

SGP-India Quarterly Newsletter for Coastal and Semi-Arid Landscapes

Theme: Women in Focus



Issue: 2025/1
(Jan-March, 2025)

PREFACE

The Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme (GEF-SGP), launched at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, supports community-led initiatives that tackle environmental challenges while strengthening local livelihoods. India joined the programme in 1996. Since then, SGP has evolved from scattered efforts to integrated, landscape-based interventions.

Under its Seventh Operational Phase (OP7), SGP-India—implemented by UNDP in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and coordinated by TERI as the National Host Institution—currently supports 59 projects across three ecologically critical landscapes: 22 in the biodiversity-rich Northeast Region (NER), 20 in the water-stressed Central Semi-Arid Region (CSAR), and 17 in the climate-sensitive Indian Coastal Region (ICR). The Council for Social Development (CSD) is responsible for knowledge management and communication in the CSAR and ICR landscapes.

This is the first quarterly newsletter prepared by CSD. It presents grassroots stories from the two landscapes, highlights key events such as monitoring visits, and captures SGP-India's coverage in academic and media platforms.

With International Women's Day observed on March 8th, and gender equality being a central theme of OP7, we have chosen 'Women in Focus' as the theme for this issue. While all 37 interventions in CSAR and ICR impact women's lives, this edition highlights 10 projects implemented in the first phase, which have had more time to create a lasting impact. The newsletter also includes key takeaways from UNDP's online gender training workshop held in January.

Additionally, we bring you glimpses of SGP-India's presence at the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS 2025), TERI's flagship annual event. Glimpses of project review and monitoring visits in the two landscapes, SGP related publication, and SGP-grantees' works highlighted in media have also been covered.

We thank you for reading and look forward to your continued support.

Dr. Susmita Mitra, CSD
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CONTENT

Major indicators during the quarter: A snapshot of ICR and CSAR

3

SGP-India interventions bringing changes in women's lives: Stories from the ground

4

Event: Online-Gender training workshop to SGP-grantees by UNDP

19

SGP-India (OP7) at the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2025

20

Project Review and Monitoring Visits

24

SGP-India related Publication

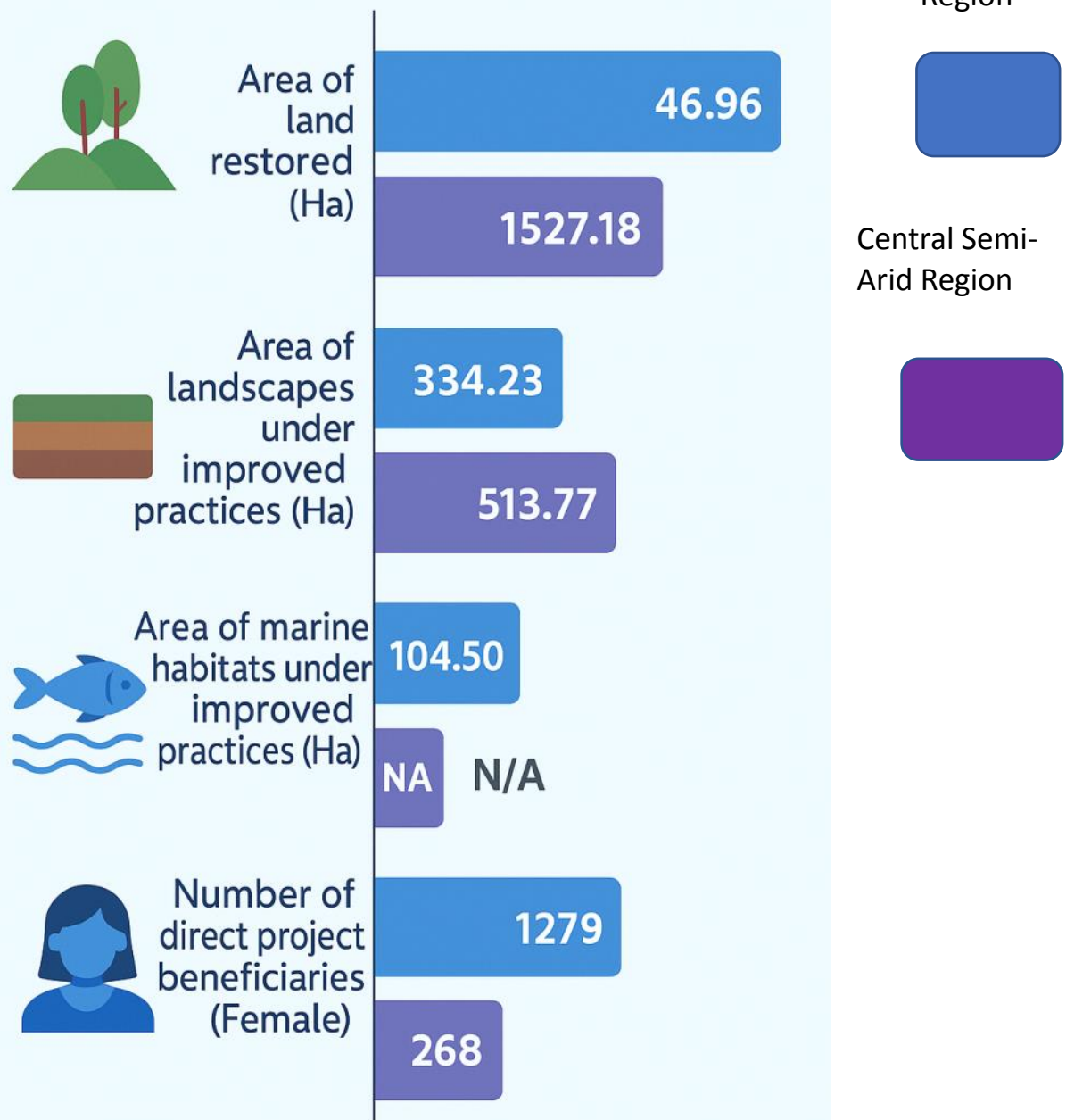
26

SGP-Grantees' works highlighted in Media

27

Major indicators during the quarter: A snapshot of ICR and CSAR

January-March 2025



SGP-India interventions bringing changes in women's lives: Stories from the ground

Ghost Nets to New Beginnings – How Coastal Women Became Champions of Change in Ramanathapuram

Along the vibrant but vulnerable coast of Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu, a quiet revolution is underway. Faced with the growing menace of ghost gears — abandoned fishing nets that threaten marine life — the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, through the SGP-India programme, launched a project that turned a crisis into an opportunity, especially for women. This endeavour offers a dual benefit: reducing the detrimental effects of marine pollution while providing alternative livelihoods for fisherwomen, empowering them to become agents of change in their communities.

At the heart of the project were the fisherwomen, long sidelined in coastal conservation. Trained in recycling and upcycling, these women learned to transform discarded ghost nets into beautiful, marketable products: baskets, handbags, and home décor items. Each stitch told a story—not just of environmental revival, but of women's resilience and creativity.



Impact at a Glance:

- ❖ Over 100 women and girls gained new skills
- ❖ The project facilitated the creation of 10 women entrepreneurs
- ❖ A total of 1,158 households benefited directly from improved livelihoods, cleaner shores, and renewed pride in their coastal heritage.

Beyond the workshops and products, the project sparked a profound shift in community attitudes. Women actively participated in clean-up drives — traditionally the domain of men — challenging norms and becoming visible stewards of the ocean.



Through community radio broadcasts, mobile apps, and local exhibitions, their voices and achievements reached wider audiences, inspiring others to join hands for cleaner seas and stronger communities.



The intervention has sparked a quiet revolution in coastal communities, especially in the lives of local fisherwomen who were once confined to the margins of marine livelihoods. The project has not only introduced a new income stream but also instilled a deep sense of purpose and pride. Women who had never imagined themselves as entrepreneurs are now artisans and environmental stewards, contributing to both household incomes and ocean health.

This project showed that protecting marine biodiversity is not just an environmental act — it is a pathway to social change, dignity, and new beginnings, especially for the women of Ramanathapuram.

From Smoke to Strength: How Biogas Transformed Women's Lives in Rural Maharashtra

For years, women in the villages of Sindhudurg district began their days before sunrise, shaped by the exhausting cycle of collecting firewood and cooking over smoky fires. Daily life revolved around long hours spent gathering fuel and managing household chores, leaving little time for anything else. This reality began to shift when Bhagirath Gramvikas Pratishthan (BGP), supported by SGP-India, introduced biogas plants across the villages. At first, the idea of a clean, efficient cooking solution seemed distant. But once biogas units were installed, change was immediate and visible. With a subsidy of ₹6,000 from SGP-India and a contribution of around ₹20,000 from each household, women saw something remarkable unfold in their courtyards.



Before



After

Project Impact at a Glance:

- ❖ 250 households transitioned to biogas, reducing firewood use by 70%.
- ❖ Over 1000 individuals, including 40–50 marginalized households, directly benefited.
- ❖ Women's additional earnings: ₹200–300 per day through new livelihood activities.

Now, instead of gathering wood, they fed their biogas plants with cow dung and organic waste. The clean blue flame that emerged from the stove brought not just ease but dignity. Smoke-free kitchens meant better health. The time once spent in the forest was now invested in running small businesses.

Cooking time dropped from nearly four hours a day to just ninety minutes, freeing up precious time for women to pursue other activities. With this extra time, many women engaged in new economic opportunities, such as working in local cashew factories, earning ₹200–300 per day. The financial contributions strengthened household incomes, but the deeper change was the boost in women's confidence and independence.

Training sessions equipped women with skills to operate and maintain biogas systems, turning them into key advocates within their communities. Improved indoor air quality reduced health issues like asthma and cataracts, creating healthier homes.



Beyond reducing dependence on firewood, the project fostered pride, self-reliance, and a stronger voice for women in household and community decisions. Today, the steady, smokeless flame of biogas symbolizes more than just clean energy—it marks a shift toward empowerment, economic growth, and environmental sustainability in Sindhudurg. The flame that once choked their kitchens now fuels their futures. Bhagirath's biogas intervention didn't just change how women cooked—it changed how they lived, worked, and dreamed.

Growing Change – How Women Reclaimed Their Land and Livelihoods

In the sun-scorched villages of Madurai, women farmers had always carried a silent burden. As climate change worsened land degradation and dried up water sources, their families' survival hung by a thread. Farming, once their anchor, became a battle against the odds. When the Covenant Centre for Development (CCD) introduced a project under SGP-India, hope quietly returned to these villages. The project didn't just bring new techniques—it brought a new vision where women stood at the forefront of reclaiming their land and dignity.



Through trainings on climate-resilient farming, soil and water conservation, and agro-biodiversity enhancement, women learned to read the soil, protect their crops, and nurture trees that would shelter future harvests. They formed Primary Producer Groups, selected their own saplings, and led community efforts to restore 500 acres of land.

Medicinal trees, fruit-bearing plants, and herbs now stood where barren fields once stretched. Women's hands that once tilled dry soil now planted life, securing food, shade, and future income. Leadership training further empowered them, positioning women not just as farmers but as decision-makers in their communities.

Project Impact at a Glance:

- ❖ 360 women farmers trained in leadership, climate-resilient farming, and sustainable agriculture.
- ❖ 10,000 trees and medicinal plants cultivated across 500 acres, improving income and biodiversity.
- ❖ 25% rise in crop yields and 30% increase in household income, boosting women's economic security.

This wasn't just an agricultural project. It was a story of resilience, of reclaiming agency, and of building futures rooted in soil, water, and the unshakeable strength of women. Through this initiative, gender equity blossomed alongside crops, and the fight against desertification became a fight for justice, livelihoods, and lasting change. Today, these women are no longer passive victims of a changing climate. They are entrepreneurs, stewards of the land, and protectors of biodiversity—carving a resilient future for themselves and the generations to come.

Restoring Sacred Groves, Transforming Women's Lives: A Story from Coastal Tamil Nadu

In the small coastal villages of Tamil Nadu, sacred groves once stood as vibrant guardians of biodiversity. Over time, these lush patches of Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF) had withered under the pressure of changing land use. But with the arrival of the SGP-India-supported project led by the Society for People Education and Economic Development (SPEED), a quiet revolution began.

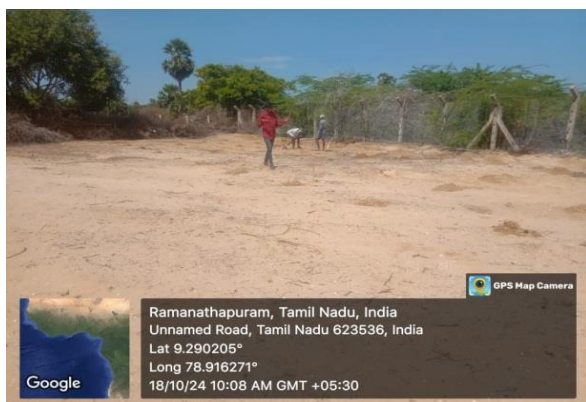
Women, often the unseen caretakers of their community's natural heritage, took center stage. At village meetings, women's voices rang clear as they shared traditional knowledge of sacred groves, water bodies, and temple ecosystems. They helped map degraded areas, select native tree species, and design the restoration plans.

Armed with new skills from nursery and biodiversity training sessions, women grew thousands of saplings, prepared soil mixtures, and mastered pest control using eco-friendly methods. Many earned fair wages, enhancing their family incomes and gaining newfound respect within their communities.



Through participatory rural appraisals and the formation of gender-balanced Village-Level Institutions, women moved from knowledge providers to decision-makers, planners, and monitors. Their active participation not only restored the sacred groves but also nurtured a deeper sense of community pride and ownership.

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Before



After

Project Impact at a Glance:

- ❖ 22,340 trees planted, covering 0.2 sq.km of coastal land
- ❖ 365 women employed, earning Rs. 800/day through planting and nursery work
- ❖ 10 water bodies restored, improving freshwater availability for 6,020 people

Today, the groves are green again, water bodies brim with life, and women's leadership continues to inspire future generations.

This work did more than restore the land—it gave the women confidence, leadership skills, and respect in their communities. They were no longer just caretakers of homes but also protectors of nature. The groves now stand tall again, thanks to the strength and spirit of the women who brought them back to life.



Rebuilding Livelihoods Beneath the Waves: How Women Are Shaping Marine Conservation in Rameshwaram

In the fishing villages of Rameshwaram, the sea has always been both a giver and a taker of livelihoods. When fish stocks began to dwindle and coastal erosion worsened, despair crept into the lives of many — especially the women who depended on the daily fish markets to feed their families. But change arrived with the “Reef for Fish Forever” project, led by PLANT Trust and supported by SGP-India.



Fisherfolk, including women and youth, learned to fabricate and deploy 300 artificial reefs using locally available materials. As marine life returned to the new underwater ecosystems, hope resurfaced. Fish catches increased steadily, while the nearby waters, once depleted, turned vibrant again.

Women seized this moment of renewal. Traditionally marginalized in fisheries, they now stepped forward as auctioneers, vendors, exporters — and crucially, as leaders in reef management committees. They ensured fair pricing, eliminated middlemen, and educated others on sustainable fishing practices.

Project Impact at a Glance:

- ❖ 300 artificial reefs deployed, covering 1,500 sq.m, producing 50 tons of fish annually worth INR 10 million
- ❖ Over 1,200 families, including women-led households, now earn INR 12,500–15,000 monthly from fisheries
- ❖ Up to 3,000 kg CO₂ sequestered annually through reef ecosystems, contributing to climate change mitigation

The reefs didn't just bring back the fish; they rewove the social fabric of the villages, empowering women economically and socially. Across the three reef zones, incomes stabilized, children's schooling improved, and communities became more resilient.

The deployment of these artificial reefs has led to a notable increase in fish populations, directly benefiting local women engaged in fish processing and marketing. With more consistent fish catches, women have experienced improved income stability and food security. Additionally, the project has fostered opportunities for women to participate in community-based resource management and conservation efforts, enhancing their roles in decision-making processes.



From the seafloor to the marketplace, Rameshwaram's women are now at the heart of a blue revolution — one that promises a sustainable, prosperous future. The 'Reef for Fish Forever' project exemplifies how environmental restoration efforts can simultaneously advance gender equality and community resilience. By integrating women's empowerment into marine conservation strategies, the initiative has not only revitalized coastal ecosystems but also strengthened the socio-economic fabric of Rameshwaram's fishing villages.

Building Resilience, Changing Lives: Women at the Heart of Climate Action in Ramanathapuram

In the drought-scorched villages of Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu, hope was fading. Years of failed monsoons had left the fields cracked and barren, forcing many families to abandon farming and migrate in search of work. But for women like Meena and hundreds of others, change began when the Sri Kannapiran Educational & Charitable Trust (SKECH Trust) brought a new vision through the "Integrated Development of Farming Communities with Climate Proofing Interventions" project, supported by SGP-India.

At first, skepticism loomed large. New techniques? Climate-resilient crops? Water conservation? It all seemed distant. But through patient village meetings, hands-on training sessions, and the nurturing of self-help groups, the women began to see possibilities.

They learned how to prepare fields with green manure, retain soil moisture using coconut coir pith, and build farm ponds to harvest precious rainwater. They debated and decided on crop

choices, strategized loan management, and even led marketing initiatives. For the first time, many women were not just supporting farming—they were driving it.



Before



After

Project Impact at a Glance:

- ❖ 1,130 individuals (a large share being women) directly benefited from improved farming practices and livelihoods.
- ❖ 94 hectares of farmland adopted climate-resilient techniques
- ❖ 25% increase in average income for women farmers, contributing to financial independence and household empowerment



As practices changed, so did fortunes. Household incomes rose, degraded lands turned green, and backyards filled with fruit trees planted by women's hands. Through every challenge—reluctance to adopt new practices, extreme drought, or dying saplings—the women's resilience only deepened. Today, women smile as they see their thriving fields. It's not just crops they have cultivated—it's dignity, leadership, and a future.

Lighting New Paths – How Solar Energy Empowered Women in Batiagarh, Damoh

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In the quiet villages of Batiagarh block in Damoh, Madhya Pradesh, the setting sun once meant darkness. In more than 50 villages without electricity, women cooked by the dim light of traditional stoves, fetched water in the dark, and navigated unsafe paths at night. Even in villages technically connected to the grid, single-phase connections and crumbling lines offered little more than flickering bulbs and broken promises. Then came a spark of change.



Through the SGP-India-supported project “Dissemination of Renewable and Clean Energy Solutions Sustainably in Batiagarh, Damoh,” Manav Swavlamban Kendra, led by Mr. Pramod Kumar Sinha, envisioned a future where energy meant empowerment—especially for women.

Project Impact at a Glance:

- ❖ 350 villages energized, covering 1,000+ households with solar solutions.
- ❖ 2,500+ people trained in solar technology use and maintenance, with 50% women participation.
- ❖ 8% household penetration of solar systems across a 12–13 sq. km project area.

Women from Self-Help Groups, young girls, and even middle-aged homemakers were trained to understand, install, and maintain solar technologies. Many, handling solar panels for the first time, saw a new world open before them—one that offered not just light, but leadership. Solar home lighting systems, solar cookers, and efficient streetlights began illuminating lives and livelihoods. Training sessions held with the support of village heads and Panchayat bodies emphasized inclusion: nearly 50% of trainees were women. These women didn’t just use solar energy—they became its champions, educating others, repairing systems, and setting up small businesses supplying parts.

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Batiagarh's nights grew safer, homes warmer, and women's aspirations brighter. Solar energy wasn't just about power—it was about reclaiming agency, dignity, and dreams.

Seeds of Change — How SGP-India Empowered Women Farmers in Bundelkhand

Across the dry, rugged fields of Bundelkhand, a quiet transformation is taking root. Through support from SGP-India, Darshna Mahila Kalyan Samiti launched an initiative to improve soil fertility and decrease soil erosion by promoting a sustainable integrated farming system. But its impact reached far beyond the land—it reshaped the lives of women who had long shouldered the burden of degraded fields and smoky kitchens.



With technical training, 1,380 women stepped into leadership roles, managing homestead nutrition gardens, restoring barren land, and reviving millet cultivation across 500 hectares. Solar stoves, introduced to 100 households, freed women from the harmful smoke of traditional cooking, improving their health and lightening their daily load.

Project Impact at a Glance:

- ❖ 1,380 women trained in organic farming, land restoration, and entrepreneurship
- ❖ 100 solar stoves distributed, reducing indoor air pollution and saving time
- ❖ 5,000 nutrition plants cultivated to enhance household food security

The project successfully rejuvenated approximately 400 hectares of rocky, undulating, and barren land. Additionally, 30 water harvesting ponds (each measuring 30 feet × 30 feet × 10 feet) were constructed to promote water conservation and further enrich soil quality and agricultural productivity.



The plantation of indigenous species significantly enhanced greenery and vegetation cover, contributing to improved soil nutrition, fertility, and groundwater recharge. Land levelling and bunding effectively reduced topsoil erosion while increasing the soil's water retention and infiltration capacity. Nutrition blossomed alongside empowerment: women planted 5,000 moringa, papaya, curry leaf, and gooseberry trees, boosting family diets with homegrown superfoods. They formed vibrant groups to process and sell millet-based products in local markets, earning incomes that gave them stronger voices in household decisions.

Solar Power, New Beginnings — How SGP-India Sparked Women's Livelihoods in Barwani, MP

In the tribal heartlands of Barwani, Madhya Pradesh, where opportunities are scarce and the power grid unreliable, a quiet revolution was set in motion. Through the support of SGP-India, the Center Of Needy, Creative, Experimental & Participatory Techniques (Concept Society) introduced Solar Powered Egg Incubators and Brooders—A Sustainable Livelihood Solution.



This innovative project harnessed the sun's energy to hatch not just chicks, but also new hopes for tribal women. Fully solar-powered and automated, the 100-egg incubators and chick brooders required little human intervention, allowing women to manage backyard poultry farming alongside their daily lives. Beneficiaries received hands-on training in poultry care, incubator management, and marketing, empowering them to earn independently.

Four solar units installed across villages now buzz with life, enabling women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to hatch chicks year-round. For 87 women, the project translated into a steady income of ₹5,000 per month, strengthening household economies and boosting self-confidence.

Project Impact at a Glance:

- ❖ 87 women are now earning a steady income of ₹5,000 per month through four installed units
- ❖ 12,969 kg of CO₂ emissions reduced in 18 months; four 8 kWp solar systems installed, equivalent to planting 500 trees
- ❖ 250 women trained in poultry care, chick hatching, and marketing

The installation of four 8 kWp solar systems is equivalent to planting approximately 500 trees over the past 10 years! Environmental gains went hand-in-hand with economic empowerment: 12,969 kg of CO₂ emissions were avoided over 18 months; proving that clean energy and livelihood enhancement can—and must—go together. By weaving renewable energy into traditional practices, SGP-India helped Barwani's women transform resilience into opportunity, creating a replicable model for rural livelihoods across India.

Cultivating Resilience — How SGP-India's Nature-Based Solutions Transformed Women's Lives in Bijawar, MP

In the sun-baked fields of Bijawar Block, Chhatarpur District, climate change once cast a long shadow over the hopes of smallholder farmers. But through the Landscape Restoration through Nature-Based Solutions project, supported by SGP-India and implemented by Haritika, a vibrant transformation has begun—especially for the women of these lands.



With a vision to restore degraded landscapes and build resilient communities, Haritika introduced climate-smart agriculture, soil and water conservation, and community-driven resource management across 15 villages. Women, often sidelined from decision-making, were placed at the heart of the mission. Trained in sustainable farming, bio-input management, and leadership, 500 women farmers now champion change in their villages.

Project Impact at a Glance:

- ❖ 500 women farmers trained in climate-smart agriculture and resource management
- ❖ 2,500 hectares restored through agroforestry and sustainable practices

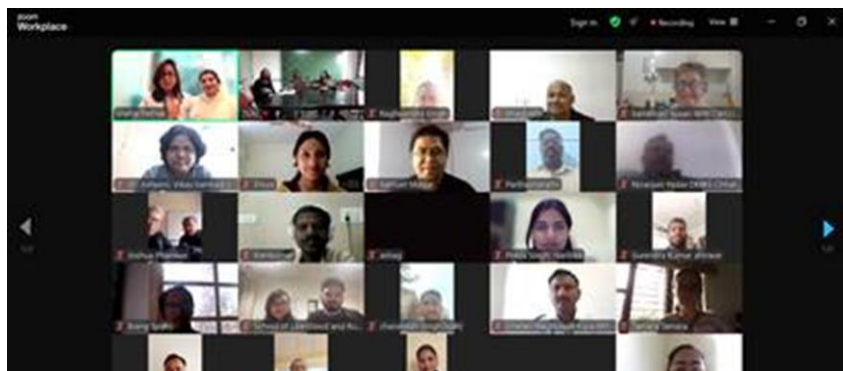
From planting endangered millet varieties to managing Bio-Input Resource Centers, women are leading the charge towards greener fields and fuller granaries. The project also provided renewable energy solutions like solar irrigation pumps, lightening the workload and boosting yields. Economic empowerment blossomed: women-led groups are now cultivating crops across thousands of hectares, participating in village governance, and earning independent incomes for the first time.

This powerful model of nature-based, gender-focused restoration has not only rehabilitated the land—it has reimagined the role of rural women as stewards of prosperity and sustainability. Thanks to SGP-India and Haritika, Bijawar's women are no longer just tilling the soil—they are sowing futures.

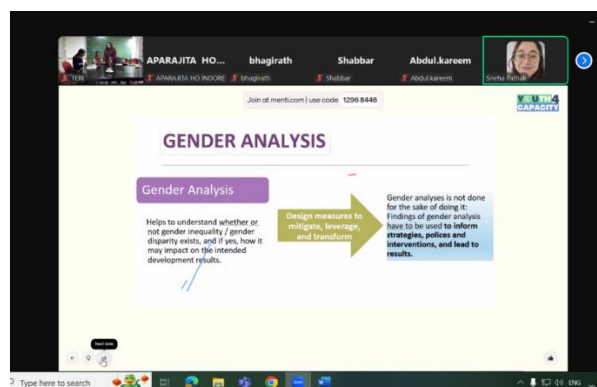
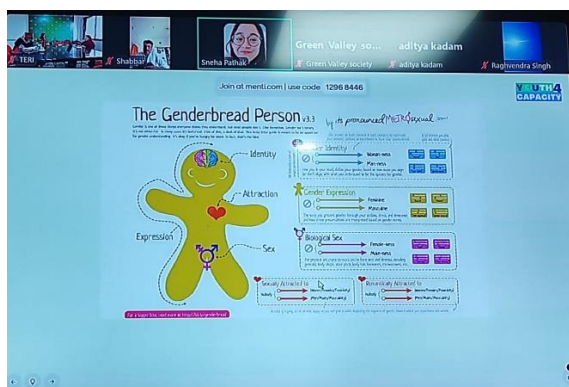
Event: Online-Gender training workshop to SGP-grantees by UNDP

On 29th January 2025, the SGP-India team conducted an insightful gender training session led by Ms Sneha Pathak from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) along with Ms Urjaswi Sondhi, with 68 participants from three landscapes.

The session covered key gender concepts, including gender-blind, gender-responsive, and gender-transformative approaches. Discussions explored various themes such as the nuances of matriarchal societies, where structural roles do not necessarily translate into actual decision-making power for women.



Participants reflected on women's participation in land restoration, noting that their exclusion often stems from the lack of engagement, and that holding separate meetings could help amplify their voices. Financial inclusion was another major focus, with the group highlighting how gender biases continue to restrict women's access to financial resources, while innovative models like Bank Sakhi were seen as effective tools for bridging these gaps. The concept of time poverty also emerged, underscoring how women's unpaid labour reduces their opportunities to engage in economic activities.



A key takeaway from the session was the importance of gender analysis and intentional project design in fostering inclusive and equitable development outcomes.

SGP-India (OP7) at the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2025

Knowledge Session: Grassroots Action for Ecosystem Restoration

At the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2025, organized by TERI under the theme “Partnerships for Accelerating Sustainable Development and Climate Solutions”, a key knowledge session showcased the grassroots impact of SGP-India’s Seventh Operational Phase (OP7) of the UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme. The session, held on March 5, 2025, highlighted community-led ecosystem restoration efforts aligned with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030).

The session titled “Grassroots Action for Ecosystem Restoration” brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including policymakers, UN agencies, NGO grantees, researchers, civil society actors, and the media. It focused on how SGP-India is driving sustainability, ecosystem resilience, and gender equity through small but impactful community-based projects.



Key speakers included Mr. Neelesh Shah (MoEFCC) praised SGP's scalable model and proposed documenting its outcomes to inform policy, Mr. Ashish Chaturvedi (UNDP) traced SGP's evolution and stressed the importance of local innovations and women's participation, Dr. Dipankar Saharia (TERI) emphasized building community capacity and strengthening district-level coordination, and Mr. Manish Pandey, National Coordinator, introduced OP7 and the vision behind it.

A panel discussion, chaired by Dr. Saharia, featured experts like Dr. Aruna Pandey (BRLF), Dr. Nambi Appadurai (WRI), Shri Lokendra Thakkar (EPCO), Dr. Priyanka Jamwal (ATREE), Prof. Nitya Nanda (CSD), and Dr. Prabha Shankar Shukla (NEHU). They shared insights on integrating traditional knowledge, capacity building, and systems thinking for ecosystem restoration. The session concluded with a powerful metaphor—SGP as a “hummingbird”—small, yet impactful, when rooted in community participation.



Brochure Launch

The session saw the launch of the OP7 brochure, profiling 59 community-led projects. It captured the vision, strategies, and on-ground impact of the programme across India.

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Innovation Awards

For the first time, SGP Innovation Awards were introduced to recognize exceptional NGOs implementing innovative, community-based environmental projects. After a transparent application and screening process, the winners were:

PLANT (Indian Coastal Region)

Aaranyak (North-Eastern Region)

Jan Madhyam (Central Semi-Arid Region)



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The awards aimed to promote replication of innovative practices and celebrate impactful grassroots solutions.

Product Marketing & Networking



SGP-India also facilitated product stalls for grantees, offering them direct access to stakeholders and potential markets. Grantees displayed eco-products, including organic foods, clean energy devices, and sustainable packaging, sparking collaboration and feedback. These stalls promoted sustainability-driven entrepreneurship and helped build grantee confidence and visibility.

Together, these activities at WSDS 2025 underscored SGP-India's transformative role in advancing grassroots sustainability, innovation, gender inclusion, and ecosystem restoration—showing how small grants can drive big changes.

Project Review and Monitoring Visits

The review meetings served as key platforms to assess the implementation status, track progress against planned activities, and identify challenges and opportunities for improvement. In addition to assessing overall progress, the review process emphasized qualitative indicators such as knowledge building, local ownership, innovation, and sustainability of initiatives. The site visits also offered an opportunity for real-time feedback, collaborative problem-solving, and on-the-spot guidance to implementing partners.

Indian Coastal Region

On 7 January 2025, the SGP India team conducted a monitoring visit to the project site. Manish Kumar Pandey, National Coordinator, Small Grants Programme, engaged with the project team and beneficiaries, as well as farmers from Sempatti Panchayat. During the visit, he witnessed soil testing demonstrations, conducted in collaboration with the Agriculture Department and led by Assistant Director Thiru. A. Murugesan, for farmers from five villages. He also had the opportunity to visit the plots of farmers who are practicing agroforestry.



Central Semi-Arid Region

As part of the monitoring and evaluation process, a project progress review meeting was held on February 10th and 11th in Bhopal, where all 20 partner organizations presented updates on their project implementation, highlighted key achievements, and outlined action plans for the next two quarters.



The review was chaired by a distinguished panel comprising Mr. Brij Mohan Singh Rathore (Chairperson, RAC-CSAR), Ms. Archana Singh (Member, RAC-CSAR), Dr. Naman Gupta (State Programme Manager, UNDP), Mr. Lokendra Thakkar (Member, RAC-CSAR), Mr. Srinivasan Iyer (Advisor, SGP), Dr. Dipankar Saharia (Senior Director, TERI), and Mr. Manish Kumar Pandey (National Coordinator, SGP India). The panellists shared valuable insights and offered constructive suggestions to strengthen project outcomes. Additionally, Ms. Archana Singh conducted a training session on Gender Mainstreaming to equip partners with inclusive and gender-responsive approaches.



SGP-India related Publication

Decoding India's Leadership in South Asia for Accelerating Sustainable Development and Climate Solutions

Perspectives from GEF-SGP

This article composed by **Dr Susmita Mitra** and **Prof. Nitya Nanda** explores India's possible role in advancing SSC in South Asia, focusing on the GEF-SGP as a model for promoting community-driven environmental action and fostering regional collaboration. The authors opine—the GEF offers a viable platform for successful uptake and replication and improvement of the impact and durability of exchanges bringing communities and government officials together to discuss common challenges and to share solutions that have worked, creating networks and establishing a community of practitioners; and using peer-to-peer exchanges to enable participants to learn about a previously applied solution and avoid repeating mistakes.

South-South Cooperation (SSC) has emerged as a vital mechanism for fostering sustainable development among countries in the Global South. By emphasizing mutual benefits, resource sharing, and knowledge exchange, SSC addresses the distinct challenges faced by developing nations. In their recent article *Environment and Sustainable Development in South Asia* in the *Routledge Handbook of South Asia*, Nanda and Mitra (2024) argue that SSC is indispensable in this region, where countries confront intertwined issues of climate vulnerability, environmental degradation, and poverty. As the largest country in the region, India holds the potential to play a pivotal role as a regional leader in the current geopolitical scenario; effective regional cooperation in South Asia seems difficult. But in a fast-changing world, it is quite possible that situation will improve soon. South Asia's progress in SSC in this area is hindered by two significant

challenges: limited financial resources and high exposure to climate risks, which exacerbate poverty and vulnerability. Without external financial support to mitigate climate risks while simultaneously creating co-benefits for development, the pace of cooperation will likely remain constrained. One effective platform addressing these challenges is the Global Environment Facility-Small Grants Programme (GEF-SGP), coordinated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), designed to tackle both climate and development issues. Established in 1992, coinciding with the Rio Earth Summit, the GEF-SGP embodies the principle of sustainable development by thinking globally, acting locally. By providing financial and technical support, the Programme enables community-driven projects that conserve and restore the environment while improving livelihoods. It demonstrates how grassroots initiatives

can balance human needs with environmental priorities. This article explores India's possible role in advancing SSC in South Asia, focusing on the GEF-SGP as a model for promoting community-driven environmental action and fostering regional collaboration.

India's Leadership in South-South Cooperation in South Asia

India's leadership in SSC stems from its historical commitment to equitable development and climate justice. Independent India viewed its membership at the UN as an important guarantee for maintaining international peace and security. As a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement and a Global South advocate, India has championed solidarity among

TERRAGREEN | MARCH 2025 43



sharing regarding successful co-financing generation will be extremely useful for other South Asian countries for long-term sustainability of these programmes. Thus, India can play a role by documenting what works (vis-à-vis what doesn't and why) in co-financing, and how and in which context. Some countries in South Asia face challenges quite similar to some of the states in India due to spatial reasons. Therefore, there are high possibilities of learning from similar interventions in order to avoid what doesn't work and follow what works. This is particularly true for the newcomers like Bangladesh. On the other hand, India can also learn from particular context-specific challenges and also successful case studies overcoming those challenges, in order to replicate that in similar contexts and help those countries to overcome the continuing challenges

with economies of scale. The Himalayas play a crucial role in South Asia's geopolitics by influencing territorial disputes and strategic alliances, while also being a vital biodiversity hotspot that supports unique ecosystems and regulates climate patterns for the region. The Eastern Himalayas, spanning India, Bhutan, and Nepal, are facing threats from deforestation, climate change, and unsustainable practices. Through the GEF-SGP, India has implemented a project—Securing Livelihoods, Conservation, Sustainable Use, and Restoration of High Range Himalayan Ecosystems (SECURE-Himalayas)—across different regions in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh. It supported community-led initiatives to protect endangered species like snow leopards and medicinal plants. The challenges being similar in different regions in

Nepal and Bhutan, fostering cross-border collaboration for ecosystem restoration can be a possibility. Similarly, the Sundarbans region, shared by India and Bangladesh, serves as a critical geopolitical zone for border management between India and Bangladesh, while also being a key biodiversity hub, home to diverse species such as the Bengal Tiger, and playing a significant role in coastal protection and climate regulation. Presently it faces challenges from rising sea levels, frequent cyclones, and energy poverty. Through the GEF-SGP, India has implemented a project in West Bengal—Conservation of Agro-biodiversity by Providing Alternate Livelihood Options to the Forest Dependent Community in Islands of Sundarbans. The project covered vulnerable and backward villages on the fringe of forest, with no alternate livelihoods and dependency

TERRAGREEN | MARCH 2025 45

FEATURE



developing nations. In its 2017 Voluntary National Review at the UN, India emphasized integrating SDGs into national policies while fostering regional and global partnerships, reinforcing its role as a leader in sustainable development and international cooperation.

Spatially, India holds a unique advantage in South Asia, sharing borders with Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, while facing geographical challenges with Afghanistan. Pakistan remains a distinct case. Unlike India, other South Asian nations face significant difficulties in deepening regional integration as they do not share

borders, with the possible exceptions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. India has actively promoted regional cooperation in South Asia through initiatives focused on capacity building, technology transfer, and knowledge exchange. Its support to neighbouring countries during the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters has further strengthened regional ties and garnered global recognition. India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy prioritizes strong ties with neighbours through enhanced cooperation and development. India's leadership of the G20, culminating in the grand Summit in New Delhi in 2023, was a declaration of the country's

emergence as a force to be reckoned with on the global stage.

The GEF-SGP in South Asia: Possibilities of India's leadership

In South Asia, GEF-SGP has enabled a number of grassroots organizations to implement innovative solutions for biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, sustainable land management, along with improving livelihoods of vulnerable communities since 1994. Table 1 reveals that Pakistan and Sri Lanka have been the first countries to receive GEF-SGP assistance. The Programme did not start in Afghanistan and discontinued in Pakistan in 2022 due to various reasons. As the first implementing country, Sri Lanka has the maximum numbers of projects, followed by India. Table 1 shows that apart from providing large amount of grant, GEF-SGP has been able to generate significant amount of co-financing in cash and kind. If we compare the co-financing generated in India and Sri Lanka, there are significant differences. India being a large country with diverse challenges has not only managed the programmes well but also been successful in generating more than double co-financing than the actual GEF financing. India's knowledge

Table 1: GEF-SGP in South Asia

Country	Start Year	Projects	GEF	Non-GEF	Total	GEF Grant Amount (US\$)	Co-financing in cash (US\$)	Co-financing in kind (US\$)
Afghanistan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bangladesh	2021	6	-	-	6	234,108	302,543	-
Bhutan	1999	207	18	225	5,973,880	1,864,701	3,373,494	3,373,494
India	1996	412	61	473	11,894,224	14,770,977	9,030,033	9,030,033
Maldives	2010	104	25	129	2,993,546	1,588,912	1,076,648	1,076,648
Nepal	1998	275	7	282	9,692,821	8,299,048	3,308,744	3,308,744
Pakistan	1994-2022*	302	10	312	9,373,303	9,194,163	4,790,708	4,790,708
Sri Lanka	1994	448	42	490	10,824,320	2,614,702	3,819,428	3,819,428

Source: Compiled from <https://sgp.undp.org/>.
Note: *GEF-SGP discontinued since 2022

44 TERRAGREEN | MARCH 2025

FEATURE



upon mangroves and non-timber forest product (NTFP) and emphasizes on natural farming activities and fuelwood efficient cookstoves for environment protection while reducing carbon emissions. By facilitating knowledge exchange and technical support, India can enable similar interventions in the Sundarbans of Bangladesh. Tamil Nadu state in India and Sri Lanka face similar coastal challenges like erosion, pollution, sea-level rise, biodiversity loss, overfishing, and extreme weather. The SGP-India project in Ramnathapuram district of Tamil Nadu—Blue is the New Pink: Women Driving Sustainable Seaweed Cultivation and Climate Solutions—addresses environmental degradation, human-marine ecosystem disconnects, women's limited participation by promoting seaweed aquaculture, seagrass restoration (for carbon sequestration and enhanced fishery yields), vocational training, business development among other community-led sustainability initiatives. Knowledge and technology exchange will be useful for addressing similar challenges in Tamil Nadu.

Challenges to Overcome and Strengthening the Possibilities

South Asia, characterized by a blend of cooperation and contention, presents both opportunities and challenges that require innovative and imaginative strategies. Security remains a pressing concern in South Asia, with issues ranging from terrorism to maritime disputes. Creative solutions are required to deal with long-standing issues. A shift from South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) (including members from all South Asian countries to Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), consisting five South Asian countries (India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka) and two Southeast Asian countries (Myanmar and Thailand) indicate the reasons for the shift.

South Asia is highly vulnerable to climate change, particularly in agriculture, which sustains livelihoods and food security of huge masses in the region. Shared agro-climatic conditions,

river, and oceanic waters underscore the need for regional cooperation in climate adaptation, water management, and marine pollution. India's scalable, affordable technologies can drive clean energy solutions and address regional challenges.

India's engagement with the GEF-SGP has generated a wealth of experience and best practices that are relevant to other South Asian countries. Indian projects have demonstrated how traditional practices can complement modern technologies for sustainable development. The SGP offers a wonderful platform for successful uptake and replication and for improvement of the impact and durability of exchanges bringing communities and government officials together to discuss common challenges and to share solutions that have worked, creating networks and establishing a community of practitioners; and using peer-to-peer exchanges to enable participants to learn about a previously applied solution and avoid repeating mistakes. *

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46 TERRAGREEN | MARCH 2025

SGP-Grantees' works highlighted in Media

Several SGP OP-7 grantees have actively published and highlighted their project-related activities through diverse media channels, including social media platforms, local vernacular newspapers, regional magazines, and national English dailies. These stories not only bring attention to the innovative approaches adopted by grassroots organizations but also help in building public trust, mobilizing community participation, and attracting support from potential partners, donors, and policy stakeholders.

जैविक खेती पर हुआ पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों का प्रशिक्षण विकास संवाद ने जैविक खेती पर किया पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों को प्रशिक्षित



छतरपुर भ्रमण न्यूज। छतरपुर/ विकास संवाद द्वारा छतरपुर जिले के राजनगर ब्लॉक के 12 गांव में जलवायु परिवर्तन के प्रभाव को कम करने के लिए टैरी संस्थान के सहयोग से जलवायु अनुकूल कृषि एवं पर्यावरण विकास कार्यक्रम का संचालन किया जा रहा है। 22 मार्च को खजुराहो के निजी होटल में पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों का एक दिवसीय प्रशिक्षण का आयोजन किया गया। प्रशिक्षण में पंचायत सरपंच, सचिव एवं पंच शामिल हुए। इस प्रशिक्षण में प्रशिक्षक की भूमिका विकास संवाद भोपाल से रामकुमार बिष्टाथी, दर्शाना महिला कल्याण समिति से निरंजन यादव एवं कृषि विभाग से बी. के. श्रीवास्तव ने निभाई।

विकास संवाद के जिला समन्वयक रविकांत पाठक ने कार्यक्रम का उद्देश्य बताते हुए कहा की जलवायु परिवर्तन एक वैश्विक मुद्दा है जिसे हम सबको संघर्ष करना पड़ेगा। और इसके प्रभाव को कम करना पड़ेगा। इस मुद्दे पर काम करने के लिए पंचायतों की महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका है। हम सब को अपनी पंचायत एवं समुदाय में जैविक खेती करने के लिए कृषकों को प्रेरित करना होगा ताकि आने वाले समय में जलवायु परिवर्तन के प्रभाव को कम कर सकें। प्रशिक्षण समन्वयक रामकुमार बताते हैं की आज के समय में बदलते मौसम के अनुसार हम सब को मिल कर जैविक कृषि करने की जरूरत है। यदि हमने खेती के तरीकों में बदलाव नहीं किया तो हमें प्रति वर्ष की तरह खेती में नुकसान देखना पड़ेगा। प्रशिक्षण में निरंजन यादव बताते हैं की आज विश्व जल दिवस है और हम सब जानते हैं की अधिक गर्मी के कारण ग्लेसियर पिघल रहे हैं। जिस कारण से समुद्र तट पर रहने वाले लोगों को लगातार क्षेत्र से बाहर किया जा रहा है। यदि इसी प्रकार गर्मी पड़ती रहेगी तो हमारे वातावरण में बहुत बुरा असर पड़ेगा। जिससे हमारी खेती प्रभावित हो रही है और हम सब को अनेकों बीमारियों को झेलना पड़ रहा है। कृषि विभाग से श्रीवास्तव ने सरकार द्वारा संचालित योजनाओं की विस्तार से जानकारी साझा की और पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों से कहा की विभाग की योजनाओं से समुदाय को जोड़ने में आप की अहम भूमिका है जिससे लोगों की योजनाओं का लाभ मिल सकेगा। पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों के साथ जल संरक्षण, वृक्षारोपण, खेत तालाब, मैद बंधान आदि की संक्षिप्त कार्ययोजना तैयार की गई। इस प्रशिक्षण को सफल बनाने में छत्रसाल पटेल, रामविशाल गौड़, सोनाली पटेल, उमा प्रजापति एवं गोविंद प्रजापति की महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका रही।

कृषि 175 परिवारों को एनजीओ ने किया नेट का वितरण महुआ का उत्पादन बढ़ाने ग्रामीणों को वितरित किए नेट



नईदुनिया न्यूज, नैदुखेड़ा ब्लॉक के कर्जना गांव में आत्मनिर्भर बनाने के लिए एनजीओ 'नैदुखेड़ा' ने 175 परिवारों को एनजीओ ने किया नेट का वितरण महुआ का उत्पादन बढ़ाने ग्रामीणों को वितरित किए नेट

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महिलाओं को दिया गया दो दिवसीय प्रशिक्षण



प्रशिक्षण के दौरान मौजूद महिलाएं। © नईदुनिया

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40 साल बाद फिर बुदेलखंड को भाया कोदो अब आसानी से सबको मिलेगी खुदई (कोदो राइस)

न्यूज वर्ल्ड रिपोर्टर नीरज सोनी किसानों में स्वास्थ्य लाभ और अच्छी आई के लिए अपनी परंपरागत कृषि वर्तमान समय में जिस तरह से घातक बीमारियों का खतरा बढ़ रहा है वह मानव जाति के लिए थिंता का विषय है विशेषज्ञ बताते हैं कि आज की समय में रक्ताण मयूह हृदय घात सामान्य बीमारियां बन गई हैं ग्रामीण एवं शहरी क्षेत्र में इन बीमारियों से ग्रस्त मरीजों की संख्या बढ़ती ही जा रही है पोषण एवं स्वास्थ्य विशेषज्ञों का कहना है कि इसका बड़ा कारण हमारे खान-पान में बदलाव भी है अगर हम चार दशक पहले की स्थिति को समझ तो विशेष कर छतरपुर जिले के ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में भोजन का मुख्य भाग मोटे अनाज हुआ करते थे जिसमें छतरपुर जिले में कोदो एक मुख्य श्री अन्यथा इसके अलावा पडरी बलली गई और भोजन की थाली में मोटे अनाजों की जगह गेहूँ और चावल ने ले ली क्योंकि

खेतों में जो उगेगा यही तो भोजन की थाली में होगा आज जिस तरह से उत्पादन की होड़ में

रासायनिक खाद कीटनाशक प्रयोग हो रहे हैं हम सब जानते हैं की संपूर्ण समाज के स्वास्थ्य



चावल और गेहूँ की फसल में

पर नकारात्मक प्रभाव हो रहा है

साथ ही पर्यावरण को भी खतरा बढ़ रहा है खाद्य पदार्थों के विशेषज्ञ बताते हैं कि गेहूँ और चावल में ग्लू 10 तत्व होता है जो मधुमेह जैसी घातक बीमारी का बड़ा कारण है रासायनिक खाद के अत्यधिक उपयोग से कृषि लागत में भी बढ़ोतरी हो रही है एवं किसानों की शुद्ध आय कम होती जा रही है इन सभी परिस्थितियों को ध्यान में रखते हुए संस्था दर्शन महिला कल्याण समिति छतरपुर ने विभिन्न संस्थाओं के साथ मिलकर एक अनोखी पहल की है जिसमें एसपी डड ए आर 07 यूएलडीपीसड पोषण समृद्धि ग्राम कार्यक्रम हो सहयोग से सहयोग प्राप्त हुआ है दर्शन की टीम ने राजनगर एवं बिजावर विकासखंड के किसानों को प्रेरित किया कि किस पुनः बुदेलखंड की परंपरा फसल को दो को उत्पादन शुरू करें परंतु इसमें समस्या थी कि किसानों के पास बी भी नहीं बचा था संस्था के कृषि विशेषज्ञ अजय गुप्ता ने

आईसीएआर से संपर्क कर मध्य प्रदेश के डिंडोरी जिले से बी का प्रबंध किया और पचासी किसानों को बीज उपलब्ध कराया कर को दो की बुवाई कराई पहले वर्ष परिणाम संतोषजनक तो नहीं रहे पर कुछ किसानों ने सकारात्मक उदाहरण प्रस्तुत किया दूसरे वर्ष स्थानीय तैयार भी से और किसानों ने कोदो की फसल उगाई और जिले में लगभग 90 से 100 विंटेन उत्पादन कर पाने में फसल सफल रहे उत्पादन के बाद भी किसानों को फसल का लाभ नहीं मिल पा रहा था क्योंकि कोदु के लिए ना तो स्थानीय बाजार बाना ही खाने में प्रयोग किया जा रहा था क्योंकि कोदो से खुदाई निकलने वाली प्रक्रिया बहुत कठिन होती है चार दशक पहले हर घर में पत्थर के को नियत जाते हुआ करते थे जो आज देखने को नहीं मिलते तब एसपी के सहयोग से को दो प्रोसेसिंग मशीन की व्यवस्था की गई वर्ष 2024 में ग्राम भास्तर में

यह इकाई स्थापित की गई यह विद्युत चलित मशीन 1 घंटे में 50 किलो पौधों से खुदाई निकालने में सक्षम है अब ग्राम वसर मझोटा के किस कोडाई तैयार करके न सिर्फ खाने में प्रयोग कर रहे हैं बल्कि बाजार में बेचकर अच्छी आमदनी भी कर रहे हैं वर्तमान समय में खुदाई 120 150 रुपए किलो बाजार में आसानी से विक्रय हो रही है हम सभी जागरूक नागरिकों की अब यह जिम्मेदारी बनती है कि इन किसानों का मनीबल बढ़ाने के लिए हम बड़े-बड़े शॉपिंग मॉल सेकोदो राइस लेने की वजह इन किसानों से जैविक तरीके से उगाई गई खुदाई खरीदे तो इसका हौसला बढ़ेगा और अगर धीरे-धीरे हम अपने दैनिक आहार में पुनः मोटे अनाज शामिल कर पाएँ जिससे बीमारियों से समाज बचेगा मुदा की गुणवत्ता खराब भी नहीं होगी पर्यावरण को लाभ होगा एवं सही मायने में हम जय जवान जय किसान के नारे को साकार कर पाएंगे

SGP-India Quarterly Newsletter for Coastal and Semi-Arid Landscapes

Theme: Women in Focus

Issue: 2025/1
(Jan-March, 2025)

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Content of stories from the ground validated by respective SGP-grantees