

ANNUAL REPORT- 2023-24



Living Farms

Plot No- 836/2654, Ratnakar Bag-2, Tankapani Road, Bhubaneswar-751018, Odisha

Introduction:

The year 2023–24 marked a significant phase in Living Farms' journey towards building resilient, sovereign food systems for Adivasi communities and health & nutrition security for adolescent girls in Odisha. Rooted in the lived realities of Adivasi communities, our work spanned across nutrition, health, agro-ecology and cultural revival.

This year, we focused on restoring community confidence in traditional agro-ecological farming, strengthening voices of women, adolescent girls and youth and building capacities through dialogue, experience sharing workshops, and participatory learning & action approach. We continued building on the strength of traditional knowledge, especially of the Kondh Adivasi community, while integrating participatory learning and action, capacity building and advocacy to amplify impact.



About Living Farms:

Living Farms, a non-government organization, has been partnering with Kondh communities since 2002 on reviving their traditional mixed cropping, and forest foods, asserting rights over their resources and improve their food and nutrition. The wise women and men from the community guided the revival process and contributed to widen and deepen the underlying ethos of their food system. Their food system reflects their social meanings, ecological realities, identity, their knowledge system, health and nutrition. It provides them varieties of safe and nutritious foods. Living Farms facilitated dialogue and critical reflection within community members on why and how of the revival of their food and agriculture system including asserting their rights over their habitat, initiation of a horizontal network amongst them and building up a strategic partnership with external resource persons and similar platforms.

The organisation does not limit its efforts to address immediate problems, but also has been accompanying the communities 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 the wellbeing of marginalized communities, and address ecological crisis.

One of our core strategies focuses on re-localized production and consumption, reviving and promoting poly-cultural farming; encouraging mixed cropping as necessary to improve household food and nutrition security. While it ensures location specific knowledge sharing, it facilitates peer networking among and between them, enhancing collective wisdom and actualizing community food sovereignty.



Vision:

We envisage a value system of responsible living /or living with ecological consciousness, considering oneself as part of the web of nature, harmony with all others, actively promoting respect and tolerance, building strong resistance to lust for wealth and power, active non-violent opposition to all kinds of inequity and injustice producing systems and processes, and local socialism.

Living Farms contributes to nurture a common space involving Adivasi and dalit women farmers, youth and small and marginal farmers from other communities along with co-strugglers/co-creators to build and strengthen solidarity with one another for a common vision of food sovereignty, in defence of our sovereign rights to food and the rights of mother earth.



Mission:

i. Is to move towards localization of food system (re-localizing production, distribution, consumption, storage and shorter food miles), various kinds of “solidarity economy” through local production, sharing, exchange, and barter etc.

ii. Is to ensure gender equity, youth participation and to contribute emergence of spaces of caring and sharing beyond the existing societal institutions based on patriarchy culture and paradigm of industrial society.

iii. Also involves working towards ensuring that every person’s basic material requirements are taken care of by village-cluster forums and collectively define the, idea of enough and not indulge in continuous growth/increase.

iv. Reviving of local health traditions as a strategy to relocate the power over the community’s health within the community itself where they understand their body through their knowledge systems and have access to multiple health care based on their needs as decided by them and not feel dependent on a given system. However, this does not mean that the biomedical health care is not required, as it is may be more effective and useful for the community for ailments that require urgent medical attention.

v. Reviving vernacular architecture practiced by appropriate integration of local science and technology and external expertise as strategy towards the construction of habitations that would strengthen communal autonomy, internal solidarity and resilience.

vi. Co-creating spaces to enable cross learning amongst the entire community and not just children, focusing on themes linked to their community life such as agro-ecology, health, nutrition, vernacular architecture, forests etc. The vision is to enable and strengthen self- sufficient and resilient rural communities.



Geographical Coverage:

Our interventions during 2023-24 covered;

Districts- Rayagada, Gajapati

Blocks- Bissam Cuttack, Muniguda, Chandrapur, Kashipur, R.Udayagiri, Mohana, Rayagarh and Nuagarh

Villages- 246 villages of the above said Blocks

Population Covers- Around 38000 population including women, men, adolescent girls, youths and children



Food Security:

Reclaiming sovereignty through seeds, soil and forest

For the Kondh and other Adivasi communities, food is more than sustenance. It is memory, culture and connection to soil, to culture, to ancestors. But over the years, this deep-rooted food system has come under threat from modern agricultural practices, monocultures, deforestation and market dependency.

In 2023–24, Living Farms deepened its work to rebuild food sovereignty through agro-ecological practices anchored in millet-based mix farming, local seed systems, forest conservation and community knowledge.

Millet based mix farming:

Across the project areas, over 2000 farmers revived traditional mix farming practices to ensure their food security and have control over the farming system. One variety of barnyard millet, one variety of foxtail millet, one variety of finger millet, proso millet and one variety of little millet have been revived back by community members in 66 villages of Kashipur Block. Through reviving back these varieties along with continuous of pigeon pea and other millets harvest period has been extended from August to end of January and community members became able to get harvest during the food scarcity months. Another strategy was taken to increase crop diversity at the village level to address hunger and climate change effects. More than 2000 numbers of famers have collected these seed varieties from the seed bank and cultivated through mix farming process. As per the data collected by the community mobilisers, crop diversity of 45% farmers have been increased at a range of 1 to 3, crop diversity of 22% farmers have been increased at a range of 4 to 6 than the last year. 8%

farmer's crop diversity have been increased at a range of 7 to 9 and 3% farmers crop diversity have been increased more than 10 than the last year.

3148 farmers (1296 male, 1852 female) have been trained on the process of preparing organic manure by using locally available bio resources to increase their harvest. They have prepared organic manures like liquid manure, Handikhata, Amrutapani, applied in their field and experienced a good harvest. As per the harvest data, 17% of farmers



produced a surplus of 301 kg to 500 kg, 15% farmers produced a surplus of 201 kg to 300 kg, 25% farmers produced a surplus of 101 kg to 200 kg and 28% farmers produced a surplus of up to 100 kg than the last year including cereals, pulses, oilseeds and tubers. The farmers have conserved seeds for the next year and returned back seeds to the seed bank with adding some more quantities they borrowed from the seed bank.

Before Kharif season crop planning exercise is prepared in 66 villages involving 3089 farmers and as per the crop plan community members have revived back climate resilient seeds which were disappeared from their villages.

Land use plan is prepared in 41 villages and in this kharif season community members have started implementing the plan. As per the land use plan farmers have revived back the disappeared climate resilient millet varieties, adopted mix farming, inter cropping, relay cropping, earth bonding, stone bonding on the dangar (hill) to check the soil erosion. Community members have done plantation on the barren land, hill and avenue plantation according to the land use plan.

Seed Bank:

Women are the custodian of seeds

Women played central roles in seed preservation. For Adivasi communities, seed is not a commodity to sale or buy. Seed is the key of freedom.

3 numbers of central training programs were organized on seed bank for 65 women and 22

men farmers. Another training program was organized on seed conservation and seed bank for 40 numbers of adolescent girls. Adolescent girls have been trained on seed conservation and seed bank.



42 numbers of village level training programs were organized for 1196 farmers (781 women and 415 men) on seed conservation and establishment of seed bank. 33 numbers of seed banks are established for both vegetable and millet seeds in Kashipur Block of Rayagada District. Adding to this, adolescent girls have formed 30 numbers of seed banks to conserve and multiply vegetable seeds in Gajapati and Rayagada District. After harvest farmers have returned seeds to the seed banks with adding some surplus. These seed banks are playing a crucial role to make the farmers self-sufficiency and reduce dependency over market or government.

Forest: More than a source of food

Forest is inseparable part of the Adivasi life. Indigenous communities have traditionally relied on forests for their life and livelihoods. However, unsustainable extraction, inefficient management and department's approach towards forest have overexploited these resources, leading to the degradation of forests and a decline in food availability. This has affected a lot to the culture of the Adivasi community.



2 numbers of forest food festivals were organized involving more than 300 community members including women and men in Bissam Cuttack and Kashipur Block of Rayagada. Community members demonstrated their cultivated and uncultivated food diversity in the festival. Experienced community members shared their experience and importance of their food system with younger generation. Community members demonstrated more than 200 varieties of food in the festival and reflected over their rich and diverse food system. The program invoked community members to decide to conserve their food system and protect the forest.

83 numbers of forest protection committee members are trained on FRA and forest management. 24 numbers of gramasabha meetings are organized in 24 villages,

FRCs are re-formed and claim filing process has been started. In 3 villages individual and community claims are submitted. In another 3 villages community claim filing is going on.

Repairing of defective water structures:

24 numbers of defective water structures have been repaired for drinking water facilities and irrigation purposes. Living Farms has provided material support and community members have provided the labour support to repair the low cost defective water structures. After repair, drinking water points have come closer to the villages, as a result travel distance of women to fetch drinking water have been reduced. In 6 villages drinking water points were at a distance of 500 meter, now it has come closer to within 100



meters. In 7 villages due to defunct drinking water structures, people were drinking water from stream. Now their drinking water structure has been repaired. Near about 150 acres of land have been irrigated due to the repairing work and farmers have been able to take second crop due to the irrigation facility.

Health & Nutrition Security:

Health and nutrition security have been a major area of focus of Living Farms throughout the 2023-24. Keeping adolescent girls and community members at the forefront, Living Farms has tried to ensure health and nutrition security through Participatory Learning & Action, training on balanced diet, increasing dietary diversity, training on hygiene practices, establishing nutrition garden and accessing government schemes and services.



Nutrition Garden:

Nutrition garden has been a major activity for Living Farms to increase dietary diversity to ensure nutrition security. A special model has been developed by LF and farmers have been trained and demonstrated to prepare the nutrition garden.

In this year more than 100 numbers of demonstration were organised among adolescent groups on establishing nutrition garden. Adolescent girls have taken leadership to prepare nutrition garden in both the Districts Rayagada and Gajapati. In the monsoon and winter season Adolescent girls have prepared 3200 and 2500 nutrition garden respectively. More than 12 varieties of vegetables were planted, harvested and consumed at the household level. Other community members are being inspired by adolescent groups to prepare nutrition garden at their backyard.

Along with these, another 2500 nutrition garden was established in the Kashipur Block. Farmers were supported with banana, lemon, drumstick and papaya saplings to plant in the

nutrition garden. Farmers have started consuming production of the last year papaya and banana plantation.

Through a concurrent monitoring, dietary diversity of adolescent girls has been tracked and found increasing. Nutrition garden is contributing 3 food groups to the diet, which is a major cause of increasing dietary diversity.



Participatory Learning & Action: The backbone of change

A cornerstone of our work on nutrition security was the PLA cycle — an interactive, reflection-based approach that empowers adolescent girls and women to analyse their own nutrition challenges and co-develop solutions.

PLA meeting is being conducted with adolescent groups and women groups in 226 villages. PLA meetings were facilitated through storytelling, picture cards, games, activities, and participants reflected over issues like malnutrition cycle, early marriage, importance of attending VHND, personal hygiene, menstrual hygiene, balanced diet, consumption of iron tablets, uses of sanitary napkins, uses of mosquito net and accessing government schemes etc.



As sessions progressed, adolescent girls and women built collective action plans and implemented at their village level. Various change process at village level have been experienced after conducting the PLA sessions.

Adolescent girls are seating in their groups regularly and discussing on menstrual hygiene, gender discrimination, health and nutrition related issues. Girls have prepared plan in the PLA meetings and executing those plans to improve the status of their health & nutrition by maintaining menstrual hygiene, other personal hygiene, stop early marriage and strengthening service delivery etc. Adolescent girls have been engaged with frontline workers, strengthened the services like distribution of iron tablets and subsidised sanitary napkins. Adolescent girls have realised the importance of using sanitary napkins during menstruation and consuming iron tablets to reduce anaemia.

As per the action tracker, in 85% (136 out of 160) of villages adolescent girls are consuming iron tablets regularly and girls in 83% (133 out of 160) of villages are using sanitary napkin during their menstruation.

VHND is a major platform for adolescent girls to get counselling on their health & nutrition and haemoglobin check-up. Adolescent girls have been realised the importance of attending VHND.

Adolescent groups across 8 Blocks in Rayagada and Gajapati have decided to stop early marriage and taking action accordingly. In this year 11 numbers of possible early marriages either have been stopped or postponed. Adolescent groups have taken initiatives, convinced community members to prepare village level resolution to stop early marriage. In 76 numbers of villages resolution has been prepared to stop early marriage. Due to collective of girls, Advika scheme has been strengthened. Anganwadi workers share that, attendance in Advika has been increased as oppose to earlier.



Adolescent girls as the change agent

Adolescent girls often occupy a unique and powerful position — linking the worlds of tradition and transition. Yet, their nutritional needs and psycho-social well-being remain among the most neglected areas in mainstream health programming. Living



Farms approached adolescent health, nutrition and leadership development not as a vertical intervention but as a deeply integrated effort that connects food, gender, voice and agency. Across 2023–24, we worked with 160 adolescent groups, primarily girls between the ages of 10–19, through the ACEH program. These efforts focused on developing leadership, building knowledge, dismantling stigma, improving dietary diversity and strengthening community-

based support systems. 160 numbers of adolescent groups have been strengthened and they are performing the role of change maker in their respective villages around health, nutrition, gender equality. Adolescent girls have organised several numbers of rallies and campaigns to create awareness on girl's education

and stop early marriage. In this year adolescent girls have dared to attend gramasabha meetings of their Gram Panchayats and highlighted their issues.

Adolescent girls have taken initiative to stop or postpone early marriages and re-admitted dropout girl children into the schools. They have been successful to strengthen the service delivery at their village and G.P by continuously engagement with the frontline workers. These adolescent groups were not just for information-sharing, but for building solidarity and voice.



Still there are some challenges and miles to go. In many villages and households, gender discrimination is visible and community members feel the discrimination as a normal. Some girls are not allowed to participate without peer support. School dropout and migration led to discontinuity in group participation, especially for older girls. Male engagement is minimal; an area we aim to address more actively in the coming year.

Yet despite these challenges, the year revealed one of our most powerful insights that adolescent girls, when supported with space and solidarity, are not just beneficiaries of change, but its boldest carriers.

Food Festival:

Celebrating the culture, identity and diversity

In Adivasi communities, food is not just sustenance, it is culture, identity and diversity. Yet in the face of standardization and market-led diets, many traditional foods are disappearing from both plate and pride. In this context, Food Festival organised by Living Farms was not just an event. It was a vibrant act of resistance, celebration and knowledge reclamation.

Held in Kashipur and Bissam Cuttak Block of Rayagada district, the festival brought together over 400 people including farmers, youth, mothers from more than 80 villages. It was a living gallery of Kondh culture, knowledge, and collective memory.

The objective of the food festival was to create a platform (i) to revive and popularize traditional and uncultivated foods, (ii) to challenge the notion of 'inferior Adivasi diets, (iii) to create a forum for intergenerational learning and pride building

It was not just about demonstrating foods, but about knowledge, culture, diversity, and relationships around food. The event embodied our belief that food systems cannot be transformed without transforming the way we relate to food itself. Women members shared about the food, its collection process, recipe and unique characteristics. Many youths expressed surprise and delight at foods they had never seen before, even though they came from the same villages.

The festival reaffirmed that culture is a powerful driver of food system. When people celebrate their food, they defend it with joy, dignity and agency. Living Farms plans to replicate such events at smaller cluster levels next year.

Seed Sovereignty

Saving seeds, sustaining sovereignty

For Adivasi farmers, seeds are not just inputs, they are inheritance. They hold memory, culture and the very right to decide what to grow, when, and how. However, industrial agriculture and commercial seed dependency have deeply eroded this autonomy, replacing rich diversity with monocultures and making farmers increasingly reliant on markets.



At Living Farms, seed sovereignty is foundational to our vision of food and nutrition security. Through 2023–24, our work focused on restoring traditional seed systems, building women led seed banks and preserving the diversity of millets, pulses and vegetables.

We supported the strengthening of 63 numbers of seed banks for both paddy, millet, pulses and vegetable seeds in Rayagada and Gajapati districts with an emphasis on women's participation and local custodianship.

Seed conservation has not only improved food security; it has also transformed the role of women and elders from passive recipients to active agents of biodiversity. In doing so, it has regenerated hope that resilience is already rooted in the soil.



Reviving the Kondh way of life:

Reclaiming ancestral wisdom, rebuilding ecological futures

To understand the food and nutrition security among the Kondh communities is to first understand their worldview- a way of life where the forest is not a “resource,” but a living relative, where land is not “owned,” but cared for, and where economy is measured not in cash, but in care, cooperation, and sharing.

Over the past year, Living Farms has deepened its efforts to revive the Kondh way of life, not as a romantic past, but as a living, evolving system that holds critical answers to today’s crises of food, climate and identity. This revival was carried forward through community-led reflections, cultural festivals, seed and soil practices, oral traditions, and everyday rituals of living with nature.

Throughout 2023–24, we facilitated over 100 village level reflection sessions across the project areas. These were designed as slow, respectful conversations, usually held in a circle, often under a tree inviting elders, women, youth to speak on their way of life. Mostly elderly persons share their experiences on forest, sharing practices, agro-ecological practices, rituals around soil, forest, rivers etc and many more. Younger generations and we ourselves get a live lesson on their ancestor’s way of life.

- Total ecology, not just human welfare — the well-being of soil, animals, rivers, and spirits is woven into daily decisions
- Community decision making and resource sharing — grain, seeds, tools, even cooked food are routinely shared without expectation of return. All the members are a part of the Kutumb (village council).
- Minimal dependence on cash economy — forest produce, bartering systems, consumption based on requirement and collective work reduce the need for market transactions
- Spiritual relationship with nature — every mountain, tree, and stream is linked to a spirit or ancestor, and hence treated with respect

Living Farms is continuously promoting traditional mixed farming practices, promotion and conservation of uncultivated foods, reviving traditional seeds, organising traditional food festivals, seed festivals, workshops among elders and youngsters. This revival is not a backward look. It is a forward looking reclamation, a path to ecological justice, community resilience, and cultural dignity.

Youths for environment:

From passive beneficiary to active change agent

In many Adivasi villages, young people today at a crossroad- between ancestral wisdom and modern schooling, between forest memory and digital dreams. They are often told their traditions are “backward,” and yet their identity is rooted in the songs, seeds, and soils of their people.

Recognizing this tension, Living Farms intentionally positioned youth not as recipients of development, but as actors and co-creators in shaping a healthier future for themselves. Across the projects, 2023–24 saw young people stepping up as farmers, nutrition champions, and climate warriors.

Living Farms has formed and strengthened 33 numbers of youth groups actively working for environment protection. Regular monthly meetings with youth groups are being organized on the issues of environment protection & role of youths, conservation of forest, stop uses of plastic, reforestation, improving soil health by using organic manure, health & hygiene and preparing biodiversity register etc.

Youth groups have been very vibrant and raised the issues of environment protection at various levels. 132 youths (Male 78 & female 54) of Kashipur Block organized a walkathon named as 'Run for Environment' in the month of December at the Block head quarter, generated awareness on environment protection and raised the issue before Block administration. 515 youths &



children (male-256, female-259) organized global action month in 21 villages of 6 GPs and 8 Schools in the month of November. On this occasion, youth groups organized debate competition, drawing on environment protection, cleaned villages, organized sports events where both male and female participated collectively and rallies against early marriage and school dropout at G.P and Block level.

407 youths (298 male & 109 female) across 66 villages of Kashipur have participated in the 'voice for green earth campaign' celebrated from 22nd April (earth day) to 5th June 2023 (environment day). During this campaign, youths of 39 villages have organized cleanness drive by cleaning their village surroundings and water bodies, youths of 6 villages have organized rally on environment protection, youths of 31 villages have collected seeds to carry out plantation drive. On 5th June, youths of Kantamala and Dumerjodi village organized a human chain with the message of environment protection. Youths of 3 villages have taken initiative to stop using plastic in marriage ceremonies and other festivals of the village. Youths have carried out plantation and seed ball throwing activities for afforestation.

Youths of 11 villages have participated in the Gramasabha and submitted their demands, youths of 5 villages have repaired their village road by their own effort, youths of 21 villages are regularly cleaning their villages and youths of 3 villages have met with BDO and collector with their demands on the issues of drinking water and road communication. 28 numbers of youths from 7 GPs have been trained on ecological tribal rights & biodiversity register. GP level youth team have been formed for preparing biodiversity register.



Study & Action Research:

Living Farms believes that knowledge must emerge from the ground, shaped by those who live the experience. Throughout 2023–24, we undertook a study on “Millets and it’s eco cultural significance in Kondh land”. The study has tried to explore the eco cultural significance through the Kondh Adivasi lens.

The full report is in annexure.

Publication:

A quarterly newsletter named as KUHOO, contains the stories of adolescent girl’s action, achievement and struggle is being published by Living Farms. In the year 2023-24, 4 issues have been published. The newsletter has been distributed among adolescent girls, their parents, frontline workers and government officials. It has inspired many girls and they are learning from each other through the KUHOO.

Success Stories:

Voices of Change, Seeds of Hope

Not A Game, But A Game Changer

It was on 20th June 2023, the Rampur village witnessed wonders happening around. The day marked the beginning of a new era for girls and heralded a gender sensitive society in the ensuing time. It was for the first time the adolescent girls played a cricket match. The two teams that played the match were least bothered about the outcome of the match. For them it was a moment of creating their own identity which was unseen, ignored and suppressed for years.

The state of girls was no better than vegetable existence in Rampur, a village under Sabarpali GP of R. Udaygiri block. The myth that male child is superior and girls are inferior was prevalent and pervasive. The adolescent boys would be acknowledged as assets and girls were considered as burdens. The adolescent girls used to



lead a life within the confines of four walls. Their interest, opinion and wishes never mattered for anyone. Such prejudicial practices fuelled by myths and misconception widened the inequality between girls and boys, and pushed the girls towards a flummoxed future. Under

sheer neglect and negation, the adolescent girls had resigned to the fact. Education, free movement and becoming independent were more like dreams than ambitions to them. Manisha, Rita and Tulasa watched their brothers playing cricket everyday and would rue the reality of being a girl.

With the formation of Trirasmi Kishori Dala under ACEH Programme, the existence and identity of adolescent girls have changed for better. It was a Herculean task for Kishori Sathi to convince the parents to send their adolescent girls to the meeting. But she relentlessly persuaded the parents and ensured that all adolescent girls became members of the group. The girls too were excited to realize that the group was to be governed and managed by them. The regular meetings and trainings saw the girls going from strength to strength. The group made them feel their worth, they began to believe that they must take action to effect the changes they wished to see.

During one meeting, while sharing their wishes, Manisha and Rita said “We wish we were boys. We want to play cricket, but we can’t as we are girls”. This sharing was picked up by the Kishori Sathi and the group underwent a brainstorming discussion over “Why can’t girls play cricket”. After insightful discussion, the group decided that there would be nothing better than starting with a game to prove a point.

As they started preparing for the match, the news spread like wildfire. Some parents discouraged them, some laughed at them, but the girls remained stoic and defiant. Their enthusiasm and eagerness drew the attention of the boys who



extended their co-operation by providing them cricket kit and getting the field ready for the match.

The Trirasmi Kishori Dala invited the Sarpanch and Block Programme Manager of Odisha Livelihoods Mission on the occasion. Finally on 20th June 2023 the coin was tossed up and the match kick-started. The hands that were more accustomed to hold the broom and accomplish the household chores struggled to grip the bat and ball, but inside the mind the adolescent girls had developed an indomitable spirit. The villagers gathered around the field. As the boys kept on clapping to motivate the girls, the parents could not stop their hands too.

The match continued for two hours. The girls fell on the ground many times while bowling, fielding and taking a run, but they only fell to rise again with more determination. The mute spectators of yester years had taken the centre stage that day. As the match completed, they

hugged each other, Manisha and Rita could not stop their tears rolling out. By that time, the match had set their minds free from fear, shame and prejudices. The resolution to take necessary initiative to trigger the changes had started forging inside. Self-belief and faith had outweighed doubts and fears.

Standing together to challenge and change

In a scenario where practices like child marriage, withdrawal of girl child from school were pushing the future of girls towards a stygian dark, an adolescent group has emerged to challenge and to change the practices. They are lot more than just a glimmer of hope. Armed with knowledge and equipped with critical thinking, they have buckled up to prohibit the practices that endanger the lives of adolescent girls in the village.

Surrounded with verdant hills, Loba is purely a Tribal village in Rayagarh block and home to 250 families. The villagers depend on agriculture and daily wage for livelihoods. Even if the villagers led a simple and peaceful life, accruing poverty coupled together with ignorance and myth compelled them to take decisions that used rob the girls of their future. Withdrawal of girl child from school was on the rise. And it would beggar belief that child marriage too was a common practice which often resulted in early pregnancy, malnutrition, anaemia and even premature birth and death of the adolescent girls. It also prompted social maladies like domestic violence and exploitation of girls and affected their mental health.



The “Dibyajyoti Kishori Dala” a group of adolescent girls swung in to action as the news of a youth eloping with a girl spread. For rest of the villagers, it was just a piece of information, but for the adolescent group it called for immediate action. What had stirred their minds that day would just

be a matter of gossip, if the group was not formed and if they did not undergo the training and discussion that had transformed them.

When the Kishori Sathi appointed under ACEH programme (implemented by Living Farms, supported by Action Child Aid, Denmark) visited the village to discuss with the adolescent girls to form an adolescent group at the village, she found it very difficult to bring them to one place. Their parents and the girls themselves were reluctant to move outside of their hamlet for any meeting. It took more than a month of visits and follow-up visits to convince the parents and girls to congregate at one place for a cause. Finally adolescent girls (within the age of 10 to 19) of four hamlets of the village formed “Dibyajyoti Kishori Dala”. In the passage of time, they developed a “We Feeling” and the meetings under the PLA Cycle took place

twice in a month regularly. Under the guidance of Kishori Sathi, they discussed various issues related to their health, nutrition, gender discrimination, government schemes and rights. They developed understanding on malnutrition cycle, ill-effects of early marriage, school dropout, importance of accessing available services and schemes and all the things that affected their lives.

The meetings were not reduced to enhance their understanding only. These meetings under PLA Cycle enabled them to think critically, analyse, strategise and take action to effect the desired changes.

As the group took the elopement of a youth with a minor girl seriously, they visited the youth's house. As the youth happened to be the brother of a group member, they could convince him and the minor girl for a discussion. They cited many incidences where early marriage was proved to be burdensome for the groom and fatally menacing for the bride. As the girl was just 16 years old, they convinced her that her body and mind were not matured enough to form a family and bear the brunt of responsibility. They advised her that she should not drop-out from the school as she was in Class-X. They also tried to discourage the youth mentioning that marrying a girl below 18 years could be a punishable offence.

The hour-long discussion and persuasion by the adolescent girls made the youth and the girl understand the mistake they had committed and they were about to commit by marriage.

The youth accompanied by some community leaders visited the house of the girl and handed over the girl to her parents. It was mutually and amicably decided that the youth and the girl would get married only after the girl attains 18 years of age and the youth secures some sustainable livelihood.

The adolescent group in the meantime is engaged to address the issue of health and hygiene in the village.

Ananta Majhi is reviving indigenous food system of Kondhs

Background:

For the past four decades, the shift towards commercial agriculture and the Green Revolution has led people to predominantly rely on rice and wheat, overshadowing the significance of millets and mix crops as staple food in many indigenous communities. The advent of commercialization, ancient crops were marginalized. Yet Mr. Ananta Majhi set an example and has taken initiative to revive the ancient crops by adopting traditional seeds to secure the food system for his family and enhanced both economic and environment health.



Introduction:

Ananta Majhi is a marginal farmer belongs to Kodiguda village. Kodiguda is a small tribal village surrounded by hills and forest, comes under Sindurghati G.P of Kashipur Block, Rayagada District. 50 households live in Kodiguda village and they depend upon agriculture, forest produces and daily wages for their livelihood. Ananta majhi is having 4 members in his family, including his wife and 2 children. His son reads in class-6 and daughter is in class-4.

His struggle:

Ananta Majhi was struggling to maintain his family from agriculture and forest produce, as agriculture has been expensive since last two decades, production has been stagnant and forest coverage has been thin. Government and some non- government agencies are continuously promoting mono crops where the production becomes miseries due to unpredictable of weather and pest & disease attack. So, he and his wife get on daily wages to



feed their kids, take care of their children's education and health. He borrows money from the villagers to meet his family's health issue and to celebrate the social functions. Ananta and fellow farmers of the village were losing traditional seeds and agricultural knowledge from one generation to the next. Gradually mix crop fields converted into mono crop which is highly risk of crop failure and as a result there is a food shortage in the family. Even though he was accessing PDS scheme, still he was facing food crisis for 3 to 4 months in a year.

His cultivation practice:

While discussing with Ananta Majhi, he says, earlier we used to harvest various types of crops on the dangar (hill) by mix farming. We used to cultivate 4 varieties of finger millet, 3 varieties of fox tail millet, barnyard millet, proso millet, 2 varieties of little millet, 2 varieties of maize, pearl millet, pigeon pea, black gram in our mix farming field. Sowing time and harvest time was different for different crops. Sowing time starts from



May and continue till late August and harvest time starts from August and continue till February. It means, we were having food during our stress period. Our land and forest provide us food round the year. Erratic rain or less rain was not a big issue for us due to our mix farming practice. If one crop damages due to climate crisis, then we harvest other crops. We had many types of climate resilient crops, which do not need much water. Ananta tried to

remember something and said, once (that year) we had very less rain, all the crops got damaged, then my father sowed little millet in the month of August and harvested well. Then Ananta took a deep breath and looking at the dangar, he said, now things have been changed. We don't know, how.

Present cultivation:

Ananta Majhi returned to the present. His eyes were still on the dangar and he said now we had only one variety of finger millet, one variety of maize and one variety of fox tail millet in our village. All the other varieties are disappeared. We don't have climate resilient seeds. Erratic rain damages our crop. Farmers are using chemical fertilisers. Soil fertility has gone down. Mix farming practice has been converted to mono cropping. Dangar cultivation has been limited to only finger millet. The taste of the food is not that good as compared to the past.



Ananta took a pause, showed his finger to a dangar and said, this year I have revived 3 varieties of crops like barnyard millet, one variety of fox tail millet and proso millet on that dangar. I have collected seeds from the village seed bank. I will return the seeds to the bank after harvest by adding some more quantity. Next year more farmers will adopt these seeds. Thanks to Living Farms for helping us to revive the disappeared seeds, which are climate resilient. I have received training on agro-ecology, organic manure preparation and seed conservation organised by the Living Farms. They also facilitated us to rethink over our traditional agriculture practices said Ananta with glittering eye.

In this kharif season, along with Ananta total 35 farmers of the village have revived barnyard millet, one variety of fox tail millet, proso millet and one variety of finger millet. They are continuing with mix farming of 11 to 12 varieties of crop including cereals, pulses, oil seeds and tubers. Earlier they were cultivating only two to three variety of crops in the mix farming.

Intervention of Living Farms:

Living Farms is implementing the project to overcome the food insecurity in kashipur block of Rayagada district. Living Farms is promoting agro-ecological farming, mix crops, seed bank, conservation of indigenous seeds, organizing food festivals to revive the diverse food systems of Adivasi. As an organisation Living Farms facilitating series of discussions among farmers and enabling them to reflect over the issues of food security and diverse food systems of Adivasi. When community members are critically



reflecting the issues, they found a clear connection between food security of Adivasis and traditional agricultural practices, which was part of Adivasi way of life and elders have the knowledge and skill about the traditional agricultural practices.

Ananta along with other farmers went through various training programs and workshops related to the agro-ecological practices organised by Living Farms. Women members of the community also attended the training programs and took the lead of seed conservation activities. Seed banks have been established by women group at the village level and they are trying to revive back the indigenous seed varieties and re-establish the labour exchange practices for agricultural activities.

Significant movement in his life:

Ananta and other farmers of the village have received training on agro-ecological practices, organic manure preparation and seed conservation, which helped them to take decision on



revival of disappeared crops and mix farming to increase crop diversity, whole farm productivity and climate resiliency. Earlier Ananta had only 2 variety of cereals, one variety of pulses, now his crop diversity has been increased to nine including cereals, pulses and oil seeds. He has also collected some of the seeds from the farmers of the nearby G.Ps. Now Ananta is very happy that, he will have harvest in the time of stress period. Ananta had prepared organic manure like liquid manure, handi khata and

used in his maize field, nutrition garden and plantation. He harvested well. In his own word, Ananta says that, this organic manure is really working very well even better than urea. I will continue this for all the crops. The preparation process of organic manure was demonstrated by community mobiliser of Living Farms. In this kharif season Ananta has prepared organic manure for more area, even he has convinced other farmers of the village to prepare organic manure and use at the place of chemical fertilisers. Ananta's experience has mobilised other farmers. In this kharif season, Ananta has not used any kind of chemical fertiliser in his field in this year.

In this kharif season, Ananta and his wife have prepared nutrition garden of 14 varieties of vegetables. They have applied organic manure in the garden to increase soil fertility. He harvested sufficient quantities of poison free vegetables like pumpkin, cucumber, bitter gourd, bottle gourd, cow pea, beans, brinjal, tomato, amaranthus, spinch, okra, basil, ridge gourd etc. Ananta and his wife became very happy that, their children got sufficient quantity of diverse vegetables from



their garden. When my children got sufficient quantity and quality of vegetables to eat, then nothing is more satisfied than this, says Ananta's wife.

Conclusion:

Ananta is now pioneer of the change process around the agriculture in the village Kodiguda. Ananta says, I was thinking in the same direction, how to revive our food system by reviving traditional agriculture practices and disappeared seeds. But I was clue less, how to start. Now things have been started in our village and it will not stop. We will revive all other seeds which are climate resilient, nutritious and was part of our culture. This is the need of the hour, when climate crisis is the new normal. This is really very good that, youths are also involved in this process. They are continuously seating and discussing on our food system and environment protection. If we will start now, they will carry it forward, says Ananta. A positive hope was floating in his eyes.

As various challenges continue to evolve in agriculture, mixed cropping provides a viable alternative to farming practices. This case study underscores the importance of integrating sustainable practices into agricultural systems. Policymakers and agricultural stakeholders should consider promoting mixed cropping as a strategy for enhancing food security, resilience, and sustainability in agricultural practices.

Conclusion:

Rooted in wisdom, growing with vision

The year 2023–24 has been a time of deepening, reflection, and quiet but resolute action across the villages we work with. It was a year that reminded us that **real change is slow, collective, and cultural**. It does not arrive through external instructions but emerges from within, through stories remembered, seeds replanted, meals reimaged, and questions asked by women, adolescent girls, youths, and elders.

Through our interventions, from food and nutrition security, adolescent health, and seed conservation to youth leadership, agro-ecological farming, and cultural revival; Living Farms has continued to walk alongside Adivasi communities, not ahead of them. We have supported them in reclaiming what is already theirs: knowledge, dignity, health, and self-determination.

Learnings:

- Culture is central to nutrition and ecology. Without restoring the value of local knowledge systems, no external program can truly succeed.
- Youth are ready, if we trust and equip them. Whether as health educators, seed savers, or storytellers, adolescents emerged as a force of hope.
- Behaviour change is possible through community dialogue. PLA tools and reflection spaces helped shift mind-sets on food, nutrition, health, slowly but meaningfully.
- Resilience comes from the collective. Whether through seed exchanges, food festivals, or menstrual health campaigns, change was most powerful when done together.

Challenges:

- Structural exclusions- Especially gendered ones continue to limit access to nutrition, education, and voice for many girls and women.
- Market pressures and mainstream schooling systems pull young people away from ecological thinking and traditional knowledge.
- Health systems still fail to meet the complex needs of Adivasi communities, particularly around adolescent and maternal health.
- Climate variability and ecological degradation pose rising risks to food security and traditional livelihoods.

