaves, hill brooms, tamarind, mahua, and sal seeds, and etc. Women play a key role in this forest-based economy as collectors, processors, and sellers of NTFPs. They also take part in protecting and managing forest resources. Across the state, women-led groups such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and *Van Dhan Vikas Kendras* (VDVKs) are leading efforts to protect forests while improving livelihoods. One inspiring example is Hemabati Mandangi from Rugudubai village in Ramnaguda block, Rayagada district. Through her leadership, Hemabati has encouraged collective decision making and promoted the collection, value addition, and marketing of forest products like hill brooms and tamarind.

Hemabati was chosen by her community to be a member of the Community Forest Resource Management Committee (CFRMC) because of her deep love and commitment to the forest. Along with other women from her SHG, she has been raising awareness about preventing forest fires, one of the biggest threats to forest biodiversity and the livelihoods of forest dependent families. Her journey started after attending a training program by SHAKTI, an organisation that trains women in environment and livelihood related activities. During the training, she participated in discussing how to protect our forests and streams for future generations. It inspired me to work for my village Hemabati. Through her SHG, Jhansirani Group, Hemabati helps villagers, especially women, to benefit from government programs such as the *Van Dhan Yojana*. This scheme, launched in 2018 by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and implemented by TRIFED, supports tribal gatherers to become entrepreneurs through value addition and fair pricing of forest produce.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 35:49 minutes.



Earlier, we sold hill brooms to middlemen at low prices. Now, after processing and selling through VDVKs, our income has increased by 20-30 percent."

Hemabati Mandangi
Rugudubai, Sundhidhamuni, Ramanaguda, Rayagada, Odisha

Guardians of the forest

The small village of Dhawai Tola, located in Jashpur District of Chhattisgarh, rests around a forest stretching over 364 acres. Locals depend on the jungle for essentials like edible roots, fruits, and traditional medicines, and also earn a living through sale of forest products such as *chironji* (*Buchanania lanzan*), *mahua* (*Madhuca longifolia*) and *tikhur* (*Curcuma angustifolia*).

Women from Dhawai Tola lead the way in conserving these forests. Each day, several women patrol the jungle, working hard to prevent illegal tree felling as they gather the forest produce for their domestic needs as well as to earn extra income. When a devastating fire broke out in April 2024, four women – Santatula Bai, Tarawati Chauhan, Pawitra Sidar, and Anjana Sidar – risked their lives and displayed extraordinary courage by dousing the flames and saving much of the forest's biodiversity. Pawitra Sidar initially noticed the smoke and cried for help from the villagers. The four women filled buckets with water from a nearby handpump and ran towards the forest. They also used green twigs with longer shoots to extinguish the flames. Later, they were joined by more community members. Their efforts protected plants and animals from irreversible loss, setting an example for their entire community.

Their efforts were also recognised by the forest , which honoured them with cash awards. Their work demonstrates how community stewardship can fight illegal logging and environmental disasters.

Pawitra Sidar and her companions have shown that the conservation of forests is not only possible but essential for survival. The goal is not just protection for today, but the promise of ensuring clean water and air for future generations.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 2:09:40 minutes.



Our forest gives us food and life. We protect it like our own home and will never allow anyone to destroy it."

Tarawati Chouhan
Dhawai Tola, Singibahar, Farsabahar, Jashpur, Chhattisgarh

Women-Led Commons Conservation in Hatipakna

Hatipakna village, located inside a dense forest, has a history of nearly 90–100 years. The Bhumia community settled here because of the rich land, plenty of water, and forest resources. Over time, the village has become an example of unity and collective effort. The women of Hatipakna play a central role in farming, collecting forest produce, and taking care of their families, while also protecting the environment around them.

For women in Hatipakna, commons like forests, ponds, grazing lands, and water sources are vital. These shared resources provide food, fuel, fodder, and livelihoods, and act as a safety net during difficult times. Tribal women, in particular, depend heavily on these resources. When commons decline, it affects them the most. Over time, their commons have faced pressure from population growth, land privatisation, agricultural expansion, and resource overuse. Forests have shrunken, water sources have dried up, and the number of animals and birds has decreased. Traditional knowledge and cultural practices connected to the commons are also fading.

To address this, the village women carried out a commons mapping exercise, comparing the state of resources from 1963 to 2023. Seeing the decline, they took action to protect and restore the commons. They presented their findings to block and district authorities and incorporated their plans into the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). Through *Gram Sabha* and *Palli Sabha* meetings, they secured community support for regenerating forests, preserving water, and sustainably using forest produce. Hatipakna now stands as a model for women-led conservation. The women's efforts have strengthened the environment, revived traditional knowledge, and inspired neighboring villages. Their story highlights the power of collective action, sustainable resource management, and the critical role women play in building sustainable, resilient communities.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:30:26 minutes.



"Women venture into the forest more. They are the ones most affected when the Commons degrade. The resource mapping exercise was conducted with the help of women as they are more in sync with the Commons around them."

Pratima Gadba
Hatipakhna, Kollar, Boipariguda, Koraput, Odisha

Guardians of the Lake: Women Reclaiming Commons in Gadchiroli

In the heart of Gadchiroli's forests, where rivers weave through tribal villages and lakes sustain livelihoods, a quiet revolution has unfolded. Led by the women of Sompur village, this story is not just about restoring a lake, it is about reclaiming dignity, agency, and ecological stewardship. Years ago, Sompur's lake had silted up, drying out the life it once nurtured. With no external funds but immense community support, the community revived the lake through shramdaan. Rains returned, water stayed, and the ecosystem began to thrive again. As fish reappeared, a few men introduced fish seeds, commercializing the process while women remained excluded from its benefits.

It was during the COVID-19 pandemic that the women took full leadership. With livelihoods lost, they saw the lake as a source of renewal. Supported by Shrishti, an organisation working in the region, they underwent training to build bamboo fish cages using forest materials, developed low-cost fish feed, and cultivated aquatic plants and native lotus to nourish the ecosystem. Invasive weeds such as *besharama* were removed through collective labour and later with MGNREGA assistance. Their unity turned the lake into a thriving hub of biodiversity and income. But in 2023, the Panchayat auctioned the lake to outsiders without consulting the community. The women resisted firmly.

Today every woman earns between Rs 2,000 –3,000 weekly, with all proceeds going into a community account. Beyond income, the lake now stands as a symbol of empowerment, a Common restored, governed, and protected by the women of Sompur.



We protected our lake with courage and unity."

Chandrakalabai Shankar Katenge
Sonpur-Bhategoan, Kurkheda, Gadchiroli, Maharashtra

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 14:25 minutes.

The Women of Sahala and their Sustainable Connection to Forest

In Sahala, the forest is the heart of the village. For Sumitra and all the women, it is more than trees; it is their home, protector, and source of food, medicine, and livelihood. Every plant, fruit, and root supports daily life, and the women, who walk the forest paths every day, carry the responsibility of caring for it. The forest and the village depend on each other.

The women shared how the forest feeds the community. When rice runs low, tubers like pitaalu and paniaalu, wild greens, mushrooms, and fruits fill cooking pots. Mahua flowers bring sweetness and extra income. Firewood, fodder, and medicinal roots lighten household burdens. But threats like fires during mahua collection, invasive plants, and soil erosion on *Budha Pahad* were putting the forest at risk. The villagers realised that if they did nothing, their forest life itself would suffer. The community came together to protect it. Women stopped burning under mahua trees, revived the *Thengapalli* patrol system, and replanted overharvested medicinal roots like Anantamul. They worked with nature allowing goats and cattle to help renew the land and restored Budha Pahad by building trenches and planting 7,000 saplings of *jamun, bamboo, neem, amla, koitho, and karanj.*

Today, the forest has regenerated again. Fires are rare, resources are plentiful, and families can rely on it. The women's bond has, strengthening the community's bond. During Van Mahotsav, villagers tie red threads around trees, like sisters tying rakhis, a reminder that protecting the forest is an act of love and care for all.



We started patrolling with thengapali again. When we walk together, we feel strong. The forest is safe because all of us protect it, not just one person."

Sumitra Dehury
Sahala, Batagaon, Kankadahad, Dhenkanal, Odisha

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 1:17:13 minutes.

Grassroots Leaders: Reclaiming Heritage, Securing Futures with FRA

"*Gaon chhodob nahi, jungle chhodob nahi*" (We will not leave the village nor the forest) for Bhagabati Mahanta, these words are not just a slogan but a mission. Once a homemaker, she is now a strong forest rights advocate, inspiring many in Keonjhar to reclaim their ancestral lands and protect the forests that sustain them.

Keonjhar, a forest rich district in northeastern Odisha, where Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) like the Juangas and Bhuinas. These communities depend on forests, streams, and grazing lands for their livelihood and cultural identity. However, mining, deforestation, and lack of awareness about the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, have threatened their way of life. Despite the provision of the Forest Act, only a few villages have secured their rightful claims. Bhagabati's journey began in 2022 when she joined *Mission Shakti* and received training from the NGOs on the FRA. The training equipped her with legal knowledge and confidence to act. She started engaging with local leaders and women *Sarpanchs*, encouraging them to organise *gram sabhas* and form Forest Rights Committees (FRCs). Through women's self-help groups (SHGs), awareness rallies, and training sessions, she mobilised communities to prepare and submit forest rights claims. Her efforts built bridges between villagers and government departments, helping streamline the entire process.

By November 2023, 15 villages in Patna block had submitted forest claims, inspiring others across Keonjhar to follow. Till now, 162 claims were filed in several blocks. These achievements brought socio economic security, political empowerment, and ecological benefits with them. Communities now manage forests sustainably while women play key roles in decision making. Bhagabati's story proves that determination and unity can bring real change.



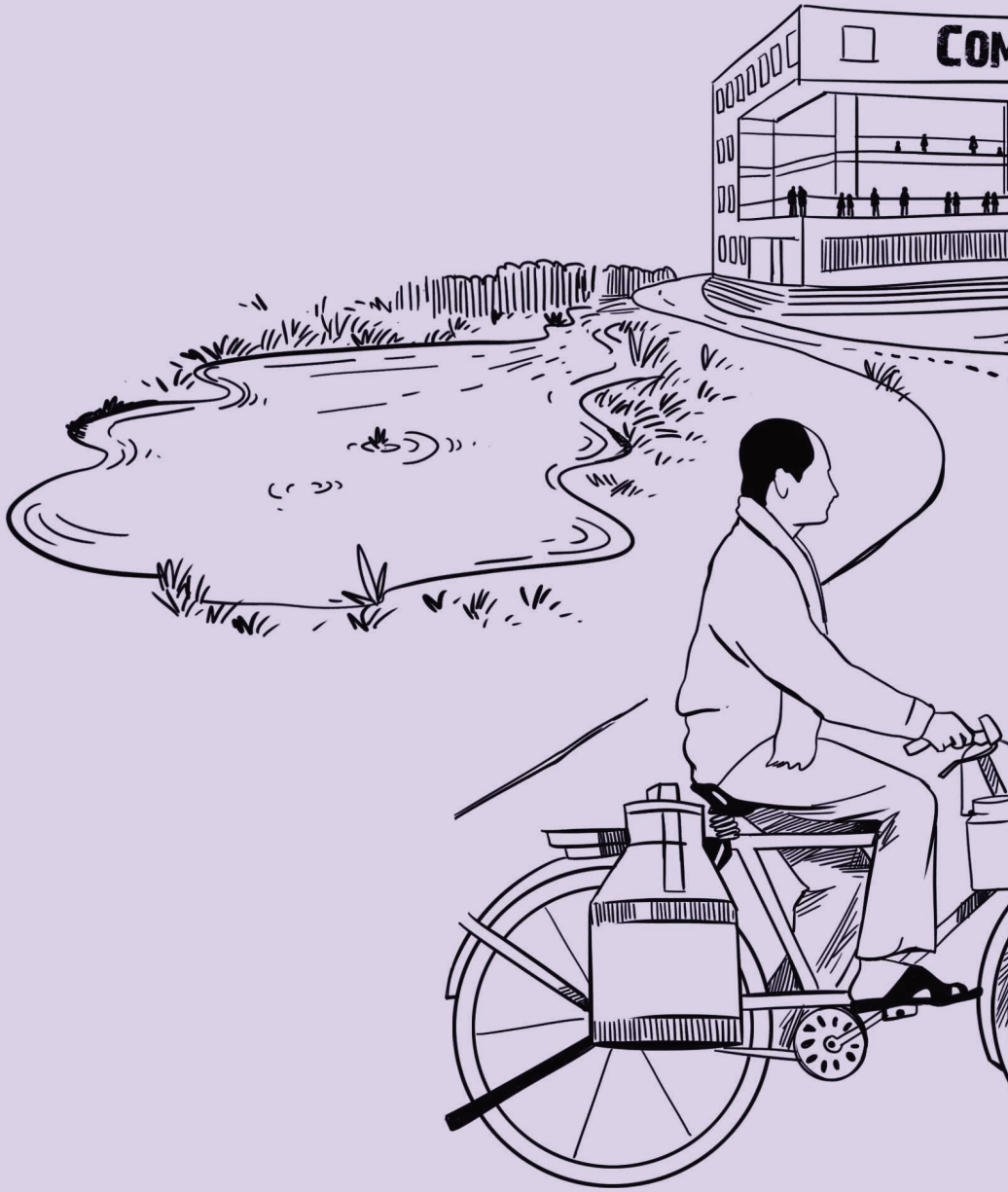
Challenges will come, but together, we can protect what is ours."

Bhagabati Mahanta
Tangarpada, Banspa, Keonjhar, Odisha

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 39:05 minutes.

10 Urban Commons




MMUNITY HALL
SCHOOL

Helping communities to improve their environment in urban spaces in Davangere

Karuna Jeeva Kalyana Trust has been actively working to raise environmental awareness and mitigate pollution since 2005. The organisation primarily serves the poor and marginalised communities while promoting sustainable development.

Their first major environmental campaign focused on the pollution caused by Harihar's poly fibre factory, which was discharging harmful effluents into the Tungabhadra River, severely affecting water quality. This struggle marked the beginning of the trust's long-standing commitment to environmental protection and advocacy.

Since then, the trust has continuously expanded its efforts in and around Davangere, organising a wide range of initiatives to promote environmental awareness and action through educational campaigns where discussions, seminars, and awareness programmes are conducted to educate communities about environmental conservation. They also take up community clean-ups in parks and common spaces to promote cleaner surroundings. By tree planting activities to increase green cover. They also implement initiatives to reduce plastic usage and encourage sustainable alternatives.

The increasing effects of climate change-such as erratic rainfall, heatwaves, and floods—continue to motivate their work. The trust focuses on the key elements of air, water, and soil, with particular emphasis on reducing carbon emissions, improving groundwater levels, and enhancing soil health. To achieve these goals, they regularly educate the public, youth, and farmers through awareness campaigns, seminars, and discussions.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 33:14 minutes.

Volunteers and students form the backbone of their efforts. Over the years, the Trust has planted around 15,000 trees in and around Davangere and installed 500 small cement water tanks to provide drinking water for birds and animals. They also promote natural farming, encourage the use of solar rooftops, and have provided bicycles to economically disadvantaged students.



Through campaigns we are educating communities, youth and especially students as they are the ones who will benefit from these efforts in the future."

Uday
Davanagere, Karnataka

The trust believes that working with the community is a continuous process and is essential for the sustainability of any initiative. The trust continues to inspire people to join hands in protecting and preserving our natural resources for future generations.

Cleaning Up the Future: How Communities Are Reshaping their Waste Habits

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have been a popular destination for tourists because of the rich biodiversity and beautiful landscapes. However, the influx of tourists has led to an increase in pollution on the islands. The reverberations of this problem have also echoed through Wandoor, which is part of the Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park and close to the Lohabarrack Wildlife Sanctuary.

To deal with this pressing concern, the village was assisted by Dakshin Foundation, an organisation that works with coastal communities. Eight young women from Wandoor Panchayat joined the Dakshin Youth Ambassador Programme and received extensive training on issues like waste management, menstrual health and community engagement. Due to the unavailability of landfills and waste recycling systems, the Youth Ambassadors (YAs) regarded the waste accumulation as a grave issue, and took up efforts to strengthen the waste management systems. They surveyed and mapped the village, identifying the locations with existing waste management services and the ones where open dumping or burning is prevalent. Moreover, they bridged the gap between different stakeholders, including the Panchayat, forest officials, youth, school students, NGOs, and sanitation workers, to understand the issues encountered by them.

Menstrual waste was identified as a significant contributor of solid waste, as the local women depended on sanitary napkins, which were often buried due to limited disposal options. The YAs introduced sustainable alternatives, like menstrual cups, cloth pads, and menstrual undergarments to ASHA and Anganwadi workers and villagers through awareness sessions and door-to-door visits. They not only distributed the products but also personally used them to improve their own understanding and answer all queries of the community. Regular follow-ups helped them to connect with 238 women, among which 224 expressed interest to switch to sustainable products and among them 118 have successfully switched to using menstrual cups. This dynamic and collaborative effort of the organisation, youth and community effectively reflects the role of locals in transitioning to sustainable practices which brings them a step closer to attaining their goal of zero waste on island grounds.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

The community speaker's segment begins at 57:01 minutes.



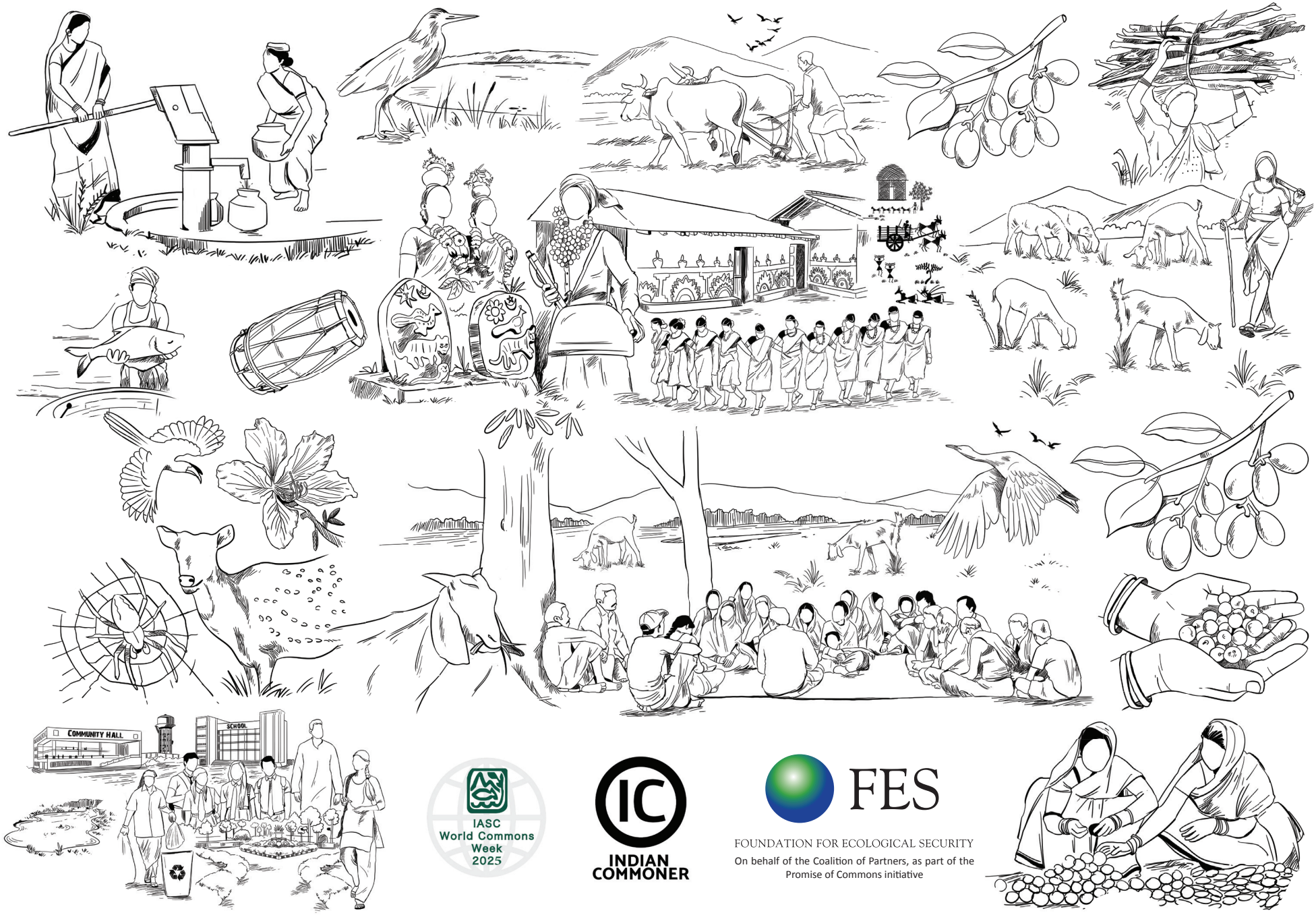
We have tried the products thus can share our experiences with the communities. Our experiences play a vital role for communities to adopt these sustainable practices which would be beneficial for them and the next generations."

Shikha Mondal
Wandoor, Ferrargunj, South Andaman, Andaman and Nicobar Islands

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Contributing Organisations

Advanced Centre for Integrated Water Resources Management (ACIWRM)
Arannayk Foundation
Awakening Peoples Action for Rural Development
Baudh Kalyankari Mahila Utthan Trust
Center for Regional Education, Forest & Tourism Development Agency (CREFTDA)
Central University of Rajasthan
Centre for Pastoralism
Centre for People's Forestry (CPF)
Centre for Youth Culture Law and Environment
Chetna Vikas
Child in Need Institute (CINI)
Dakshin Foundation
Darpan Society
Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)
Gram Sudhar Samiti
Gram Vikas Navyuwak Mandal, Laporiya (GVNML)
Gram Vikas Samiti
Gramoday
International Land Coalition (ILC), Asia
Jai Bharati Shiksha Kendra
Jamanalal Kaniram Bajaj Trust, Sikar
Jan Chetna Sansthan
Jashpur Jan Vikas Sanstha (JJVS)
Koya Bumkal Kranti Sena
Malti Art Association
Manav Jeevan Vikas Samiti
Manav Adhikar Seva Samiti (MASS)
National Institute of Women, Child and Youth Development
Nature Conservation Foundation
Nav Nirman Chetna Manch
Partnering Hope Into Action (PHIA) Foundation
Partners of Community Organizations in Sabah (PACOS) Trust
Prayatna Samiti
Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR), Karnataka
Rural Integrated Development Society
Sahjeevan
Sajag
Samarthan Centre for Development Support
Samerth Charitable Trust
Sampark Samaj Sevi Sanstha Raipuriya
Seba Jagat
Seva Niketan
Shakti Social Cultural & Sporting Organisation (SSCSO)
Shroffs Foundation Trust
Society for Promoting Rural Education and Development (SPREAD), Koraput
Society for Rural and Urban Joint Activities Nagpur (SRUJAN)
Spoorthy Organisation for Education and Social Development
Society For Rural Initiatives In Sustainable And Holistic Themes In India (SRISHTI)
Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)
University of Granada
Vikasana Institute for Rural & Urban Development
Youth for Action & Research (YAR), Nuapada



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On behalf of the Coalition of Partners, as part of the
Promise of Commons initiative