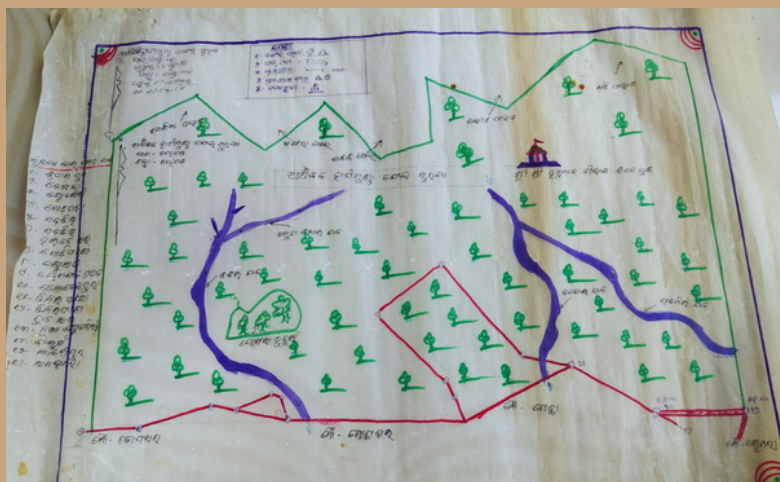




# COMMUNITY-LED CONSERVATION TRIUMPH: SIXTEEN VILLAGES UNITE TO SAFEGUARD A 2200-HECTARE FOREST IN ODISHA



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# **"COMMUNITY-LED CONSERVATION TRIUMPH: SIXTEEN VILLAGES UNITE TO SAFEGUARD A 2200-HECTARE FOREST IN ODISHA"**

## **Introduction:**

In the heart of Nayagarh district in Odisha, a remarkable story of community-driven environmental conservation is unfolding. Sixteen villages, collectively known as Solah Mauja, have joined hands to protect and rejuvenate a once-barren forest spanning over 2200 hectares. Spearheading this noble cause is the 'Anchalik Hatimunda Jangal Surakshya Au Parichalana Committee,' a committee formed by representatives from each village.

## **The Genesis of Conservation:**

Udayanath Behera, a retired army personnel and the vice president of the committee, recounts the dire state of the forest in its early days. Rampant deforestation, aided by corrupt practices within the forest department, had left the land stripped of life. Faced with this environmental crisis, elders from the sixteen villages convened in 2004, deciding to take matters into their own hands.

## **Formation of the Committee:**

In that pivotal meeting, the decision was made to establish a committee dedicated to the protection and management of their forest. Thus, the 'Anchalik Hatimunda Jangal Surakshya Au Parichalana Committee' was born. With a commitment to enforcing sustainable practices, the committee formulated comprehensive rules and regulations to govern the protection and utilization of forest resources.

## **Community Contributions:**

To fund the ongoing protection efforts, a system of financial contributions was implemented. Every household in the sixteen villages contributes Rs 5 on the first Sunday of each month. This collective effort enables the employment of a dedicated forest guard, whose monthly wage has increased from Rs 1000 to Rs 9000 over the years.

## **Patrol and Vigilance:**

To maintain a watchful eye over the vast expanse of the forest, a patrol system called Thengapali was initiated. Two individuals from each village undertake daily patrols, ensuring the forest remains secure from potential threats. This hands-on approach to surveillance underscores the community's unwavering dedication to safeguarding their natural heritage.

## **Balancing Resource Utilization:**

In recognition of the community's contributions, every household is entitled to receive 50 bamboo and 50 logs from the forest annually. To regulate this process, individuals must obtain a ticket from the committee by paying a nominal fee of Rs 10. The ticket serves as authorization for collecting bamboo and logs and must be presented to the forest guard during the process.

### **Preserving Biodiversity:**

While the community benefits from the forest, there are strict guidelines in place to ensure sustainable resource management. Certain trees, such as sal, piyasal, kusum, bheru, kendu, anwla, harad, mehua, and mangoes, are protected and cannot be felled. This conservation-minded approach preserves the biodiversity of the forest and safeguards its ecological balance.

### **Village Classification:**

Among the sixteen villages actively participating in forest protection, twelve are classified as revenue villages, while the remaining four are designated as hamlet villages. The revenue villages include Kiridaspur, Koska, Kantabania, Khaidapada, Gabadiha, Jaimangal, Jaimadeipur, Dimripatna, Chakasahi, Baluan, Maladipur, and Sanahamara. The hamlet villages comprise Gabadiha Harijansahi, Godisahi, Chakasahi, and Nua Kantabania.

### **Conclusion:**

The collaborative efforts of these sixteen villages in Nayagarh district serve as a shining example of grassroots conservation. Through their shared commitment, they have not only revived a once-depleted forest but have also established a sustainable model for coexisting with nature. This inspiring initiative underscores the transformative power of community-led conservation in preserving our precious natural resources for future generations.