

# JUNE- JULY 2024

# IN THE LOOP



Vasundhara Newsletter, 10th July

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## OVERVIEW :

## Women at the Heart of Vasundhara's 30-Year Success Story

A state-level consultation program for women forest gatherers was held on July 17th and 18th. A significant highlight of the event was the participation of women from five districts, 21 blocks, and 253 villages. Over the years, these women have undergone remarkable transformation, acquired valuable skills, and strengthened their community ties. Their involvement with Vasundhara has not only

empowered them but also deepened their understanding of sustainable practices.

The event was a celebration of cultural diversity, featuring captivating performances by participants from various tribes. Through songs and dances, they showcased their rich cultural heritage and a sense of unity among the attendees. As Vasundhara enters its next decade, participants are optimistic about the future. They discussed strategies to further enhance their efforts and achieve even greater impact.

- Kalikaprasad village celebrates assertion of Forest Rights
- CR CFR claim making process.
- ST&SC commissioner promises forest rights to Dengajhari and cashew unit for Kodalpalli .
- Mango Kernels: A New Source of Income.

## Three-day Gender Budget training at Pipili



A comprehensive three-day Gender Budget Training Program concluded at The Ranch Resort in Pipili, bringing together 35 participants including WHH fellows, PRI members, research associates, and village volunteers.

The program, held from June 24-26, focused on addressing gender discrimination and implementing effective gender-responsive budgeting at the panchayat level.

Expert speakers including Ms. Ranjita Patnaik, Sailabala Panda, Ghasiram Panda Pravas Mishra, and Ms. Upali Mohanty led sessions covering crucial topics from gender discrimination awareness to practical budget implementation strategies. The training featured interactive sessions on comparing gender status in Odisha, understanding gender budgeting processes, and developing women-friendly panchayat initiatives.



Participants engaged in practical exercises, including family budget simulations and role-playing scenarios, to better understand gender-based challenges and budgetary planning. The program concluded with certificate distribution, equipping attendees with tools to promote gender-sensitive approaches in local governance and community development.

## Leadership Camp for Tribal Women

A two-day District Level Women's Leadership Camp concluded successfully at CET Campus, Keonjhar, bringing together 32 Juango tribal women leaders from two blocks of Keonjhar district.

The camp, organized by Vasundhara with support from German Cooperation and WHH on June 21-22, 2024, focused on developing leadership skills and empowering tribal women to take active roles in their communities.

Trainers including Sri. Debasish Pradhan, Nihar Takri (POCB, ITDA Champua), and Sri Sushant (CBIB of MJJM) led sessions covering crucial topics such as self-awareness, effective leadership, and various government initiatives including Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (VDVK) and OPELIP programs. Through role-playing exercises and interactive sessions, participants explored different leadership styles and community development strategies.

The program highlighted opportunities in tribal livelihood enhancement and emphasized the importance of women's participation in local governance. Ms. Ranjita Pattanaik, Program Officer, WHH, who coordinated the event.



## Mahak Sandhayani Sangha Holds First General Board Meeting



Mahak Sandhayani Sangha held its first general board meeting on June 19, 2024, in Jashipur, Mayurbhanj district. The meeting, a significant milestone since the Sangha's founding in 2021, brought together board members to discuss the progress of Producer Groups (PGs), identify challenges, and plan future initiatives. Sumati Soren was introduced as the Chairman, along with other new board members. The discussion focused on empowering the 36 PGs, which currently comprise 881 members, to improve their operations in managing and selling Minor Forest Produce (MFP). The meeting highlighted the importance of women's empowerment. Vasundhara's executive director Y. Giri Rao emphasizes their critical role as primary income earners and advocates for skill development to create sustainable communities. However, a significant challenge identified was the language barrier among members, which affects communication and education. Plans were set in motion to address this issue, improve collaboration, and enhance the operational systems within the PGs.

## ST&SC commissioner promises forest rights to Dengajhari and cashew unit for Kodalpalli



Roopa Roshan Sahoo, Special Secretary to the Chief Minister and also as Commissioner-cum-Secretary of ST & SC Development, visited Vasundhar's intervention area Dengajhari and Kodalpalli villages in Nayagarh district on June 26, 2024.

Her main purpose was to observe how women in these villages have traditionally conserved and managed forests.

During her day-long visit, she engaged with

the community to understand their perspectives on forest conservation. She assured the villagers that their long-awaited Community Forest rights claim would be reviewed by the state, with titles expected to be granted by August 15 of this year. She promptly directed the sub-collector of Nayagarh to expedite the necessary formalities.

Additionally, in Dengajhari, she promised support from the ST & SC Development department for the establishment of "jungle kutira," a unique learning center that captures their knowledge of forest conservation and management. She also promised to address the villagers' concerns regarding the recognition of Odia Kandha as a Scheduled Tribe.

At Kodalpalli, discussions centered on forest protection, conservation, management and the proposed establishment of a cashew processing unit to enhance the livelihoods of the forest-dwelling community.

# Mango Kernels: A New Source of Income

Mango kernels, which were once considered poisonous, have become a lucrative source of income for forest-dwelling communities in Odisha. This transformation is the result of an awareness program initiated by Vasundhara.

The Kandhamal and Nayagarh districts are at the forefront of this change, with forest communities selling an impressive 140 quintals of mango kernels and earning lakhs of rupees. Two women's federations, the Banani Mahila Mahasangha in Kandhamal and the Adibhumi Mahila Mahasangha in Dashapalla, Nayagarh, have played crucial roles in implementing effective collection strategies.

Both the Mahila Mahasangha Banani Mahila Mahasangha and Adibhumi Mahila Mahasangha have led this initiative, training self-help groups in effective collection methods. This effort has been particularly crucial this year, as Odisha faces a scarcity of other minor forest produce.



The women are maximising profits by selling both dried mangoes (₹50/kg) and mango kernels (₹15/kg). Sargiful Mahila Mahasangha (Kandhamal) sold 75 quintals and earned ₹1,25,000. like this, Adibhumi Mahila Mahasangha (Daspalla) Sold 55 quintals, earned ₹68,000

This initiative not only provides a new income source but also transforms a previously feared product into a valuable resource for Odisha's forest communities.