

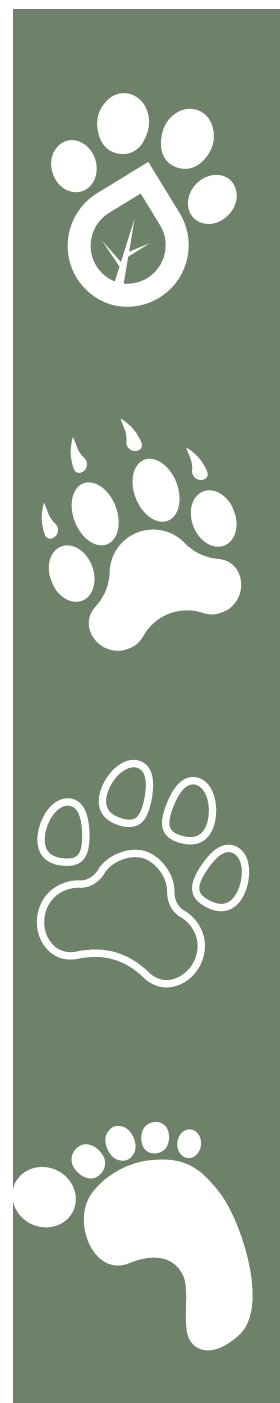
JULY 2023

IN THE LOOP



Vasundhara Newsletter, 5th AUGUST

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QUARTERLY REPORT





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OVERVIEW :

TEAM VASUNDHARA

- A Campaign to Empower Forest-Dependent Communities.
- A Tale of Economic Triumph in Thakurguda.
- A collective effort to give recognition.
- The Remarkable Tenacity of Adibasi Families in Similipal.
- A Model for Sustainable Forest Conservation and Livelihoods.
- Postcards Pave the Way to solve the problem of tribals.
- MOU between FM University and Vasundhara
- Awareness meeting on 'Mo Jungle Jami Yojana.'
- Breaking Barriers, Building Equality
- The meeting focuses on Empowering Livelihoods
- Efforts to Strengthen Forest Rights and Land Ownership Show Mixed Results
- New Claim-Making Process
- District wise data
- Conversion of Forest Village into Revenue Village
- Photo of the month.....

A CAMPAIGN TO EMPOWER FOREST-DEPENDENT COMMUNITIES

>>> CAMPAIGN

The Sal Seed Awareness Campaign by Vasundhara is a shining example of how strategic interventions can empower forest-dependent communities and foster sustainable livelihoods. By providing training, market linkages, and infrastructure, the campaign transformed the lives of these communities.

It also allows them to access fair prices and expands their economic opportunities. Moreover, the active participation of women and the preservation of traditional knowledge underscore the campaign's commitment to gender equality and cultural heritage. Despite the challenges, the campaign's positive impact resonates, leaving a lasting legacy of empowerment and economic independence among forest dwellers in Odisha.

Despite the economic importance of Sal Seeds, forest-dependent communities face numerous challenges in the process of collecting, sorting, packing, and selling them. Forest-dependent communities often lack direct access to potential buyers and face difficulties reaching wider markets.

This limits their bargaining power and exposes them to exploitation by intermediaries. Inadequate infrastructure for processing and storing Sal Seeds hampers the communities' ability to maximize their profits. Forest-dependent communities often lack awareness of market dynamics, pricing, quality standards, and value-adding techniques.

The Sal Seed Awareness Campaign by Vasundhara spanned six months, commencing from January 2023 to June 2023 in 13 tribal districts of Odisha. We did capacity-building workshops for Forest-dependent communities.

They participated in workshops, receiving training on market dynamics, sustainable collection practices, and value-addition techniques. Vasundhara facilitated direct linkages between forest dwellers and socially responsible businesses, promoting fair pricing and eliminating intermediaries; Vasundhara established storage and packaging units to enhance product quality.





Through Vasundhara's intervention and awareness campaign, forest-dependent communities experienced an incredible 30% rise in income from Sal Seed trading. This year, the generated revenue from Vasundhara's field area amounted to ₹91,81,371, benefiting the forest-dwelling community directly.

In the Deogarh district, the forest-dwelling community united as Banani Mahila sangha earned ₹6,37,253, while Adibhumi Mahila Sangha generated ₹3,20,880. Additionally, Banaja Banijya Sangha from Kuchinda received ₹48,51,923, Sargifula Mahila Sangha made ₹11,69,680, and Mahaksandhyani Mahila Sangha gained ₹22,01,635 through Sal Seed trading.

A noteworthy aspect of this initiative is that all forest dwelling communities engaging with Vasundhara for Sal Seed business benefited directly from the ultimate buyers, eliminating intermediaries. Previously, the government didn't procure Sal Seeds directly from the forest dwellers, causing delayed payments and low prices when the forest dwelling community resorted to middlemen.

However, with Vasundhara's intervention and direct market linkages to ultimate buyers and producers, forest-dwelling communities across Odisha now receive immediate payment, significantly improving their economic conditions and reducing their dependence on seasonal activities.

The campaign also led to a remarkable 40% increase in women's participation in Sal Seed trading, promoting gender equality and women's leadership. Moreover, it successfully preserved traditional knowledge on Sal Seed collection and processing techniques, safeguarding cultural heritage.

This inspiring journey exemplifies the transformative power of collective action and sustainable practices, guiding us toward a future where communities thrive harmoniously with nature.

Continued support and innovative initiatives are crucial to creating a world where empowerment and environmental conservation go hand in hand.



A TALE OF ECONOMIC TRIUMPH IN THAKURGUDA

>>> **INSPIRING**



Armed with newfound knowledge and confidence, they set out on a path to prosperity.

Sitamani's incredible dedication and hard work as the group secretary became the cornerstone of their success. The Sal leaf business was a resounding triumph, yielding over 1,200,000 leaves and a remarkable profit of approximately Rs. 6,000 to each family. The group's collaborative efforts and meetings strengthened their bond and inspired neighboring villages to embrace collective business.

Undeterred by the challenges, the women ventured into the Karanja business, collecting 42 quintals and striking a lucrative deal with international company TERVIVA at Rs. 42 per kilo. Sitamani's leadership and the group's unwavering determination paved the way for their dreams to become a reality.

We are delighted to share an inspiring success story that unfolded in the heart of Thakurguda village, Jashipur, Mayurbhanj. In pursuit of sustainable livelihoods and economic independence, the Vasundhara civil society organization embarked on a transformative journey to empower tribal women through Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) collectives.

With the formation of the Danipat Producer Group in 2022, comprising 30 dedicated members, hope blossomed in the village. Thakurguda, blessed with bountiful forests and fertile lands, provided the perfect backdrop for their endeavors. However, the journey was not without its challenges.

Undeterred by poverty, a lack of market opportunities, and unfair practices by local traders, the women rallied together under the dynamic leadership of Sitamani Mahakud. The group's collective spirit breathed new life into the village's economy.

Vasundhara's unwavering support and guidance proved to be a game-changer. With carefully crafted business plans and training sessions, the women honed their skills in bookkeeping, quality parameters, and market awareness.



Today, the women of Thakurguda proudly stand as symbols of economic empowerment and hope.

They have uplifted their lives and contributed to the well-being of their families and the entire community.

The success story of the Danipat Producer Group exemplifies the power of collective action, resilience, and community-driven initiatives. As we celebrate their triumphs, we hope for a brighter and more economically independent future for these remarkable tribal women.

A COLLECTIVE EFFORT TO GIVE RECOGNITION

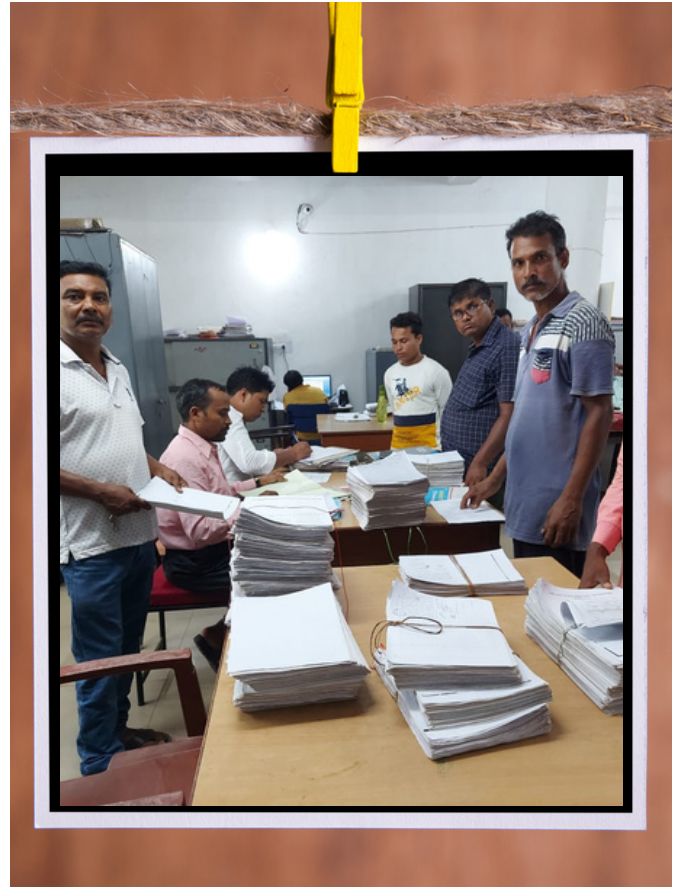
>>> COLLECTIVE

In a remarkable display of collective effort and determination, Mayurbhanj District achieved a significant milestone by submitting 607 Individual Forest Rights (IFR) and 22 Community Forest Resource Rights (CR CFR) case records at the Bisoi Tahasil. This incredible feat was made possible through a well-orchestrated step-by-step approach at the village level, involving extensive discussions with district administration and government officers.

The district administration and government officers engaged in detailed discussions to lay the foundation for this monumental undertaking. At the block, tahasil, and Grama panchayat levels, informative FRA orientation and training programs were conducted, ensuring that forest communities were well-versed in the claim-making process. The Forest Rights Committee (FRC) occurred in the presence of the Grama sabha, ensuring inclusivity and representation of all community members.

Extensive evidence was compiled, supported by documentation and detailed records of roads, rivers, forests, sacred sites, traditional knowledge, grazing lands, and more. A meticulous sketch map was prepared, incorporating GPS mapping to represent the village boundaries and essential community resources accurately. Collaborative meetings with neighboring villages (3 villages) were held to verify shared resources, fostering cooperation. The process culminated with a final Grama sabha meeting, where all records and decisions were meticulously recorded, ready for submission to the Sub-Divisional Level Committee (SDLC).

Through this process, challenges surrounding the collection of Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP), such as mahua flowers, were skillfully addressed through sustainable harvesting practices. Despite the complexities arising from a large village with varied political groups, the Gramasabha successfully orchestrated the claim-making process, unifying communities around a common goal.



FRA awareness programs were conducted to overcome the lack of awareness at the village level, emphasizing the importance of collective efforts for the benefit of all. The demarcation of Individual Forest Rights (IFR) land was thoughtfully managed to prevent disputes and conflicts. This incredible success story of securing 607 Individual Forest Rights and 22 Community Forest Resource Rights is a testament to the unwavering spirit of forest communities in the Mayurbhanj District. Through collaborative efforts, inclusivity, and dedication, the villagers demonstrated the power of collective action in preserving their heritage and securing their forest rights. With GPS training and mapping, the villagers navigated the complexities of record submission with precision and accuracy.

Mayurbhanj District's achievements inspire other regions, exemplifying the transformative potential of unity, knowledge, and sustainable practices. Let us celebrate this remarkable accomplishment and continue supporting efforts that empower communities and protect our natural heritage.

THE REMARKABLE TENACITY OF ADIVASI FAMILIES IN SIMILIPAL

➤➤➤ DISPLACEMENT

In the picturesque landscape of Simlipal Tiger Reserve, a remarkable tale of courage and determination unfolds. Despite facing challenges and enticements, the Adivasi families of Ramjodi village in Karanjia block, Odisha, adamantly refuse to leave their ancestral homes in pursuit of modern amenities.

Gobardhan Nayak, a respected elder of the Gond Adivasi community, speaks passionately about their unwavering stance: "Development is vital, but not at the cost of displacement. Our ancestral home holds deep cultural and emotional significance, and we are determined to remain connected to our roots."

In 2017, nearly half Ramjodi's family were relocated to a rehabilitation colony in Sialinoi village outside the reserve boundary, promising a brighter future. The village lies near a stream that falls from a beautiful waterfall.



The waterfall is about 3 kilometers from Ramjodi village. The rehabilitation colony in Sialinoi village is about 35 kilometers from their original habitation.

Gobardhan Nayak's family is the only Gond family that refused to relocate from their ancestral home despite threats of fake hunting charges and the lure of a rehabilitation package and modern amenities.

"We also want to remain connected. We don't have television here because there is no electricity here. If the government provides electricity, we can arrange for television. What is the big deal about it? But if the government wants us to leave our ancestral home to watch TV, we will not. We are happy here even without TV," says Gobardhan Nayak with much conviction.

18 families of 34 families in Ramjodi village, including two families of Gobardhan Nayak brothers, have been displaced. Soon after their rehabilitation, Forest Department personnel



Demolished their original houses using JCB machines. The forest department wants to evacuate people living inside the Simlipal Tiger Reserve to get National Park status in Simlipal.

However, the livelihood needs of people have been barely taken care of in the rehabilitation package offered by the forest government.

The families that have accepted the rehabilitation package have Rs 10 Lakh in fixed deposits, a house under the PM Rural Housing Scheme, and 30 decimals of homestead land, including the land on which the house is built. However, the houses offered to displaced families are of inferior quality. The houses don't have proper ventilation, and most have started leaking in less than five years of their construction.

The families in the rehabilitation colony of Sialinoi village face the challenge of meeting their livelihood needs. Most of the families that got relocated from Ramjodi village belong to the Khadiya community.

It is one of the 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) of Odisha. The primary livelihood of the Khadiya community comes from the sale of wild honey, which they fetch from Simlipal Tiger Reserve.

Pratap Dehury (28) from the Sialinoi rehabilitated colony says, "We were living in Ramjodi village from time immemorial, but then forest department officials started saying that we have to relocate because this is a tiger reserve.

They said that they would take care of all our needs, but I was forced to run from one office to another to get my house under PMGAY completed.

Now I want to extend my house, but I don't have money. The money that we got under the rehabilitation package can be withdrawn only with the permission of the collector."



Biranchi Dehury of the same village says; that now he doesn't have any livelihood options other than his ten goats and paddy cultivation, which he does on a piece of land he leases from someone. He says they rarely go to fetch honey now as the forest is quite far from their place.

Reality fell short of expectations for displaced families of Ramjodi village. The houses provided were of poor quality, lacked proper ventilation, and began deteriorating within five years. Furthermore, their traditional livelihoods, such as gathering wild honey, were severely impacted due to their distance from the forest.

The Adivasi families' resilience reflects their harmonious coexistence with nature. They question the necessity of displacement for development, urging a more sustainable approach that respects their rights and unique way of life.

A MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE FOREST CONSERVATION AND LIVELIHOODS



➤➤➤ CONSERVATION

Nestled in Daspalla block, Nayagarh district, Kusumgadia village is a shining example of community-driven forest protection, conservation, and management. With 84 families residing here, comprising 43 belonging to scheduled castes and 40 to scheduled tribes, the villagers have taken it upon themselves to safeguard their precious forest resources.

In 1995, the journey began when a seven-member forest protection committee was formed to take up the task of guarding the forest. However, it wasn't until 2019 that the community decided to assert their rights and raise claims under community forest resource rights for better management. Their efforts bore fruit in 2022, when their rights were officially recognised.

The turning point came with recognizing tribal forest resource rights, which instilled a sense of ownership and responsibility among the villagers. This transformed their perspective, and they now consider the forest an extension of their homes. Daily, the villagers vigilantly protect the forest, taking turns with two-man patrols, while a dedicated forest resource management committee has been established to divide responsibilities and make informed decisions.

The village has introduced a unique law that mandates each resident spend one day a week in the forest for firewood collection. This sustainable approach ensures that everyone gathers only what they need, promoting responsible forest usage.

Moreover, a comprehensive assessment of the area's biodiversity has been conducted, allocating 80 to 90% of the forest for bamboo tree management.

The committee, now comprising 12 members, has the authority to make crucial forest protection and management decisions.

One remarkable initiative is forming a youth group exclusively responsible for assessing and harvesting bamboo once a year during the winter. Then the harvested bamboo will be sold to traders based on decisions taken by the village committee.

Harihar Jani, the committee's president, expressed his satisfaction with the progress:

"We are blessed with abundant bamboo in our forest, and with the committee's guidance, we have devised a sustainable plan for its management and trade. Our village has truly become a model for sustainable forest conservation and livelihoods."

Kusumgadia village's inspiring journey is a testament to the power of community-led initiatives in safeguarding natural resources and securing a prosperous future for future generations.

POSTCARDS PAVE THE WAY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF TRIBALS

➤➤➤ PROBLEM SOLVING



In the heart of Nayagarh District, a remarkable success story has been unfolding since 1999, where the resilience and ingenuity of tribal villages have triumphed over adversity.

Faced with challenges such as accessing old age pension (Bardhakya Bhatta) and securing Forest rights and forest resource rights, these communities found an unlikely ally in the form of small postcards—a simple yet powerful tool for change.

Recently, the women of Ranpur Central Women's Committee spearheaded a groundbreaking initiative to bring justice to 24 villages within the Mal Reserve forest under Bandhamunda Panchayat of Ranpur Block.

For sustenance, these villages have relied on the forest's bountiful produce for generations. However, obstacles, ranging from forest department pressures to a lack of awareness, hindered them from obtaining fair prices for their forest products. Undeterred, the women united their voices and penned their grievances on postcards addressed to the forest department and district magistrate.

Tikina Pradhan from Shankhyodi village shared that this method of applying pressure through postcards has been tried and tested, yielding success numerous times.

Empowered by their collective strength, the Central Women's Committee rallied a hundred individuals to write similar letters to various departmental officers, urging them to grant long-overdue old age pension to Sarojini Apa of Chhatchura village. Astonishingly, the long-standing predicament was resolved within three days, marking a resounding victory for the power of unity and postcards.

Megha Pradhan of Jamugand village recounted another compelling tale of transformation. In Mardakot Lunisahi village, women united their voices on postcards to address the issue of inadequate low-quality chhattua distribution to children.

Their efforts resulted in a government-level inspection committee and the delegation of responsibility to the village women. With monthly meetings and postcard complaints becoming the norm, women have seen a positive shift in problem-solving dynamics.

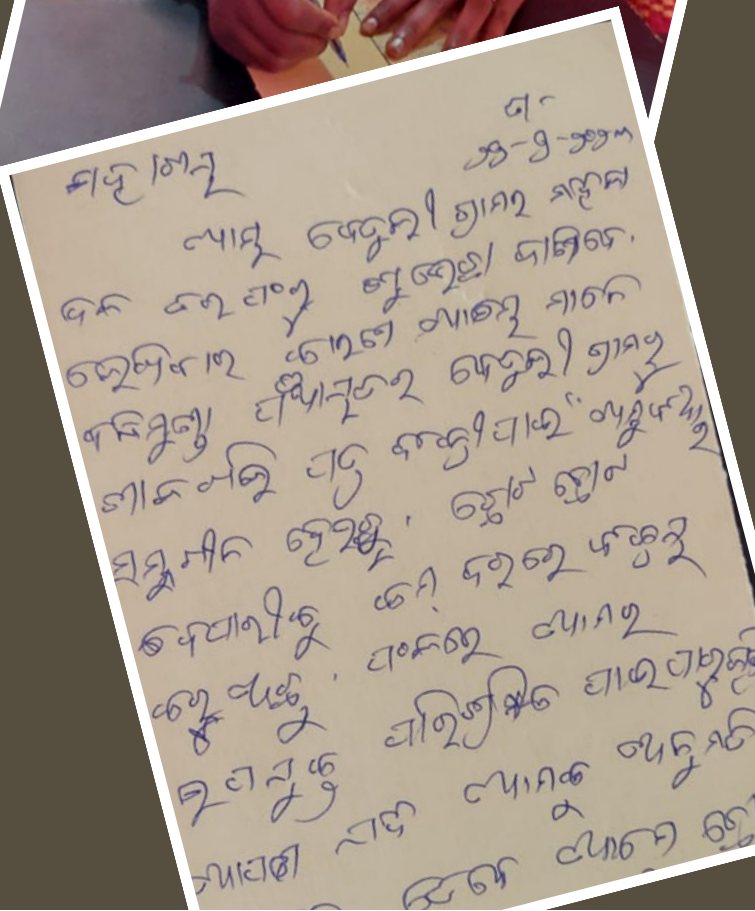
A watershed moment was achieved when Sarpanch Kisapa Pradhan, a woman of unwavering determination, actively participated in the campaign from the village of Shankodi. The significance of the 24 villages within the Mal Reserve forest cannot be overstated, as their livelihood depends on the forest resources.

However, the arduous 40-kilometer forest road to reach the market often proved insurmountable for first-time collectors, leading to the exploitation of villagers by unscrupulous retailers.

To address this concern, a postcard appeal was made to the forest department, requesting the allowance of Dala autos to access the village. This thoughtful and strategic approach could revolutionize these communities' lives.

The success story of these tribal villages is an inspiring testament to the power of collective action fueled by the simplicity of postcards. Their unwavering spirit and determination have proven that where traditional government policies falter, innovative grassroots solutions can conquer the most formidable challenges.

As these postcards continue to tell tales of change and progress, hope shines brightly on the horizon for many more communities nationwide.



MOU BETWEEN FM UNIVERSITY AND VASUNDHARA

Fakir Mohan University and policy advocacy organization Vasundhara have signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to advance action and policy research on forest governance and community-based forest management. The 36-month partnership fosters collaboration and provides valuable opportunities for research students and scholars to contribute to sustainable natural resource management.

Under the MoU, Fakir Mohan University students will engage in internship programs focused on ecology, indigenous knowledge systems, biodiversity conservation, and climate change. Vasundhara will facilitate the program and provide expert-led seminars and workshops.

The collaboration will also develop a Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (Tkdl) to protect traditional knowledge from biopiracy and create an ethnos biodiversity dictionary integrating biodiversity and public health.

This alliance marks a significant step towards sustainable forest management, empowering students and researchers to impact forest ecosystems and local communities positively.



AWARENESS MEETING ON 'MO JUNGLE JAMI YOJANA'



The state government is set to launch the 'Mo Jungle Jami Yojana,' a pioneering scheme aimed at expediting the recognition of rights granted by the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and accelerating post-recognition activities within the designated timeframe.

In this regard, Vasundhara organized a meeting on the CYSD Campus on July 10th with its volunteer to familiarize him with the 'Mo Jungle Jami Yojana' and understand the importance of providing justice to the forest-dwelling community of Odisha.

Y. Giri Rao, the Executive Director of Vasundhara, expressed, "The Mo Jungle Jami Yojana scheme will establish Forest Rights Cells at the tahsil and district levels, comprising proficient personnel, to ensure the efficient implementation of the FRA, 2006. This initiative aims to expedite post-recognition activities within the specified timeframe."

Noted academician Professor AB Ota, former Director of the Tribal Research Institute, also attended the meeting and conveyed to the fellow Vasundhara volunteer that the ST and SC Development Department has devised this scheme. It entails the establishment of forest rights cells at the tehsil and district levels, staffed with qualified individuals to guarantee and support the effective execution of the FRA, 2006.

The government's primary objective is to ensure that all eligible claimants, especially single women and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), receive land titles. Additionally, it aims to make necessary corrections to records for all title holders. The scheme also focuses on converting all identified unsurveyed and forest villages into revenue villages while ensuring access to water supplies, road connectivity, healthcare, and schools for every household. Addressing post-recognition issues, such as providing livelihood support through converging government schemes.

BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING EQUALITY

After a highly productive meeting with esteemed authorities, including the District Collector, Sub Collector, and District Welfare Officer (DWO), Vasundhara is overjoyed to announce a significant stride toward gender equality and empowerment in Nayagarh district.

In line with our unwavering commitment to inclusivity, the district administration of Nayagarh has issued a groundbreaking directive to all Tehsildars. The directive mandates immediately including women's names in the Record of Rights (RoR) for Individual Forest Rights (IFR). This momentous decision ensures that women's invaluable contributions and rights are recognized and officially documented.

The objective is to discuss the process for initiating the correction of Community Forest Resource Rights (CFR) titles. This milestone marks a significant step toward creating a more equitable society where every individual's rights and identities are respected.

In a proactive move, a Vasundhara team member visited the Ranpur Tehsil Office to discuss initiating the process for RoR correction of 14 CFR titles, encompassing 24 villages. These titles were distributed in 2022. During the visit, it came to light that women's names from Ranpur were not mentioned in the RoR of the IFR, which had already been uploaded on the LRMS portal for public access.

In a heartening turn of events, the Tehsildar has assured us that the correction process for CFR and IFR RoRs, including women's names, will commence promptly on Tuesday. The updated RoRs will be uploaded on the LRMS portal shortly thereafter.

MEETING FOCUS ON EMPOWERING LIVELIHOODS

The Banigocha Region saw a momentous gathering of women from six producer groups at the Kumbhikila village in a promising development. The zonal BoD meeting was held in Danju village of Dalapada GP, Khajuripada Block, Kandhamal District. Apart from this an engaging session on the institutional building process for AdiBhumi Mahila Sangha in Daspalla and a preliminary meeting with the Sargiful volunteer and the Representative of MFP collectives at the Khajuripada GP Training Hall.

The meeting focused on empowering livelihoods and fostering sustainable growth. Critical discussions centered around the flourishing ventures of Sal seed, Shiali leaf plates, and Mango Carnal, exploring innovative approaches for production and marketing strategies. The meeting highlighted efforts to uplift tribal communities and promote transparency in account management. The region also welcomed new WHH volunteers geared to make a positive impact alongside the Kujamendhi Panchayat. With renewed enthusiasm, Banigocha Region is marching towards a stronger future, creating opportunities for all.



EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN FOREST RIGHTS AND LAND OWNERSHIP SHOW MIXED RESULTS

The latest progress report from May to July 2023 reveals significant strides in forest land claims and the conversion of forest villages into revenue villages across various districts in Odisha. The state government's initiatives to recognize and secure the rights of forest-dwelling communities are steadily moving forward, with some districts making notable progress.

New Claim-Making Process:

During the reporting period, the New Claim Making Process witnessed substantial efforts to secure land rights for forest-dependent communities in different districts. A total of 1,439 target villages were identified under this process. The process involved several key steps, including introductory visits, Gram Sabha holds, and the constitution or reconstitution of Forest Rights Committees (FRC).

Among the districts, Gajapati led the way with 90 target villages, completing introductory visits and Gram Sabha holds. Additionally, 21 FRCs were constituted or reconstituted in the district. In comparison, districts like Rayagada and Bhadrak faced some challenges, with fewer villages completing the process.

Follow-up Pending Claims:

Despite progress in the New Claim Making Process, several claims were pending approval. Of the 268 claims submitted to the State Level Development Committee (SDLC), only 154 were approved during this period. Notably, Sambalpur district made considerable headway, with 41 claims approved by SDLC and a significant area of 8,113 hectares recognized.

Conversion of Forest Village into Revenue Village:

Efforts to convert forest villages into revenue villages have been initiated across the state. In this regard, Gajapati district led with 54 villages initiating the process. However, none of the claims reached the approval stage at SDLC or higher authorities.



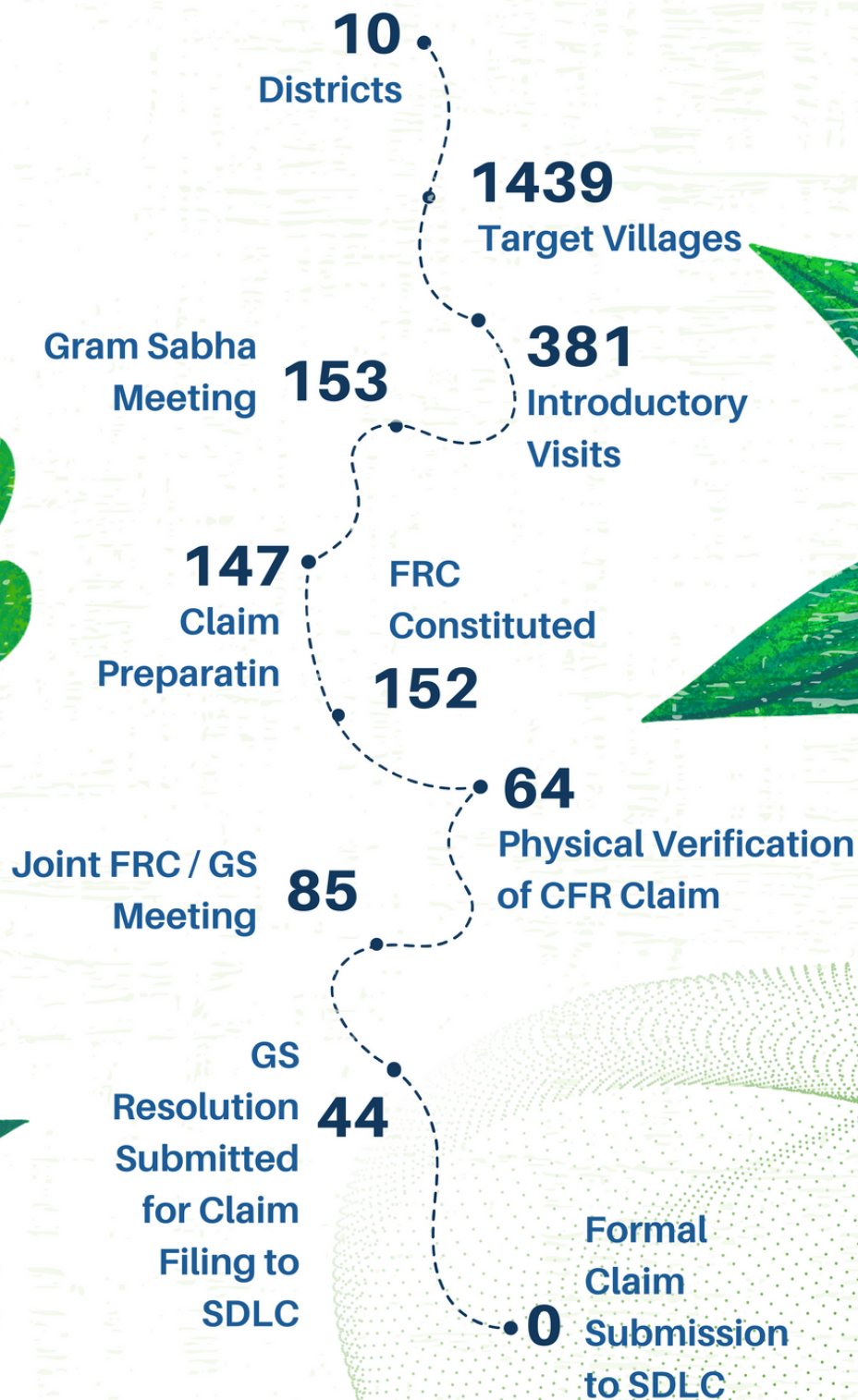
Conversely, Mayurbhanj and Sambalpur districts have made commendable progress, with 2 and 1 villages being approved for conversion. Mayurbhanj secured recognition for 133 hectares of land, while Sambalpur achieved 399 hectares.

In conclusion, Odisha's journey towards securing forest rights and converting forest villages into revenue villages shows promising developments in some districts. However, challenges in processing pending claims and obtaining approvals remain prevalent. The state government and relevant authorities continue to promote equitable land ownership and protect forest-dwelling communities' rights. As the efforts continue, the hope is that more progress will be made in the coming months to ensure the welfare and empowerment of these marginalized communities.



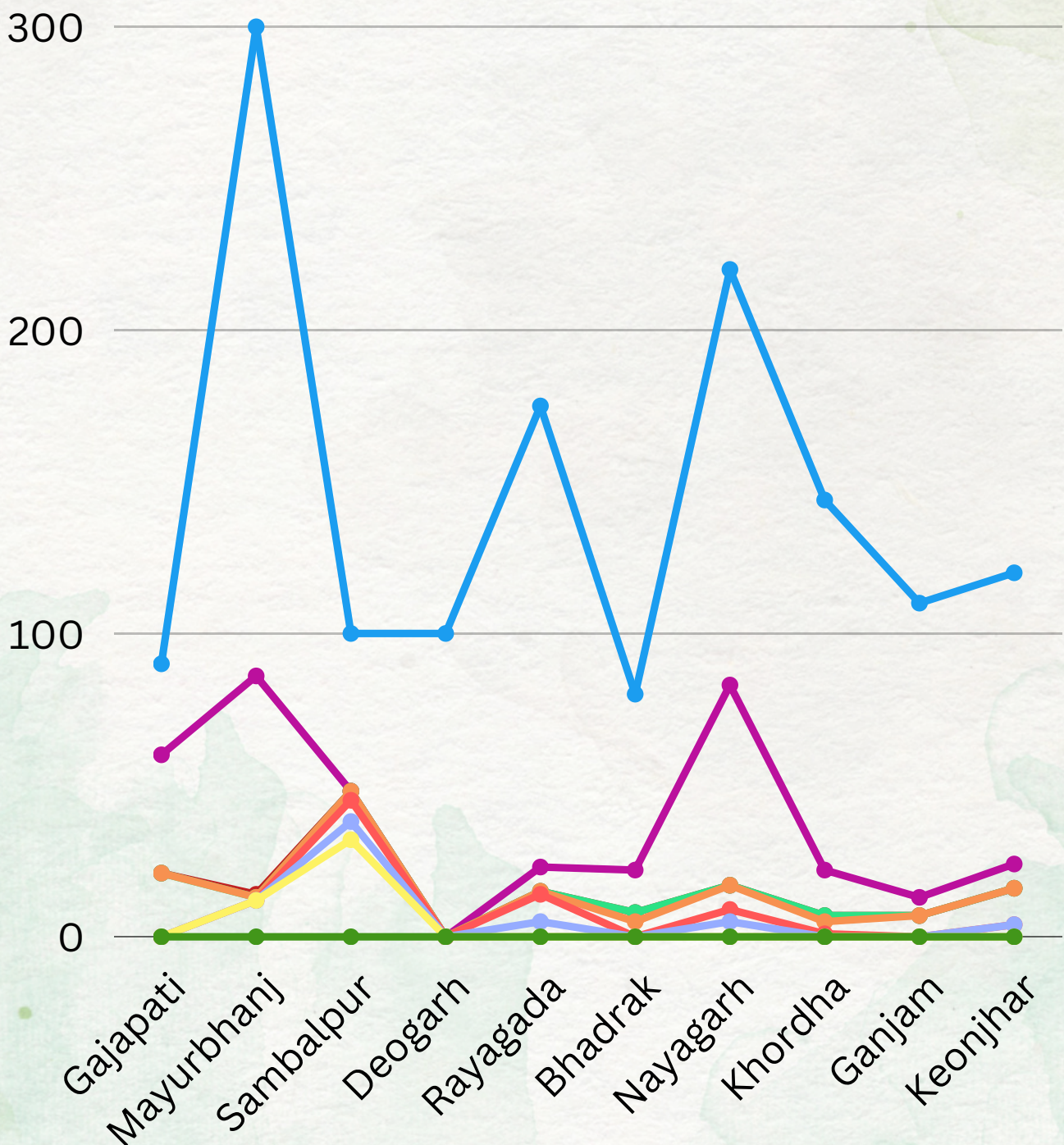
FOREST RIGHTS STATISTICS

It is the information related to
new claim making process of Vasundhara for the period
May 23 - Jul 23



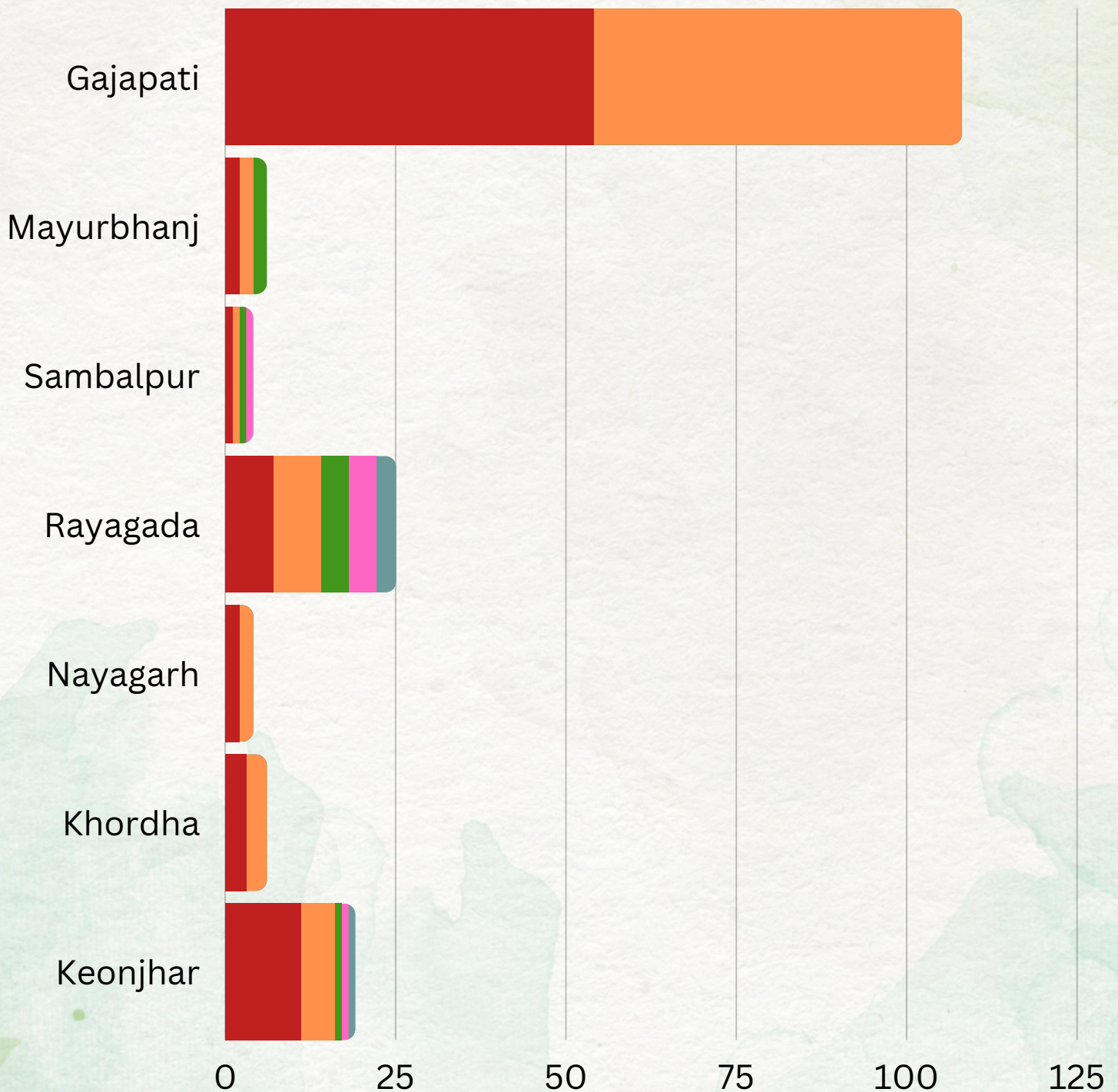
DISTRICT WISE DATA

- No. of Target Village
- Introductory visit
- No. of Gram Sabha Hold
- No. of FRC Constituted/Re-Constituted
- Preparation of Claims
- Joint FRC/GS meeting with neighbouring v...
- Physical Verification Of CFR claims and ...
- GS Resolution for Claims submissions to ...
- Formal Submission to SDLC



CONVERSION OF FOREST VILLAGE INTO REVENUE VILLAGE

■ Target ■ Process Initiated
■ Submitted at SDLC ■ Approved by SDLC
■ Approved by DLC





Meeting with ACF Khordha is needed for possible collaboration on a community-based Forest Management plan



discussion with the esteemed CEO of ORMAS, Deogarh, covering various topics and development areas for PGs



meeting chaired by Tahasildar Harichandanpur, significant updates on the conversion of forest villages into revenue villages were discussed



Key stakeholders from the Revenue, Forest, and Welfare departments came together under the leadership of Tahasildar Mohana.



Mission Sakti and OLM Chakapada organized an enlightening awareness program, where Vasundhara as a guest