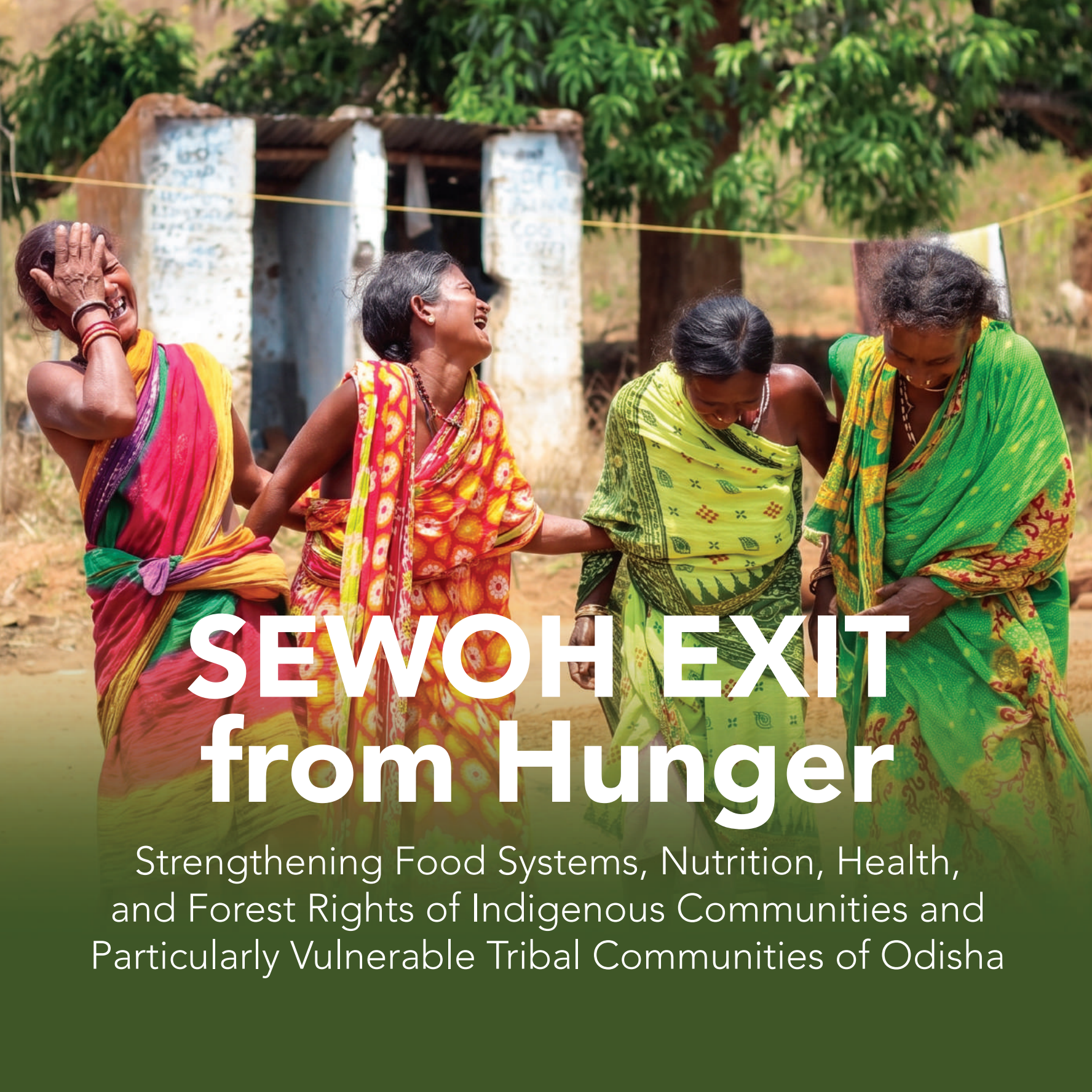


A photograph of four women in a rural village setting, wearing colorful saris (red, yellow, green, and orange). They are laughing and dancing joyfully. In the background, there is a simple white building with a thatched roof and lush green trees. A yellow string is strung across the scene.

SEWOH EXIT from Hunger

Strengthening Food Systems, Nutrition, Health,
and Forest Rights of Indigenous Communities and
Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Communities of Odisha

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Implemented by



Supported by





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Call to Action

We invite all stakeholders—government agencies, civil society organizations, researchers, and community leaders to collaborate in this shared effort. Collective action is essential to eliminate hunger, secure forest rights, and build long-term resilience for tribal communities, ensuring dignity and sustainable livelihoods for all.



Introduction

SEWOH EXIT PROGRAMME

Living Farms and DAPTA are implementing the program SEWOH-EXIT in the Kashipur block of Rayagada district and Lanjigarh block of Kalajandi district in Odisha by the support of *Terre Des Hommes* (TDH) , focusing on food and nutrition security through agro-ecological approaches, sustainable management of forests, women-led nutrition initiatives, improved access to government schemes and youth action for protecting the environment.

Project Aim

To improve food sovereignty and nutrition security for Adivasi communities in the target area by promoting agro-ecological farming, strengthening community-based forest management, and increasing awareness of government food security programs.

Project Vision

To build resilient indigenous communities in Kalahandi and Rayagada who are free from hunger, have sustainable livelihoods, and are empowered to protect and claim their forest rights.

By the end of the project:

- ✓ **5,063 households** in Kalahandi and Rayagada districts are resilient to hunger crises and are able to advocate for their forest rights with civil society stakeholders at regional and national levels.
- ✓ **2,310 children and youth** will be able to advocate for ecological children's rights.
- ✓ **5,063 households** will have food in sufficient supply, village structures to detect and combat malnutrition, undernourishment among women and children.
- ✓ Implementation of **forest rights entitlements** as community and individuals.



Image generated by gemini

TERRE DES HOMMES

Terre des Hommes Germany - India (Earth of Humanity), is a children's aid organisation working with children, women and communities on the edges of society to transform their lives through progressive development and help reclaim their rights and follow their dreams.

Terre des Hommes believes in empowering children to help shape their own future and supporting them in their own environment and social context. It envisions a just and peaceful world where no child remains unhealthy, goes hungry, is unschooled or uncared for, or suffers violence.

Mission

As a child-focused organization, Terre des Hommes Germany-India Programme aims to support children, women and their communities, irrespective of gender, caste and religion, by finding them the most suitable ways to improve their lives without separating them from their cultural and social environment. Terre des Hommes strongly believes in active participation by the children in their communities and in process empower and enable themselves to shape their own future.

Vision

Terre des Hommes Germany – India Programme focuses its endeavours on equal educational and development opportunities for children, youth and their communities regardless of their religion, gender or race and envisions a world in which survival is guaranteed for all children, no child is exploited and where economic and social justice and peace prevail.

BMZ

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is the principal institution of the German Government responsible for international development cooperation and sustainable development partnerships across the world. BMZ works toward reducing poverty, strengthening human rights, promoting climate resilience, supporting equitable economic development, and advancing social justice through collaborative partnerships with governments, civil society organizations, multilateral institutions, and the private sector. The ministry places strong emphasis on child rights, gender equality, sustainable supply chains, environmental sustainability, and inclusive governance systems, particularly in vulnerable and marginalized regions. Through its strategic funding and policy engagement, BMZ supports long-term systemic approaches that strengthen local institutions,

community resilience, education, livelihoods, and sustainable development outcomes aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

LIVING FARMS

Living Farms is a social organisation based in Odisha, working for food and nutrition security of Adivasi communities through agro-ecological approaches, conservation of biodiversity, strengthening of traditional food systems, and promotion of community-led natural resource management. With more than a decade of experience in grassroots engagement, Living Farms works closely with communities to reclaim indigenous knowledge systems, seed sovereignty, food sovereignty, and sustainable livelihood practices.

Living Farms is an initiative that promotes partnership engagement with communities to cultivate critical consciousness; develop the ability to objectively analyse the root causes of the current crisis, the Adivasi peasants are confronted with. Living Farms put efforts to address immediate problems and also to enabling the Adivasis to respond to the challenges and help create linkages and solidarities between different local grassroots initiatives, academia, researchers, media, and the government, by fostering innovative dialogues in meaningful ways, valuing local and traditional knowledge and stimulate ethical action for their wellbeing and address ecological crisis. As an organization, Living Farms holds the abilities and wisdom of local communities, particularly women in high regard.

DAPTA

Development Agency for Poor and Tribal Awakening (DAPTA) is a non-political, secular, social service organisation based on love of humanity and universal brotherhood. Its activities are the upliftment of the poor, rural, tribal, marginalised and other weaker sections. The association aims towards the self-reliance of the people rather than charity. It is a non-profit-oriented organisation leading people towards self-reliance, self-confidence and self-dignity. It is a community-based humanitarian organisation committed to improving the lives of vulnerable communities through education, livelihood, child protection, health, and emergency response interventions. Since its inception, the organisation has worked closely with local communities, government departments, and civil society partners to design and implement context-specific development and humanitarian programmes.

IMPACT

Over the project period, significant changes have taken place in community food production systems as, consumption is given higher priority, dietary diversity, livelihood resilience, collective action, and local leadership through collaborative actions of Living Farms and DAPTA in their respective intervention regions.

Living Farms, Rayagada

DAPTA, Kalahandi

Villages

66

52



Natural Farming Adoption



20+ villages

- 25 out of 52 villages have adopted natural farming practices.

- 20 out of 66 villages have transformed from chemical to natural farming practices.
- Now all 66 villages have adopted natural farming practices.



25 villages

Nutrition Gardens

3000 farmers

- 3,000 farmers across 66 villages have adopted nutrition gardens
- Families consume 10–12 varieties of nutritious vegetables
- Approximately 2,600 farmers sell surplus produce in local markets (haats)
- Average weekly income from sales: ₹400–₹500

2800 farmers

- 2,800 farmers across 52 villages have adopted nutrition gardens
- Families consume 10–12 varieties of nutritious vegetables
- Approximately 700 farmers sell surplus produce in local markets (haats)
- Average weekly income from sales: ₹400–₹500

Nutrition Impact

10–12 vegetable varieties consumed
Improved household nutrition

Income Boost

₹400–₹500/week (vegetable sales)
₹5,000–₹7,000/year (millets, cereals, pulses)



Mixed Cropping

2,800 farmers (Rayagada)



621 farmers (Kalahandi)



Crop Diversity

- Increased from 4–5 to 12 varieties
- Climate-resilient crops adopted

Landrace Revival

- 8–10 indigenous paddy varieties
- 4 Millet varieties, 3 pigeon pea varieties, 4 cowpea varieties restored (Rayagada and Kalahandi)

Forest Protection Committee (FPCs)



35

Out of 45 FPCs, around 35 are engaged in selling Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) such as bamboo, moringa, mahua, tamarind, and wild mushrooms
Income: Approximately ₹8,000–₹10,000 annual earnings per family



11

11 FPCs are engaged in selling Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) such as bamboo, moringa, mahua, tamarind, and wild mushrooms
Income: Approximately ₹8,000–₹10,000 annual earnings per family

Individual and Community Forest Rights

1452 Households

Individual Forest Rights entitlements (IFR)

47 Villages

Community Forest Rights entitlements (CFR)

463 Households

Individual Forest Rights entitlements (IFR)

9 Villages

Community Forest Rights entitlements (CFR)





1

Food and Nutritional Security

Nutritional Diversity

Health and Nutrition

Seed Sovereignty



“Earlier, I felt weak and worried for my children. Today, they are healthier. When I see them eating fresh vegetables from our own garden, I feel strength in my body and joy in my heart as I am no longer anemic.”

*—Bunde Majhi
Farmer, Pipalpadar Village*



Nutrition Gardens: Breaking a Generational Cycle of Anemia and Malnutrition Securing Year-Round Food Sovereignty



Community: Kondh



Region: Pipalpadar Village, Kashipur Block, Rayagada District

Impact:

- **3,000 farmers** have been preparing nutrition garden and accessing **12 to 16 varieties** of chemical free nutritious vegetables.
- More than **1,500 farmers** are harvesting papaya, lemon, banana, and drumstick from their garden.

Issue

In the rugged highlands of Pipalpadar village, life for the 45 Kondh Indigenous families was a repetitive rhythm of rice and millet. The terrain was hilly, rain-fed, and without irrigation facilities, leaving families with little access to vegetables. Calories filled the stomach but left the blood thin and the spirit weary. Post-monsoon, barren fields meant months of scarcity.

For Bunde Majhi, a 42-year-old mother of four, this reality was harsh. She was chronically weak with anemia, her children frequently fell ill, and the family's meager earnings were drained by medical treatment often—a desperate attempt to buy back the health their diet could not provide.



Bunde Majhi in her nutrition garden that promises food security

Intervention

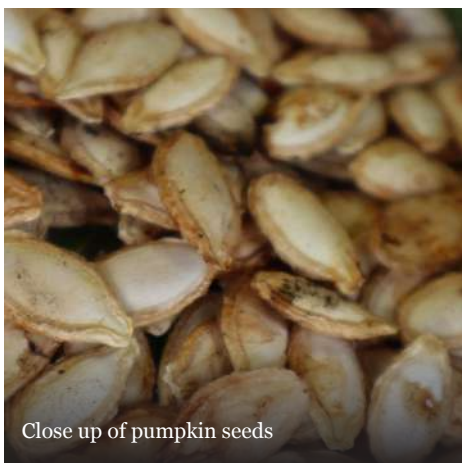
The shift began when Living Farms started promoting nutrition gardens to improve dietary diversity of community members supported by TDH and BMZ. Demonstration nutrition gardens or nutri-gardens were introduced.

Nutrition Gardens (Nutri-Gardens) are small, sustainable backyard plots designed to combat malnutrition by providing year-round access to fresh, organic vegetables and fruits. This initiative improves dietary diversity, enhances food sovereignty, and creates surplus income.

Living Farms staff explained the benefits of Nutri-Gardens encouraging villagers to adopt organic practices of composting, mulching, and the use of bio-fertilisers. They distributed seeds of spinach, okra, brinjal, tomatoes, beans, pumpkin, onions, and leafy greens along with banana, papaya, jackfruit, and guava saplings.

Bunde Majhi, along with her husband Dumeng and a few other farmers, showed keen interest. Together, they finalized cultivation sites and participated in hands-on training sessions that successfully helped overcome any initial reluctance.

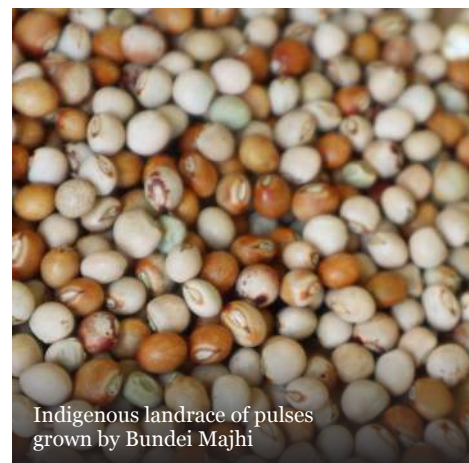
Soon, Bunde converted ten decimals of barren land into a thriving Nutri-Garden, cultivating indigenous varieties of climate-resilient vegetables and fruits and securing a healthier future for her family.



Close up of pumpkin seeds



Indigenous variety of brinjal crop



Indigenous landrace of pulses grown by Bunde Majhi



Onion crop growing in Bunde's nutrition garden



Close up of bio-fertiliser prepared by Dumeng Majhi



Dumeng Majhi selling his surplus produce in the local vegetable market

Outcome

Bunde's family now enjoys a balanced diet rich in vitamins and minerals. Surplus vegetables are sold in the local market, earning her a weekly income of up to 1000 rupees. Medical expenses have reduced, financial stability has improved, and year-round food security has been secured. Her success inspired other villagers to set-up nutri-gardens, creating a ripple of sustainable change across Pipalpadar.

Learning

This story is about dignity, resilience, and the power of small interventions. Small-scale homestead interventions can effectively break generational cycles of malnutrition and provide financial independence. The lesson is clear: when families cultivate diverse food, they cultivate health, hope, and resilience for generations to come.



***“If my hands can work and
the mountain sends water,
why should I stop? This
garden gives me respect.”***

— Lingaraj Majhi
Resident, Kanchanmukhi Village



Lingaraj Majhi: Hands that Still Grow Food



Community: Kutia-Kondh



Region: Kanchanmukhi Village, Ianjigarh Block, Kalahandi District

Impact:

- From **500 families** at the initial stage to **1,500 families** presently are practicing the Nutrition garden concept for food security

Issue

In the hilly, forested terrain of Kanchanmukhi- a remotely-located, tribal-dominated village once defined by rain-fed millets and forest tubers–vegetables were never part of the dietary habits or agricultural practices. Families depended on wild tubers and leafy greens for nutrition, but forest degradation gradually reduced their availability. Malnutrition among children, adolescents, and pregnant women became a pressing concern.

For Lingaraj Majhi, an 80-year-old farmer, this reality was deeply felt. His village lacked food diversity, and the absence of balanced nutrition reflected in the health of its children, adolescents and pregnant women.

With a purpose in mind, Lingaraj Majhi begins his day at his nutrition garden tending to the rows of tomato, brinjal, and carrot while most of the elders rest in their homes.

“If my hands can work and the mountain sends water, why should I stop? This garden gives me respect,” says Lingaraj Majhi.



Lingaraj Majhi's nutrition garden with diverse vegetables



Interventions

Lingaraj was not always an organic cultivator. The turning point came when Lingaraj participated in an exposure trip organized by DAPTA. There, he learned about the loss of food diversity and its link to malnutrition. He was introduced to compost-based cultivation and chemical-free agricultural practices. Counselling sessions gave him the confidence to experiment, and his small plot of land near the village became a living classroom.

DAPTA's foundational interventions—mobilization meetings, training programs, and distribution of open-pollinated vegetable seeds—had already inspired families to diversify their diets. Lingaraj took this vision further, proving that age is no barrier to change.

He began cultivating tomatoes, brinjals, carrots, leafy greens, and potatoes, channeling gravity-fed mountain water into his nutrition garden. For him, farming became more than food—it was dignity, income, and purpose.

Outcomes

On his modest plot, Lingaraj now grows vegetables that feed his six-member household and supply fresh produce to ten neighboring families. His garden is a microcosm of sustainability, where every leaf and root reflects his commitment to health and climate action.

His example has radically reshaped the outlook of younger generations. Youth began to see farming not as drudgery but as a dignified, sustainable livelihood.

Today, 41 out of 60 families in Kanchanmukhi grow diverse and nutritious food in their gardens. Surplus produce is sold in nearby markets, generating additional income of **₹7,000–₹8,000** for many households.

Learnings

This story demonstrates that age is not a limit, land need not be vast to be impactful, and sustainable farming pays—in health, dignity, and climate resilience.

Lingaraj's nutrition garden stands as a living testimony to resilience and the power of small interventions that can lead from forest dependency to sustainable agriculture. His hands, weathered by time, continue to grow food and hope, proving that the spirit of farming can inspire generations and transform communities.



Lingaraj Majhi preparing a compost pit



Lingaraj displaying tomatoes from his nutrition garden



Teaching the new generation about organic farming and growing diverse food



*“We want to bring back all
the seeds of our youth, of our
ancestors, so they are never
lost again.”*

*—Ruai Majhi
Organic Farmer, Sirlijodi Village*



The Seed Guardian of Sirlijodi: One Woman's Voice Sparks Collective Action to Revive Vanishing Indigenous Crops



Community: Kondh



Region: Sirlijodi
Village, Kashipur
Block, Rayagada
District

Impact:

- **33 seed banks** are established.
- **10 to 12** varieties of seeds including millets, pulses, oil seeds have been revived.
- **13** climate resilient indigenous varieties of paddy have been revived.

Issue

For decades, the hilly agricultural landscape of Sirlijodi village underwent a troubling transformation.

The community's bond with the soil ran deep, and Ruai Majhi, now 50 years old, has become a custodian of this heritage.

Four years ago, she realized that many traditional indigenous seeds - especially millet varieties were vanishing. The village was left with only one variety each of finger millet, maize, and foxtail millet.

Agriculture became expensive, and production stagnated as farmers turned to chemical fertilizers, causing soil fertility to plummet.

The once-vibrant system of mixed farming on the slopes was reduced to mono-cropping, and the unique taste of traditional crops became a distant memory.



Ruai Majhi with her daughter. Combining revived seeds with existing ones, the community now maintains approximately 30 different varieties of seeds.

Intervention

Refusing to let her community's legacy fade, Ruai Majhi took the lead. She and the local “mothers” organized meetings to list the seeds that had vanished over the years. A pivotal turn occurred through the support of **Living Farms**, which facilitated the community's efforts to rethink their traditional agricultural practices and provided intensive training on **agroecology**, seed conservation, and organic farming.

They organized:

- **Seed Festivals:** Held in Metkesh and Kenduguda to revive lost varieties.
- **Training sessions:** Conducted at the panchayat, block, and state levels—including in Bissam Cuttack, Rayagada, and Bhubaneswar—focusing on seed conservation and agroecology.

- **Community Engagement:** Monthly meetings and seed exchanges (*adal-badal*) across villages.

Outcomes

The community has successfully revived **12 indigenous varieties** of paddy including **4 distinct types** like *Kala Dhan* and *Rango Dhan*, multiple traditional varieties of barnyard and foxtail millets, pulses, tubers, vegetables and 4-5 varieties of oilseeds.

Ruai Majhi's eyes now glitter with hope as she leads monthly meetings to ensure that the climate-resilient and nutritious seeds of her youth are carried forward. She hopes to revive heritage, empowering women, and securing the future of food and forests.



Learnings

Ruai Majhi's journey is about reclaiming ancestral wisdom, protecting biodiversity, and empowering women to lead conservation. One voice can spark collective action and encourage others. Women-led conservation of ancestral seeds is critical for protecting biodiversity and ensuring future food security against climate challenges.





“Chemical farming of cotton drained our soil and our pockets. By returning to traditional millets and pulses, I have improved my income. Now, my crops feed both my family and the earth itself.”

***—Bade Majhi
Organic Farmer***

Bade Majhi: Reviving Traditional Farming

 **Community: Kondh**
 **Region:**
Ghatikundru
Village, Lanjigarh
Block, Kalahandi
District

Impact:

- The number of indigenous seed varieties preserved and utilized grew **from just 4 to 22** across the region.
- Sustained project interventions led to the revival of additional varieties. Ultimately, these traditional crops have been adopted and are now actively cultivated by **1,364 households**.

Issue

Ghatikundru, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) settlement in Odisha's Kalahandi district, is home to 49 Kondh tribe households. For generations, villagers cultivated diverse short-duration crops—paddy, millets, pulses, and oilseeds—that enriched biodiversity and nourished families. But over the past two decades, hybrid cotton and chemical-intensive farming replaced these practices.

Soil fertility declined, biodiversity shrank, and farming became increasingly precarious. Hybrid cotton demanded high input costs—seeds, fertilizers, pesticides—while erratic rainfall and pest infestations made yields uncertain.

Monocropping eroded soil health and left families vulnerable to market fluctuations. Nutritional diversity in diets also suffered as traditional crops disappeared.

Among those affected was Bade Majhi, a 65-year-old farmer living with his wife, son, and daughter-in-law and grandchildren. He used to cultivate hybrid cotton across four acres, alongside improved paddy and pigeon pea. However, lacking irrigation, his fields lay fallow in winter and summer. Dependent on a single, high-risk cash crop, his family's livelihood remained deeply fragile, and their daily diet lacked essential nutritional diversity.





Bade Majhi is happy to shift from cotton farming to growing vegetables and pulses now



Bade Majhi's wife drying the recently harvested black gram crop before storing it for consumption and further selling

Interventions

In 2024, DAPTA organized awareness sessions on eco-friendly agriculture and traditional farming practices. Bade learned how organically grown traditional crops—millets, pulses, and indigenous paddy—could restore soil health, reduce risks, and ensure food security. The Forest Rights Act (FRA), which secured land tenure for the community, gave him confidence to reclaim his fields for sustainable farming.

In the next *kharif* (monsoon) season, Bade reduced cotton cultivation drastically and diversified his land. He planted *kosla* (little millet) on three acres, *ragi* (finger millet) on half an acre, *kandul* (local pulse) on half an acre, traditional paddy varieties on a quarter acre, and retained cotton on just half an acre.

This shift marked his return to traditional multi-cropping, blending ecological wisdom with resilience.



Farmers use natural methods to grow different varieties of paddy in the village

Outcomes

The results were remarkable. A favorable monsoon, reduced pest incidence, and organic inputs led to a successful harvest. Bade anticipates earning **₹30,000–₹40,000** this season from crop diversity. More importantly, his family now enjoys diverse, nutrient-rich food grown on their own land.

The benefits extended beyond his household:

- **Enhanced Biodiversity:** Diverse crops restored ecological balance and reduced dependence on chemicals.
- **Eco-Farming System:** Traditional methods fostered natural pest control and soil fertility.
- **Community Empowerment:** FRA-secured land tenure encouraged sustainable practices and self-reliance.

DAPTA's role in facilitating awareness and empowering farmers has been pivotal. By reconnecting communities to their ecological roots, they are not just reviving agriculture—they are reviving dignity, resilience, and hope.

Learnings

Bade Majhi's journey is more than a personal triumph—it is a model for change. His decision to switch from chemical-intensive cotton cultivation to traditional multi-cropping demonstrates how sustainable practices can secure livelihoods while protecting the environment.

- **Age-old practices can be revived to meet modern challenges.**
- **Secure land rights empower communities to invest in sustainable futures.**
- **Sustainable farming pays—in health, dignity, and climate resilience.**

By reconnecting to ecological roots, Bade Majhi and his community are not just reviving agriculture—they are reviving dignity, resilience, and hope.



“Living Farms gives training sessions to help us be responsible as a community... They train us on nutrition garden management, and menstrual hygiene, organize health camps and manage Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNC).”

– Dipa Majhi

Member of Aliguna Women’s Collective



Aliguna Village: From Neglect to Vitality

 **Community: Kutia-Kondh**

 **Region: Aliguna Village, Kashipur Block, Rayagada District**

Impact:

- Fortnightly **sanitation drives** carried out in **66 villages** and **medical expenses reduced**.
- **Improved menstrual hygiene** practices adopted in **59 villages**.
- **Dietary diversity** has increased in **66 villages**.
- **40 VHSNCs** and **15 AWCs** have been strengthened.

Issue

Aliguna village, tucked deep within the hilly terrain, lived in the shadow of silent crisis due to distance and neglect. With the nearest Primary Health Centre seven kilometers away and the Community Health Centre a daunting 25 kilometers across treacherous terrain, healthcare was a distant dream.

Poor sanitation infrastructure, food insecurity and malnutrition among children was starkly visible in underweight children and anemic mothers. Seasonal outbreaks of diarrhea drained both lives and savings. Open defecation, poor menstrual hygiene, and food insecurity compounded the crisis. The silence was not just of distance—it was of systemic invisibility.

Intervention: The PLA Revolution

In 2022, Living Farms ignited a participatory spark, aiming to strengthen women's leadership, improve health and hygiene practices, and enhance local food security in the 66 villages of Kashipur through **Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)**—a community-based, gender sensitive participatory process that involves identifying community issues, planning actionable solutions, and monitoring progress collaboratively.



A collective of 25 tribal women gathered for the initial meetings. Women members identified and prioritised their problems based on urgency and feasibility, with an initial focus on improving sanitation and nutrition.

They used storytelling and “cause and effect” analysis to prepare a strategy and detailed action plan to address the malnutrition and other health issues of their village.

Sanitation became their first battlefield: fortnightly cleaning drives reshaped the village landscape with large participation by youth and adolescent girls.

Nutrition gardens bloomed in backyards, seeded with 12 to 14 varieties of indigenous, chemical-free seeds—the “three colors” of health: vibrant orange and yellow fruits, fresh green vegetables, and nutrient-dense, dark leafy greens.



Outcome

Today Aliguna's landscape is completely transformed.

- **Economic Relief:** Hospitalization expenses have plummeted with low incidence of diseases due to hygiene and sanitation management.
- **Nutritional Autonomy:** They harvest chemical-free food directly from their nutri-gardens ensuring every child meets the minimum dietary diversity required for growth.
- **Social Evolution:** Adolescent girls openly discuss reproductive health and use sanitary napkins.
- **Gender Parity:** There is no longer a difference in how boys and girls are fed or educated.

Aliguna is no longer a village silenced—it is a community speaking through its own vitality.

Learnings

Aliguna's journey teaches that:

- **Distance shrinks when communities mobilize.**
- **Women's leadership is the cornerstone of transformation.**
- **Food sovereignty begins in the backyard.**
- **Health is not merely delivered—it is cultivated.**

The village's newfound vitality is far more than just an outcome—it is a model for resilience, showing how participatory action can rewrite the narrative of neglect into one of empowerment.



A happy young child—testimony to how good nutrition and happiness go hand-in-hand



DAPTA's efforts in children's education, growth and monitoring are visible across intervention villages

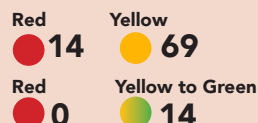
From Yellow to Green: Nurturing Growth in Kalahandi's Children

 **Community: Kutia-Kondh**

 **Region: Barguda Village, Lanjigarh Block, Kalahandi District**

Impact:

- **50 target villages**
- Initial status: **Malnourished children–83**
- Present status: **Malnourished children–0**



Issue

In the tribal villages of Kalahandi, malnutrition and illiteracy remain pressing challenges. Families often survive on small plots of land that yield only a single annual crop, while migration for work leaves mothers to manage households alone. Children face high infant mortality, poor nutrition, irregular schooling, and exploitation. Against this backdrop, growth monitoring becomes a vital tool to safeguard child health and rights.

Lesika was born on October 1, 2023, in a home delivery—a common practice in many poor families in the area. At birth, she weighed 2.6 kg. Her mother, Tipa Majhi, manages a household of seven while her father, Bighna Majhi, has migrated to Kerala for work to support the family. With only two acres of land yielding a single crop each year, maintaining consistent nutrition is a constant struggle

During a recent check-up, Lesika's weight was recorded at 9.6 kg. According to standard growth charts, this placed her in the "yellow zone" (moderately underweight or faltering) signalling a risk of slipping into severe malnutrition, though she remained within the normal range by WHO standards.

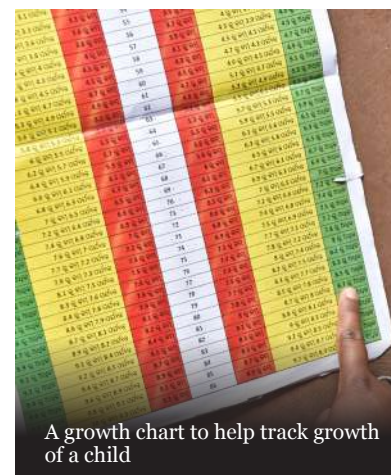
Identifying children in yellow zone is critical; if their nutritional needs are not immediately addressed, they risk falling into the "red zone," which indicates acute malnutrition and requires urgent admission to a Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre (NRC).



An ASHA worker counselling Lesika's mother on which foods help prevent malnutrition



Lesika's height and weight are measured to monitor her development from yellow zone to green zone



A growth chart to help track growth of a child

Intervention

As part of DAPTA's learning, growth and monitoring initiatives in the region, parents were sensitised through community mobilizers like Vinodini Sahu who conduct regular growth monitoring with the help of local Anganwadi workers.

DAPTA's intervention goes beyond just measurement. Vinodini Sahu and the local ASHA workers engage in nutrition education, counseling mothers on how to use locally available resources to improve their children's health.

To help Lesika move from the yellow zone to the green zone (the healthy, normal category), the team provided her family with the following practical guidance:

- **Nutritious Local Foods:** They encouraged the consumption of nutrient-rich local produce, including papaya, drumsticks (moringa), raw bananas, and eggplant. Nutrition gardens helped families grow vegetables and fruits.
- **Dalma:** A traditional Odia dish combining lentils and assorted vegetables—which was highlighted as an accessible, balanced meal packed with essential proteins and vitamins.

- **Supplementary Nutrition:** The family was taught how to effectively utilize *chhatua* (a nutritious, roasted grain powder) provided by the local Anganwadi centers.
- **The First 1,000 Days:** Training sessions emphasised that care during the first two years of life is vital for long-term development.

Additionally, the Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) meetings and regular growth monitoring and counseling sessions were held to help families understand growth charts and recognize danger zones.

Outcome

Lesika, along with 14 other children in Barguda, showed improvement through consistent monitoring and dietary changes. Children moved from the yellow zone toward the green zone, reflecting healthier growth. Families gained confidence in using local resources to nourish their children, while adolescents and parents became active participants in safeguarding community child health.



Children lined-up for growth monitoring

Learning

- **Early identification saves lives:** Detecting faltering growth before it worsens prevents severe malnutrition.
- **Local solutions matter:** Affordable, locally available foods can provide balanced nutrition when families are guided properly.
- **Community ownership ensures sustainability:** When mothers, adolescents, and local workers engage together, interventions become lasting.
- **Education is empowerment:** Teaching families to read growth charts and understand nutrition builds resilience against cycles of poverty and malnutrition.

“

Two children were in the yellow zone. After weighing them with the Anganwadi didi, we explained to the mothers that by feeding the child 3 different coloured foods, the children would move to the green zone. After this counseling, they have moved from yellow zone to green zone.

—Vinodini Sahu
Community Resource
Person, DAPTA

”



“The packaged foods of the market have no roots, no memory, and no strength. Our power grows in the wild millets, the foraged greens, the deep tubers, and the quiet wisdom of the woods.”

– Burghi Majhi
Advocate of Tribal Forest Rights



Burgi Majhi: Guardian of Food, Forest, and Future



Community: Kondh



Region: Kalakani
Village, Kashipur
Block, Rayagada
District

Impact:

- **45 villages** are protecting their forest and practicing sustainable management.
- Consumption and promotion of forest food has improved in **66 villages**.

Issue

In the quiet hills of Kalakani, millets once grew in abundance and forest greens nourished generations. But a silent shift was underway. The younger generation was lured by packaged snacks, adolescent girls struggled with anemia, and pregnant mothers were deprived of nutritious indigenous foods.

Villagers were losing touch with the foods that had once kept their ancestors strong.

Burgi Majhi, a 47-year-old Kondh woman, feared that if the wisdom of the forest—the beans, tubers, mushrooms, and leafy greens—was lost, both the forest and its people would eventually fade away.

Intervention

Burgi began her revival right at home—feeding her grandchildren millet porridge instead of biscuits, forest greens instead of packaged snacks. She spoke to young mothers about the strength of millets, the iron in leafy greens, and the vitality of mushrooms.

She reminded adolescent girls that their health was their strength, urging them to eat local foods that carried the resilience of their land.

She led women back into the woods, reclaiming forgotten forest foods: wild millets like *boda kangu*, dals like *kanadula*, greens such as *amibili sago* and *kena sago*, and seasonal delicacies like *bausa chatu* (bamboo mushrooms).



With support from Living Farms, Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) meetings, health camps, agroecology workshops, food festivals, and seed fairs connected traditional diets to health and cultural identity.

These interventions were designed to promote the preservation of indigenous knowledge and revival of traditional food systems and cultural identity.

Burgi also spearheaded a historic fight for Forest Rights, stopping outsiders from cutting sacred trees and securing land titles for her community.

Outcomes

- **Forest Protection:** Her leadership bore fruit when the community collectively filed for and received the Community Forest Rights (CFR) title for their land. Empowered by this victory, they are now campaigning to secure the rights to the neighboring mountain, ensuring that the “pharmacy of the forest” remains protected and accessible for generations to come.





- **Nutritional Revival:** Children and mothers now consume diverse indigenous foods, reducing anemia and malnutrition.
- **Cultural Pride:** Younger generations embrace local foods with a renewed sense of identity.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Indigenous crops improved soil health, reduced monoculture dependence, and promoted biodiversity.

Learnings

- Nourishing the Future with the Past
- Reviving indigenous foods restores both health and cultural identity.
- Women's leadership is central to sustaining traditions and protecting forests.
- Forest rights are inseparable from food sovereignty.
- By saving ancestral seeds, communities nourish future generations.

Kolakhani today stands as proof that resilience lies in the soil, seeds, and traditions carried forward by guardians like Burgi Majhi.





“For the Kondh community, the forest and the seeds are not separate entities. A seed is part of the human body. If seeds disappear, we will disappear too.”

*—Sapai Majhi
Farmer, Ambabali Village*



Sapai Majhi: Reclaiming Identity, Reviving Native Seeds



Community: Kondh



Region: Ambabali
Village, Kashipur
Block, Rayagada
District

Impact:

- **33 seed banks** are established.
- **10 to 12 varieties of seeds** including millets, pulses, oil seeds have been revived.
- **13 climate resilient indigenous varieties of paddy** have been revived.

Issue

For the Kondh community of Ambabali, the forest is kin, and seeds are its lifeblood.

However, 60-year old Sapai Majhi, witnessed a quiet tragedy unfolding in her village—the disappearance of traditional seed varieties.

Sapai grew up listening to stories from her father and grandfather—narratives that were deeply intertwined with the preservation of local seeds.

Where fields once brimmed with rich diversity of millets, oilseeds, rice, and tubers, only a handful remained. This erosion was not just agricultural: it was deeply cultural, threatening the very identity of her people.

Intervention

Determined to restore what was lost, Sapai began organizing village meetings, urging her community to remember ancestral wisdom. She traveled to seed festivals, visited relatives in distant villages in search of lost seeds. Even while grazing her cattle, she remained vigilant: if she noticed that a small patch or corner of a field contained a crop variety no longer present in her own village, she would secure those seeds and bring them home.



Living Farms' team guiding Sapai Majhi and other members of the seed bank on how to increase climate-resilient seed varieties

With support from Living Farms, she and other women rediscovered natural farming, seed preservation methods, and documentation techniques. A farmers' group was formed, with Sapai at the helm.

Sapai began cultivating these rescued seeds in her own fields. Within a few years, her yields multiplied so significantly that she had an abundance of seed to share freely with her neighbors. Today, her fields are so prolific that farmers from neighboring villages travel to Ambabali just to procure these rare varieties.

Outcome

Ambabali today thrives with oilseeds, millets, paddy, and tubers.

- **Biodiversity Reclaimed:** Forgotten varieties flourish once more in fields and kitchens.
- **Nutrition Revived:** Mothers and pregnant women consume diverse foods, driving down malnutrition rates.



Gaba or Castor beans- used for extracting oil



Seeds stored within a dried gourd



Jhudunga or Cow Pea bean – another indigenous seed variety revived by Sapai Majhi

- **Community Empowered:** Farmers from neighboring villages come to Sapai for seeds, receiving them freely as part of her mission.
- **Cultural Identity Restored:** Seeds are no longer commodities—they are symbols of Kondh heritage and resilience.

Learnings

Seeds as Sovereignty

Sapai's journey is a testament to the philosophy that seeds are more than food—they are identity, heritage, and sovereignty.

By nurturing diversity, she has shown that women's leadership is central to preserving biodiversity and cultural continuity. Further, sharing seeds freely strengthens community bonds and ensures resilience.

Her primary focus is on how **food diversity** can be increased and how seeds can be saved for the future.



Empowered women with their heritage seeds



“We have been able to conserve 10–12 types of traditional, indigenous seeds. In Rice: ‘kalajeera’ and ‘kantakaker’. We have three varieties of ‘Mandia’ plus ‘Gurji’, ‘Kosla’, and ‘kangu’ in millets. In legumes, we have desi kandulo (pigeon pea), and Jhudunga (long beans).”

*—Gondhari Majhi
President, Balisara Seed Bank*

Farmers no longer needed to search for seeds outside the village.



Sovereignty in a Grain: The Balisara Seed Revolution



Community: Kutia-Kondh



Region: Balisara village, Lanjigarh block, Kalahandi district

Impact:

- **Seed varieties** preserved by farmers has **increased from 4 to 22**.
- Targeted initiatives—including the reintroduction of indigenous seeds, the revival of forgotten local varieties, and the establishment of community seed banks—have successfully ignited the widespread cultivation and consumption of traditional crops.

Issue: The Disappearing Heritage

In Balisara village, home to just 20 households and 97 people, the Kutia Kondh families faced a silent crisis: the erosion of indigenous seed storage knowledge. Traditional varieties of rice, millets, and pulses were disappearing, reducing dietary diversity and increasing vulnerability to climate risks. Without access to their own seeds, farmers were forced to depend on external markets, often at high costs and with limited availability often missing ideal planting windows or incurring costs they could not afford.

Interventions

DAPTA's initiative began in 2023 with the creation of a **community seed bank** to ensure collective ownership and intergenerational learning.

Three distinct community groups were formed: a farmers' group, a youth group, and a children's group. The farmers' group was instrumental in establishing a seed bank, also known as a "seed storehouse," which has significantly improved access to seeds for local women.

- Indigenous seeds were collected from local farmers with surplus and purchased for distribution among target families.



A revived landrace of highly nutritious foxtail millet

- Farmers borrowing seeds agreed to return double after harvest (e.g., 1 kg borrowed → 2 kg returned). This ensured sustainability and growth of the seed stock.

Over five consecutive years, five seed bank festivals were organized to celebrate indigenous farming knowledge and encourage participation.

DAPTA purchased excess indigenous seeds from local farmers to stock the bank. Today, a committee of **10 women** and **5 men** supervises the bank's operations, maintaining meticulous incoming and outgoing inventory registers.

Outcomes

The project transformed the 30–35 acres of agricultural land in Balisara into a self-sustaining ecosystem:

- **Seed Security Restored:** Farmers no longer needed to search for seeds outside the village. Indigenous varieties became readily available for timely planting.
- **Stock Growth:** Through the rotation system, the seed bank accumulated 62 kg of seeds for future seasons.
- **Women's Leadership:** Local women played a central role in managing the seed bank, ensuring equitable access and strengthening community resilience.
- **Cultural Revival:** Traditional crops returned to fields, enriching diets and reinforcing cultural identity.

Learnings

The Balisara experience offers a blueprint for sustainable rural development.

- **Women as custodians:** Centering the farmer group around women has improved local seed access and empowered them as the primary guardians of nutritional security.
- **Trust as Currency:** The success of the 1:2 rotation model relies on community trust and shared responsibility rather than financial transactions.
- **Traditional Knowledge is Resilient:** By reviving “lost” seeds, the community has proven that indigenous wisdom provides a more stable defense against climate risk than modern, external dependencies.



Seeds that empower



The Balisara seed bank has helped revive a variety of indigenous paddy landraces



The women seed keepers of Balisara seed bank transferring the preserved seeds into earthen pot



Pita kanda or a wild edible tuber- a vital source of nutrition providing essential minerals and energy during lean seasons





“Through this seed bank, we are preserving our traditional seeds like finger millet, little millet, foxtail millet, black gram, and vegetables. These seeds are well-suited to our environment and yield good crops. We use seeds from our own bank for farming. We can plant them at the right time and get a good harvest. It has helped us overcome food shortages and lets our children eat healthy.”

*—Lachimdei Majhi
Member, Maa Thakur Ani Seed Bank*

A revived landrace of highly nutritious grain- foxtail millet-preserved by Lachimdei at her home



Maa Thakurani Seed Bank: A Collective Journey for Reviving Indigenous Seeds



Community: Kondh



Region:

Bhitarsunger
Village, Kashipur
Block, Rayagada
District

Impact:

- **33 seed banks** are established.
- **Seed exchange** practices have been revived among the community members.
- **10 to 12 varieties of seeds** including millets, pulses, oil seeds have been revived.
- **13 climate resilient indigenous varieties** of paddy have been revived.

Issue

Bhitarsunger, a small tribal village of 42 households in Rayagada's Kashipur block, once thrived on diverse crops—millets, paddy, vegetables, cereals, and legumes grown across its hilly terrain.

However, hybrid seeds and chemical inputs began to erode this ecosystem. Soil fertility declined, traditional seed diversity shrank, and younger villagers lost interest in farming. Consequently, the community faced food insecurity and a fading connection to ancestral wisdom.

Intervention

A group of women, led by Lachimdei Majhi, Kajol Majhi, and 23 others, took the initiative and created the *Maa Thakurani* seed bank, a repository of indigenous seeds to preserve biodiversity and ensure availability for future planting seasons. The establishment of the seed bank was facilitated by Living Farms with a vision to restore ecological balance and revive sustainable farming practices.



Community meetings sparked conversations on agroecology, seed conservation, and organic practices. The turning point was the Seed Festival (*Bihana Mela*)—a vibrant celebration where local millets like *mandia*, *koshla*, *kangu*, and *khedjana* were exchanged, stories were shared, and the seed bank was formally established.

Outcome

- **Villagers have adopted natural and mixed farming practices** enriching diets and soil health. Neighboring villages, inspired by Bhitarsunger, started their own seed conservation efforts.



- **Food Security Restored:** Families now plant indigenous seeds at the right time, ensuring reliable harvests.
- **Biodiversity Preserved:** Millets, pulses, rice varieties like *Deuling*, *Chornang*, *Gurukiya*, and vegetables such as pumpkin and beans are stored in earthen pots.
- **System of Sharing:** Farmers borrow seeds and return double after harvest, creating abundance and continuity.
- **Trust and Accountability:** A register meticulously tracks seed exchanges, strengthening community bonds.

Learnings

- Indigenous seeds are central to ecological balance and cultural identity.
- Women's leadership ensures continuity of traditional farming practices.
- Community-led seed banks foster resilience, accountability, and self-reliance.
- Food security is not just about harvest—it is about preserving heritage for future generations.

Bhitarunger today stands as a beacon of sustainable agriculture, proving that collective action can reclaim traditions and secure the future.





2

Biodiversity Conservation

Effective Water Management



“If sand enters the canal, we get together as a group and remove it. Even if the canal gets damaged, we can write an application as a group and submit it to the collector or go to the block office to submit it.”

—Budharu Majhi
President of Pipalpadar Village



Water Restored, Life Renewed: Water and Food Security Through Collective Renovation Efforts of a Canal



Community:
Predominantly
Kondh



Region: Pipalpadar
Village, Kashipur
Block, Rayagada
District, Odisha

Impact:

- **Improved irrigation** and drinking water facilities in **20 villages**.
- More than **200 hectares of land** came under cultivation and double cropping.
- **Reduced seasonal migration** in **10 villages** through improved agriculture.
- **Reduced diarrhea** and **water-borne diseases** in **15 villages**.

Issue

Nestled amidst forests and nourished by the Dhangadidhara river, Pipalpadar village is home to 45 tribal families who revere the forest as their mother. Agriculture and forest produce sustained them for generations. Years ago, a check dam was constructed here which transformed their fields high up in the hilly region, enabling paddy and vegetable cultivation.

Pipalpadar village faced a crisis when the canal broke. For three years, 150 acres of land lay dry, triggering widespread food insecurity and acute child malnutrition.

The burden fell heavily on the village women—including the young, the elderly, and expectant mothers—who had to trek up the hills to carry contaminated water from muddy ponds, risking physical injury and waterborne illnesses. The community's spirit dimmed under the weight of uncertainty.

“

Previously, we used to eat only one type of food. Now we are eating so many varieties of vegetables. We are eating food we grow ourselves instead of pesticide-laden market produce that made us and our children ill.

—Nirabati Majhi,
Resident of
Pipalpadar village

”



Nutrition and diet: A villager feeding her child wholesome, diverse food comprising finger millet, lentil and vegetables cultivated in their farm.



Nirabati Majhi harvesting tomatoes from her farm



Wholesome, diverse food comprising finger millet, lentil and vegetables.



Building capacities: Villagers being collectively trained in future maintenance of the canal by the Living Farms team.

Intervention

The transformation began with a profound exercise in community mobilization led by Living Farms. Villagers collectively identified the challenges they faced and were trained in group governance and advocacy to formalize their needs by learning how to navigate local bureaucracy, write formal applications, and approach the District Collector or Block Office independently. Despite submitting the application, they did not receive any result. Finally, they submitted a written petition to Living Farms requesting assistance for carrying out the work.

They took the lead by drafting and submitting an application for the canal's repair, shifting from passive observers to active participants

Living Farms provided construction materials while the villagers volunteered the collective labor required to repair the canal and lay new drinking water pipelines. The intervention focused on empowering the 45 families to take ownership of their own development.

Outcomes

The canal now irrigates **100 acres** during the summer season and **150 acres in the *rabi* (winter) season**, enabling year-round cultivation of rice and diverse vegetables. Earlier, the land was not irrigated before summer. Families earn **₹1,000–₹1,500** per week from surplus sales in the weekly markets.

Children have access to nutritious food, and migration for work has reduced. Clean drinking water piped from a mountain spring has eliminated diarrhea outbreaks and freed women from the dangerous burden of carrying heavy pots.

Learnings

Collective action and shifting from passive observers to active participants can restore critical infrastructure and build long-term community resilience.



“For four years we carried water from far away, quarreling among ourselves. Now, with this solar pump working again, our families can drink clean water and there is peace in the village. It is like life has returned to us.”

—Bhagaban Majhi
Resident of Ghatikundru

A solar-powered water system ensures there is access to water for drinking and irrigation

The Sun Rises in Ghatikundru: Water Restoration for Drinking and Irrigation Through Alternative Energy



Community:
Predominantly
Kondh tribe



Region:
Ghatikundru
Village, Lanjigarh
block, Kalahandi
District, Odisha

Impact:

- From **7 Tube wells** in unfunctioning condition to **7 Tube wells** with solar based safe drinking water points in **7 Villages**.
- The project area being in a hilly terrain, comes up with many issues. Majorly water related, during the intervention, the team came across 7 villages where water availability was a challenge due to de-functioned water structures. After reviving the structures, it helped the communities in daily usage, drinking purpose and irrigating the back yard kitchen gardens.

Issue

In Ghatikundru village, a broken solar-based water pump left 45 households without clean water for four years, leading to community conflicts and long treks to secure water.

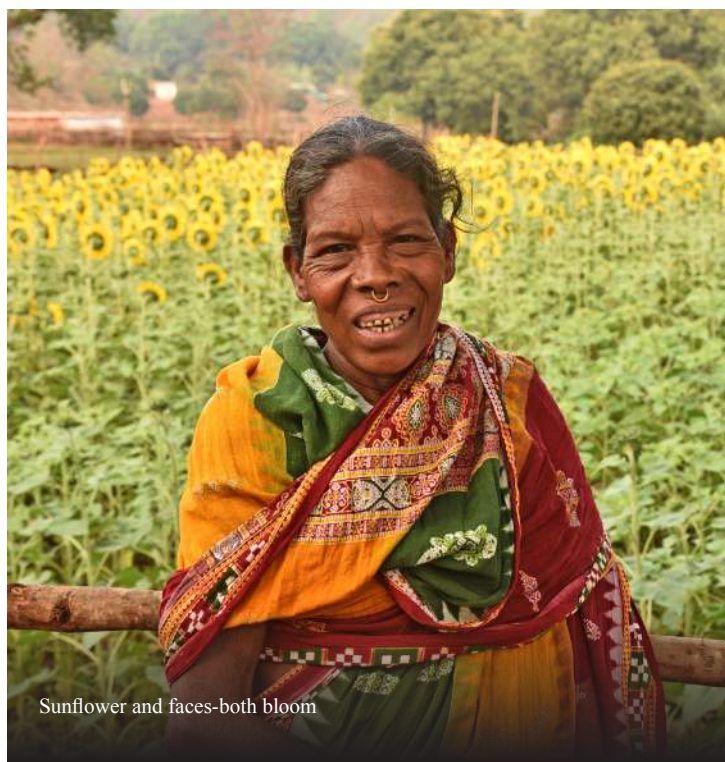
Ghatikundru lies under the Lakhabahali Gram Panchayat, surrounded by undulating fields and scattered hamlets that stretch toward the distant hills. The drought-prone region depends on rain-fed agriculture and relies on small streams and a single canal for irrigation and drinking.



Families use excess water to nurture nutrition gardens, turning scarcity into nourishment



Water flows again after the solar-based pump was restored— clear, abundant, life-giving



Sunflower and faces-both bloom



Households now drink clean water without fear of contamination.



With nutrition gardens blooming, children eat healthy and women find relief from long treks

Its 45 households have long endured the harsh summers when water scarcity turned daily life into a struggle. Women walked miles to fetch water, families struggled to grow diverse food, and quarrels over access to limited safe drinking water fractured the bonds of the community.

In 2018, a solar-powered water point was installed. For two years, it worked, bringing clean water to every doorstep. But when the pump failed, it brought life to a standstill.

Despite repeated efforts and appeals for repair, the water-connection remained non-functional. For nearly four years, the solar panels stood silent, a stark reminder of neglect and unfulfilled hope.

Intervention

The turning point came in 2022, when DAPTA adopted Ghatikundru as one of its targeted intervention village. Professional technicians were engaged, not for temporary fixes but for a sustainable solution. The villagers assisted the team collectively in repairing the pump and checking the distribution network for any breakages.

Within weeks, the solar-based water pump was restored, and water flowed again—clear, abundant, life-giving.

Training and awareness campaigns were organized to sensitize villagers about collective action. Residents were equipped with information on government helplines and existing public schemes, empowering them to independently seek timely resolutions for any future infrastructural challenges.

Outcomes

- The impact has been transformative. Safe, reliable drinking water is now available at every doorstep, allowing all 45 households to consume clean water without the fear of waterborne contamination.
- Seven families use excess water to nurture nutrition gardens, turning scarcity into nourishment. The quarrels that once divided neighbors have given way to unity, and a renewed sense of ownership binds the community together.
- The landscape itself seems changed. Where once the silence of broken machinery echoed despair, now the hum of the solar pump carries hope. Children play freely, women find relief from long treks, and elders speak of peace returning to the village.

Learnings

Development through technology or harnessing natural resources works when paired with community ownership and a plan for long-term maintenance.



The background is a solid teal color. It features a graphic of four stylized human figures, each composed of a circular head and a rounded, open-bottom torso. These figures are arranged in a square pattern. The central figure is a lighter shade of teal, while the three surrounding figures are a slightly darker shade. Overlaid on the central figure is a large, white, sans-serif number '3'. Below the number, the text 'Community-led Forest Protection' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font, stacked in three lines. Behind this text, within the central figure's torso, is a faint, stylized illustration of a tree with a thick trunk and several branches bearing small, rounded leaves.

3

Community-
led Forest
Protection



“If the forest wasn’t there, it would be a disaster. We get everything from the forest — wild roots, fruits, even wood for cremation. Without it, there is no well-being. We guard the forest like tigers.”

*—Dumme Majhi
FPC member*



Guardians of the Forests: The Kondh Tribe's collective Efforts in Protecting Their Forests



Community: Kondh



Region: Metkesh
Village, Kashipur
Block, Rayagada
District

Impact:

- **45 Forest Protection Committees (FPCs)** strengthened.
- More than **20,000 forest trees** planted for ecological restoration and biodiversity conservation.
- **29 FPCs** promoted community-led forest protection through patrolling, fire prevention, and restoration activities.
- **33 youth groups** engaged in biodiversity documentation and forest conservation initiatives.

Issue

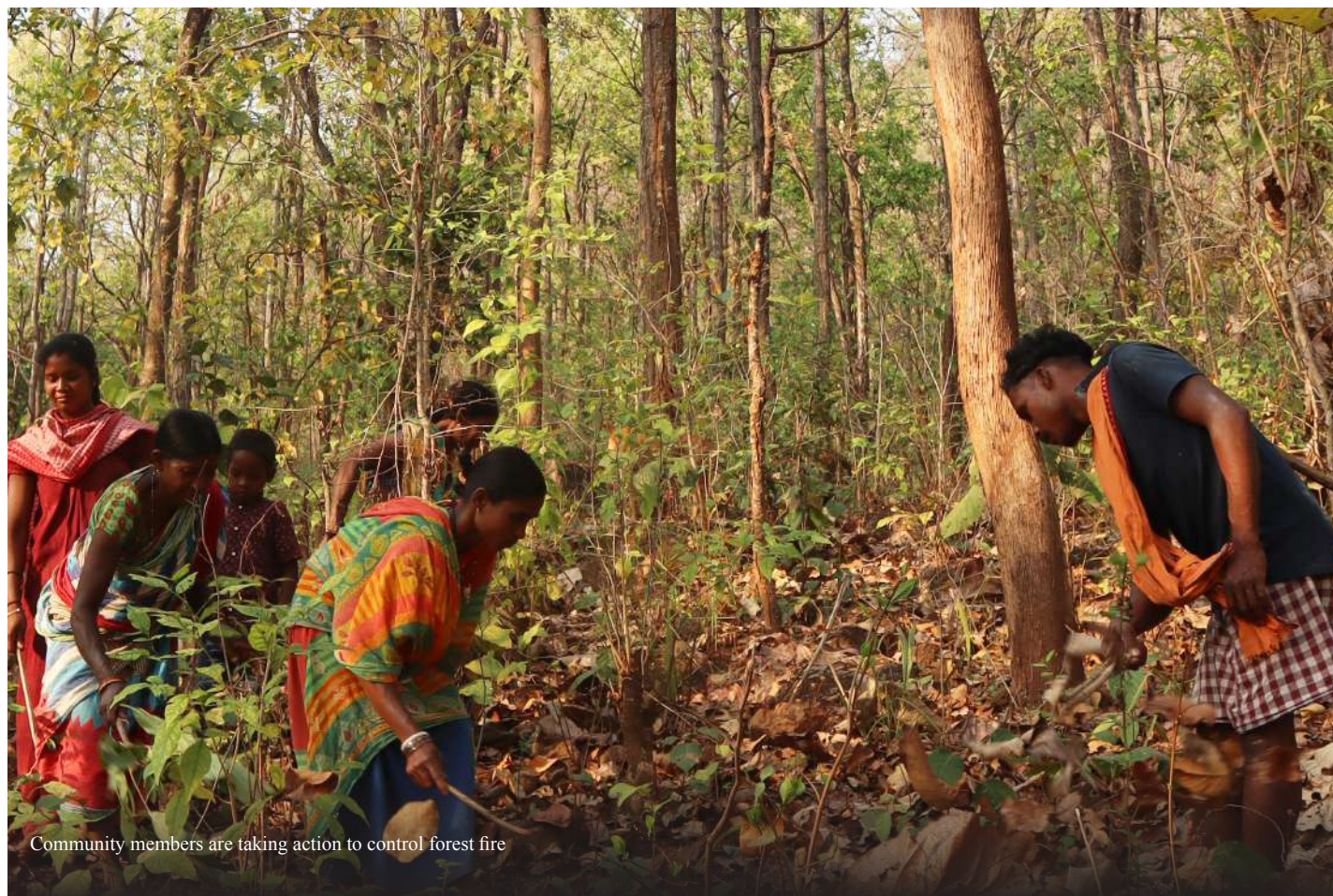
In the hilly and dry terrain of Odisha's Rayagada district, the Kondh tribe and other indigenous groups have lived for generations in symbiosis with the forest. Most of their sustenance needs are met through forest resources. But as illegal logging, mining, external exploitation, and shifting cultivation scarred the hills, the land began to bleed. Soil erosion spread, water sources dwindled, and biodiversity shrank — threatening not just ecology, but identity and survival.

Interventions

Faced with this crisis, Living Farms worked with the Kondhs to awaken a deep spirit of guardianship. Communities were sensitized, empowered, and organized into **Forest Protection Committees (FPCs)** — 45 in total across different operational villages.







Community members are taking action to control forest fire



Minor Forest Produce (MFP) sold to government cooperatives



We are the custodians of our forest

FPC involved the local communities in planning and decision-making. Their efforts focused on securing legal entitlements to forest land to ensure community ownership, promoting agroecology and sustainable farming practices, and drastically reducing deforestation.

The committee became the heartbeat of local conservation: villagers patrolled forests, cleared dried leaves to prevent fires, built stone walls to stop illegal entry, and sowed seed balls in degraded lands. Youth groups documented biodiversity registers, while elders exchanged forest seeds and plants to keep traditions alive.



Outcomes

The results of this collective stewardship were profound.

Livelihoods flourished through sustainable forest produce — *barada saga*, *gandiri saga*, tamarind, *mahua* flowers, bamboo, mushrooms — turning heritage into income. Food security and nutritional diversity have increased through biodiversity preservation and traditional knowledge strengthened. Deforestation slowed, soil erosion reduced, and wildlife conservation strategies emerged.

Youth groups were mobilized through Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) activities proving that grassroots governance can succeed where top-down systems falter.

Learnings

Forest Protection Committees are vital because they:

- Provide a legal and social framework to resist exploitation.
- Enable sustainable livelihoods through Non timber forest produce (NTFP).
- Strengthen tribal identity and cultural pride.
- Demonstrate that grassroots governance can succeed where top-down systems falter.
- Producer groups generating income from forest produce.

This story shows that when indigenous voices lead, landscapes heal. Ownership builds resilience, youth engagement safeguards heritage, and livelihoods entwine with conservation. The Kondh tribe's guardianship is more than protection—it is a living model of hope, inspiring conservation across India.



Community-led forest conservation is a powerful approach to protect biodiversity. It helps to manage, protect, and restore forest resources through collective action and traditional knowledge.

—Living Farms





*"We are the guardians of our land —
and the forest listens when we speak."
—Kapileswar Dora
Youth Group Leader*



When Youth Protect: Kapileswar and the Gandhiji Group



Community: Kutia-Kondh



Region: Kandasari and Bondel Villages, Lanjigarh Block, Kalahandi

Impact:

- From **Zero** youth group to present **33 youth groups** formed across **50 target villages**.
- The formation of **33 youth groups** in 50 villages of Lanjigarh block, The Gandhiji youth group particularly changed the mind-set of youths towards ecological resilience through various activities like seed ball, common area plantation, gathering knowledge about traditional plants and forest. They also actively participated in Gram Sabha (village council) meetings and confidently raising their voices to address pressing village-level issues.

Issue

The villages of Kandasari and Bondel, home to the **Kutia Kondh** community—a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)—once thrived on traditional agriculture, and forest-based livelihoods.

However, in recent times, deforestation began to strip away their life-sustaining resources.

Due to lack of environmental awareness, elders overlooked the long-term impact of tree cutting not realizing that losing the canopy meant losing vital oxygen, medicinal plants, and essential fruit-bearing trees.

Forest fires and chemical-heavy farming threatened its delicate biodiversity. Without land development, families faced livelihood instability, relying on seasonal wage work through MGNREGA. The hills that once nurtured them were now gasping for breath.



Youth preparing seed balls — planting hope for tomorrow.

Intervention

Kapileswar Dora, a 22-year-old young man from Kandasari village, with a vision for his ancestral land as vast as the forests he fights to protect, leads the Gandhiji Group, a youth collective. It is one of several youth groups across the Kalahandi district working towards sustainable development, forest management, and community empowerment.

Since 2022, DAPTA worked alongside these communities forming Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) such as farmers' groups, youth groups, and children's collectives.

Through Participatory Learning and Action (PLAs) activities, sensitization and training, youth transformed from observers into architects of their own development.

The Gandhiji Group's strategy blended ancient and modern wisdom- collecting seeds of rare flowers and fruits, rolling them into seed balls, and casting them into forest depths before the monsoon.

They promoted organic farming, taught the art of *Neemastra* (a natural pesticide) and created vermicompost using cow dung and earthworms. Through *mishrit chasa* (mixed cropping), they encouraged farmers to plant *kandula* (pigeon pea) alongside *makka* (maize), ensuring resilience even when one crop failed.

Outcome

In Bondel village, this intergenerational collaboration led to a landmark **Land Use Plan**. During a Special Gram Sabha in 2025, tribal youth and elders



Youth organises street plays to prevent illegal felling of trees



Community meeting under the banyan tree — decisions for the forest's future.

demanding land development. Their voices were heard — **Staggered Trench and Trench cum Bund (TCB)** work was approved for 3 hectares, with a sanctioned budget of ₹5 lakhs.

All 15 local youth actively participated in the implementation, earning around **₹2.5 lakhs** collectively through daily wages under MGNREGA (at a rate of ₹325 per day). This not only provided immediate income support but also built local ownership and skills in land development activities.

Today, the hills are greening again. Fruit-bearing trees promise food security and permanent income. Deforestation is declining, education is taking root.

Learnings

The youth of Kalahandi have proven that they are not just the leaders of tomorrow — they are the leaders of today. Their story shows that when young minds unite with ancestral wisdom, transformation begins.

Community-led conservation, organic farming, and land development have turned despair into renewal. The Gandhiji Group stands as a testament to how youth can heal landscapes, empower communities, and redefine leadership.

“

We have created the Kalahandi WhatsApp group which connects all youth groups. We alert each other in case of forest fires or illegal tree cutting and mobilize help to extinguish fires. We also tell elders not to cut trees.

—Kapileswar Dora

”





“We started organizing monthly meetings. We celebrate significant days like World Earth Day and World Water Day. On the last World Water Day, we visited various villages and used street plays and other activities to educate people about the importance of forests and water and how to save it.”

—Naveen Majhi
Youth Group Leader

Seed balls ensure the forests stay green



Budharaja Youth Group: Leading the Way to Biodiversity Conservation and Development



Community: Kondh



Region: Musatakiri
Village, Kashipur
Block, Rayagada

Impact:

- **33 youth groups** actively engaged in environmental protection and community development initiatives.
- **24 youth groups** are participating in Gram Sabha decision-making activities.
- **6 Bio-diversity** registers are maintained and regularly updated.
- More than **20,000 forest trees** planted for ecological restoration and biodiversity conservation.

Issue

Musatakiri, a small farming village in Rayagada, is cradled by forests and a restless river. Yet four years ago, its beauty masked a harsher truth: a community trapped in systemic neglect with no road connectivity.

Deforestation gnawed at the land, local companies clashed with villagers, and the absence of roads and basic infrastructure left the village isolated. For generations, young people were forced into “*dadan*” (bonded labor migration) leaving behind their homes for meager wages elsewhere.

Intervention

In 2022, a spark of hope was lit during a community mobilization meeting organized by Living Farms.

At first, villagers thought it was just another panchayat gathering. But by the second meeting, something clicked.



A villager preparing the land for planting mango saplings



Naveen Majhi- founding member of the group pioneered organic farming, procured mango grafts and medicinal flora, and documents native species in a biodiversity register.

The youth decided to form the ‘Budharaja Youth Group’, comprising 15 boys and 5 girls, determined to bring positive change to their village.

18-year-old Naveen Majhi emerged as a founding member, pioneering organic farming, nurturing mango grafts and medicinal flora, and documenting native species in a Biodiversity Register.

To support this vision, Living Farms distributed over 66 high-yield mango saplings, along with various other fruit trees, to help the group establish community orchards. Today, these orchards are growing steadily, ensuring long-term food security while providing a sustainable source of income to promote overall community well-being.

The group also took practical steps to protect their local ecosystem: they crafted paper bags from old newspapers to replace plastic, and patrolled rivers and picnic spots to clear waste that endangered livestock and aquatic life.

Policy & Advocacy: Acting as a bridge to local governance, they petitioned the Gram Sabha for infrastructure, resulting in sanctioned road work and a new community hall.

Sustainable Alternatives: For generations, the youth of Rayagada felt forced to leave their homes for meager wages elsewhere. The Budharaja group changed the narrative by securing 200 mango saplings through ‘Living Farm’.

“

33 youth groups actively engaged in environmental protection and community development initiatives.

”

Outcome

The transformation of Musa Thakri is now visible in the soil and the spirit of its people.

- **Infrastructure Growth:** Road construction is currently underway, physically connecting the village to economic opportunities.
- **Economic Security:** The mango orchard provides a roadmap for the future; proceeds from fruit sales will soon fund local education and the village committee, making labor migration a choice of the past rather than a necessity.
- **Global Recognition:** Naveen Majhi's personal journey—climbing hilltops for cellular signal to join virtual climate meetings—carried him from the hills of Odisha to the South Asia Regional Youth Workshop in Nepal.
- **Specialized training** in sanitation and gender equality strengthened community health and balance.

Learnings

The story of the Budharaja Youth Group shows that youth awareness and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) can transform neglected villages into empowered communities. Environmental stewardship and livelihood creation are inseparable, and solutions often speak louder than protests.

When young people protect their land, the land sustains them in return.





The background is a solid olive green. Overlaid on this are two faint, light-green graphics: a large, stylized leaf shape on the right side and a circular arrow path that loops around the left and bottom of the leaf.

4

**Sustainable
Livelihoods**



“We have saved the money and will use it to buy more seeds and supplies for farming. We are saving surplus money for our children’s future education. We plan to to expand cultivation year-round and explore new markets, including schools and BSF camps. More than livelihood, we feel empowered.”

*—Lalita Majhi
Mushroom Farmer*

A plateful of mushrooms, tomatoes cultivated by the women’s group



Mushroom Cultivation in Madanguda: A Collective Journey of Socio-Economic Women Empowerment



Community: Kutia-Kondh



Region: Madanguda village, Lanjigarh block, Kalahandi district

Impact:

- **From Zero to 500 families** adopted Mushroom farming.
- As of now, the current status of mushroom cultivators from 50 intervened are 500 households/families, who consume and sell the cultivated crop ensuring food security and livelihood income generation.

Issue

In the quiet hamlet of Madanguda - a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) settlement of 185 people, dependent on rain-fed agriculture - a new story of empowerment is unfolding. At its heart is Lalita Majhi, who, along with 15 other women, has turned a simple idea of mushroom farming into a source of nutrition, income, and dignity.

The village women, despite their industrious nature, often had limited opportunities to earn or utilize their free time productively. Malnutrition and lack of dietary diversity were pressing issues, especially among children and women.

Intervention

In 2023, DAPTA introduced mushroom cultivation as a low-investment, high-nutrition livelihood strategy to Lalita and 3 other enterprising women. The intervention included a two-day classroom training program in Bhawanipatna followed by practical sessions in the village. DAPTA provided essential material support, including paddy straw, spawn, polythene sheets, drums, lime powder, and shade-nets to set up the cultivation beds.





Lalita prepares mushroom curry for her children- nutrition served to the family

Outcome

The collective of 16 women successfully prepared 27 beds, harvesting 24 kilograms of mushrooms in a single month. The impact of mushroom cultivation by the women collective has been two folds: Income generation by selling 10 kg at the local market, and 14 kg consumed domestically, directly improving their families' health.

Learnings

Transitioning from wild foraging to systematic, collective farming allows communities to stabilize their food supply and create a “circular economy” where profits are reinvested into the group. The project demonstrates that low-barrier technical training can quickly transform a group of subsistence foragers into a self-managed micro-enterprise.



“I have learned to prepare between 40 and 50 types of medicines. I prepare remedies for parasites, worms, loss of appetite, and “khorda” (a condition where animal fur falls out). I can identify illnesses through behavioral changes, such as animals refusing food, increased body fever, or visible symptoms like a bloated stomach. I have an aim that no livestock will die in our region due to diseases.”

—Dambarudhar Gauda
Resident of Iadakhman village

Dambarudhar administers medicines prepared by him to treat illnesses in his livestock



Dambarudhar Gauda: The “Ethnoveterinary Healer”— Biodiversity Management and Traditional Medicine Practice in Tribal Areas for Livestock Healthcare



Community: Kondh



Region: Ladakhman
Village, Kashipur
Block, Rayagada
District

Impact:

- Ethnoveterinary practices have been well adopted by villagers in **66 villages**.
- Increased annual household income by approximately **₹10,000–₹20,000** through livestock rearing and sales.
- More than **10 numbers** of barefoot ethnoveterinary experts are actively providing their services to community members.

Issue

In the quaint village of Ladakhman in Sunger gram panchayat of Kashipur block, lives Dambarudhar Gauda - a man whose wealth is measured not in land - of which he has little - but in the steady heartbeat of his livestock.

He proudly rears 52 goats, 70 chickens, 7 cows and 4 buffaloes.

He takes care of his domestic animals with all the effort but livestock diseases often claim animal lives as the nearest veterinary hospital is 25 km away, a distance that often led to livestock loss. Despite many pleas, professional veterinary help rarely reached the village.

Traditional knowledge of ethnoveterinary practices followed by their forefathers had been largely forgotten. In



Collecting material for Ethno medicines

the remote tribal pockets of Odisha, where modern veterinary infrastructure is often out of reach, livestock security relies heavily on ancestral wisdom. For generations, pastoral and tribal households have depended on healers like Dambarudhar to protect their cattle, goats, and poultry—the primary assets of their rural economy. His specialized practice represents far more than alternative medicine; it is a vital repository of indigenous conservation, relying on the sustainable harvesting and careful preservation of rare forest plants, roots, and bark.

‘Tribal ethno-medicine relies on identifying, conserving, and sustainably harvesting plants from the forest and surrounding ecology and is the primary, cheapest, and most accessible form of healthcare due to the unavailability or high cost of modern medicine.’



Preparing medicine for his livestock from herbs foraged from the forest



Preparing medicine for his livestock from herbs foraged from the forest



Reviving indigenous veterinary knowledge protects livestock from immediate illness and families from debt and ensures livestock remain a reliable economic shield

Intervention

The turning point arrived through Living Farms when they organized a three-day intensive training program on ethnoveterinary practices.

Dambarudhar along with 35 other farmers attended these trainings on medicine preparation using local resources to treat common ailments, mastering deworming and parasite control and crafting high-protein food for better growth.

Returning home, Dambarudhar turned his cattle shed into a laboratory of hope. Within two weeks, the results were undeniable.

Outcomes

Dambarudhar, can now prepare 40–50 types of medicines and earns ₹40,000–₹50,000 from livestock sales. He has trained all 50 households in his village, drastically reducing animal mortality.

His mission eventually crossed borders into the Kalahandi district. In one notable instance, he saved

a high-value goat—worth over ₹25,000—that had refused food for days. He refuses to take payment for his help, believing that this knowledge belongs to the community.

Today, Dambarudhar is often called the “Ethnoveterinary healer” of the region. He deflects the title with a humble smile, noting that these practices are the heritage of the tribal people—a legacy that was simply waiting to be remembered.

While his two young sons focus on their studies, he is already planning for the future. To him, these animals are more than livestock; they are the shield that protects his family from debt and the loss of their ancestral land.

Learnings

Reviving indigenous veterinary knowledge protects livestock from immediate illness and families from debt and ensures livestock remain a reliable economic shield.

A photograph of a middle-aged man with dark hair and a mustache, smiling at the camera. He is wearing a bright yellow t-shirt and blue and white checkered shorts. He is holding a large bunch of green, unripe mangoes in both hands, presenting them towards the viewer. He stands in front of a large, leafy tree with many green mangoes hanging from its branches. The background shows more trees and a dry, grassy field under natural daylight.

“Some people mocked me when I used to water the saplings. I said, when a mother gives birth to a child, she care for it too.. I want to care for my trees like that. Growing trees like this is beneficial; it helps pay for our children’s education or medical expenses. If someone is sick, we can arrange the money; otherwise, it’s impossible. If we don’t do anything like this, where will we get money from?”

*—Sabi Majhi
Mango farmer*



Sabi Majhi's Mango Orchard—Cultivating Livelihood and Resilience



Community: Kutia-Kondh



Region: Kendupet Village, Lanjigarh Block, Kalahandi District

Impact:

- In the first phase of the initiative, orchard development was purposefully launched on **7 acres of community waste land** to serve as a baseline for local consumption and basic income generation.
- In the final phase of the project cycle, the community successfully scaled this model into **12 acres of high-yield mango orchards**—reclaiming degraded land to establish a long-term, sustainable foundation for enhanced household livelihoods.

Issue

Kendupet village. Like most villages in Lanjigarh block, faced severe challenges including rocky, infertile soil, shrinking forest cover, and a lack of nutritional awareness. Farming was limited to subsistence crops, which led to high rates of malnutrition and forced many residents to migrate for labor to afford basic education and healthcare.

Intervention

However, amid limited resources and food scarcity, Sabi Majhi, a 50- year-old farmer with unwavering determination, is trying to turn his land into a thriving orchard of prosperity with the help of DAPTA.

Under the “**SEWOH–Exit from Hunger**” initiative, DAPTA implemented a convergence model combining nutrition gardens and fruit orchards to combat malnutrition and improve sustainable livelihoods.



This included the distribution of diverse mango saplings (*Langda*, *Dussehri*, and *Amrapali*) and vegetable seeds (tomato, okra, ridge gourd, brinjal), alongside providing technical training in organic composting, soil preparation, and water management.

Sabi underwent training and encouragement of individual ownership and care of orchards to ensure sustainability.

He dug **three-foot-deep pits**, watered his trees through scorching months of *Chaita* and *Baisakha* (March to May), and fenced them carefully. His dedication paid off—all **sixty mango trees he planted survived**.

Outcomes

Sabi's orchard has become a consistent source of revenue, with profits rising from ₹7,000 in the first year to ₹15,000 by the third year from the sale of 750kg of mangoes. Beyond income, the family's diet has been enriched by fresh produce, and the success has inspired other community members to begin their own planting initiatives.

Motivated by the benefits, he has also planted lemon and orange trees and intends introducing more fruit varieties.

DAPTA's support has also helped him grow vegetables for home consumption, reducing dependency on markets and saving money.

- **Economic Empowerment:** Farming now provides steady income and financial security.
- **Nutritional Improvement:** Fresh fruits and vegetables enrich family diets.
- **Environmental Renewal:** Mango orchards restore greenery and biodiversity.
- **Community Inspiration:** Seeing Sabi's success, others in Kendupet have begun planting and caring for their own trees.



Sabi Majhi proudly showcasing the raw mangoes from the orchard.



Family sorting mangoes for sale. "From orchard to market—income that sustains."

Learnings

Individual ownership of natural resources are critical for sustainability. Success in agro-ecology creates a "demonstration effect" where one farmer's prosperity can spark a community-wide shift toward self-reliance and environmental renewal.



“All the people are now providing medicines; previously, the animals used to die due to cough, nasal discharge, and fever. Now that they know the medicines, there is no fever or pain. We are doing that, which is why the goats and cows are not dying anymore. It was about poultry, goats, sheep, cows, and bullocks.”

*—Patadei Majhi
Ethno-veterinary practitioner*

Healing the Herd: A Tale of Ancient Wisdom and New Hope in Kaksur

 **Community:** Kondh
 **Region:** Kaksur
 Village, Lanjigarh block, Kalahandi district

Impact:

- **From Zero** practices to **1,183 families** adopted and practicing across the **50 target villages**.
- The ethno-veterinary practices brought the life sustaining and cost-effective healing practices for the livestock, and further, securing respective livelihoods and reduced life & loss risk to the families.

Issue

Kaksur is one of the remotest corners of the region, where infrastructure is a distant dream.

Here, families like those of Patadei and Sabi Majhi live in harmony with a landscape that is as beautiful as it is unforgiving. Their lives are anchored to two acres of un-irrigated upland and the small herds of livestock—buffaloes, goats, and poultry—that represent not just their livelihood, but their “living bank accounts” used for health expenses, festivals, and survival.

However, the nearest veterinary service is 8 km away. During monsoon seasons, animals frequently suffered from coughs, nasal discharge, and fevers. Without accessible care, these illnesses often led to death, causing devastating financial losses—up to ₹15,000 for a single animal—which threatened the families’ ability to afford healthcare and primary education for their children..

Intervention

The turning point came through a bridge built between ancient traditional knowledge and organized community action.



Singari Majhi, a local Community Resource Person (CRC) and Patadei Majhi teaching villagers to identify ailments and prepare low-cost medicines from “the pharmacy of the earth.”

The DAPTA project trained Singari Majhi, a local Community Resource Person (CRP), to bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and animal care. The intervention focused on ethno-veterinary training, teaching villagers to identify ailments and prepare low-cost medicines from “the pharmacy of the earth.” This included hands-on demonstrations on creating medicinal “pills” using kitchen staples like turmeric and cumin to treat pox, fever, and colds.

Outcome

The community shifted from a state of helplessness to active resilience. In one initiative alone, 189 households across 36 villages treated nearly 833 animals (goats and poultry) for pox, fever, and cold.

In Koksar specifically, animal mortality from common infections has been virtually eliminated. Families have secured their economic stability, ensuring that their livestock assets remain intact to fund their children’s future and household needs.

When a prized buck fell ill after getting wet in the rain, the community didn’t wait for a distant veterinarian. Using the ethno-veterinary practices promoted by DAPTA, they prepared a tonic of medicinal pills administered twice daily. The

“

It was hard at first, the villagers eventually accepted, learnt and understood. They transitioned from watching their animals die to actively providing medicine at the first sign of illness.

—Singari Majhi

”



The “revival” of traditional ethno-medicine proves that sustainable and cost-effective solutions are often found within the community’s own environment, provided they are supported by organized community action.

buck didn’t just survive; it recovered fully, and the intervention prevented the spread of infection to the rest of the village’s livestock.

Farmers are now advocates, sharing their success stories with others to promote sustainable, cost-effective, and traditional management practices.

Learnings

Empowering a local “torchbearer” (CRP) who further empowers a community is more effective than relying on distant, external infrastructure. Furthermore, the “revival” of traditional ethno-medicine proves that sustainable and cost-effective solutions are often found within the community’s own environment, provided they are supported by organized community action.



Local youth group preparing the bed for a vegetable seedling nursery , which proved to be a transformative initiative for the village

When Youth Nurture: The Vegetable Nursery and Water Story of Dangabahali

 **Community:**
Kondh and other scheduled castes

 **Region:**
Dangabahali village,
Lanjigarh block,
Kalahandi district

Impact:

- Initially, the project began with no nursery at all. Today, **one youth group** and **one farmer group** are actively facilitating a sapling nursery.
- Throughout the project period, the youth and farmer group got inspired and involved in developing the nursery. With the availability of water, crop diversification became possible, and cultivation expanded. The sale of produce and saplings has generated income, turning the nursery into a sustainable livelihood source for the community.

Issue

Dangabahali, a small tribal village in Lanjigarh block is home to a small, marginalized community comprising 78 people -6 Scheduled Tribe (ST) households and 7 Scheduled Caste (SC) households.

Dependent on forest produce and rain-fed agriculture, the villagers historically faced the interconnected hardships of chronic malnutrition, acute water scarcity, and severely limited income-generating opportunities for local youth.

The old water tank had also broken down, leaving families struggling for even drinking water, Youth started migrating for work, impacting farming practices and consistent vegetable food cultivation.

Intervention

During a community meeting, mothers and fathers voiced their grievances to Lochan Majhi, a youth mobilizer with DAPTA who carried their complaint forward. Recognizing these challenges, DAPTA intervened to guide the community toward sustainable solutions.

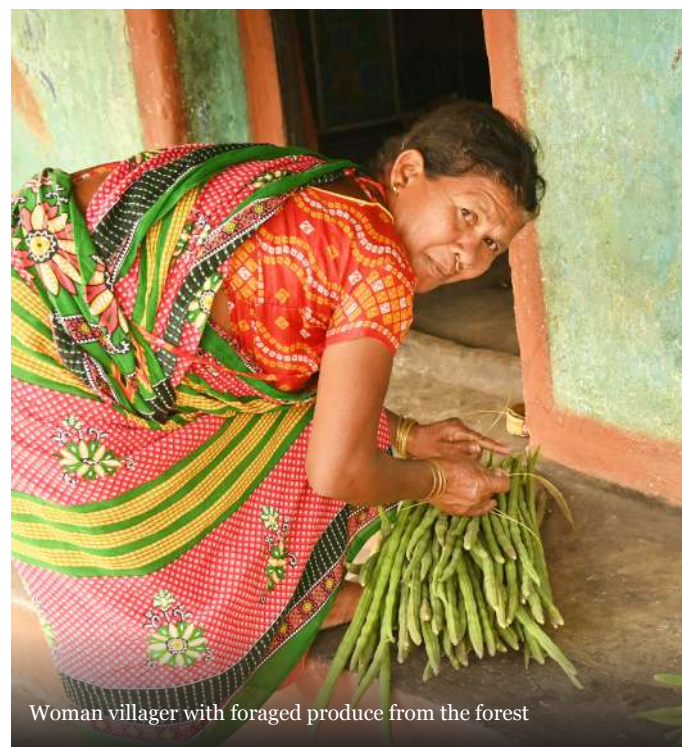
Soon a new 2,000-liter solar-powered water tank was installed. Clean potable water began flowing again refreshing lives of the villagers and their home gardens..

DAPTA introduced the idea of vegetable cultivation by setting up nutrition gardens as a dual solution to address nutritional deficiencies and generate additional income for the people. However, lack of quality seeds was again a challenge.

DAPTA engaged the local youth group to establish a vegetable seedling nursery, which proved to be a transformative initiative for the village.

Nine young members, guided by Lochan, set up a green shade-net nursery (30'x10'x10') and received seeds for various vegetables that had previously been distributed to the community for nutri-gardens.

- **Infrastructural Setup:** Demonstrating immense collective determination, the youth independently sourced structural wooden poles, dug foundation pits, and successfully installed the protective shade-net canopy.
- **Organic Bed Preparation:** Collaborating with several women from the village, the youth prepared seven uniform raised cultivation beds. They systematically enriched the local soil matrix with organic neem cake and committed to nurturing the beds entirely through bio-pesticides and natural inputs.
- **Precision Sowing and Cultivation:** To ensure optimal germination and proper spacing, seeds were meticulously mixed with fine sand before being sown in clean, structured lines under the protective shade net. Through careful water and microclimate management, the seedlings achieved robust growth and were ready for field transplantation within 25 to 30 days.



Woman villager with foraged produce from the forest



Youth leadership matters: When young people are empowered, they become architects of sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity conservation



The 2,000-liter solar-powered water tank has provided a fresh lease of life since its installation



Seeds were sown in lines, mixed with sand to ensure proper spacing, and nurtured under the protective shade net

The nursery operations were rolled out in two distinct, strategic phases:

Phase I (November 4, 2024): Initial sowing focused on foundational nightshade staples, including tomato, brinjal, and chilli seeds.

Phase II (November 9, 2024): Secondary sowing expanded the nursery's diversity by introducing high-demand cabbage and cauliflower seeds.

The youth also embraced biodiversity conservation. They collected seeds of indigenous trees — *mahua*, *kendu*, *jamun*, *kusum*, mango, jackfruit — with plans to plant them on their Community Forest Rights land. Their vision was not just to grow vegetables, but to restore the forest canopy and protect the ecological balance.

Outcome

The transformation was visible within months. Farmers from nearby villages purchased seedlings, generating income for the youth group.

• Community and Market Impact:

- Farmers from nearby villages purchased 500 tomato seedlings and 350 brinjal seedlings at ₹1 per seedling, earning the youth group ₹850 in their first attempt.
- As a gesture of community involvement, the group distributed 910 seedlings (tomato, brinjal, chili, cabbage, and cauliflower) among all 13 households in Dangabahali, promoting vegetable cultivation to enhance nutrition.

• Nutritional Improvement:

The nursery provided access to diverse vegetables, enriching the community's diet with essential vitamins, minerals, and nutrients.

• Income Generation:

The youth group's earnings from selling seedlings created a new livelihood opportunity, instilling confidence and hope for future ventures.

• Sustainability:

The nursery established a reliable source of quality seedlings, addressing a long-standing challenge in vegetable cultivation.

• Water Access:

The new water tank became a lifeline for personal consumption, nurturing nutri-gardens, and WASH activities.

Learnings

The Dangabahali story shows that small interventions can spark profound change when rooted in community ownership.

- **Water is foundational:** Clean, reliable access to water is the bedrock of nutrition, health, and dignity.
- **Youth leadership matters:** When young people are empowered, they become architects of sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity conservation.
- **Organic practices restore balance:** Jeevamruta, vermicompost, and mixed cropping not only enrich soil but also protect communities from chemical dependency.
- **Collective action inspires resilience:** From nutri-gardens to forest restoration, the people of Dangabahali proved that unity can transform hardship into prosperity.

Encouraged by their initial success, the youth group plans to expand the nursery to include greens like spinach, coriander, and radish, as well as mushrooms, to diversify income sources further.

**SEWOH EXIT from
Hunger: Strengthening
Food Systems, Nutrition,
Health, and Forest Rights
of Indigenous Communities
and Particularly Vulnerable
Tribal Communities of
Odisha**

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