



यशवंतराव चव्हाण सेंटर
YASHWANTRAO CHAVAN CENTRE



Report Back on National Consultation on the Role of Panchayats in Gender Responsive Climate Action

Yashwant Rao Chavan Centre, Mumbai

8 October 2025



ABOUT THE CONSULTATION

Climate change impacts are deeply gendered, often amplifying existing inequalities and disproportionately affecting women. Yet, women's leadership and local knowledge are vital to building resilient, inclusive climate solutions. In India, Panchayats serve as critical platforms for localized climate action. Their proximity to communities and mandate for participatory governance make them uniquely positioned to integrate gender-sensitive strategies, address regional vulnerabilities, and ensure women's equitable participation in climate planning and resource allocation.

Key objectives of this national consultation were to:

- Explore the role of panchayats in enabling gender responsive approaches to climate adaptation and mitigation.
- Highlight the experiences and knowledge from the field regarding working with Panchayats to create gender responsive climate actions.
- Discuss strategies to enhance women's participation, leadership and capacity within Panchayats to strengthen climate action.
- Identify focus areas and formulate actionable recommendations to advance gender-inclusive bottom up climate planning in the State.





SETTING THE CONTEXT:

Context Setting: Neha Saigal, Asar Social Impact Advisors and Bhim Raskar, Resource and Support Centre for Development (RSCD)

Keynote Address: Ms Supriya Sule, Member of Parliament and Mr Abhijit Ghorpode, Director - State Climate Action Cell, Environment and Climate Change Department, Government of Maharashtra

Special Remarks: Mr Sourav Bag, State Programme Manager, Panchayati Raj Department, Government of Jharkhand

Ms Supriya Sule gave the keynote address which underscored the uneven and escalating impacts of climate change across India, from droughts in Marathwada to floods in Konkan. She emphasized that while climate awareness is growing, action remains fragmented and often symbolic. She noted that *“unchecked urbanization, fragmented climate responses, and the erosion of traditional knowledge further compound these challenges”*.

Using Pune as a cautionary tale, she highlighted how unchecked urbanization without ecological planning leads to infrastructural stress and environmental degradation. Ms Sule called for a shift from awareness to accountability, urging governments to take shared responsibility and prioritize long-term, locally grounded solutions.



She also stressed the importance of traditional agricultural knowledge, critiqued the discontinuation of solar schemes like KUSUM, and warned against the digital divide in energy access.

Ms Sule advocated for empowering Panchayats to lead decentralized, gender-responsive climate governance, proposing a joint policy initiative between Maharashtra and Jharkhand.



She called for women's leadership in environmental decision-making, not as tokenism but as central to community resilience. Her address urged a national climate movement modeled on India's fight against tuberculosis, emphasizing cross-party collaboration, sustained political will, and inclusive participation. As Ms Sule emphasized, "climate action must move beyond tokenism to become a national movement—driven by political will, cross-state collaboration, and everyday environmentalism rooted in cultural consciousness." and this political will must translate into sustained support, inclusive policies, and community-driven implementation. Closing with a reflection on cultural consciousness, she reminded the audience that sustainability begins with personal responsibility and everyday actions, rooted in respect for Mother Earth.



Ms Neha Saigal from Asar Social Impact Advisors set the context for day's discussions by framing climate change as an intersectional crisis that impacts communities in unequal and complex ways across regions. She emphasized that marginalized women face compounded vulnerabilities due to structural inequities, limited access to resources, restrictive social norms, and exclusion from decision-making spaces. The effects of climate change are far from gender-neutral, manifesting in increased caregiving burdens, gender-based violence, adverse health outcomes, child marriage, disrupted education, and acute water scarcity—particularly in climate-sensitive areas like Maharashtra.

To address these challenges, Asar's gender-transformative climate framework is anchored in three pillars: Leadership, which focuses on amplifying women's voices and building their capacity to shape policy; Vulnerability, which leverages social protection schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) to enhance resilience; and Benefits, which promotes women-led cooperatives and sustainable livelihood opportunities.



In Maharashtra, the water crisis is a major challenge communities face due to the climate crisis, where gendered impacts are especially pronounced. Communities of women have identified water as a critical focus area in tackling Maharashtra's climate vulnerability and shaping effective climate action. Ms Saigal highlighted the urgent need for integrating a gender perspective into early warning systems and local climate governance to ensure inclusive, equitable, and effective responses.



Mr Bhim Raskar, from Resource and Support Centre for Development (RSCD), highlighted that Panchayats, as grassroots governance institutions, play a pivotal role in fostering gender-responsive climate planning and ensuring women's meaningful participation in climate decision-making. Initiatives such as Gaav Samvads (village dialogues) and Mahila Sabhas have demonstrated how inclusive local platforms can elevate women's leadership and amplify their voices. The 250 Gram Samvads conducted by RSCD, which saw strong engagement from women, elders, and youth, revealed water as the most pressing climate concern across communities—underscoring the need for localized, gender-sensitive responses. He further stressed that to truly democratize climate governance, there is a need to evolve Panchayati Raj into "Representation Raj," advocating for 50% representation of women in decision-making bodies.

Mahila Sabhas can serve as transformative spaces, shaping pre-election charters, forming water committees, and influencing local governance structures. By reframing climate challenges through a gender lens, these efforts unlock inclusive, community-driven solutions that are essential for a just and equitable transition.



Mr. Abhijit Ghorpade, Director of the State Planning Department, Maharashtra, highlighted Maharashtra's proactive climate response amid rising extreme weather events such as heatwaves, floods, droughts, and erratic monsoons. *"The past decade has witnessed some of the most extreme climate events in India, with floods, droughts, and heatwaves severely affecting communities from Himachal to Maharashtra. To respond effectively, we need to strengthen climate-resilient practices in agriculture, water, and forestry, and ensure that women are at the centre of these efforts,"* shared Mr. Ghorpode. He outlined the State Action Plan on Climate Change (2020–2050), which includes mitigation strategies across agriculture, energy, and infrastructure, as well as adaptation measures like cooling plans for livelihoods and agricultural storage. Initiatives such as the Majhi Vasundhara campaign, large-scale bamboo plantations under MGNREGA, and the promotion of solar energy and electric vehicles reflect the state's commitment to restoring ecological balance and advancing sustainable development.





Crucially, Mr. Ghorpade emphasized the gendered dimensions of climate vulnerability, noting that water scarcity—identified as the core climate issue across Maharashtra—disproportionately affects women’s time, health, and safety. He called for strengthening Panchayats through gender-sensitive governance, enabling women’s participation in planning and resource allocation via the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). He celebrated the progress in women’s political representation and underscored the need to link successful community models across districts, ensuring that women lead resilient, locally grounded climate solutions.

India’s commitment to net-zero emissions by 2070 and the rollout of National and State Action Plans reflect a growing recognition of the need for inclusive, localized solutions. “Localized voices are critical to drive gendered climate solutions,” emphasized Mr. Sourav Bag, SPM, Panchayati Raj Department, Government of Jharkhand. Jharkhand’s institutionalization of Mahila Sabhas and Youth Forums, training of 50% women mukhiyas in leadership and communication, and the PARI index tracking gender-responsive Panchayats offer promising models for replication.

The session closed with a strong call to embed equity, representation, and local leadership in climate governance. Emphasizing women’s central role in building resilient communities, speakers highlighted water as a shared climate concern and advocated for gender-sensitive planning through platforms like Mahila Sabhas and Gaav Samvads. With women’s leadership at the center, communities can build resilient systems of water management, sustainable agriculture, and equitable energy access. By reframing climate challenges through a gender lens, we unlock transformative solutions that honor both tradition and innovation—ensuring climate action is just, inclusive, and effective.



PANEL 1: VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE: WORKING WITH PANCHAYATS ON GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Panelists:

Sharda Shende (Sarpanch, Bela Gram Panchayat, Maharashtra),

Chaya (Joint Secretary of the District Gram Panchayat Federation of Mysore, Karnataka),

Bidyut Mohanty (SPREAD, Koraput, Odisha),

Komal Devulkar (Sarpanch, Kalamna Gram Panchayat, Nagpur, Maharashtra) and

Mukesh Sonkamble (RSCD, Maharashtra)

Moderated by: Malti Sagane, RSCD





The panel showcased successful grassroots experiences from Panchayats, sharing learnings, challenges, and emerging community-driven recommendations for gender-responsive climate planning. The discussions brought forward compelling examples of how women-led initiatives at the Panchayat level are driving climate resilience.

One inspiring case was of Bela Gaon in Maharashtra, where tree plantation was seamlessly woven into cultural rituals such as births, deaths, and Haldi-Kumkum ceremonies. This approach led to the planting of 9,000 trees and earned the village Zero Carbon Village status along with the Majhi Vasundhara award. The community adopted fines and incentives to ensure compliance, and night meetings were organized to accommodate women's schedules. These practices highlight the importance of culturally rooted climate initiatives and flexible engagement formats to enhance women's participation.

In a Panchayat in Mysore, Karnataka, women were mobilized across 30 Panchayats through NRLM and federations to take up afforestation and financial literacy. Climate dialogues with children and women helped embed environmental perspectives into everyday thinking, while efforts to promote women's participation in Gram Sabhas and budget discussions strengthened their civic engagement. This case underscores the value of federated women's networks and the integration of climate literacy into local governance.



Koraput in Odisha offered a powerful example of participatory resource mapping, where indigenous women used revenue maps from tehsil offices to assess the condition of commons and link resource degradation to their labor and livelihoods. Their insights were incorporated into Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs), increasing both accountability and representation. Institutionalizing such participatory mapping and ensuring that women's plans are reflected in Panchayat-level development strategies is a critical step forward.

In Maharashtra, work across 50 villages demonstrated the impact of structured dialogue and leadership development. Through 250 FGDs with farmers, elders, women, and youth, water committees were created and re-elected with women in leadership roles. The initiative showed that training combined with awareness leads to self-sufficiency and sustained engagement among women leaders. Investing in leadership training and formalizing women's roles in water governance structures can significantly strengthen local climate resilience.



Across these diverse examples, several cross-cutting recommendations emerged for policymakers. One key recommendation is the need to empower Panchayats as central actors in gender-responsive climate action. This includes allocating flexible budgets for women-led initiatives, strengthening federated women's networks, and embedding climate literacy in local governance. Policymakers were urged to support culturally rooted practices, promote intergenerational dialogues, ensure GPDs reflect women's lived experiences, invest in leadership training, and facilitate cross-state learning to scale successful community-driven models. These action points offer a roadmap for inclusive, bottom-up climate governance rooted in the lived realities of women at the grassroots.



PANEL 2: PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF PANCHAYATS IN CREATING GENDER RESPONSIVE CLIMATE ACTION PLANS AND CLIMATE FINANCE.

Panelists:

Arindam Banerjee (PDAG),

Manjula Bharathy (TISS, Mumbai),

Satish Khade (Rotary International and Jalsamvad),

Suvarna Damle (Prakruti),

Prashant Pawar (Baimanus)

Moderated by: Elizabeth Soby, Asar





The panel on “Perspectives on the Role of Panchayats in Creating Gender-Responsive Climate Action Plans and Climate Finance” brought together diverse voices to explore the role of governance at different levels to drive gender-responsive, inclusive and sustainable climate solutions.

The conversation began by framing climate change as a systemic crisis, deeply intertwined with biodiversity loss, inequality, and capitalism. The panel emphasized the importance of feminist counter-publics, particularly Mahila Sabhas, as spaces of agency and collective decision-making. The Kudumbashree model from Kerala was highlighted as an inspiring example, where women-led community theatre and district-level funds were earmarked specifically for gender-responsive climate action. A study from the University of Toronto on vulnerability mapping in Raigad further reinforced the need for localized data to inform inclusive planning.

The transformative role of Panchayat leaders as pivotal actors in local climate governance was highlighted, with the head of a Panchayat likened to the “Prime Minister of their area.” With 50% reservation for women, leadership dynamics have shifted, enabling women to play prominent roles in decision-making through grassroots federations and NRLM initiatives. The evolution of climate action—from small, locally grounded gatherings with Asar to participatory platforms across multiple states shaping the process of Conference of Panchayats — has highlighted the value of traditional knowledge in addressing environmental challenges. Emphasis on community water systems, forest rights, and climate-adapted agriculture, alongside emerging technologies like GPT funds and solar solutions, reflects a growing movement to center village voices in shaping inclusive, bottom-up climate strategies.



Specifically on the issue of water, the urgent need to address the intersection of climate change, water scarcity, and gender was highlighted, especially how women and marginalized communities bear the brunt of these challenges. Actionable steps for Gram Panchayats were proposed, including integrated water management, real-time monitoring, and inclusive water committees with at least 50% women representation. By combining traditional knowledge with modern technology and promoting behavior change, communities can build locally sustainable solutions. There is also a need for revamping skill development programs to include practical training in water and agriculture, linking climate resilience with improved livelihoods, health, and community empowerment.

Insights were shared from Nagpur's panchayats, where agricultural commercialization—especially BT cotton—has led to food insecurity, soil degradation, and increased debt. Women farmers remain under-recognized, facing economic strain and social stigma. In response, the Prakurti team initiated agroecological experiments like millet cultivation, which improved biodiversity, food security, and women's decision-making power. The importance of creating local registers of women farmers and integrating them into Panchayat planning was stressed. These small, community-led interventions have attracted government support and demonstrated how inclusive planning can transform rural livelihoods.



The panel also emphasized the power of storytelling in mobilizing climate action. Traditional journalism often fails to engage local audiences, so her media house trains women reporters from marginalized communities—Adivasi, Dalit, Muslim, and transgender—to tell context-rich stories of climate and gender. These reporters connect local realities to policy conversations, showcasing adaptive strategies and lived experiences. Over four years, Baimanus has built a robust network of community media, ensuring that grassroots voices shape climate planning and challenge top-down narratives.

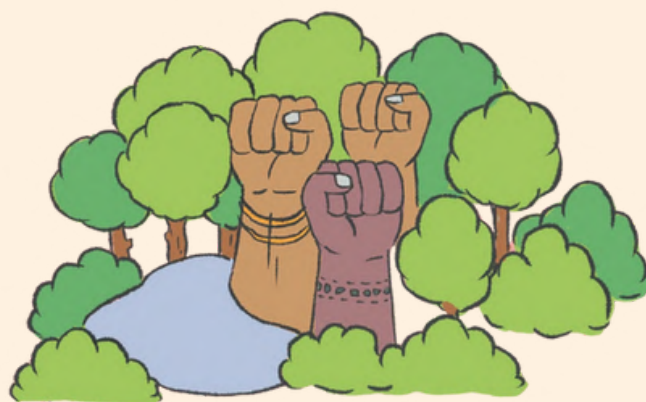
The panel concluded with a set of actionable recommendations for policymakers. These included empowering Panchayats with financial and administrative autonomy, institutionalizing Mahila Sabhas, supporting community media, investing in agroecology and livelihood diversification, integrating climate skills into rural employment programs, and ensuring that climate finance reaches the last mile. The discussion reinforced that climate resilience must be built from the ground up—with women, Panchayats, and communities at the center of planning, finance, and governance.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONSULTATION

The consultation underscored that climate adaptation and resilience must be built from the ground up—with women, Panchayats, and communities at the center of planning, finance, and governance. The group discussions highlighted six critical areas where Maharashtra must focus its efforts to ensure gender-responsive climate action, particularly through the leadership of Panchayats and support from state and district-level institutions.

1. Forests and Commons: Empowering Tribal Women for Climate-Resilient Livelihoods Panchayats must activate and strengthen Gram Sabhas and committees dedicated to forest preservation, water management, and Community Forest Rights (CFR). Tribal women should be supported in mapping natural resources and leading conservation efforts. Nature-based solutions, commons' regeneration, and capacity-building for women and youth are essential. Value addition to forest produce and marketing support can help build sustainable, climate-resilient livelihoods rooted in local ecosystems.





KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONSULTATION

2. Coastal Communities: Strengthening Institutional Support During Climate

Disasters District and state bureaucracies must prioritize mangrove conservation and enforce existing environmental laws for their conservation and protection. Public education for women and youth is vital for disaster preparedness. Post-disaster damage assessments must be timely and accurate, with grievance redressal mechanisms in place—especially for issues related to mangroves and forests. Women fish vendors should be formally recognized in compensation frameworks. Policies must center women, children, and vulnerable groups throughout the disaster management cycle in coastal areas, with a strong focus on restoring and protecting livelihoods before and after climate events.

3. Water Management: Gender-Inclusive Conservation and Governance

Village Water Sanitation Committees (VWSCs) should be strengthened with active participation from women. Awareness campaigns and training on watershed development must be integrated into GPDP processes. Increasing women's labor days under MGNREGS for water conservation and training them in monitoring and evaluation under Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) will enhance their role in water governance. Conservation planning must reflect women's perspectives and lived experiences.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONSULTATION

4. Convergence of Schemes: Aligning Budgets and Programs for Women-Centric Climate Action Panchayats should integrate schemes like Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), GPDP, MGNREGS, and Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) to create cohesive climate action plans and same should be part of the GPDPs. Local climate budgets must be developed with a focus on women's livelihoods and the needs of women farmers. Environmental protection activities—such as tree plantation, organic farming, and waste management—can be supported through convergence of tied and untied funds, 15th Finance Commission grants, and Panchayat's own revenue. Strategic use of overlapping schemes can amplify impact and ensure resources reach women-led initiatives.

5. Supporting Women Farmers During Climate Crises A three-pronged approach—Aware, Organise, Act—should guide Panchayat efforts to support women farmers. Building the capacity of Bachat Ghats and SHGs for diversified livelihoods and group farming can enhance resilience. Climate change must be brought onto Panchayat agendas, with targeted measures like POCRA (Project on Climate Resilient Agriculture) and water conservation initiatives involving women. Women's participation in conservation and decision-making spaces is key to long-term sustainability.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONSULTATION

6. Early Warning Systems: Making Climate Preparedness Inclusive and Participatory

The state must ensure that Early Warning Systems (EWS) are participatory and gender-inclusive. Existing SOPs should be reviewed by a state-level working group, and inter-departmental convergence must include WCD, PRI, health, and rural development departments. Community awareness and collaboration with CSOs and SHGs are essential for co-designing EWS tailored to local needs. Multi-channel communication—SMS alerts, community broadcasts—should be developed, and dedicated budget lines under disaster management and climate resilience funds must be allocated for gender-inclusive EWS. The state's role should be that of an enabler and capacity builder, ensuring equity, participation, and accountability in climate preparedness.



The discussions concluded with a call to action: empower Panchayats with financial and administrative autonomy, institutionalize Mahila Sabhas, invest in agroecology and climate skills, and ensure climate finance reaches the last mile. These recommendations underscore that climate resilience must be built from the ground up—with women, Panchayats, and communities at the heart of planning, governance, and implementation. Maharashtra's path to gender-responsive climate action lies in empowering Panchayats, integrating women's voices into planning and governance, and ensuring institutional support across sectors. These recommendations offer a roadmap for inclusive, resilient, and locally grounded climate strategies.



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1	Ms. Supriya Sule	Member of Parliament (Baramati)
2	Abhijit Ghorpade IAS	Director, State Climate Action Cell, Maharashtra
3	Sourav Bag	SPM, Department of Panchayat Raj, Jharkhand
4	Mr.Bidyut Mohanty	Spread, Odisha
5	Mr.Arindam Banerjee	PDAG
6	Ms.Manjula Bharghy	TISS ,Mumbai
7	Ms.Chhaya	Gram Vikas
8	Mr.Prashant Pawar	Baimanus
9	Mr.Suraj Patake	Baimanus
10	Ms.Sanjana	Baimanus
11	Ms.Apsara	Baimanus

12	Ms.Manorama	HOPE, Jharkhand
13	Ms.Sushma Devi	Deshaj Abhikram, Jharkhand
14	Ms.Leena Budhe	CFSD, Nagpur
15	Mr.Sanjay Patil	Mumbai University
16	Ms.Ankita Bhatkhande	Dasra
17	Ms. Suvarna Damle	Director Prakruti
18	Satish Khade	Water- Expert
19	Pratima Ingole	Amravati
20	Sangeeta Kharat	Assist. Director Srushtidnyan
21	Gouri Bhopatkar	Director, Econet
22	Nutan Bhagat	PRI trainer Ahilyanagar

23	Sangeeta Malshe	Director, Jhalkari
24	Ms. Gouri Donde	MAVIM,Mumbai
25	Anuya Kuwar	CLGF
26	Rajesh Lingayat-	Sarpanch Gadchiroli
27	Bharti Gavkar	Secretary, Ratnagiri
28	Anjali Nate	PRI representative,
29	Raju Gaykhe	Farmers Union
30	Sharda Gaydhane	Sarpanch , Bhandara
31	Rimi Palmo	SCAC WRI
32	Mahesh Shelar	Vikas Sahyog Pratithan
33	Devraj patil	Yuva Rural Association

34	Pratik Balkunde	Sarpanch, Kadora Umarga
35	Amit Bhalerao	Climate Adaptation Expert,
36	Nithi	State Climate Action Cell,
37	Sarita F	State Climate Action Cell,
38	Suraj	TISS
39	Anil Pazare	YCC
40	Yogesh Kudale	YCC
41	Datta Balsaraf	YCC
42	Sanjana Pawar	YCC
43	Prashant Ikhar	YCC
44	Sadhana Tippanakaje	YCC



45	Bhagyshree	Baimanus
46	Bharti Takle	Pune
47	Malhar Indulkar	Ratnagiri
48	Alka Dhupkar	Anchor and Journalist
49	Malati Sagane	RSCD
50	Lata Mengade	RSCD
51	Jayashree Kumbhare	RSCD
52	Archana Janganwar	RSCD
53	Pushpa Bankar	RSCD
54	Shubhangi Kolge	RSCD
55	Chatura Kshirsagar	RSCD





56	Trupti Patil	RSCD
57	Ratnmala Vaidhya	RSCD
58	Mukesh Sonkamble-	RSCD
59	Mr.Bhim Raskar	RSCD
60	Ms.Rajashree Pagare	RSCD
61	Ms.Mayuri Lad	RSCD
62	Ms.Nayan Parab	RSCD
63	Ms.Nayani Palkar	RSCD
64	Mr.Vijay Valnju	RSCD
65	Mr. Sandeep Pawar	RSCD





66	Mr.Sudeep	Asar
67	Ms.Neha Saigal	Asar
68	Ms.Saumya Shrivastava	Asar
69	Ms.Elizabeth Soby	Asar
70	Ms. Mythreyee Ramesh	Asar
71	Kishor Veer	Asar
72	Shradha Mahilkar	Asar
73	Sachin	Photographer



