



# ROOTED IN POWER

Women's Grassroots Leadership  
and Climate Action in India

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Climate Action in India

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Copyright:** Asar Social Impact Advisors Private Limited, Bangalore

**Concept, Research and Writing:** Ms. Neha Saigal and  
Ms. Ankita Bhatkhande, Asar

**Illustrations:** Ms. Supriya Tirkey and Mr. Rohit Karandadi

**Book Design, Cover Illustration and Additional Illustrations:**  
Ms. Sriparna Ghosh and Mr. Rohit Chaudhary, Tiffinbox

**Additional Design Support:** Ms. Silki Khanna

**CSO Partner Collaborators:**

Hasiru Dala (Karnataka)

Rama Gera (Delhi)

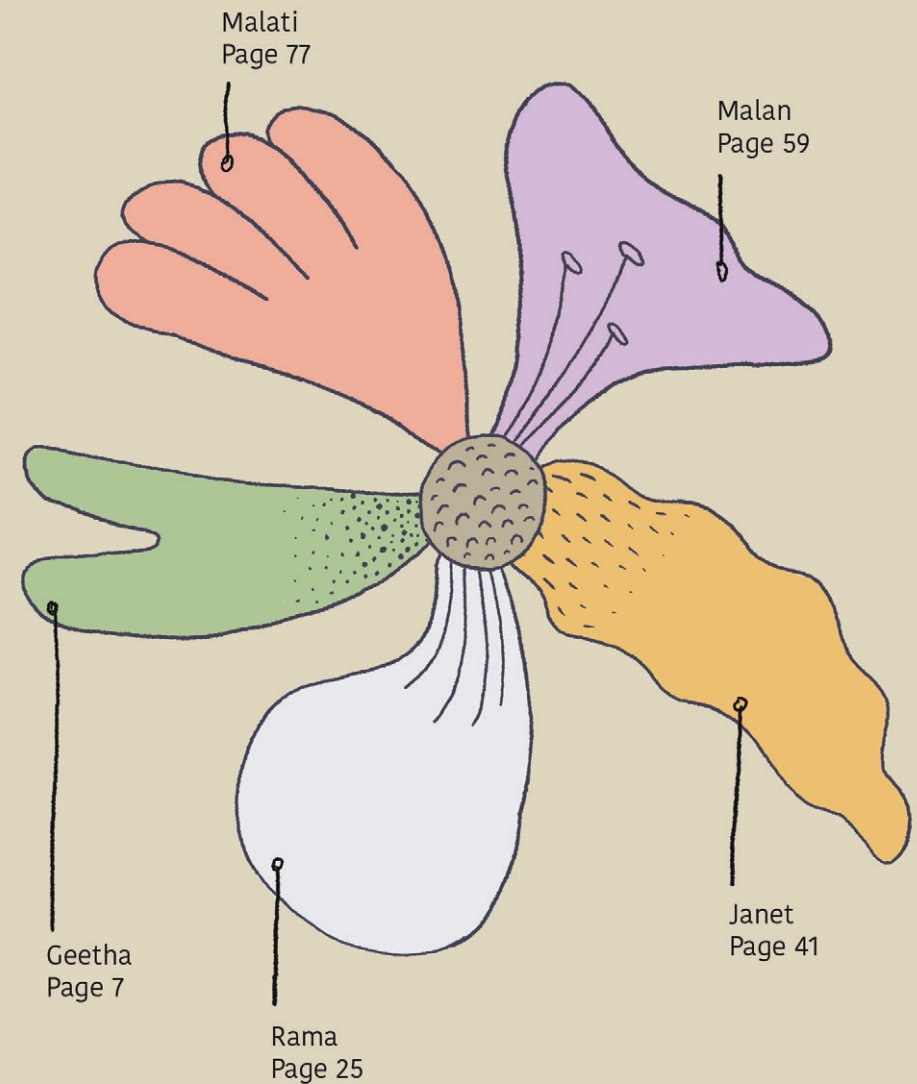
Janet Orlene (Karnataka, Kerala)

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (Maharashtra)

Society for Promoting Rural Education and Development (Odisha)

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## INTRODUCTION

Climate change exacerbates existing gender inequities, with women from vulnerable and marginalized groups facing a harsher reality of climate-induced challenges. The broader discourse on climate, often technocratic and top-down, tends to overlook women and gender diverse identities, focusing instead on macro-level conversations- centered around emissions, mitigation, and policy strategies. This leaves a significant gap in understanding the lived experiences of those who face the differential impacts of climate change and cope with the crisis despite limited resources.

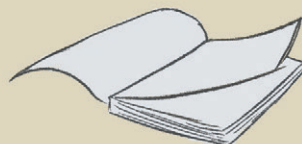
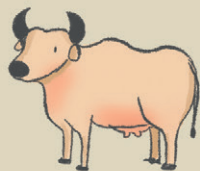
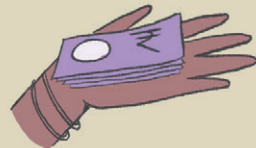
Women are frequently portrayed as victims of the climate crisis, seldom recognized as active agents in mitigation and adaptation efforts. However, in India, countless women confront climate change daily, driving local solutions and building community resilience through their leadership.

**Rooted in Power: Women's Grassroots Leadership and Climate Action in India** is a graphic narrative series that aims to uncover such powerful stories of hope, resilience and transformative leadership at the frontlines of the climate crisis.

Our first series narrates the following stories:

In Karnataka, Geetha and the remarkable women working with Hasiru Dala exemplify the critical role of waste pickers in mitigating climate impacts. Their story traces the journey of waste from our homes to landfills, revealing how small efforts can alleviate the hardships faced by thousands of waste pickers, while highlighting their indispensable contribution to climate resilience.

In the narrow alleys of New Delhi's slums, Rama, a former ASHA worker, leads a campaign against household air pollution. She tirelessly advocates for the adoption of cleaner cooking stoves, addressing an issue that increases drudgery of thousands of women, forced to rely on biomass due to financial and social constraints.



Janet, a writer, researcher, and artist from Bangalore, embarked on a journey along the Malabar coast, documenting the challenges faced by coastal communities deeply impacted by climate change. Her narrative sheds light on the lived realities of those on the frontlines, offering a poignant glimpse into the human face of the crisis.

In Maharashtra's Marathwada region, Malan Raut, a determined farmer, practices the one-acre farming model championed by Swayam Shikshan Prayog. Despite recurring droughts and agrarian crisis, Malan has managed to secure a steady income for her family through climate resilient agriculture, embodying resilience and innovation in the face of adversity.

From Odisha's Koraput district, we share the inspiring tale of Malati and her community. With the support of NGO SPREAD, these women have developed a model for generating livelihoods from common lands, protecting them from private interests and environmental degradation. Their collective effort demonstrates the power of community-driven solutions in the fight against climate change.

Through these compelling stories, this graphic narrative celebrates the resilience, ingenuity, and strength of women, actively addressing the climate crisis but rarely finding space in mainstream discourses on climate change. Their journeys are a testament to the power of grassroots action and the indomitable spirit of those who dare to make a difference.

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# GEETHA





Married off early to a scrap dealer, her drudgery continued as she had to scramble through piles of waste everyday to earn herself and her family two square meals.

The dumpsite where Geetha and many other waste pickers worked was full of stench and it was unbearable for her to work there without any safety gear. She came in contact with hazardous waste and sometimes even dead animals. But she had to continue doing it so that she can get some sellable waste from the dump.



## Geetha

was born in a poor family in Davangere and lost her mother at a very young age. Her parents were waste pickers and she started picking up waste from a very young age to support the family.

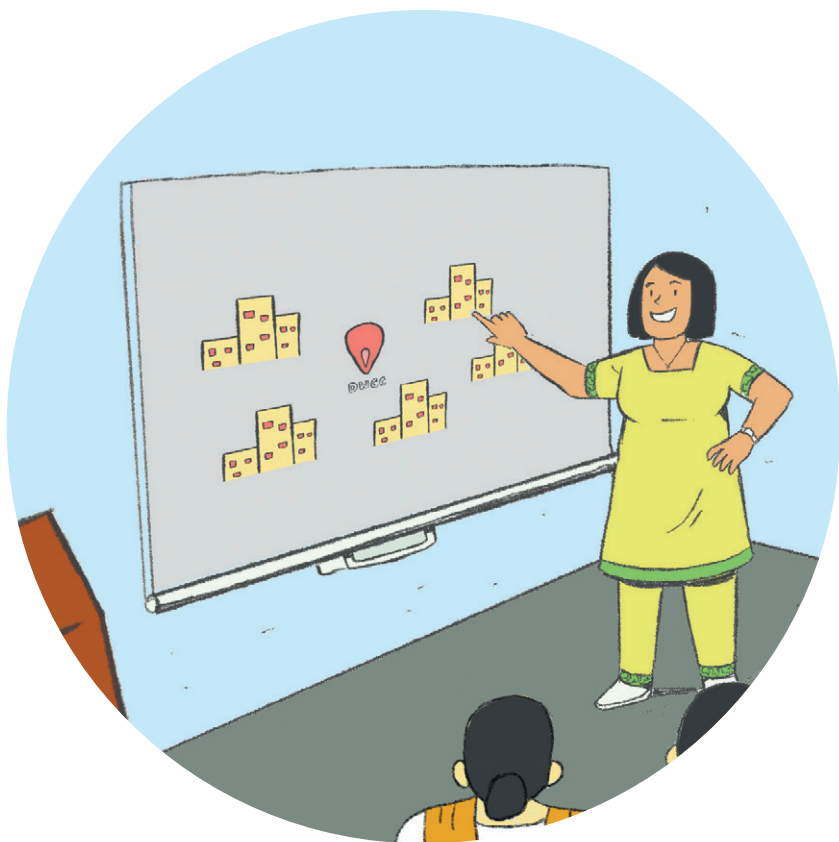


The Avaragolla landfill in Davangere receives all the town-side waste and is spread across 33 acres.



It poses a risk for waste-pickers, contributes to pollution, releases greenhouse gases, and fuels climate change. Methane emissions from the landfill not only endanger human health but also lead to frequent fires, compounding the environmental impact.

Our livelihood comes at the cost of our health, well-being, and dignity. As a woman in this profession, it's a risky business. Many of us risk our lives daily, sorting through the waste at the landfill. Our work is considered dirty and we face a lot of social discrimination and exploitation on a daily basis.



Having faced years of hardship and social stigma, Geetha's life and the lives of many women waste pickers changed after they came in contact with Hasiru Dala, a civil society organisation that actively works with 1753 waste pickers in Davangere district alone.

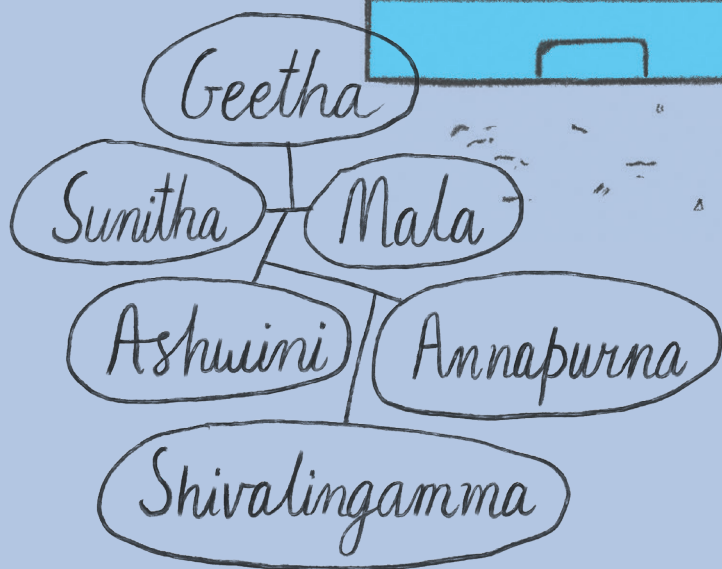
HASIRU  
DALA



KITTURU  
RANI  
MAHILA  
SANGHA

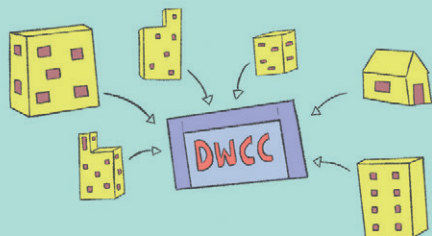
With the support of Hasiru Dala, Geetha and 11 other women waste pickers collectivized to form a Self Help Group (SHG), Kitturu Rani Mahila Sangha under the National Urban Livelihood Mission. The SHG is named after Kittur Rani, one of the first women independence activists against the British East India company in 1824 as many women who are part of this SHG reflect bravery and courage like the Rani.

Some of the women who are part of this SHG are Sunitha, Mala, Ashwini, Annapurna and Shivalingamma. They run their own Dry Waste Collection Centres (DWCC). As part of this work, Geetha runs a DWCC and oversees door to door collection and segregation from 3200 households in Davangere. She has employed two other people in her centre and earns between Rs. 15,000-20,000 a month.

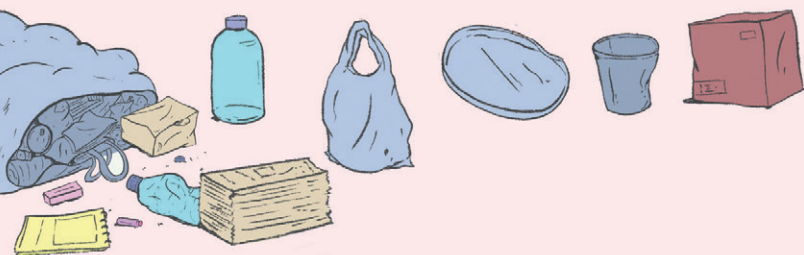


The SHG is a source of strength for us. We discuss our problems and find solutions together and the SHG also maintains a savings fund to support any of the members when in need.

The SHG oversees 5 DWCCs in Davangere which collect and segregate 10 tonnes of waste each month which is sold to the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) managed by the NGO Hasiru Dala.



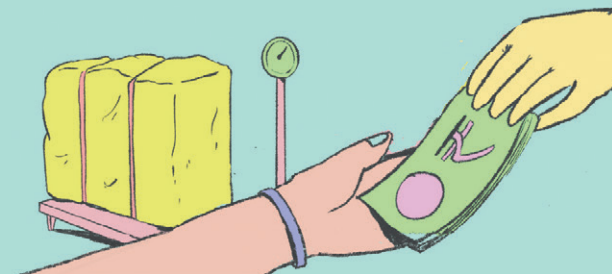
The SHG is able to run these operations as it has an MoU with the Davangere Municipal Corporation with Hasiru Dala playing the role of the resource agency.



Recycling is one of the cheapest and fastest ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and this makes the role of waste pickers critical in fighting climate change. DWCCs are an important aspect of decentralized waste management providing dry waste aggregation and sorting facilities within neighborhoods. They encourage citizen awareness and engagement on proper

waste management, dignity of work for waste pickers to do their work in a safer and better environment with more autonomy and ownership and reduce the waste that ends up in landfills thereby reducing the greenhouse gas emissions and fires in the landfill. Collected waste from the households is sorted at DWCCs and useful waste is sold to the MRF.

Hasiru Dala also manages the MRF in Davangere which currently has a capacity of 20 tonnes of waste, and this is where all the segregated and sorted waste is brought in by the waste pickers and they get paid in line with market rates.



Hasiru Dala plans that in the future they would like to hand over the management of the MRF to the waste pickers like they are managing the DWCC centres in their respective wards.

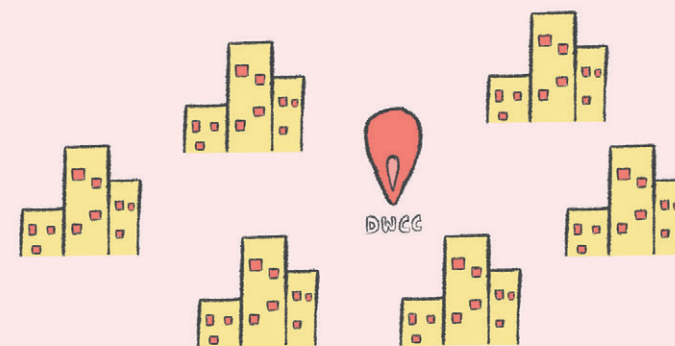
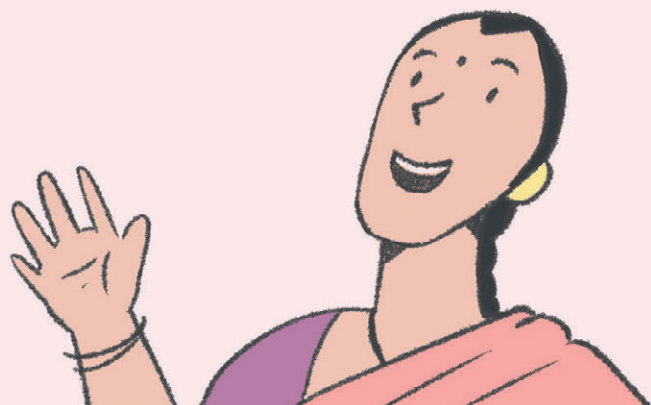


The role of waste pickers in segregating, reusing, recycling and material recovery, decreases the waste that gets dumped in the landfills and mitigates green-house emissions. Hasiru Dala which is the resource agency for the Kitturu Rani Mahila Sangha has over a decade of experience working with waste pickers across cities and towns in South India.



Hasiru Dala supported the informal waste picking community by linking them to important Government schemes around health, nutrition and other social security schemes, ensuring that they have a social safety net. They played an active role in integrating the waste pickers in the Solid Waste Management department of the Davangere municipality by piloting the

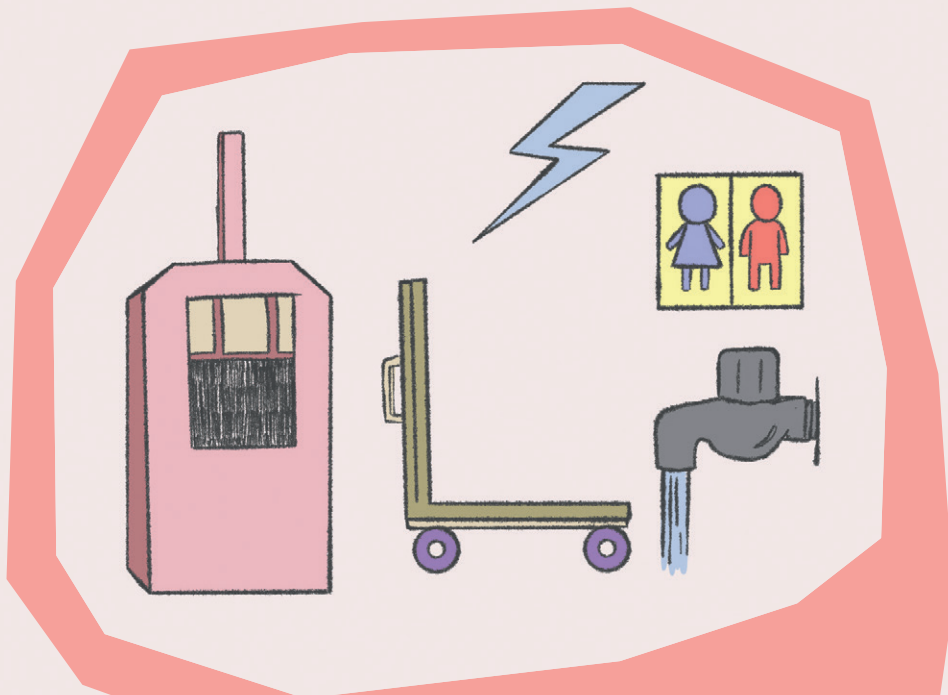
first DWCC and presenting evidence on how this model could save the municipality money and time. They also support the empowerment of the waste picking community by providing leadership training on climate change and running door to door campaigns along with the waste pickers on segregation creating awareness among citizens.



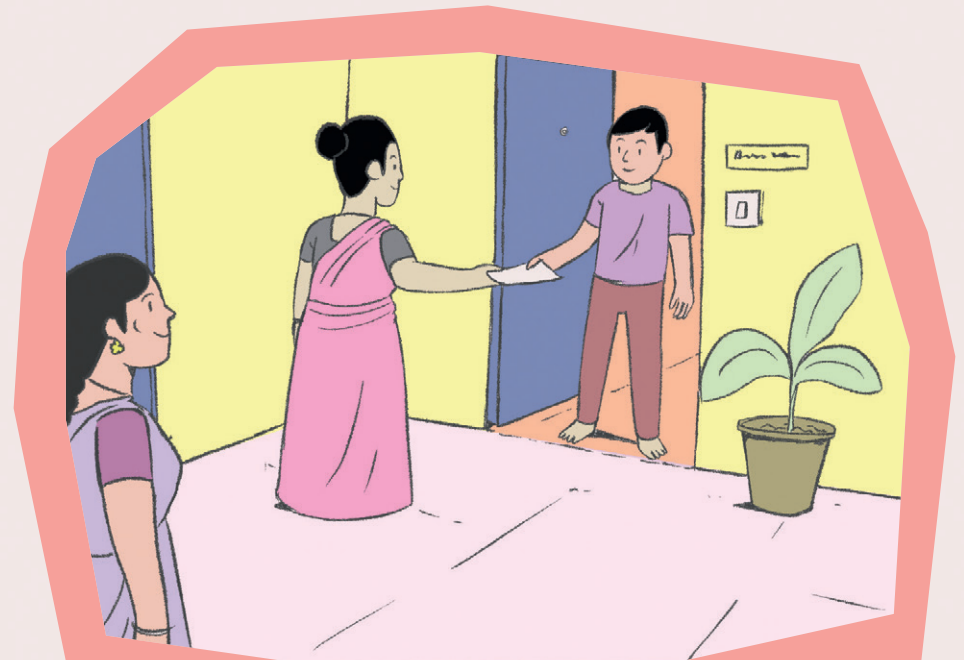
For women like Geetha who are engaged in informal occupations, SHGs like the Kittur Sangha and the DWCCs have given them a new identity and hope that they too can do something meaningful and the reassurance that their work is appreciated. The DWCC model like the one in Davangere is an effective decentralised model for

waste management which can reduce waste reaching the landfill and therefore play an active role in climate mitigation. And the true champions of this model are the women waste pickers who are collectivised to make this model work with the support of Hasiru Dala and the Municipal Corporation.

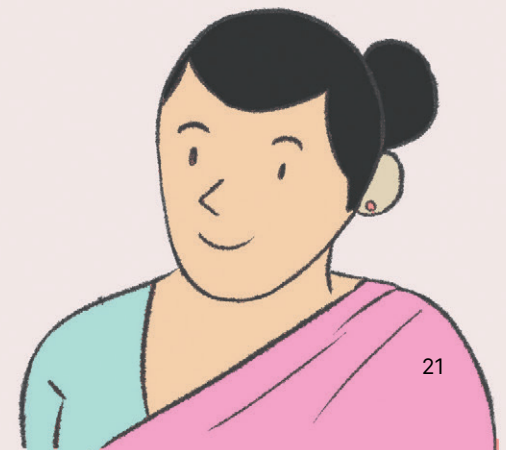




We have been given IDs so that we do not have to face harassment and exploitation while doing our work. We have also been provided machines, equipments like weighing scales along with electrical connections and basic amenities.

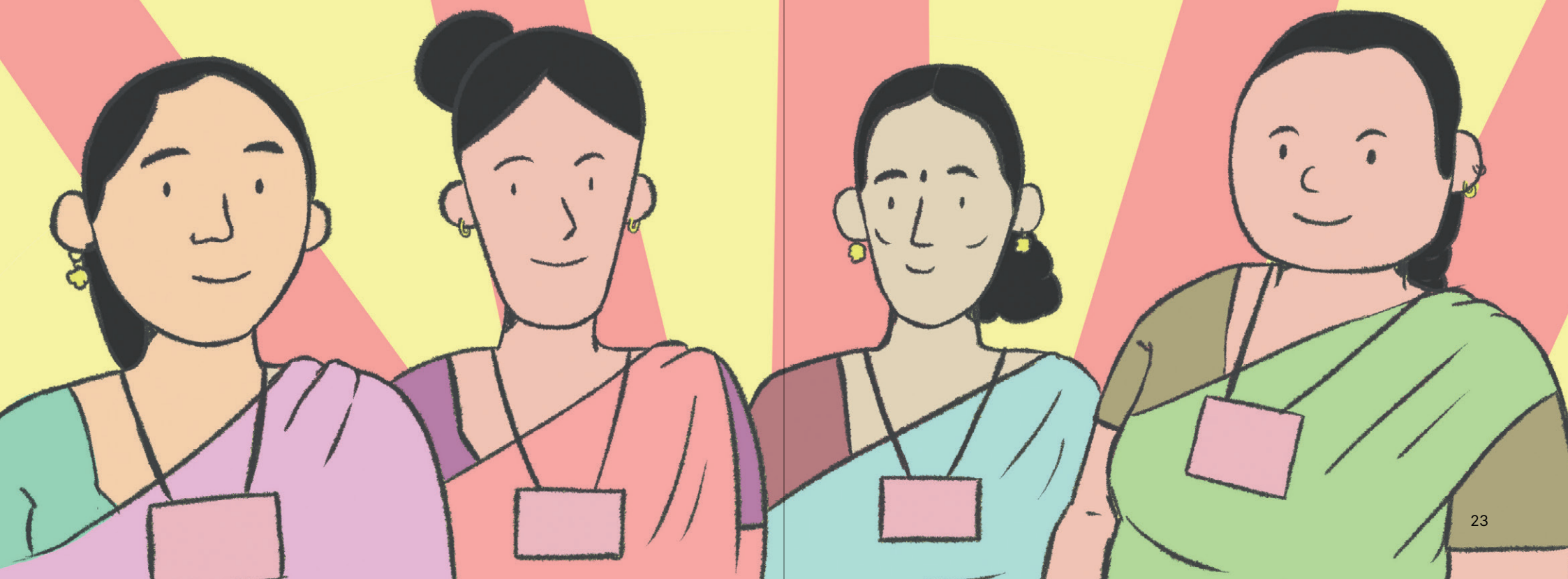


Hasiru Dala also helped us learn more about the importance of leadership and the process of running an effective door-to-door campaign. We educate the citizens about the importance of waste segregation for keeping their neighbourhood clean.



Geetha and many other women like her are living a life of dignity and making a decent livelihood with the model. But the need of the hour is to have more such DWCCs managed by waste pickers who are entrepreneurs not just in Davangere but across

many Indian cities and towns as waste is a contributor to climate change and environmental pollution. Organisations like Hasiru Dala are on a mission to bring more and more women waste pickers under this model.





If you wish to contribute  
to their efforts in any way,  
reach out to them at  
[www.hasirudala.in](http://www.hasirudala.in) or  
email at [info@hasirudala.in](mailto:info@hasirudala.in)

# Rama



Bhalswa slum surrounds the Bhalswa landfill, an overfilled waste dumping site in North Delhi that houses more than half of the city's total waste generated. Communities living around the landfill are engaged in waste-picking and make a living out of selling rags, plastic, copper wires etc. that they pick from the landfill. Men and women who work and live here wade through filth-laden roads everyday and are highly exposed to toxic substances.

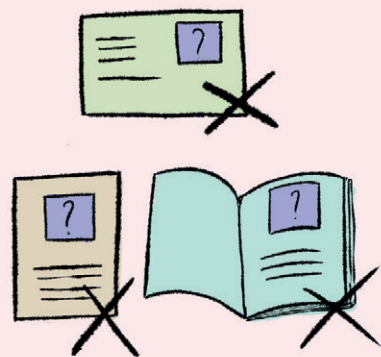
Most families living here have migrated from other parts of the country while many have been brought to the place in promise of rehabilitation and re-settlement over a decade ago which never happened.



Due to their informal nature of work and the unregistered nature of housing, many families lack legal identities and have no access to Aadhar cards, Voter IDs and Ration Cards. Many of them have these under their native addresses but this keeps them away from voting and their issues are mostly unheard by the elected representatives.

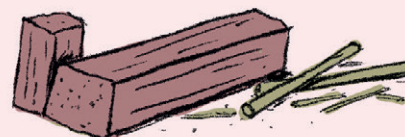
Due to their financial hardships and occupational drudgery, most residents of these slums use biomass (wood, coal, dry leaves etc.) for their cooking needs as they cannot afford Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG). Women in these households continue using chulhas (earthen or brick stoves) to cook food and heat water.

The inability to procure basic identity documents, high cost of refilling LPG, poor awareness about the impact of chulhas on their health and gender norms at household level adds to the drudgery of women who are already under immense pressure for survival and poses serious health hazards due to constant exposure to Household Air Pollution (HAP).



Worldwide, around 2.4 billion people still cook using solid fuels (such as wood, crop waste, charcoal, coal and dung) and kerosene in open fires and inefficient stoves. In India, a large number of households cook using chulhas made up of brick and use biomass such as wood and coal to cook on these chulhas. Cooking is mostly done in badly ventilated kitchens with the smoke from the chulhas engulfing the house. When these solid fuels are burned incompletely in inefficient stoves, they produce Black Carbon along with other pollutants such as Carbon

Monoxide, Particulate Matter, and volatile organic compounds. Black Carbon consists of fine particles that can penetrate deep into the lungs when inhaled, leading to various respiratory and cardiovascular health problems such as COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease). Women and children spend a lot of time around the chulhas while food is being cooked and are at a higher risk of its adverse impacts. Black Carbon is also a potent climate forcer, contributing to global warming by absorbing sunlight and heating the atmosphere.

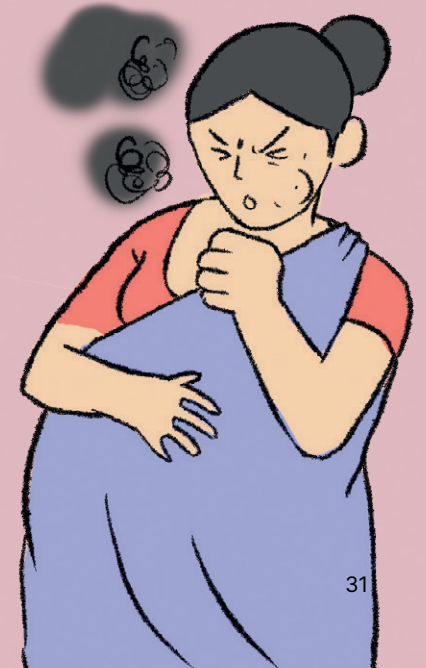


Rama, a 41-year-old woman from Delhi who used to be an Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), started working on the issue of household air pollution after she realised the disastrous impact that it has on the lives of women in low-

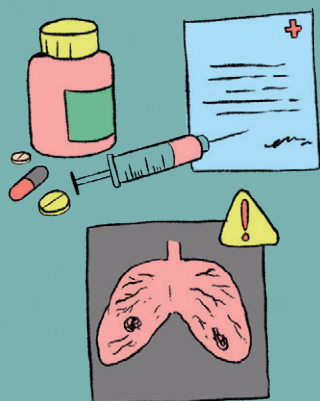
income households. She would leverage her local networks to create awareness about the need to move to clean cooking in the bastis of Delhi and came to Bhalswa as part of a project on air pollution and clean cooking.

One particular instance shook me. I saw a pregnant woman cooking on the chulha gasping for breath as the fumes coming from it had gone into her body and she struggled to keep her eyes open.

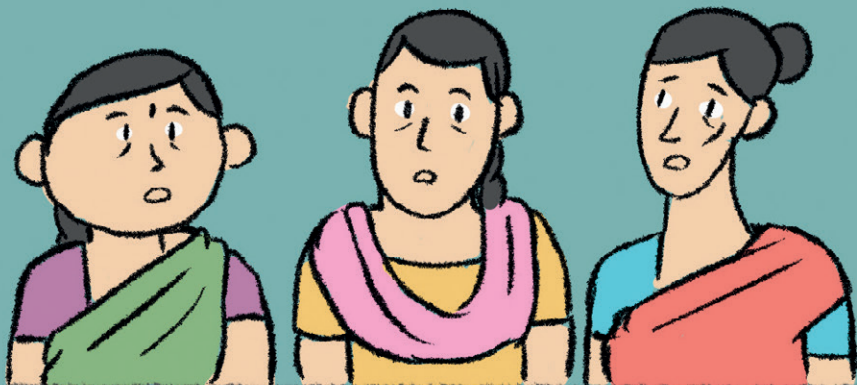
Rama



While speaking to the women using chulha, Rama realised that many of them were unaware of the health impacts of using chulhas in the long term. She started creating awareness about the linkages between women's health and household air pollution using material in the local language. She faced a lot of resistance in the beginning.



You are asking us to stop using chulha but will you give us a free LPG every month?



PRADHAN MANTRI  
UJJWALA YOJANA.

It was tough to convince the women about the benefits of using cleaner fuels such as LPG considering that most of them were using biomass out of helplessness. A few months after she began work in the various neighbourhoods, Rama realised that many women were unable to switch to LPG as they did not have documents to register under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY). Over a period of time, Rama surveyed many localities and compiled the data of households who are yet to register under the PMUY scheme.



## What is Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana?



The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), initiated on May 1, 2016, by the Indian government aims to provide cooking fuel such as LPG to rural households. The scheme's focus is on offering LPG connections to women from below poverty line (BPL) households. Under PMUY, households are given an LPG connection, a gas stove, and one 14.2 kg LPG cylinder. Several new connections were issued under this scheme, with the government meeting 99.8% of the target of releasing 8 crore LPG connections to deprived households by 1 April 2021, which increased to almost 9.5 crore in January 2023. In August 2023, the government announced an additional subsidy of Rs. 200 for the 14.2 kg LPG cylinder for all consumers. With this, the cost of LPG for those availing the scheme is reduced to Rs. 703 for a cylinder which costs Rs. 1103 at market price.



Rama conducted massive awareness sessions for women in the communities and often spoke to men about the ill-effects of using chulha. She realised that cultural norms are another key barrier in access to LPG.

We prefer chulha cooked meals as they are tastier!



Rama started following a three-pronged approach to address the barriers in women's access to clean fuels in Delhi.

## Awareness

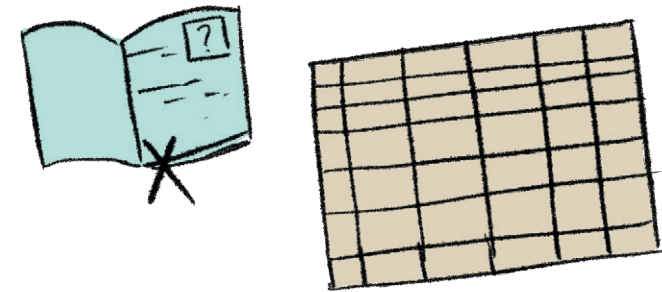
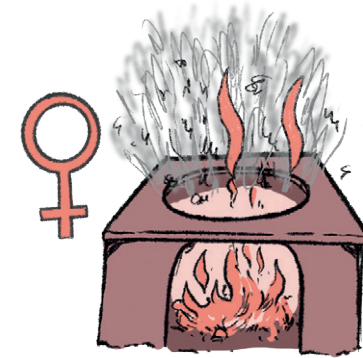
Rama created awareness about the linkage between use of chulha and women's health and well-being. She also told communities about the PMUY scheme under which they can get subsidised cylinders every month. She did so with the help of a toolkit on women's health and household air pollution created in local languages.

## Access to documents

Rama realised that a key hurdle for most families to obtain LPG was the lack of identity documents. She initially supported many residents across different slum colonies of Delhi in procuring basic documents. She did this with the support of ASHAs, local politicians and organisations working for the people on ground. Once families have necessary documents, she encourages women to apply under PMUY to get an LPG subsidy.

## Behaviour shift

Rama's constant intervention in the neighbourhoods helped break some stereotypes and cultural beliefs around using chulhas. While there is a long way to go, people have at least realised that cooking on the chulha is not sustainable in the long run.



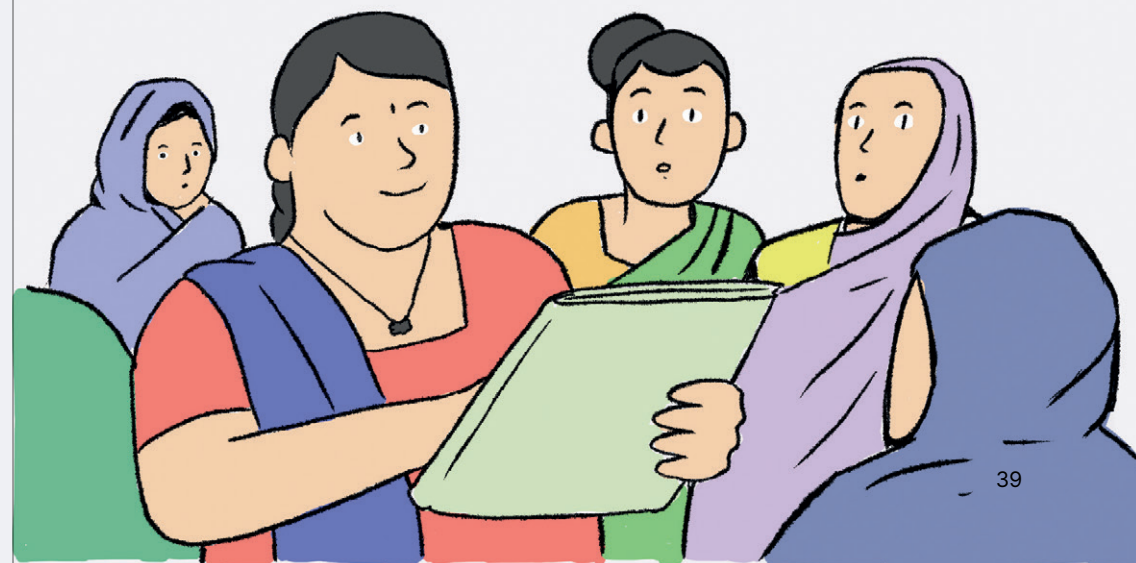


Rama is aware that mere access to LPG might not ensure it's continued and sustained usage and she is determined to work with local communities in the long run.

While there are many barriers, if families prioritise to spend some part of their income on LPG, it is not impossible to achieve. This would require a combination of approaches – from continuous awareness to behaviour change and filling policy level gaps.

With the support of government officials, local gas agencies and grassroots organisations working on the issue, Rama has been organising registration camps for the residents of various slum colonies such as Bhalswa, Madanpur Khadar and Bharola. In the camp held in Bhalswa, she registered over 700 women for PMUY.

700+ WOMEN





Have you registered under PMUY yet? If you want to know more, contact the helpline numbers below:  
Ujjwala Helpline number  
1800-266-6696  
Toll-free number  
1800-233-3555 to check PMUY connection.

# Janet





Janet Orlene was born and brought up in Bangalore and studied environmental science from a reputed institute. She was passionate about environmental conservation and always wanted to pursue a career in it.

While the course that she was enrolled in was excellent, she realised that there was a lot of focus on data collection. The approach of looking at things was very unilateral and it lacked people's perspectives.

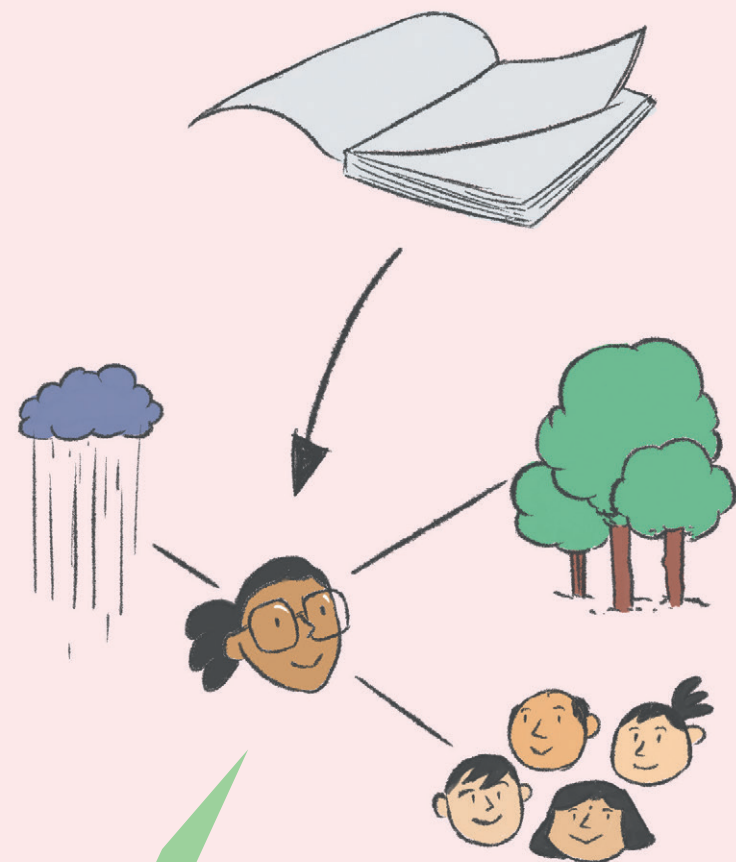


I have been visiting forests since I was a child. Having observed the communities who are dependent on forests, I realised that while scientific research had its own merits, there was a need to have more hyperlocal interventions in conservation.



This made her interested in pursuing conservation outside of the four walls of the classroom. Janet briefly worked at an NGO in Uttarakhand to document the birds in the region. Living without electricity, running water, shops and a mobile network made her

feel the importance of things that people in cities mostly take for granted. In the course of the next few years, Janet pursued a Diploma in Experiential Education and Practice while completing her degree in Environmental Education.



Experiential education is a philosophy in which the educator purposefully and intentionally engages the participants in direct experience and challenges and engages them in reflective learning. Educators trained in it lead their learners to various probe questions which allow them to think about a certain phenomenon through different lenses.



In her journey as an experiential educator, Janet came across an idea. She wanted to speak to communities living around the coast – who are vulnerable to climate change and it's consequences and understand how they experience it in their daily lives. She wanted to speak to them

to understand how they perceive the climate crisis. She was also interested in capturing how stories on climate and the day to day impact it has on people's lives makes it to their self expressions and imaginations.

Communities living around the Karnataka to Kanyakumari coastline in India face a range of issues that affect their lives, livelihoods and overall well-being. They are further exacerbated due to the worsening climate crisis. Coastal areas are particularly vulnerable to sea level rise, increased frequency of extreme weather events (like cyclones and storms),

and coastal erosion. This poses risks to settlements, agriculture, and infrastructure. Similarly, coastal pollution from various sources, including industrial discharge, untreated sewage, and plastic waste, affects marine ecosystems and poses health risks to communities reliant on fishing.

Janet decided to walk across the southern coastline and meet people on her way. She decided that she would only walk, take a boat, hike or climb a slope but would not take a car or a vehicle during the entire journey. She started her walk from Ullal in Karnataka and walked all the way upto Kanyakumari in Kerala, a 850+ km long journey which she completed in 62 days.

During these days, she started walking in the morning and only stopped during the nights. The days were hot and Janet had to practice for days together to walk on the sand. During this time, she would speak to the different communities of people living around the coast.

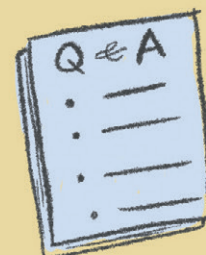


850 KMS

Ullal

Kanyakumari

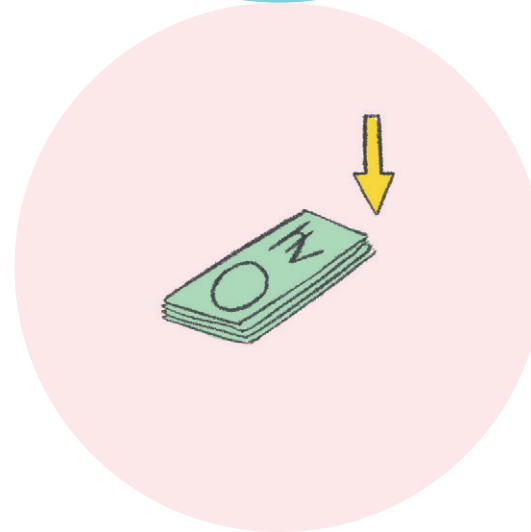
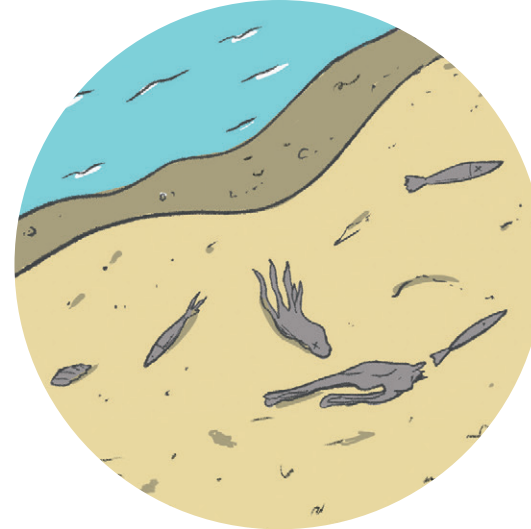
I had a small plan. I had listed out a few questions to ask, and had a few points to discuss. But when I met these people, I realised that their life experiences are much more powerful than what me or anyone can imagine. I kept my conversations with them free-flowing.



Come evening, Janet would request people from the nearby localities to allow her to set up a tent or sleep in the neighbourhood. They always said yes and also offered warm hospitality by giving her their traditional food and offering her to sleep in their homes.



From the time she started training for the walk, Janet found a tiny puppy with waves washing over him on a beach and rescued him. The pup was a companion sometimes on the beach and other times traveling in the car driven by Janet's logistics team.



In the course of her journey, Janet learnt a lot of things about the people she met. First, she got to know that a lot of people mentioned that the coast and the life around it has changed substantially over the years. There is more and more garbage dumped in the sea, erratic weather patterns have led to an increase in sea levels which has made it riskier for the fisherfolk to venture out and the frequency of disasters such as floods has only increased.

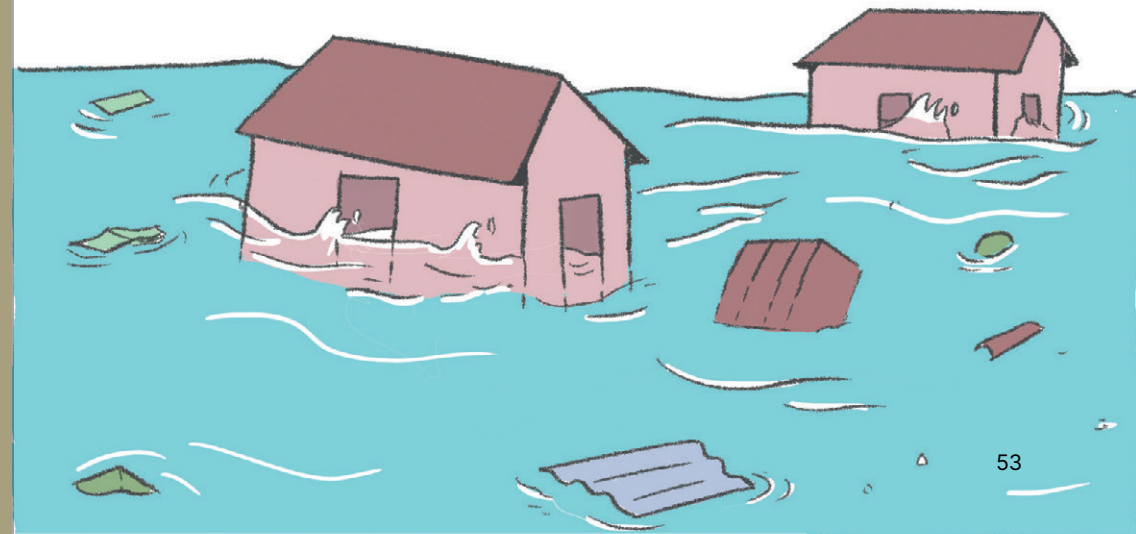
While the communities did not explicitly use the term climate change while they spoke about these issues, they were able to articulate what was happening to their lives and livelihoods over the last few years with great detail.

For some years now, rising sea levels and growing pollution has been causing great difficulty for the fisherfolk to fetch a good catch. This leads them to venture further inside the sea and risk their lives amidst choppy waters. Many fisherfolk lose their lives while on the job while many others continue to face extreme hardships as they struggle to survive in a livelihood that is no longer lucrative.



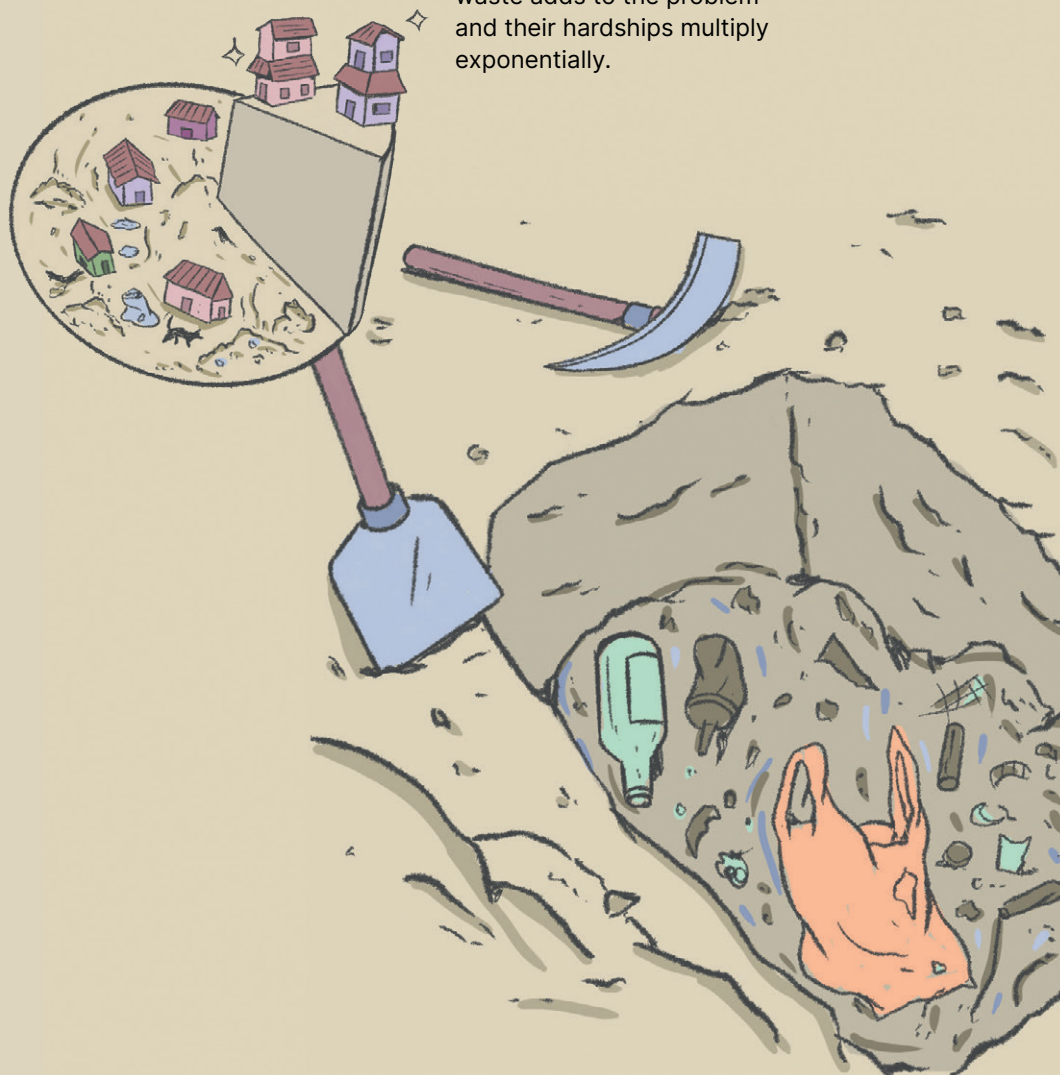
The communities mentioned that their traditional methods to understand the oceanic currents were not working anymore due to climate induced changes and challenges.

Janet saw some very stark examples of how climate change particularly affects those on the social margins. For instance, in a village in Kerala, rising sea levels have led to frequent flooding in the locality and floodwater often enters the homes of these fisherfolk. There is no way for the community to move in the interiors of the village as the other communities do not allow them to move their homes further inside.



The village is drawn on caste lines to such an extent that the upper castes do not even allow the garbage collection trucks to pick up waste from the households of the lower castes.

The fishing community is thus forced to dig deep trenches near the sea and dump their waste in it. They have an inherent, traditional belief that waste dissolves in water, which no longer applies to today's waste. When the area floods, this waste adds to the problem and their hardships multiply exponentially.



Janet worked with the Kerala government on the issue of solid waste management and handed over a report based on her findings from the ground and gave suggestions to improve the issue of waste management for households living near the shore.

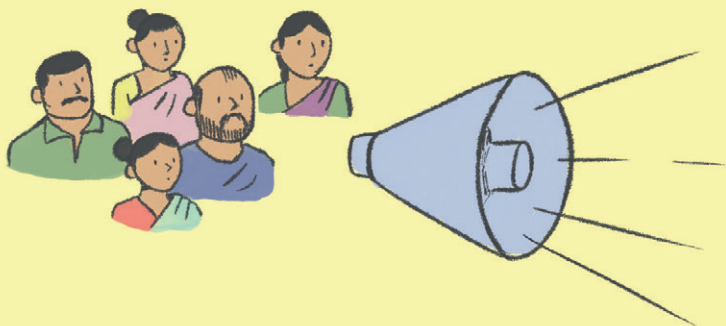
She also documented the lived experiences of communities living near the shore across the Southern belt and made a film on the same which is expected to be out soon.



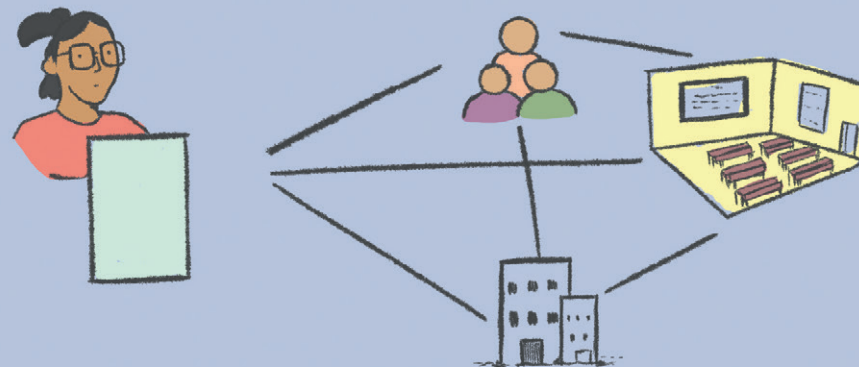
While I always knew that women and marginalised communities are more impacted by climate change, I could see living examples of it during my walk. It was heartbreaking.

## SOME OF THE KEY LEARNINGS THAT EMERGE FROM JANET'S INITIATIVE

Her work attempts to bring to the fore the issue of climate change through the voices of local communities. She hopes to document the stories of climate change through her work while trying to understand a new perspective on the Climate Crisis emerging from communities which are not exposed to the "taught" narrative of it. She learnt from the trip what textbooks and formal courses could not teach her and now attempts to take these learnings to more people across India.



She eventually completed her course in environment sciences and now wants to blend theory and praxis in her future work. It underlined the significance of capturing bottom up narratives through such women-led initiatives. Janet had a hard time convincing people to support her in this endeavour. Being a woman who decided to walk alone for so many days, there was a lot of judgement and very little support.



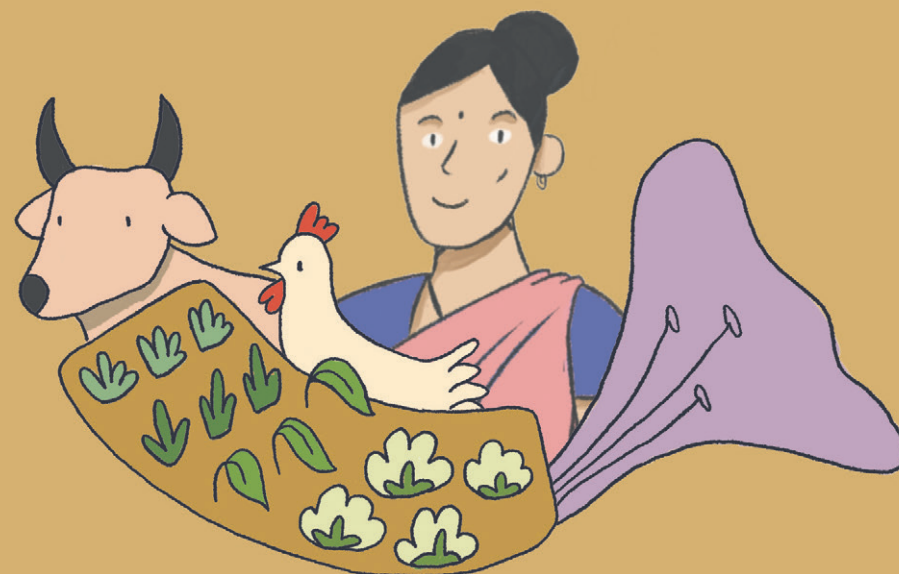
It took a year to plan, prepare and walk. She crowdfunded most of her trip and had a great team for logistical support. She practiced walking on sand before beginning her walk. She now plans to bring out the stories of people by partnering with various individuals and organisations working on the issue of climate change and adaptation. She is readying an exhibit of her stories along the journey and a film that looks at people's stories.

Janet plans to cover the entire coastline of India in different phases and wants to walk across the Tamil Nadu coastline in 2024. During her future walks, she plans to engage with various groups of people and hopes to find stories of community-led responses to climate change and stories of refugees. She is open for collaborations and support of various kinds including-funding, and partnerships for her next project or creative collaborations.



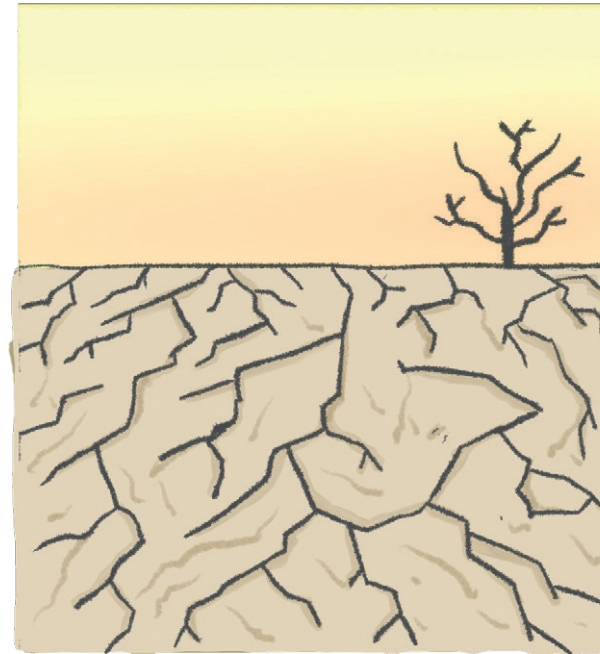
Janet can be reached at  
[janet.orlene@gmail.com](mailto:janet.orlene@gmail.com).  
You can also visit  
[www.janetorlene.com](http://www.janetorlene.com)  
to know more about  
her work.

# MALAN

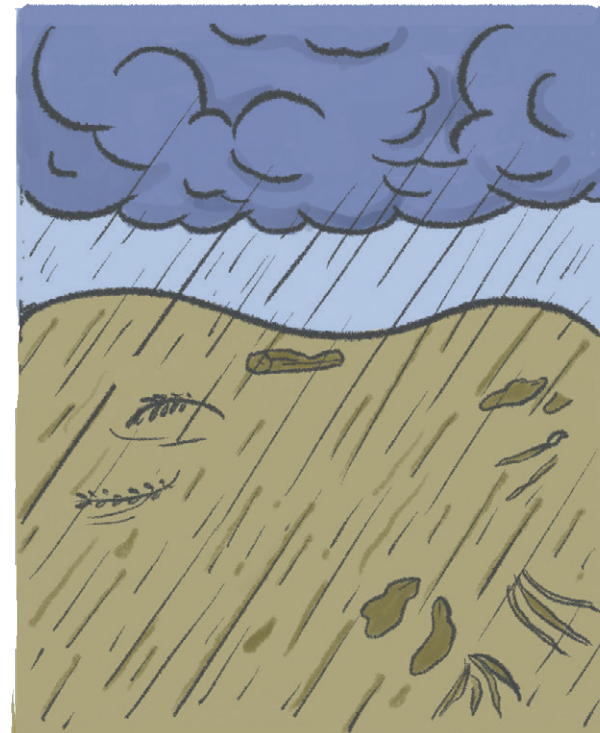


The Marathwada region of Maharashtra is spread across 64,590 sq. km and has a population of over 1.8 crore people. It has always been in the news due to its vulnerability to droughts and extreme weather events. The region has soaring temperatures during summers and rainfall is almost always scanty here mainly due to its geographical and

topographical location. Latur and Beed in particular have been the worst hit with the two places seeing drought-like conditions once every few years. With rainfall getting even more unpredictable due to the impact of Climate Change in the last decade in particular, the situation in Marathwada has only worsened.



Nagarsoga, a village that falls in Latur's Ausa block was hit hard by the drought of 2015 and 2016 in the state. The village, which currently houses about 6000 people barely received any rainfall until September 2015.



The end of the year marked torrential unseasonal rains which destroyed crops and exacerbated the vulnerability of farmers who were already reeling under the pressure of drought.

The drought of 2015 made things worse and family distress only grew.

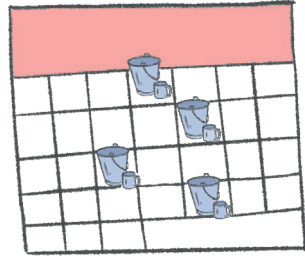


## Malan

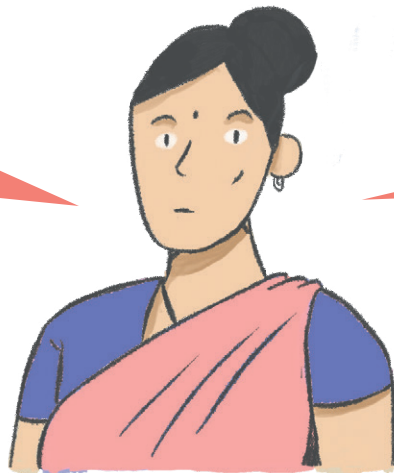
With majority farmers being marginal farmers holding just 1-2 acres of land, this crisis hit them the hardest. Like hundreds of women in Latur, Malan Raut, a resident of Nagarsoga bore the double burden of the drought.

Malan hails from Khanapur, a small village in Beed, another drought-prone region of Maharashtra. She got married to Sambhaji who worked as a painter in Mumbai but the family had to migrate back to their home in Nagarsoga in 2015 due to financial distress. Malan's in-laws were barely making a living by cultivating their 2 acre farm. Sambhaji had to work as a labourer in other farms to make ends meet and barely made Rs. 100-200 per day after toiling for 8 hours.





We would bathe once in 8 days and the women would run helter-skelter if they heard about a tanker being sent. People would get hurt, and fall in the bid to get water. Our children would also accompany us.



Men in the family started becoming even more aggressive due to mounting pressures and the women bore the double burden of the crisis.



Malan would toil for hours and would struggle to fetch water as the women in the village had to walk miles to get drinking water due to the drought.

Once, while she was returning from the farm, she saw that many women had assembled inside the village temple. She spotted a friend in the crowd.



Anjali tai, what are they talking about?

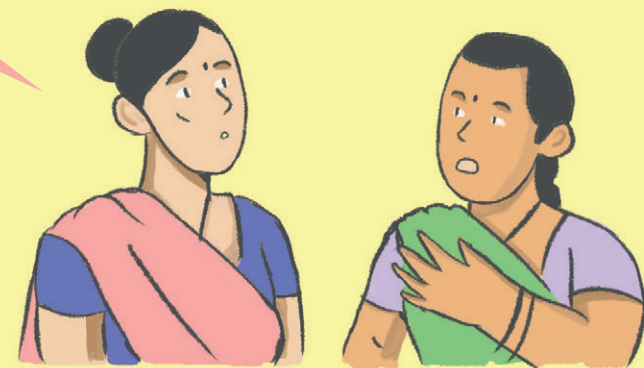
Arre Malan, some people from an NGO Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) have come to educate women from our village on farming with new methods to cope with the current drought. They plan to conduct a training of women in Latur soon. Why don't you join?



Malan got interested in knowing more and attended her first training with SSP in Latur. She lied to her in-laws and told them she was visiting the doctor to be able to attend the training 30kms

away from her home. At the training, Malan was happy to see many women from her village. She saw the confidence on their face and wanted to get the same confidence.

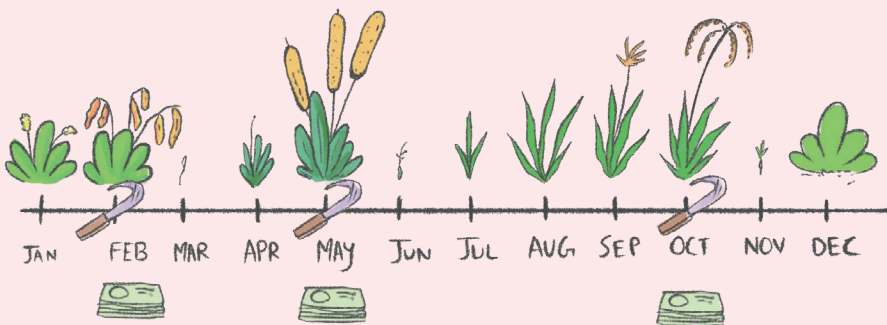
## Swayam Shikshan Prayog



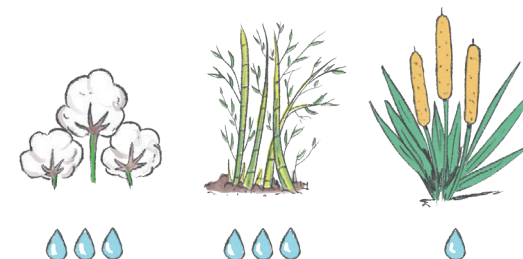


At the training, Malan learnt about SSP's One Acre Model. The model is a part of Women-led Climate Resilient Farming (WCRF) programme. It is a combination of several ways and techniques to improve farm yield and livelihoods of farmers especially in regions that

are more prone to climate related impacts such as drought. It encourages farmers, mainly women farmers, to take a diverse range of crops instead of relying on cash crops like sugarcane alone. The mixed crop model has several benefits.

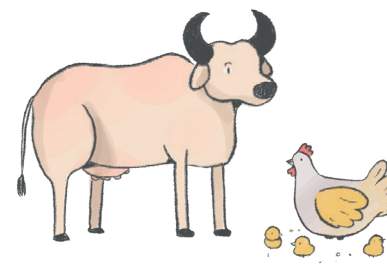


- It gives a steady income to farmers all year round as they harvest different crops as per their different harvesting schedules.



- In drought-prone districts like Marathwada, it also allows farmers to take crops which require minimum or less water as opposed to sugarcane which consumes a lot of water.

- As part of the model, women farmers are also encouraged to engage in poultry/livestock farming. This supports the income from agriculture and also helps in times when the yield is poor. SSP also encourages farmers to move towards organic farming and do away with fertilisers and chemicals that are usually used to produce better yield as they spoil the soil health in the long run and the crop produced in the end is not healthy for consumption.



SSP leveraged the following schemes to make their one acre model a success

### Government Agricultural Department

SSP works with the Block Agricultural office to access agricultural schemes and subsidies. In turn, it helps the department in increasing the uptake for their programmes for women farmers.

### Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVKs)

It is an integral part of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS), aimed at assessment of location specific technology modules in agriculture and allied enterprises, through technology assessment, refinement and demonstrations. SSP has tied up with KVKs to impart training on climate resilient farming to women farmers.

### ATMA (Agricultural Technology Management Agency)

SSP has partnered with ATMA since the inception of the programme. This includes conducting exposure visits and training for adopter farmers accessing special schemes on fodder etc. and registering village level farmer groups with the district ATMA office for different schemes.

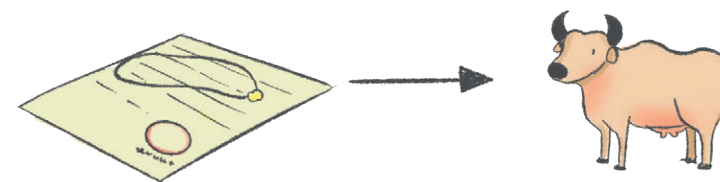
Malan came back from the training and decided to do the experiment on her 2 acre farm. She discussed the idea with her husband and in-laws but it was immediately shot down. She asked them to just give her a small patch of land on their farm to experiment with.

Give me just a 1 acre patch and I promise I will do my best to get a good yield



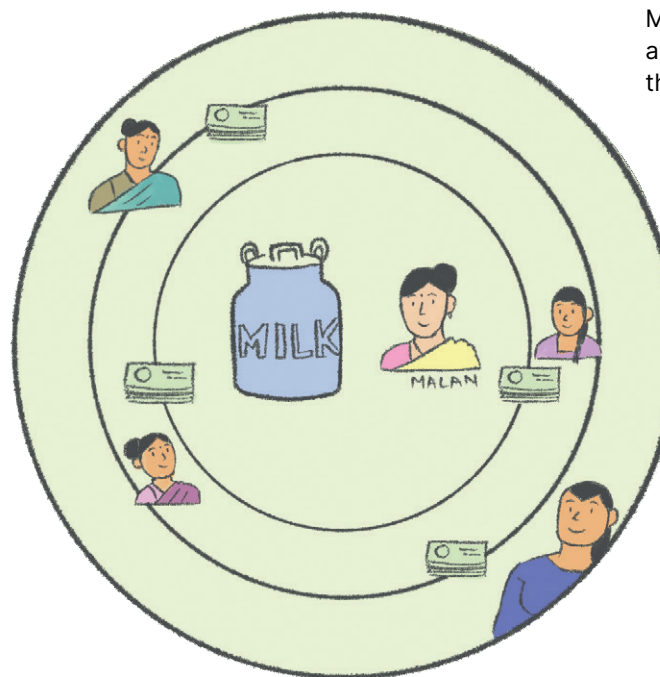
Malan's family relented and gave her 1 acre to experiment. She started seeing the results within a year. She planted more than 50 varieties of crops. This includes fruits such as guava, chickoo, pomegranate, custard apple, banana etc, vegetables including

several leafy vegetables, corn, and bamboo, soybean, sag (teakwood) trees, napier grass (fodder crop), etc. She also got some chicks. The farm produce started generating some income for the Rauts who were otherwise reeling under financial pressures.



Malan did not stop at that. Within the next two years, she also sold her gold chain and bought a cow.

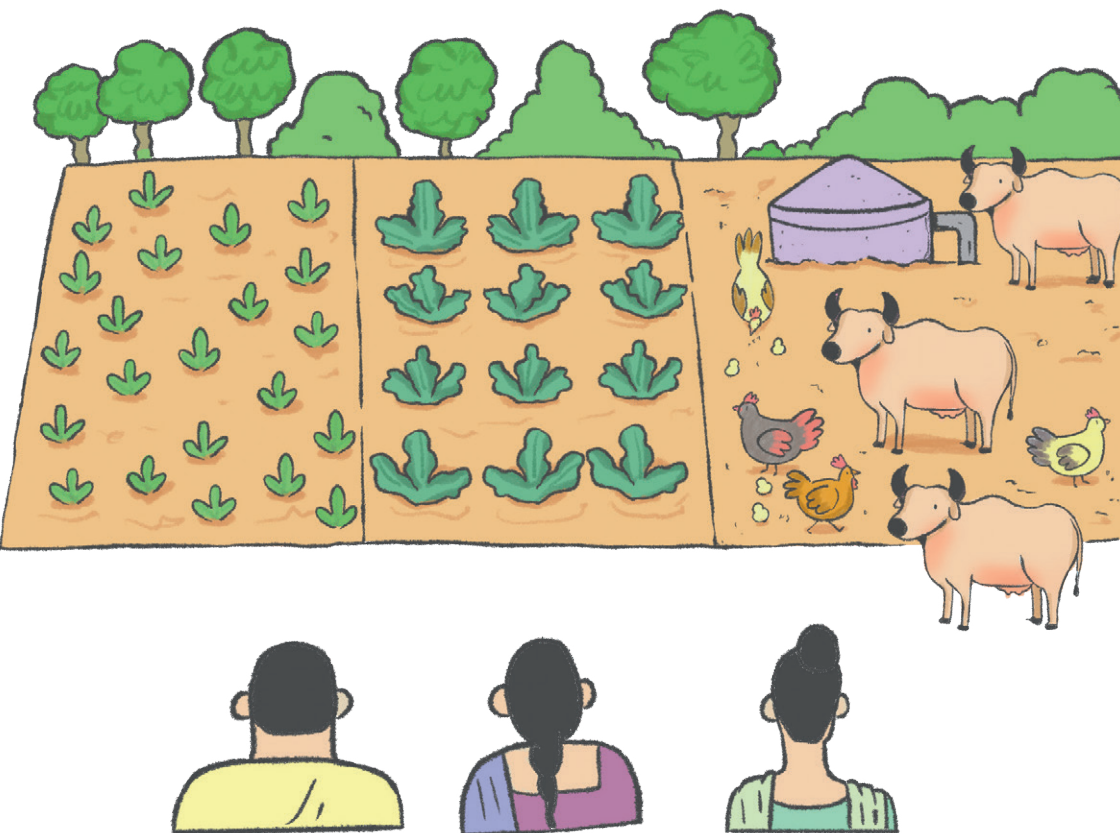
Women from her village and block came together and formed a Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) – Lakshmi Dairy under Malan's directorship and started selling milk through the same.



Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs): An FPO is a legal entity that is owned and managed by farmers, which includes cultivators, dairy producers, fishers, plantation owners, and others engaged in primary production in the agriculture sector. In order to generate farmer income and create more employment opportunities for small and marginal farmers, the government launched a scheme called the Formation and Promotion of 10,000 New Farmer Producer Organisations in February 2020. Source IDR

Bit by bit, Malan created a model farm using SSP's strategy and with her resilience and hardwork. Her farm has now become a model farm and is a site of attraction for farmers across Latur. She is happy that she has been able to give a good life to her family members due to her determination and

hardwork. She earns over Rs. 60,000 per month from selling her farm produce and through her poultry and milk business. This is exclusive of her family earnings. Her children are currently studying in hostels and her family supports her enterprising ideas which also yield good income for the household.

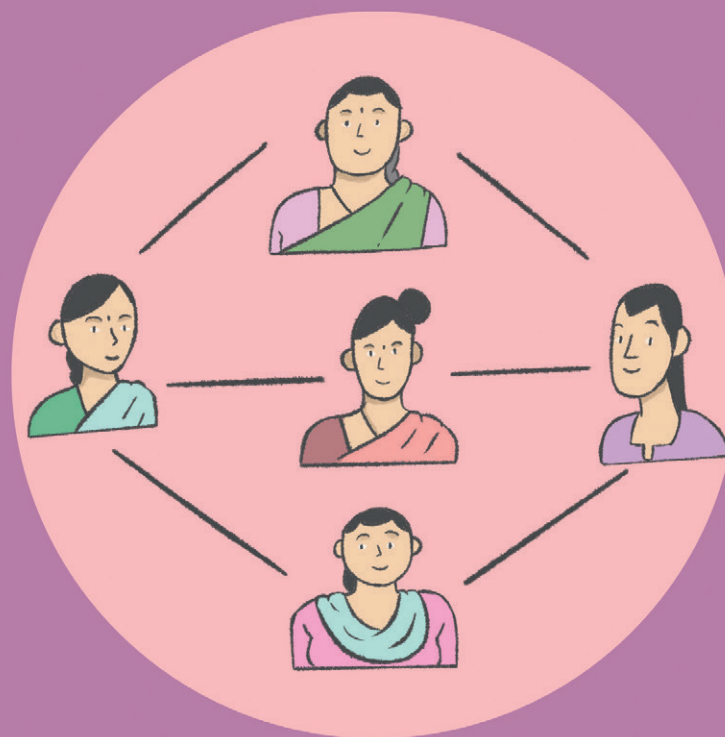


Malan has over a hundred chickens, three cows and a 2 acre farm with vegetables, pulses and seasonal crops. Malan slowly rose from just a member of SSP's programme in 2016 to being a block coordinator in the organisation in 2022.

As a block coordinator, Malan now trains hundreds of women from villages in her block on the 1 acre model and also works

with them on building strategies to make women farmers economically self-reliant. She has helped many women in the process and has also created a fan following of her own in the block.

The hundreds of women she trained are also substituting their agricultural income with other businesses like poultry, milk and organic vegetables.



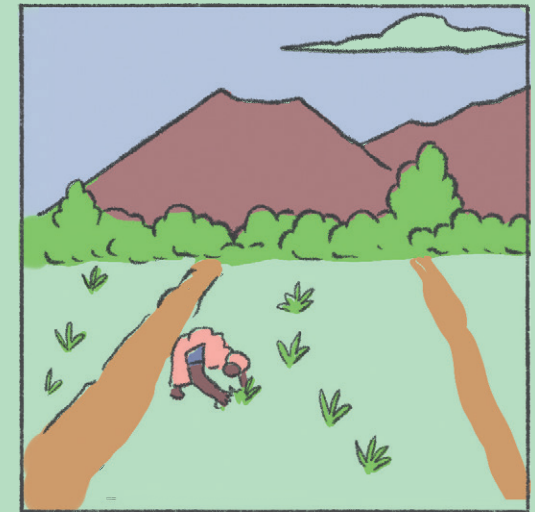


Want to know more or  
join the movement?  
Visit SSP's website at:  
<https://swayamshikshanprayog.org>

# MALATI



The Boipariguda block in Odisha's Koraput is a picturesque village with lush green forests engulfing the region. Inhabitants of different regions in Odisha have settled here. It is known as Jungle Gaon (Forest Village).

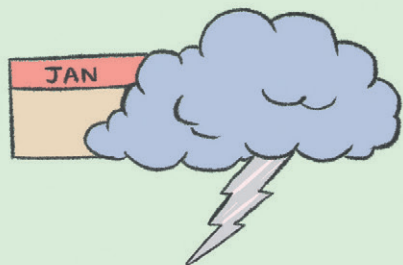


The village is home to a predominantly Adivasi population and for years together, communities in the village have been surviving on forest resources. While some rely on working in

their own farms or as laborers on other farms, many are dependent on collecting and selling forest produce such as timber, sal leaves etc.

While life in the hills has always been tough for the Adivasis, over the last two decades, this became particularly challenging due to two reasons.

One, climate induced challenges including unseasonal rainfall made it difficult for communities to gather forest produce in sufficient quantities and make a living. Agriculture has also been heavily hit due to unpredictable weather conditions thus hitting those who are dependent on it for their livelihood.



On the other hand, over-exploitation of forest resources (especially timber) at the hands of timber mafias and big corporations has impacted the livelihoods of indigenous communities the worst as they have been conserving these commons for a long time and their lives and livelihoods are heavily dependent on them.

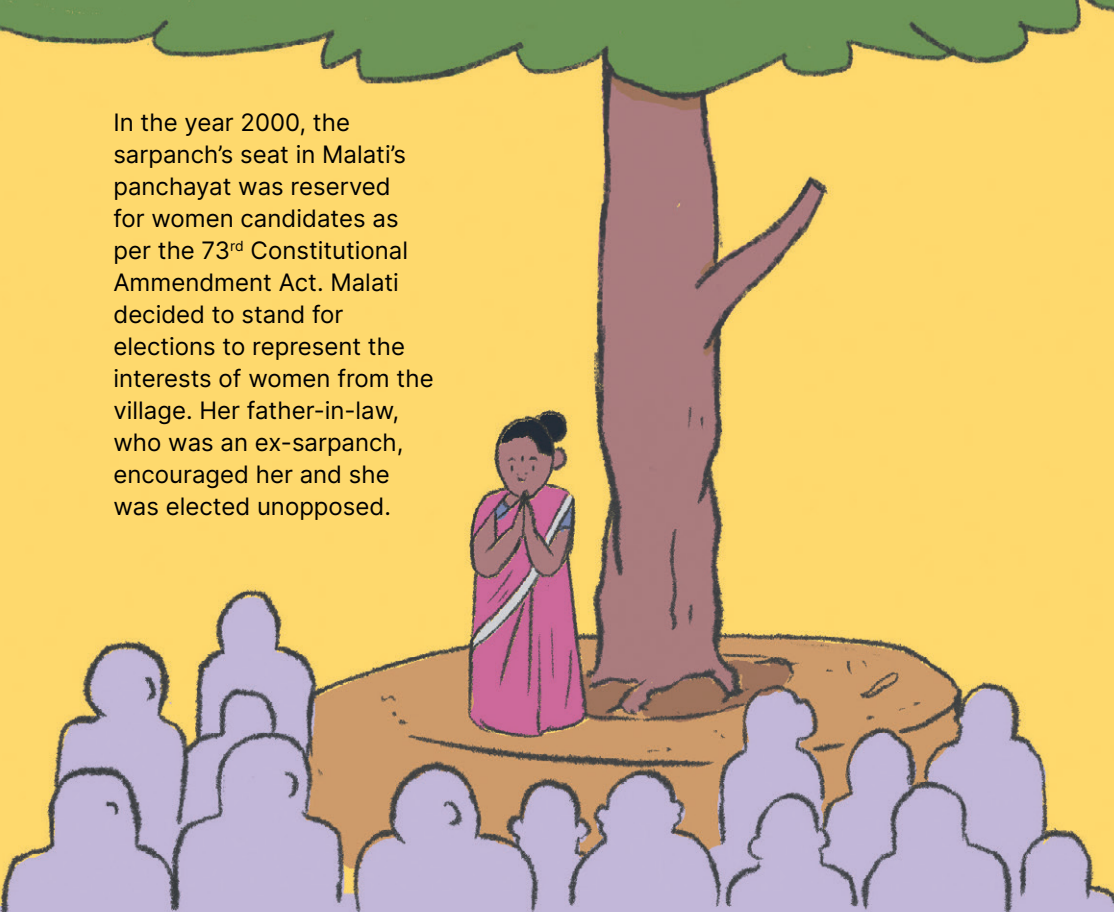


Malati Nayak, a member of the Bhumia community is one of the many women who were particularly vulnerable to this situation. Malati was dependent on the subsistence farming that she and her family engaged in and some additional income generated by working on other farms in her village. Even as the village was surrounded by natural resources, Malati saw most families like hers struggling to make ends meet.

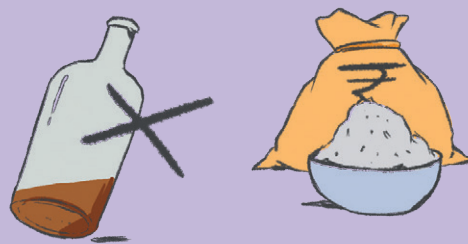


Poor financial conditions, remote location of the village and resultant challenges along with the lack of education about rights had pushed most households on the brink of poverty. Alcoholism and violence against women was also on a rise.

In the year 2000, the sarpanch's seat in Malati's panchayat was reserved for women candidates as per the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act. Malati decided to stand for elections to represent the interests of women from the village. Her father-in-law, who was an ex-sarpanch, encouraged her and she was elected unopposed.

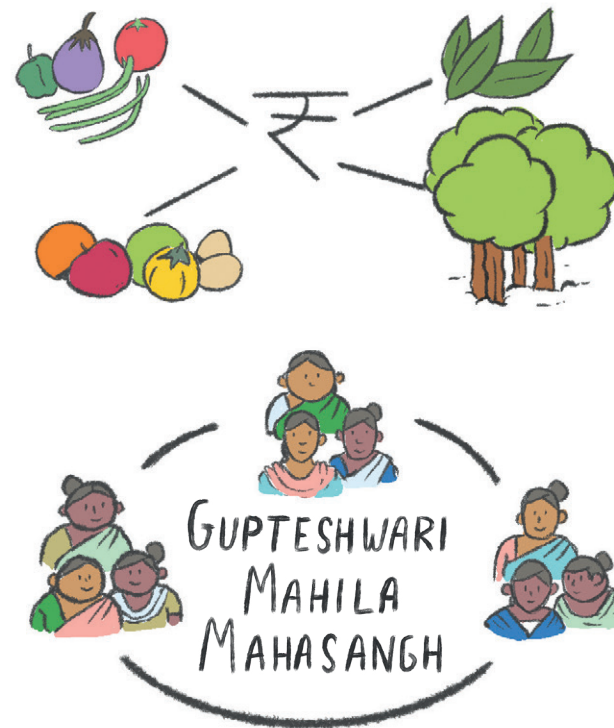


While most villagers expected her to just remain a shadow candidate and take decisions as per the directions of her male counterparts, Malati was determined to try something on her own. Malati started working on alcoholism, an issue that impacted women the most and realised that to make women more self-reliant, it was important to give them good livelihood opportunities.



Through her interactions with the village women, a small group emerged of women who were determined to make a difference in their lives. Malati kept them motivated

and the group started working out strategies to utilize the available resources – trees, leaves, fruits and vegetables to name a few – for generating incomes.



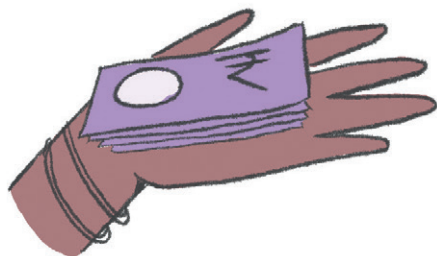
Around 2005, they came in contact with the Society for Promoting Rural Education and Development (SPREAD), an NGO that works on livelihoods of indigenous communities and mainly women. With the guidance and support of SPREAD, the women formed a federation, which was a collective of

many self help groups (SHGs) and named it Gupteshwari Mahila Mahasangh. Under the federation, they started focussing on collecting Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) and selling it in the open market along with using some of it for their household needs.

## What is NTFP?

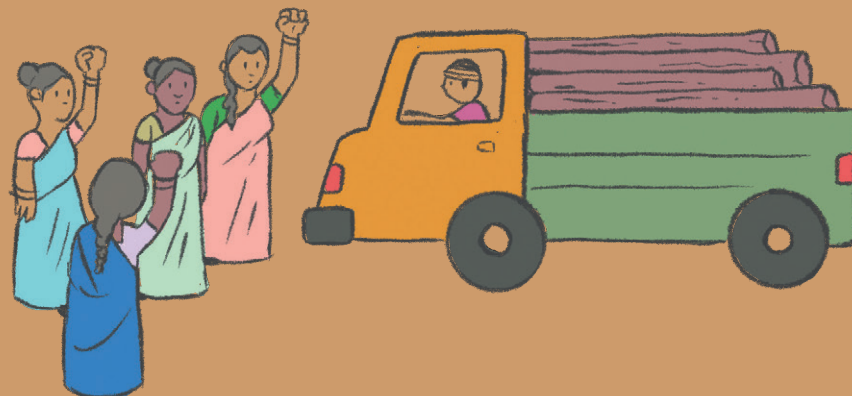
Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) are products such as mushrooms, fruits, flowers, nuts, fungi, fibers, medicinal and ornamental plants, dyes, leaves, honey, etc. They play a key role in generating livelihoods in rural areas, and are also important in providing diverse and healthy food and nutrition to indigenous communities.

The women from Gupteshwari Mahila Mahasangh began collecting sal seeds and sold them in the open market. They faced challenges very early on. While the government was giving a minimum price of Rs. 6 per kg, the women were only getting about Rs. 2. They fought with the buyers collectively and made sure they only sold at market prices. In one particular season, the mahasangh sold 36 lakh sal seeds and women earned anywhere between Rs. 10,000-12,000 from this.



Members of the federation also decided to focus on planting local varieties of crops and challenged the monocropping method used to produce teak. Such a method was detrimental to soil health, leaving fewer

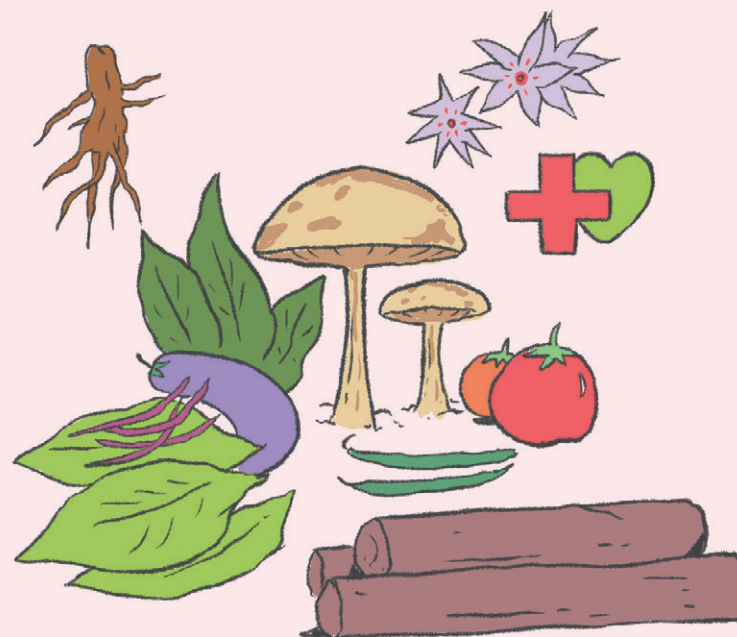
livelihood options for small-marginal farmers. Women also protested against illegal selling of teakwood in the village. They once stopped a truck that was transporting timber illegally to a seller.





Slowly, the villagers started trusting the members of the federation as they focussed on equitable distribution of resources and their efforts also created livelihoods for women. Today, the federation has about 2,000 women. Nearly 800 women are engaged in making plates from sal and siyali leaves which has generated a good income for many households. They earn anywhere between Rs. 5000-6000 per month and can support their family income.

Similarly, many women also sell kendu leaves which are used for various purposes ranging from making medicines to bidis. Similarly, their collective ownership over NTFP also means better access to fruits, vegetables and mushrooms that grow in the forests which they can use in their homes and have access to a nutrition-rich diet without having to spend a lot of money on buying it from the market.

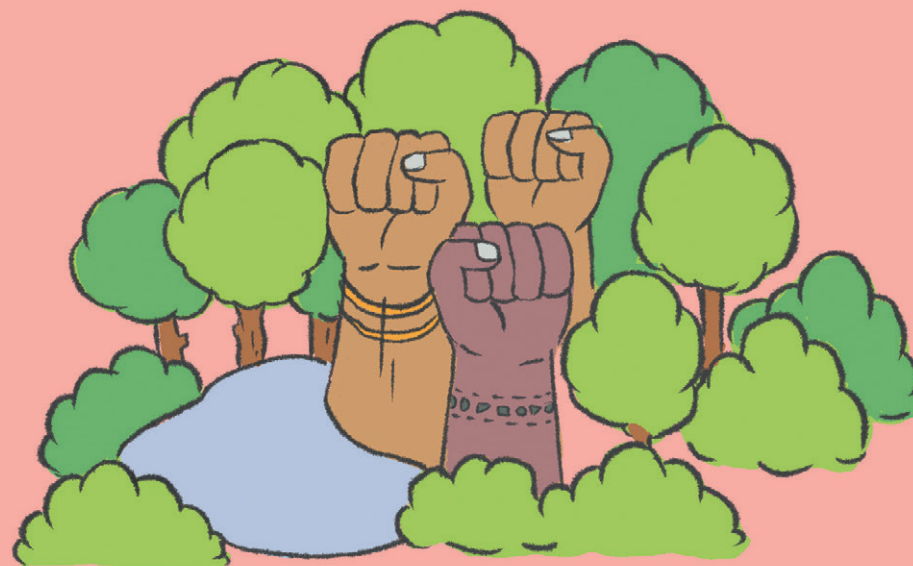


The model which Malati and the other women built with the support of SPREAD is turning out to be very important in conserving natural resources and also utilising common resources for livelihoods. Through their work, the women are mitigating and adapting with climate change by conserving commons and creating sustainable livelihoods for themselves in the face of a climate crisis.



The Mahila Sangh is only growing day-by-day and the women are now aiming to run a solar based cold storage where vegetables can be stored before being sent to the market and are also in the process of learning natural dyeing on fabrics which can then be set up as a small enterprise business going forward.

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) is a piece of legislation that enables tribal communities and forest dwellers to claim legal rights over the forest land they have been using for generations. The Act is helpful for local, indigenous communities who have been denied a say or authority over the management of forests or have been denied free access to forest produce due to any reason. FRA which came into effect in 2006 immensely helped the women in accessing their commons with greater agency. They earlier faced harassment from local goons and sometimes even the police for collecting NTFP which gradually reduced due to provisions under FRA.

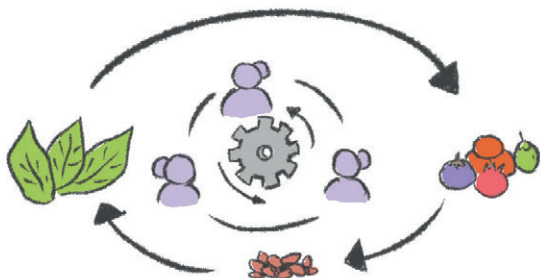


FOREST RIGHTS ACT

How did Malati and the other women develop a successful livelihood model in Odisha?

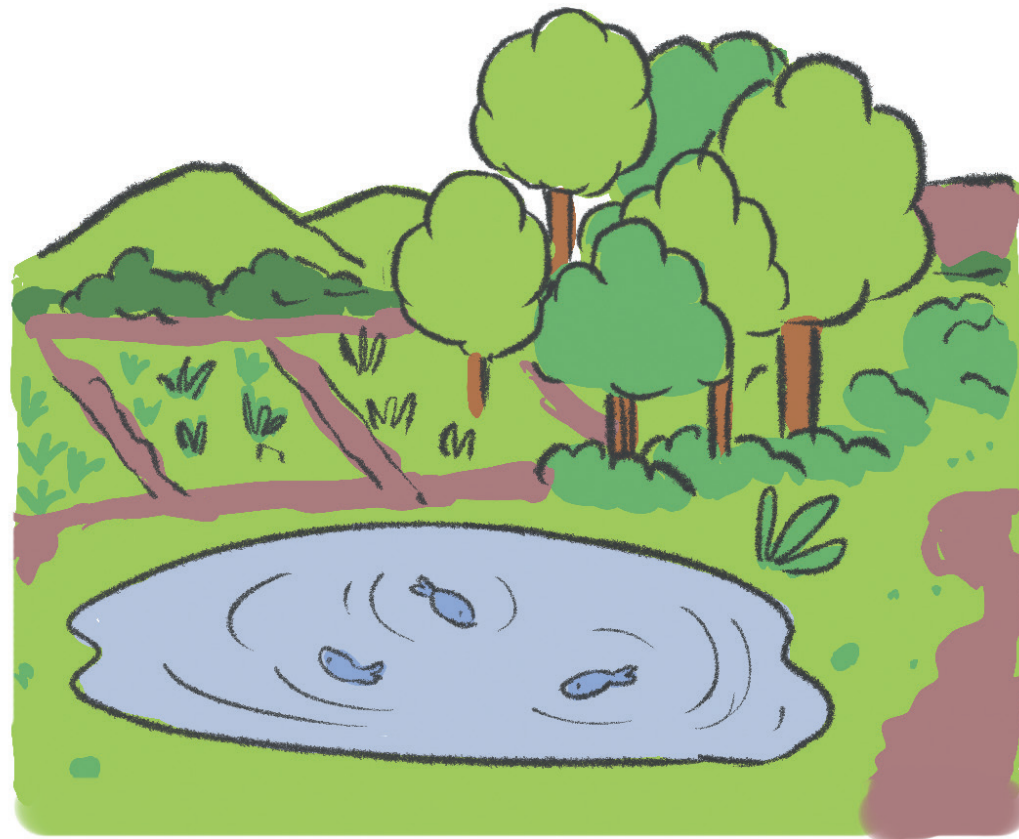
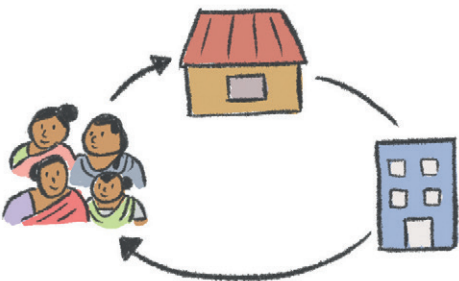
### By forming a federation

The women registered a federation as a mutual benefit trust and have been engaged in various sustainable livelihoods such as leaf plate making, sal seed collection and mahua processing. They collectively take big orders and also share resources and skills with each other and upskill themselves to venture into more lucrative livelihoods. This helps them survive through periods when their agricultural incomes are really low due to erratic rainfall.



### Support gained from NGO SPREAD

NGO SPREAD handheld the women in the entire process – from registering the Federation to linking it to the markets. Today, the organisation provides strategic vision and operational assistance to the mahasangh to ensure that the women living in these regions get sustained livelihoods.



### By leveraging policies and laws

The women successfully leverage policies and laws such as the FRA to protect their commons and their rights over it. This helps them protect their common resources and also contributes towards mitigating climate change in the long run.

Having the ability to earn for themselves also helps women in the domestic spaces as they have more agency and are more likely to fight gender norms and oppressive practices.





Want to know more about  
the work done by Malati  
and other Adivasi women  
in Odisha or wish to  
support their work?  
Contact NGO SPREAD  
on the below-mentioned  
email address:  
[spread@spread.org.in](mailto:spread@spread.org.in)

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