

# PRAGATI NEWSLETTER

Forest Ecosystem Services as the Foundation for  
Equitable and Sustainable Development



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## Forest Ecosystem Services as the Foundation for Equitable and Sustainable Development

**Dr. Jyothis Sathyapalan**  
Professor, CPGS&DE,  
NIRDPR

India's tropical forests are critical both ecological sustainability and rural development. They are rich in biodiversity and support millions of people who depend on forests for livelihoods, water, food, fuel, and cultural identity. Unlike the idea of forests as untouched wilderness, most forests in India are inhabited and actively used landscapes. Their survival and health are closely linked with local institutions, governance systems, and development pathways.

Forest ecosystem services such as water regulation, climate moderation, non-timber forest products, and disaster risk reduction form the foundation of rural well-being and resilience. However, these services are increasingly under stress due to climate change, land-use pressures, and fragmented governance. This article argues that forest ecosystem services must be understood and governed through an inclusive and plural approach to achieve equitable and sustainable development. It highlights the relevance of the Nature Futures Framework (NFF) developed by IPBES and underscores the central role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in shaping India's.

### India's Tropical Forests: Importance and Vulnerability

India's tropical forests extend across regions such as the Western Ghats, Central India, and the North-Eastern states. These landscapes are biodiversity-rich and provide essential ecosystem services, including groundwater recharge, soil conservation, climate regulation, and livelihood support. Forest-dependent communities rely on these ecosystems for non-timber forest products, wage employment, fuelwood, fodder, and cultural practices.

At the same time, these forests face growing pressures. Climate change has increased the frequency of floods, droughts, heat stress, and erratic rainfall, affecting forest health and productivity. Land-use change, infrastructure expansion, and fragmentation are accelerating biodiversity loss. These ecological stresses directly affect rural livelihoods, water security, and climate resilience.

Forest governance is also complex. Forest Departments, Panchayats, community institutions, and customary systems operate simultaneously, often with limited coordination. As a result, conservation and development objectives are frequently treated as separate or even conflicting goals.

### Key Challenges at the Forest-Development Interface

Four major challenges define the current forest-development relationship in India. First, climate variability and biodiversity loss are altering forest ecosystems. Biodiversity hotspots such as the Western Ghats and the North-East face rapid degradation, threatening long-term ecological stability and ecosystem services. Second, pressure on forest-based livelihoods is increasing. Millions depend on forests for income and subsistence, but declining resource availability, restricted access, market pressures, and rising human-wildlife conflict have made these livelihoods uncertain. Conservation policies are often perceived as limiting livelihood options. Third, there is a rising demand for ecosystem services. Forests function as natural infrastructure by regulating water flows, reducing disaster risks, and supporting climate adaptation. Yet these services are

rarely recognised or integrated into local development planning. Fourth, India's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) require forest restoration and carbon enhancement. Achieving these targets without local participation risks social exclusion and weak implementation.

### Ecosystem Services and Human-Nature Relationships

Human relationships with forests are shaped by both use and stewardship. While development pathways have often focused on extraction and over-use, many forest communities maintain long-standing relationships of coexistence. Forests are not only sources of material benefits but also spaces of cultural identity, spiritual meaning, and collective memory. The concept of ecosystem services, popularised by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, helped highlight how ecosystems support human well-being. Forest ecosystem services are commonly classified into provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services. This framework has been useful in linking conservation with development objectives. However, ecosystem service valuation has clear limitations. Studies in India show that values are high but highly variable. Watershed services and carbon benefits are better studied, while cultural, livelihood, and relational values remain poorly captured. Many services cannot be expressed in monetary terms, and valuation alone cannot guide equitable forest governance.

### From Ecosystem Services to Nature's Contributions to People

To address these limitations, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) introduced the concept of Nature's Contributions to People (NCP). NCP expands the ecosystem services idea by recognising multiple value systems, economic, social, cultural, and relational.

IPBES promotes plural valuation, acknowledging that different groups value nature differently. It also recognises the

importance of Indigenous and Local Knowledge in understanding forest ecosystems. The focus shifts from pricing nature to using ecosystem services and NCP to support inclusive and informed decision-making.

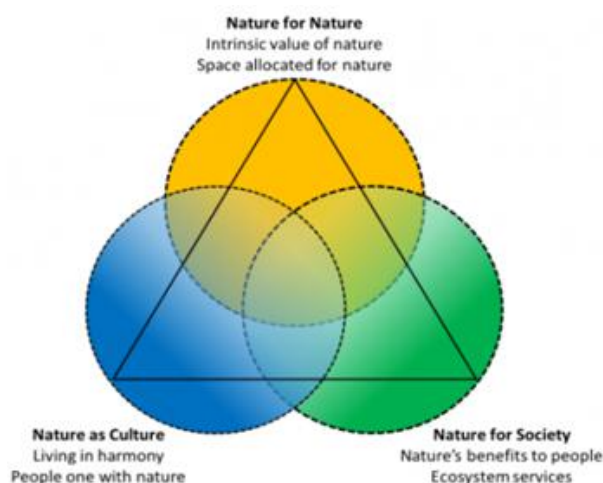
### The Nature Futures Framework: A Plural and Transformative Lens

Building on plural values, IPBES developed the Nature Futures Framework (NFF). The NFF helps societies imagine futures where people and nature thrive together. It is based on three interconnected perspectives:

**Nature for Nature** – biodiversity and ecological integrity

**Nature for Society** – ecosystem services and livelihoods

**Nature as Culture** – identity, knowledge, and stewardship



The framework emphasises that sustainable development is possible only when these perspectives are integrated. Focusing on a single objective, such as carbon sequestration, risks weakening both ecological and social outcomes.

### Why India Needs a Plural Forest Approach

India's forest landscapes are socially and ecologically diverse. The country has extensive forest and tree cover, a high tribal population, and rich cultural traditions linked to forests. These landscapes face increasing climate risks and development pressures. A narrow focus on protection or carbon ignores

livelihoods and cultural values, often leading to conflict and weak local stewardship. The Nature Futures Framework provides a way to balance conservation, development, and social justice in forest governance.

### **Panchayati Raj Institutions and Nature Futures**

Panchayati Raj Institutions play a critical role in India's forest landscapes. Panchayats are the closest governance institutions to forests, commons, and forest-dependent communities. Rural development outcomes water security, livelihoods, disaster resilience, and climate adaptation depend heavily on forest ecosystem services. The Nature Futures Framework helps Panchayats integrate biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, and community stewardship within local planning. Local self-governance thus becomes central to shaping nature-positive development pathways.

### **Operationalising Nature Futures through GPDP and Schemes**

The Nature Futures approach can be implemented using existing institutions. The Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) provides a platform to integrate forests, commons, water, and climate concerns into development planning. Gram Sabhas can recognise cultural and relational values of forests and strengthen collective stewardship. Convergence of schemes such as MGNREGS, NRLM, PMKSY, and watershed programmes can support forest restoration, livelihood diversification, and climate resilience. The Forest Rights Act (FRA), especially Community Forest Resource rights, strengthens equitable access and benefit sharing.

### **Gaps in Current Forest Management**

Forest management in India remains largely sectoral and top-down. Emphasis is placed on protection, timber, and increasingly carbon-centric approaches. Economic valuation focuses on easily measurable services, while livelihood,

cultural, and relational values remain under-recognised. This creates risks of exclusion, conflict, and weak local ownership. Conservation outcomes under such conditions are fragile and difficult to sustain. Shared custodianship between Forest Departments, Panchayats, and communities is essential. The application of this approach is particularly important in village forests, which are highly fragmented and degraded in many parts of India. These forests are under constant pressure from overuse, land conversion, and climate stress, yet they remain crucial for local livelihoods and ecosystem services.

### **Conclusion**

Forest ecosystem services are the foundation of sustainable and equitable rural development in India. They link biodiversity, livelihoods, water security, cultural identity, and climate resilience. An inclusive ecosystem services approach, guided by the Nature Futures Framework, provides a powerful lens for forest governance. Panchayati Raj Institutions are central to translating this vision into action. By integrating ecological integrity, livelihood needs, and cultural values within GPDPs and local governance, Panchayats can shape India's forest futures from the ground up. India's nature-positive future will be built village by village, through empowered local institutions and shared stewardship of forests. A plural and inclusive framework helps restore ecological functions while strengthening community stewardship and local governance.

(Based on the keynote presented at the Tropical Forestry Conclave 2025, KSCSTE-Kerala Forest Research Institute, Kerala, 15-19 December 2025)

## Workshop on Digital Storytelling for Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in Local Governance



***Dr Anjan Kumar Bhanja, Associate Professor & Head, CPRDP&SSD, NIRDPR, with participants during the workshop on Digital Storytelling for Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in Local Governance***

**A** two-day national workshop on 'Digital Storytelling for Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in Local Governance' was organised by the School of Excellence in Panchayati Raj (SoEPR), NIRDPR, on 18-19 December 2025. Elected women representatives from five states- Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Tamil Nadu & Maharashtra participated in the first cohort of this unique initiative. The primary aim of the programme was to empower women leaders in local governance by equipping them with digital communication skills. The workshop focused on using digital storytelling as a tool to enhance political leadership, document grassroots impact, and leverage modern technology for effective local administration. The first day focused on conceptual understanding and technical foundations: The day began with registration and a pre-assessment led by Mr. Arun Raj, Training Manager. Dr. Deeksha, Assistant Professor, SoEPR provided an overview of the workshop, followed by a keynote address from Dr. Anjan Kumar Bhanja, Associate Professor and Head, CPRDP&SSD.

Dr A. K. Bhanja highlighted the importance of digital storytelling for women elected representatives to have a wider impact on their leadership and find their voice, which amplifies their work, values and commitment to development. He presented several examples of how social media and

digital pathways can enable leaders, especially women leaders, to showcase their work, create transparency and accountability and overcome various barriers within local governance and politics. Ms Pousali Sarkar led a session on the prospects and impact of digital storytelling in the context of gender and political leadership. Participants were introduced to scripting and the use of AI tools by Mr Kaushik Babu and Dr Srikanth, both Producers associated with the AV Lab of SoEPR. An afternoon session provided practical tips on mobile filmmaking, conducted by a team including Mr Kaushik Babu, Mr Srikanth, and Mr Kranthi Kiran. The day concluded with instructions on preparing for shooting scripts and an introduction to a storytelling competition.

The second day shifted towards hands-on practice and application. A dedicated practice session for field shooting was facilitated by the AV lab, SoEPR. Participants learned the basics of video editing and further applications of AI tools. A practical session on "Editing for Impact" allowed participants to refine their captured footage. The workshop concluded with film previews, where participants received feedback and comments on their work from the resource persons. The Valedictory session began with feedback from participants from each state, an address by Dr Bhanja, and a vote of thanks by Dr Deeksha.

## Towards Climate-Resilient Gram Panchayats: National Write shop Brings Experts and Panchayats Together



*Dr G. Narendra Kumar, IAS, Director General, NIRDPR, along with Dr Jyothis Sathyapalan, Professor & Head, CPGS & DE; Dr Ravindra S. Gavali, Professor & Head, CNRM, CCDM; and, Dr Anjan Kumar Bhanja, Associate Professor & Head, CPRDP&SSD, during the National Writeshop on “Carbon-Neutral and Climate-Resilient Gram Panchayats*

**T**he School of Excellence in Panchayati Raj (SoEPR) at the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, in collaboration with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Government of India, organised a two-day National Writeshop on “Carbon-Neutral and Climate-Resilient Gram Panchayats” on 22–23 December 2025 at the NIRDPR campus.

The writeshop brought together experts from national research institutions, policy organisations, and field-based agencies, including representatives from GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment (GB Pant NIHE), Thanal Trust, Telangana Pollution Control Board, EPTRI and WRI India, along with faculty members from NIRDPR. Importantly, the discussions were strengthened by the participation of Sarpanches from Bela Gram Panchayat, Bhandara, Maharashtra, and Kanha Gram Panchayat, Nandigama Mandal, Rangareddy, Telangana, who shared first-hand experiences of implementing climate and sustainability initiatives at the village level. This combination of technical expertise and grassroots leadership

ensured that the discussions remained grounded in practical realities.

Across India, Gram Panchayats are increasingly facing the impacts of climate change—ranging from heatwaves, floods, droughts, and water stress to declining livelihoods and environmental degradation. While national and state-level policies and schemes for climate action exist, translating them into practical, village-level action remains a challenge.

Recognising this gap, SoEPR–NIRDPR initiated the development of a training module focused on carbon-neutral and climate-resilient Gram Panchayats. The writeshop was organised to ensure that this module moves beyond theory and becomes a usable, practice-oriented training resource for Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

The discussions covered key areas such as:

- Understanding climate change and local climate risks
- Climate adaptation and ecosystem-based resilience
- Sector-wise approaches to reducing carbon emissions
- Community engagement and participatory planning
- Learning from existing best practices and scaling them up

Experts emphasised that the training module must move away from a largely technical and theoretical approach and instead become practical, solution-oriented, and facilitation-driven. The discussions highlighted the need to focus on what Gram Panchayats can realistically implement, using existing schemes, local resources, and strong community participation. Building basic climate literacy was seen as a critical foundation before moving towards planning and action. Experts recommended designing the module as a blended training programme, combining classroom interaction, hands-on practice, and guided self-learning, with a strong emphasis on adaptation-led planning supported by simple tools for risk mapping, action planning, and monitoring.

A key strength of the writeshop was the sharing of real-world experiences and ongoing practices from across the country. Experts discussed examples of climate-positive action already being undertaken by Gram Panchayats, including the adoption of renewable energy and electric mobility, community-led waste management

and large-scale plantations, ecosystem-based adaptation practices, and the use of tools for estimating emissions and sector-wise planning. It was emphasised that such experiences should be systematically documented and shared, enabling Gram Panchayats to learn from one another and aspire towards achievable climate goals.

The writeshop concluded with a shared understanding that local climate action must be embedded within routine Panchayat planning processes, particularly Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs), and supported through convergence with existing schemes rather than standalone initiatives. Community participation, practical tools, and strong local leadership were identified as essential drivers of effective climate action. The insights generated during the writeshop will guide the next phase of work on the training module, helping SoEPR-NIRDPR and the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) strengthen capacity-building efforts for Panchayati Raj Institutions across the country and support Gram Panchayats in becoming resilient, low-carbon, and future-ready.



## National Workshop on Thematic Module Revision: Clean & Green, Water-Sufficient and Self-Sufficient Infrastructure Panchayat



*Dr G. Narendra Kumar, IAS, Director General, along with Dr R. Ramesh, Associate Professor & Head, Centre for Rural Infrastructure; Dr Anjan Kumar Bhanja, Associate Professor & Head, CPRDP&SSD ; and Dr Tandra Mondal, Assistant Professor, NIRDPR, with participants of National Workshop*

The School of Excellence in Panchayati Raj (SoEPR) at the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, in collaboration with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Government of India, organised a three-day National Workshop on “Thematic Module Revision: Clean & Green Panchayat, Water-Sufficient Panchayat, and Self-Sufficient Infrastructure Panchayat” on 22-24 December 2025 at the NIRDPR campus.

Dr Anjan Kumar Bhanja, Associate Professor & Head, CPRDP&SSD, in his Keynote Address mentioned that this workshop is designed to review, strengthen, and harmonise the modules for better field relevance and capacity-building effectiveness. He also stated that as GPDP preparation increasingly demands evidence-based planning, convergence across schemes, and adherence to indicator frameworks such as PAI and XV FC guidelines, the existing modules require revision to reflect updated policies,

emerging practices, state-level Innovations and improved training designs. The Lead Sessions on the above-mentioned three themes were taken by Dr C.Kathiresan, Associate Professor & Head, CIAT & SJ NIRDPR, Dr R.Ramesh, Associate Professor & Head, CRI, NIRDPR, Mr Venkatkumar Tangirala, Managing Director, Windstream Energy Technologies, Hyderabad and Ms Sharda Gaidhane, Sarpanch, Bela Gram Panchayat, Maharashtra.

The workshop brought together experts from academic and research institutions, Faculty specialising in rural development, water governance, environment, and infrastructure, elected representatives from high-performing Gram Panchayats, Government officials from state PR departments, and SIRD&PRs, organisations working in green technologies, renewable energy, and waste management and WASH consultants of UNICEF and JJM/SBM specialists.

Dr Naveen Chaturvedi, Asst. Prof, SoEPR, Dr Tandra Modal, Asst. Prof. SoEPR and Dr Anshika Singh, Assistant Prof SoEPR, presented the revised training modules, organising the discussions around one theme per day. Experts were divided into three groups to deliberate on each theme and develop group presentations. Accordingly, one theme was discussed in detail each day.

As a result of these deliberations:

- Training modules for Themes 4, 5, and 6 were updated and streamlined.
- Session plans, facilitator guides, and training methodologies were refined and improved.

- Learning materials were strengthened through revised FAQs, MCQs, and case studies.
- A clearer, integrated framework was developed, highlighting the interlinkages among water, sanitation, infrastructure, energy, and environmental management.

Dr Tandra Mondal, Assistant Professor, SoEPR, along with Ms K. Vidyullatha, Consultant, SoEPR and Mr Upender, Sr. Consultant, SoEPR, coordinated the Workshop effectively. Their efforts created a highly collaborative environment, enabling experts to comfortably and enthusiastically share their inputs for the revision of the training modules.

## Bharat Darshan Programme: BPSC Officer Trainees Visit NIRDPR



**Dr G. Narendra Kumar, IAS, Director General, NIRDPR, with Dr Anjan Kumar Bhanja, posing for a group photograph with Officer Trainees of the 69th BPSC batch during the Bharat Darshan Programme at NIRDPR**

A five-day Exposure Visit for Officer Trainees of the 69th BPSC batch under the Bharat Darshan Programme was organised at NIRDPR, Hyderabad from 20-24 December 2025. The programme was sponsored by BIPARD, Government of Bihar, and organised by the Centre for Panchayati Raj, Decentralised Planning and Social Service Delivery (CPRDP&SSD), NIRDPR. A total of 128 Officer Trainees, along with two BIPARD Coordinators, participated in the programme.

Dr Anjan Kumar Bhanja, Course Director and Associate Professor & Head, CPRDP&SSD, delivered the welcome address and provided an overview of the programme, highlighting its objectives, structure, and expectations from the participants. The academic sessions were enriched by a special address from Dr G. Narendra Kumar, IAS, Director General, NIRDPR, on “Leadership in the Age of AI

and Beyond Timeless Lessons for Modern Leaders.” His lecture drew insightful parallels between contemporary leadership thought, including Simon Sinek’s ideas, and classical Indian wisdom from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavat Gita. Emphasis was placed on humility, ethical conduct, conflict resolution, self-awareness, equanimity, duty (dharma), compassionate leadership, and action-oriented governance.

As part of the field exposure component, participants were divided into three groups and undertook a visit to Malkapur Gram Panchayat, where they observed grassroots governance practices, community participation, and local development initiatives. The final day featured group-wise presentations on field learnings and training reflections, followed by constructive feedback and guidance from Dr Anjan Kumar Bhanja and Dr Ajit Kumar Singh, Senior Consultant, SoEPR.

## 30-Day Community Auditor Certification Programme under DAY-NRLM Concludes at NIRDPR



***Programme Coordinator Dr Vanishree Joseph, along with NRLM-RC Mr Jyoti Prakash Mohanty and Mr Ravi Naidu seen with participants of 30-Day Community Auditor Certification Programme under DAY-NRLM***

**T**he National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, (NIRDPR), through its DAY-NRLM Resource Cell, successfully conducted a 30-Day Community Auditor Certification Programme under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) from 01 November to 05 December 2025.

The intensive capacity-building programme aimed at strengthening the competencies of community auditors in social and financial auditing, transparency, and accountability within Self-Help Group (SHG) institutions and DAY-NRLM implementation structures. Participants drawn from different States underwent structured classroom sessions, practical exercises, and field-oriented learning modules focusing on audit processes, governance standards, community institutions, and programme guidelines.

The certification programme placed strong emphasis on participatory auditing practices, ethical standards, and the role of community auditors in promoting good governance and financial discipline at the grassroots level. Interactive sessions, group work, and hands-on exposure enabled participants to gain practical insights into auditing SHGs, Village Organisations, and Cluster Level Federations.

The programme concluded with a valedictory session marking the successful completion of the training. The initiative reflects NIRDPR's continued commitment to supporting the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, in building robust community-based systems and strengthening accountability mechanisms under DAY-NRLM through systematic training and certification of grassroots functionaries.

## BDO Leadership Programme on Saturation of Rural Development Schemes



**Dr R. Aruna Jayamani, Assistant Professor, Centre for Good Governance & Policy Analysis, NIRDPR, with participants during Batch-I of the training programme on Saturation of Rural Development Schemes**

**T**he National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised Batch-I of the training programme on “BDO Leadership for Bringing Saturation in Rural Development Programmes: Building Prosperous Blocks” from 1 to 6 December 2025 at its campus.

The programme was designed to strengthen the leadership capacities of Block Development Officers (BDOs) and block-level functionaries to achieve saturation of key rural development schemes through convergence, evidence-based planning, and effective implementation. It focused on translating national priorities into block-level action for building prosperous, inclusive, and resilient blocks.

Participants were exposed to thematic sessions on block planning, programme convergence, saturation strategies, use of data and indicators, monitoring frameworks, and leadership skills, supported by case studies and practical discussions. The programme

also emphasised the critical role of BDOs in coordinating line departments, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and community institutions to ensure effective last-mile delivery of services.

Faculty members of NIRDPR and domain experts facilitated interactive and practice-oriented sessions, enabling participants to reflect on field-level challenges and develop actionable strategies for improving programme outcomes in their respective blocks.

The programme further provided a platform for peer learning and experience sharing, where participants discussed innovative practices adopted to address service delivery gaps, beneficiary saturation, and inter-departmental coordination. Structured group exercises enabled BDOs to prepare block-specific action plans, aligning them with national frameworks such as GPDP, Aspirational Blocks indicators, and outcome-based monitoring systems. These deliberations helped participants internalise practical leadership approaches for driving convergence, strengthening governance processes, and ensuring measurable development outcomes at the block level.

## Exposure Visit on Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi NREGS for Rajasthan Officials Held at NIRDPR



*Officials from Rajasthan along with Dr Anuradha Palla, Assistant Professor, CWEL, NIRDPR during the Exposure Visit on Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi NREGS*

**T**he National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj Hyderabad, organised an Exposure Visit on Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi NREGS for officials from Rajasthan from 22 to 24 December 2025. The programme was organised by the Centre for Wage Employment and Livelihoods (CWEL), NIRDPR, under the guidance of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The exposure visit was designed to provide participating officials with a deeper and practice oriented understanding of planning, execution, and monitoring processes under Mahatma Gandhi NREGS. Special emphasis was placed on improving the quality and durability of assets, ensuring timely completion of works, and strengthening convergence with other rural development and natural resource management initiatives.

Over the three days, participants took part in interactive sessions covering themes such as natural resource management, water conservation and watershed works, livelihood linked asset creation, use of digital and geo-

tagging tools, and systems for transparency and social accountability. Sessions were facilitated by NIRDPR faculty members and domain experts, who shared field-based insights and encouraged open discussions on operational challenges faced at the district and block levels.

The programme also placed strong emphasis on peer learning and experience sharing, enabling officials to exchange views on innovative practices, successful implementation models, and context-specific solutions. Group discussions and reflections helped participants identify best practices that could be adapted to local conditions in Rajasthan to enhance programme outcomes.

The exposure visit concluded with collective reflections and feedback from participants, reaffirming the importance of continuous learning, cross-state knowledge exchange, and institutional support in strengthening the effective, transparent, and outcome-oriented implementation of Mahatma Gandhi NREGS at the grassroots level.

## When Women Come Together: Field Reflections from Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman

**Dr Vanishree Joseph**  
Director, NRLM-RC  
NIRDPR



*Dr Vanishree Joseph, Director, NRLM-RC, NIRDPR, interacting with Self-Help Group members during her field visit to villages in Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman*

December 26–28, 2025

I still remember the moment clearly. Standing inside a small rice mill in Dolara village, I asked a group of women a casual question why did you name your Self-Help Group Karuna? I was expecting the answer most of us would give: compassion. Instead, the women smiled and explained that in the Warli language, Karuna means coming together working collectively and helping one another. That explanation stayed with me through the rest of my visit to Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman, because it quietly captured the spirit of what I witnessed across villages, markets, Panchayat offices, and enterprises.

### Listening First: Institutions Behind the Field

My visit began at the District Panchayat Office in Silvassa, where I interacted with the District Programme Officer and the NRLM team. What started as a formal presentation on NRLM achievements soon turned into a thoughtful conversation about the future about training needs, research support, documentation of best practices, and the potential of tourism-linked livelihoods in the Union Territory. There was a sense of pride in what had been achieved, but also clarity that

institutional support must continuously adapt to emerging aspirations at the grassroots.

### Gram Dukans and Growing Confidence

In Sayali village, I visited a Gram Dukan run by Laxmi Mahila Mandal. Rashidaben and her fellow SHG members spoke confidently about store operations monthly income, loan support, procurement of goods, and reinvestment. What struck me was not just the numbers, but the ease with which they discussed them. These were women who had moved from hesitation to ownership.

A short walk away, I met Ramiben of Vaishnavi Mahila Mandal in her PMAY-G house, built through convergence support. As we spoke about housing assistance, schooling, Anganwadi access, and livelihoods, it became evident how secure housing strengthens women's capacity to plan for the future. Livelihoods, after all, do not exist in isolation they are sustained by stability in everyday life.

At Rakholi, Ankitaben of Savitri Mahila Mandal narrated her journey of running a Gram Dukan alongside selling bamboo products sourced from Assam. She began her enterprise in 2023 with a loan from her Village Organisation ₹1lakh

that she repaid and later renewed. Her story reflected something deeper than entrepreneurship: learning to manage risk, build trust with customers, and think beyond survival toward expansion.

### **Livelihoods Where People Gather**

Some of the most vibrant livelihoods I encountered were located where life itself converges tourist spots and public spaces. Near the Vasona Lion Safari in Dapada, Mitaliben ran a Didi Café, selling snacks, tea, and cold drinks to visitors. As customers came and went, she spoke about daily sales and steady income. Her café was more than a stall; it was a statement that SHG women belong in public-facing enterprises, visible and confident.

At Kauncha Panchayat, I had the opportunity to inaugurate the Sylvan Cart, a women-managed food stall. What stayed with me was not the inauguration itself, but the quiet pride among SHG women who had gathered to support one of their own. It felt less like a launch and more like a collective milestone.

In Daman, interactions at the District Panchayat reinforced similar themes. Discussions with NRLM staff focused on programme progress and future support required from NRLM-RC, NIRDPR. A visit to the SHG food stalls at Daman beach once again highlighted how tourism can be leveraged as a steady livelihood source for women when supported institutionally.

### **Collective Enterprises, Collective Meaning**

The visit to Dolara village brought me back to the idea of Karuna. The mini rice mill managed by Karuna Mahila Mandal is run by eleven women who collectively process rice, nagli, udad, jowar, and wheat. They track electricity expenses, manage daily operations, and ensure loan repayments are made punctually. When they explained the meaning of Karuna as togetherness and mutual support, their enterprise suddenly made perfect sense. This was cooperation in practice not as a slogan, but as an everyday economic strategy.

At the Kherdi Panchayat Office, I interacted with elected women representatives Sarpanch, District Panchayat members, and Ward Members many of whom were also SHG members. They spoke about navigating governance roles alongside livelihoods, illustrating how economic empowerment often becomes the entry point to leadership and voice in local decision-making.

### **Culture as Livelihood**

In Dudhani, I visited the Warli Painting Unit run by Sangini Mahila Mandal, comprising women from the Warli tribal community. Initially producing just a few items, the group expanded its product range with technical support and convergence assistance for machinery. Participation in SARAS fairs has opened new markets for them. Their journey demonstrated how cultural heritage, when supported thoughtfully, can translate into sustainable livelihoods without losing its essence.

Nearby, at Dudhani Jetty, I met Meruben Devram Patara of Aaradana Mahila Mandal. With convergent support from NRLM and the Gram Panchayat, she runs a food stall and operates two tourist boats. She now earns around ₹50,000 per month and provides employment to two other SHG women. Her enterprise stood at the intersection of tourism, convergence, and women's entrepreneurship quietly powerful in its impact.

### **A Closing Reflection**

As I concluded my visit, the word Karuna stayed with me not as compassion alone, but as collective action. Across Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman, women are coming together—in Gram Dukans, rice mills, cafés, food carts, Panchayat offices, and art units. These are not isolated success stories; they are outcomes of sustained institution-building, convergence, and trust in women's collective capacities. When women come together, livelihoods grow but more importantly, communities begin to thrive.

## Exposure Visit on Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi NREGS in Telangana Held at NIRDPR (10–12 December 2025)



*Dr V. Suresh Babu, Associate Professor & Head, CWEL; Dr Digambar A. Chimankar, Associate Professor, CWEL; Dr G. V. Krishna Lohi Das, Assistant Professor, CWEL; Dr Sonal Mobar Roy, Assistant Professor, CWEL, and Dr Anuradha Palla, Assistant Professor, CWEL, with participants during the Exposure Visit on Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi NREGS in Telangana*

**T**he National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised an Exposure Visit on the Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi NREGS in Telangana from 10 to 12 December 2025 at its campus. The programme was conducted by the Centre for Wage Employment and Livelihoods (CWEL), NIRDPR, under the aegis of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The exposure visit aimed to familiarise participating officials and practitioners with successful implementation models and innovative practices adopted under the Mahatma Gandhi NREGS in Telangana. The programme focused on strengthening participants' understanding of planning processes, execution strategies, and monitoring mechanisms that contribute to the creation of durable assets, sustainable livelihoods, and effective natural resource management.

During the three-day programme, participants were oriented on key thematic areas such as water conservation and watershed development works, land development, afforestation, and livelihood-linked asset creation, and convergence of

Mahatma Gandhi NREGS with agriculture, irrigation, and rural development programmes. Sessions also highlighted the use of digital tools, geo-tagging, and Management Information Systems (MIS) for enhancing transparency, accountability, and timely reporting.

Faculty members of NIRDPR and experienced resource persons facilitated interactive sessions, encouraging open discussions on field-level challenges and practical solutions. Participants actively shared their experiences and reflected on issues related to worksite management, timely payment of wages, community participation, and improving the quality and sustainability of assets created under the programme.

A key strength of the programme was its emphasis on peer learning and sharing of experiences. Participants exchanged insights on innovative practices followed in different districts of Telangana and discussed how these approaches could be adapted to suit local conditions in their own areas.

The exposure visit concluded with collective reflections and feedback from participants, who appreciated the opportunity to learn directly from Telangana's experiences.

## Exposure Visit on Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi NREGS in Telangana (17–19 December 2025)



**Participants of the Exposure Visit on Best Practices of MGNREGS in Telangana with Dr Digambar A. Chimankar, Associate Professor, CWEL, and Dr Sonal Mobar Roy, Assistant Professor, CWEL, NIRDPR, at the NIRDPR campus, Hyderabad.**

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, an Exposure Visit on the Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Telangana from 17 to 19 December 2025. The programme was conducted by the Centre for Wage Employment and Livelihoods (CWEL), NIRDPR, under the guidance of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The exposure visit aimed to provide participating officials and practitioners with a clear and practical understanding of successful planning, implementation, and monitoring practices followed under MGNREGS in Telangana. The programme focused on showcasing field-level innovations and administrative practices that have contributed to improved asset quality, timely execution of works, and enhanced livelihood outcomes.

Participants attended sessions on natural resource management, water conservation, land development, livelihood-supporting assets, and programme convergence with agriculture and other rural development initiatives. Emphasis was also placed on the use of digital tools, geo-tagging, and MIS to strengthen transparency and accountability.

Faculty members and resource persons facilitated interactive discussions on field challenges such as worksite management, timely wage payments, and community mobilisation. The programme encouraged peer learning and experience sharing, helping participants explore ways to adapt and scale up successful practices in their own contexts.

The exposure visit concluded with reflections from participants.

## Exposure Visit on Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi NREGS Organised for Rajasthan Officials



***Dr Akanksha Shukla, Programme Coordinator and Associate Professor, CPGS&DE, NIRDPR, with SHG members and Community Resource Persons during the training programme on Natural Farming Technologies***

To promote sustainable agriculture and strengthen women-led livelihoods, the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised an Exposure Visit on the Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) for officials from Rajasthan from 18 to 20 December 2025. The programme was conducted by the Centre for Wage Employment and Livelihoods (CWEL), NIRDPR, under the guidance of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The exposure visit was aimed at providing participating officials with practical insights into effective planning, implementation, and monitoring practices followed under MGNREGS. The programme focused on showcasing successful approaches that have contributed to improved asset quality, timely execution of works, and enhanced livelihood outcomes through wage employment.

In the three-day programme, participants were oriented on key thematic areas such as natural resource management works, water

conservation and watershed development, land development activities, and creation of livelihood-supporting assets. Sessions also highlighted the importance of programme convergence with agriculture, irrigation, and other rural development initiatives to maximise impact at the village level.

Through a series of interactive and discussion-oriented sessions, faculty members of NIRDPR and resource persons created space for participants to share their field experiences and discuss implementation challenges. The deliberations focused on worksite management, timely payment of wages, community involvement, and mechanisms to ensure social accountability.

The programme provided opportunities for participants to exchange experiences and understand successful practices followed in different regions, and to discuss how these approaches could be adapted to the Rajasthan context. The exposure visit concluded with reflections and feedback from participants.

## Exposure Visit on Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi NREGS Organised for Karnataka Officials



***Dr V. Suresh Babu, Associate Professor & Head, CWEL; Dr Anuradha Palla, Assistant Professor, CWEL; and Mr Mohammed Khan, Senior Consultant, RTP-CIAT, NIRDPR, posing with participants during the Exposure Visit on Best Practices of MGNREGS for Karnataka officials***

**T**he National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised an Exposure Visit on the Best Practices of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) for officials from Karnataka from 29 to 31 December 2025. The programme was conducted by the Centre for Wage Employment and Livelihoods (CWEL), NIRDPR, under the guidance of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The exposure visit aimed to strengthen the understanding of participating officials on effective methods adopted in the planning, execution, and monitoring of MGNREGS. Emphasis was placed on sharing field-based experiences that have contributed to better quality of work, timely completion, and improved livelihood benefits for rural households.

During the three-day exposure visit, participants gained insights into a range of MGNREGS activities, including works related to natural resource management, water conservation, watershed development, land improvement,

and the creation of long-lasting assets that contribute to rural livelihoods. Emphasis was placed on aligning these works with agriculture, irrigation, and other development programmes so that benefits reach villages more comprehensively.

The sessions were conducted in an interactive format by NIRDPR, allowing officials to discuss the challenges faced in the field and share practical experiences. Key areas, including the management of worksites, the timely release of wages, community involvement, and social accountability, were discussed through real-life examples.

Participants also explored ways in which proven practices from different regions could be modified to suit the specific needs and conditions of Karnataka.

The visit concluded with participants sharing their takeaways and observations, reflecting NIRDPR's continued efforts to strengthen capacities and promote effective implementation of MGNREGS across States.

## NIRDPR Conducts Training on Home-based Sanitary Products Making under Lakhpati Didis Initiative



***Dr C. Kathiresan, Associate Professor & Head, CIAT&SJ; Mr Mohammed Khan, Senior Consultant, RTP-CIAT; and Mr G. Murli Krishna, Manager, AV, with participants during the five-day training programme on Home-based Sanitary Products Making***

**A**s part of its efforts to promote women-led livelihoods and strengthen income-generating opportunities at the grassroots level, the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised a five-day training programme on Home-based Sanitary Products Making for Community Resource Persons (CRPs) and Self-Help Group (SHG) members under the Lakhpati Didis Initiative from 08 to 12 December 2025. The programme was conducted by the Centre for Innovations and Appropriate Technologies for Skills and Jobs (CIAT&SJ), NIRDPR, with support from the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The programme aimed to equip participants with practical skills required to manufacture sanitary products at the household level, thereby enabling women to explore sustainable livelihood options through small-scale enterprises. It also sought to improve awareness around hygiene and sanitation while creating opportunities for local production and consumption of affordable sanitary products.

During the training, participants received hands-on exposure to various stages of sanitary product manufacturing, including selection of raw materials, production techniques, quality assurance, hygiene practices, packaging, and basic costing. Sessions were designed to be practical and participatory, allowing participants to actively engage in the learning process.

Resource persons and faculty members from NIRDPR facilitated interactive sessions, addressing field-level challenges and encouraging participants to share their experiences. The training also included discussions on group-based production models, branding, marketing strategies, and linkages with local markets and institutions, helping participants understand how to translate technical skills into viable livelihood activities.

The programme concluded with feedback and reflections from participants, who expressed confidence in applying the skills acquired during the training.

## Training on Handmade Paper Production and Micro-Enterprise Development



*Dr C. Kathiresan, Associate Professor & Head, CIAT&SJ, NIRDPR; Mr Mohammed Khan, Senior Consultant, RTP-CIAT, NIRDPR; Mr G. Murli Krishna, Manager, AV; and Mr Ravinder Rao, Head, Handmade Paper Unit, with SHG members and Community Resource Persons during training programme on Handmade Paper Production and Conversion Entrepreneurship Development*

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised a five-day training programme on Handmade Paper Production and Conversion Entrepreneurship Development for Self-Help Group (SHG) members and Community Resource Persons (CRPs) under the Lakhpati Didis Initiative from 08 to 12 December 2025. The programme was conducted by the Centre for Innovations and Appropriate Technologies for Skills and Jobs (CIAT&SJ), NIRDPR, under the guidance of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The training programme aimed to equip participants with practical skills in handmade paper production and value addition, enabling them to explore micro-enterprise opportunities using locally available and eco-friendly materials. Emphasis was placed on developing income-generating activities that are environmentally sustainable while providing viable livelihood options for women at the grassroots level.

During the programme, participants received hands-on training in various stages of handmade paper making, including pulp preparation, sheet formation, drying techniques,

finishing, and conversion into value-added products such as envelopes, files, notebooks, gift items, and decorative articles. Sessions also covered basic aspects of quality control, costing, pricing, and packaging, helping participants understand the requirements of running a small-scale enterprise.

Faculty members and technical experts from NIRDPR facilitated interactive sessions and practical demonstrations, encouraging participants to actively engage in the learning process. The programme also included discussions on group-based enterprise models, marketing strategies, branding, and linkages with local markets and institutions, enabling participants to visualise pathways for scaling up their initiatives.

The training concluded with reflections and feedback from participants, who expressed confidence in applying the skills gained to initiate or strengthen micro-enterprises in their communities. The programme reaffirmed NIRDPR's commitment to supporting women's entrepreneurship, skill development, and sustainable livelihoods through appropriate technologies under the Lakhpati Didis Initiative.

## Training-cum-Exposure Visit on Advanced Organic Farming Technologies Held at NIRDPR



***Dr Vanishree Joseph, Director, NRLM-RC, NIRDPR, and Mr Jyoti Prakash Mohanty, with Krishi Sakhis and officials of Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) during the Training-cum-Exposure Visit on Advanced Organic Farming Technologies***

**W**ith the aim of strengthening capacities in sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture, the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised a Training-cum-Exposure Visit on Advanced Organic Farming Technologies for Krishi Sakhis and officials of Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) from 07 to 15 December 2025. The programme was conducted through the DAY-NRLM Resource Cell, NIRDPR, under the guidance of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The programme was designed to provide participants with practical exposure to advanced organic farming practices that can be adopted and scaled up in rural livelihoods initiatives. It focused on enhancing technical knowledge and field-level understanding of sustainable agricultural methods that improve soil health, reduce input costs, and increase farm productivity and incomes.

During the nine-day programme, participants were introduced to a range of topics, including organic

crop production practices, preparation and use of bio-inputs, soil fertility management, natural pest and disease management, composting techniques, and integration of organic farming with livelihoods under DAY-NRLM. Classroom sessions were complemented by exposure visits and demonstrations, enabling participants to observe successful practices and interact with practitioners.

The programme also provided a platform for peer learning and experience sharing among participants from Assam, helping them reflect on how the learnings could be adapted to local agro-climatic conditions and integrated with ongoing livelihood interventions of Assam SRLM.

The training-cum-exposure visit concluded with feedback and reflections from participants, who appreciated the balanced mix of theory and practical exposure. The programme reaffirmed NIRDPR's commitment to building the capacities of frontline functionaries and state officials for promoting sustainable agriculture, enhanced farm livelihoods, and resilient rural development.

## Consultation Workshop on Enhancing Placements and Strengthening PG Programmes Held at NIRDPR



**T**he National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, conducted a Consultation Workshop on Enhancing Placements and Strengthening Postgraduate (PG) Programmes on 18 December 2025 at its campus. The workshop brought together senior faculty members, academic coordinators, and administrative officials associated with NIRDPR's postgraduate teaching and placement activities.

The consultation was convened with the objective of reviewing the current status of PG programmes, assessing placement outcomes, and identifying measures to further strengthen the academic relevance and employability of students. The discussions focused on aligning academic curricula with emerging requirements in rural development, public policy, livelihoods, governance, and development practice.

During the workshop, participants deliberated on key aspects such as curriculum updates, integration of field-based learning, strengthening internships and research components, and improving industry, government, and development sector linkages. Special attention was given

to enhancing placement support through stronger engagement with recruiting organisations, alumni networks, and partner institutions.

Faculty members shared insights on challenges and opportunities related to student placements, skill gaps, and evolving expectations of employers. The discussions also highlighted the need to strengthen students' competencies in areas such as data analysis, project management, communication skills, and practical exposure to development programmes, alongside strong theoretical grounding.

The workshop provided a platform for open dialogue and collaborative planning, enabling participants to propose actionable strategies for improving placement processes and enriching the overall learning experience of PG students. Suggestions were also made to strengthen career guidance, mentoring, and continuous interaction between academic programmes and the professional development sector.

The consultation concluded with a shared understanding on the way forward for reinforcing the quality, relevance, and impact of NIRDPR's postgraduate programmes.

## Beekeeping and Honey Processing Training Held at NIRDPR under Lakhpati Didis Initiative



**Participants of the Beekeeping and Honey Processing training programme, with Dr C. Kathiresan, Associate Professor & Head, CIAT&SJ, and Mr Mohammed Khan, Senior Consultant, RTP-CIAT**

To promote sustainable livelihoods and strengthen women-led micro-enterprises, the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised a five-day training programme on Beekeeping and Honey Processing for Self-Help Group (SHG) members and Community Resource Persons (CRPs) under the Lakhpati Didis Initiative from 15 to 19 December 2025 at the Rural Technology Park, NIRDPR. The programme was conducted by the Centre for Innovations and Appropriate Technologies for Skills and Jobs (CIAT&SJ), NIRDPR, under the guidance of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The training programme aimed to equip participants with practical knowledge and hands-on skills in scientific beekeeping and honey processing, enabling them to explore beekeeping as a viable income-generating activity. The programme highlighted the potential of apiculture in enhancing rural incomes, supporting agricultural productivity through pollination, and promoting environmentally sustainable livelihood options.

During the programme, participants were introduced to various aspects of beekeeping practices, including selection and management of bee colonies, hive maintenance, seasonal management, disease and pest control, and safety measures. Practical sessions at the Rural Technology Park provided participants with direct exposure to handling bee boxes, understanding bee behaviour, and managing apiaries.

The training also focused on honey extraction, processing, quality control, storage, and packaging, along with basic insights into value addition and hygiene standards. Discussions were held on pricing, branding, and local marketing strategies to help participants understand how beekeeping enterprises can be organised individually or through group-based models.

Faculty members and technical experts from NIRDPR facilitated interactive sessions, encouraging participants to share their experiences and raise practical concerns related to field implementation. Emphasis was placed on linking beekeeping activities with existing livelihood interventions under DAY-NRLM and promoting convergence with agriculture and horticulture programmes.

The programme concluded with feedback and reflections from participants, who expressed confidence in adopting beekeeping and honey processing as supplementary or primary livelihood activities.

## Workshop-cum-Training on Digital Finance under DAY-NRLM Held at NIRDPR



***Programme Coordinator Dr Vanishree Joseph, Director, NRLM-RC, NIRDPR, posing with participants during the Workshop-cum-Training on Digital Finance under DAY-NRLM***

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, through its DAY-NRLM Resource Cell, organised a Workshop-cum-Training on Digital Finance under DAY-NRLM from 17 to 19 December 2025 at the NIRDPR campus. The programme was conducted under the guidance of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, with the objective of strengthening digital financial capabilities within the DAY-NRLM ecosystem.

The workshop aimed to enhance the understanding and practical skills of participants in the area of digital financial services, particularly in the context of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), their federations, and community institutions. The programme focused on improving financial inclusion, transparency, and efficiency by promoting the effective use of digital platforms and tools at the grassroots level.

During the three-day programme, participants were oriented on key aspects of digital payments, banking systems, Direct Benefit

Transfers (DBT), online financial transactions, accounting software, and digital record-keeping relevant to SHG operations. Sessions also covered topics such as cyber security, fraud prevention, grievance redressal mechanisms, and responsible use of digital financial services, ensuring safe and informed adoption of technology.

Faculty members of NIRDPR and other resource persons conducted interactive sessions that combined simple explanations with practical demonstrations. Participants took part actively, discussing common challenges faced in using digital finance at the field level, such as limited access, lack of skills, and hesitation in adopting digital tools. They also shared their experiences from different States and districts, making the discussions practical and relatable.

The programme concluded with reflections and feedback from participants, who highlighted the relevance and usefulness of the training in strengthening their day-to-day engagement with SHGs and community institutions.

## Natural Farming Technologies Training Organised at NIRDPR under Lakhpati Didis Initiative



***Dr C. Kathiresan, Associate Professor & Head, CIAT&SJ, NIRDPR, and Mr Mohammed Khan, Senior Consultant, RTP-CIAT, NIRDPR, posing for a group photograph with SHG members and Community Resource Persons during the training programme on Natural Farming Technologies***

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised a five-day training programme on Natural Farming Technologies for Self-Help Group (SHG) members and Community Resource Persons (CRPs) under the Lakhpati Didis Initiative from 15 to 19 December 2025 at the Rural Technology Park, NIRDPR. The programme was conducted by the Centre for Innovations and Appropriate Technologies for Skills and Jobs (CIAT&SJ), NIRDPR, with the support of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The training programme aimed to build practical knowledge and skills among participants on natural and low-cost farming practices that help improve soil health, reduce dependency on chemical inputs, and enhance farm productivity and incomes. The focus was on promoting eco-friendly farming methods that are suitable for small and marginal farmers and can be easily adopted at the village level.

During the programme, participants were introduced to key aspects of natural farming such as preparation and use of bio-inputs, natural pest

and disease management, soil fertility improvement, composting techniques, and crop-specific natural farming practices. Practical demonstrations and hands-on sessions at the Rural Technology Park helped participants clearly understand the processes involved and gain confidence in applying these methods in their own fields.

Faculty members and resource persons explained concepts in a simple and practical manner, encouraging participants to ask questions and share their field experiences. Discussions also focused on the role of SHGs and CRPs in spreading awareness about natural farming, supporting farmers during the transition phase, and linking farming practices with livelihood initiatives under DAY-NRLM.

The programme also provided space for experience sharing and peer learning, where participants discussed challenges faced in adopting natural farming and possible local solutions. Emphasis was placed on gradually scaling up these practices through group-based approaches and community support systems.

## Training Programme on Production of Compressed Stabilised Earth Blocks



***Dr C. Kathiresan, Associate Professor & Head, CIAT&SJ, NIRDPR; Dr S. Ramesh Sakthivel, Associate Professor & Head, CSR, PPP & PA; and Mr Mohammed Khan, Senior Consultant, RTP-CIAT, NIRDPR, with participants of training programme on Production of Compressed Stabilised Earth Blocks***

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised a three-day training programme on the Production of Compressed Stabilised Earth Blocks (CSEB) for Self-Help Group (SHG) members and Community Resource Persons (CRPs) under the Lakhpati Didis Initiative from 18 to 20 December 2025 at the Rural Technology Park, NIRDPR. The programme was conducted by the Centre for Innovations and Appropriate Technologies for Skills and Jobs (CIAT&SJ), NIRDPR, with support from the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The training equipped participants with practical skills and technical knowledge related to eco-friendly and cost-effective construction technologies, particularly the production and use of CSEB as an alternative to conventional building materials. The programme highlighted the potential of CSEB in promoting sustainable housing solutions while creating livelihood opportunities for SHGs and rural entrepreneurs.

During the training, participants were provided hands-on exposure to the entire process of CSEB production, including soil selection and testing, mix design, stabilisation techniques, block pressing, curing methods, and quality control. Demonstrations at the Rural Technology Park enabled participants to understand the technology in a simple and practical manner.

Faculty members and technical experts from NIRDPR guided the sessions, encouraging participants to ask questions and discuss field-level challenges. Discussions also covered the use of CSEB in rural housing, community infrastructure, and government programmes, along with aspects of costing, enterprise management, and group-based production models.

The programme also facilitated experience sharing among participants, helping them explore how CSEB production units could be set up at the local level and linked with housing and infrastructure initiatives. The training concluded with participant feedback and reflections.

## NIRDPR Organises Training Programme on Mushroom Production Technology under Lakhpati Didis Initiative



***Dr C. Kathiresan, Associate Professor & Head, CIAT&SJ, NIRDPR, with SHG members and Community Resource Persons of the training programme on Mushroom Production Technology conducted***

**W**ith the objective of strengthening farm-based livelihoods and promoting women-led income activities, the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, organised a three-day training programme on Mushroom Production Technology for Self-Help Group (SHG) members and Community Resource Persons (CRPs) from 22 to 24 December 2025 at the Rural Technology Park, NIRDPR. The programme was conducted by the Centre for Innovations and Appropriate Technologies for Skills and Jobs (CIAT&SJ), NIRDPR, under the Lakhpati Didis Initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The training focused on building practical skills in scientific mushroom cultivation as an affordable and profitable livelihood option for small and marginal households. Emphasis was given to mushroom farming as an activity that requires limited space and resources, making it well suited for women and SHG-based enterprises.

The programme covered essential aspects of mushroom production such as selection of varieties, substrate preparation, spawning, crop management, harvesting, hygiene, and post-harvest handling. Practical demonstrations helped participants understand each stage of the process and build confidence in adopting the technology.

Interactive sessions encouraged open interaction, where faculty members and technical experts spoke with participants about their day-to-day challenges and practical concerns. Simple discussions on costs, packaging, selling in local markets, and working as groups helped participants understand how mushroom cultivation can become a steady source of income.

The programme drew to a close with participants sharing their takeaways and suggestions, reflecting NIRDPR's continued efforts to support farm livelihoods, encourage women's entrepreneurship, and improve incomes through suitable and easy-to-adopt technologies under the Lakhpati Didis Initiative.

## When Algorithms Learn Patriarchy: A Gender Lens on Artificial Intelligence

**Dr Vanishree Joseph**  
Head, CGS&D, NIRDPR  
vanishreej.nird@gov.in



**A**rtificial Intelligence (AI) is often described as neutral, objective and data-driven. But here is an uncomfortable truth: AI systems learn from us—and we live in a deeply gendered world. When machines learn from unequal societies, they quietly absorb and reproduce those inequalities, often at scale.

Consider this: if an AI system is trained on decades of labour data where women were under-represented in leadership, the algorithm may “learn” that men are more suitable for managerial roles. If it is trained on internet content filled with stereotypes, it may associate women with care work and men with authority. The bias is not in the machine—it is in the data, the design choices, and the assumptions we feed into it.

### Invisible Bias, Visible Consequences

Unlike overt discrimination, algorithmic bias is subtle. It does not shout; it whispers. A resume-screening tool quietly downgrades women applicants. A voice assistant responds more submissively to male voices. A facial recognition system struggles to accurately identify darker-skinned women. These are not science-fiction scenarios—they are documented realities.

In development and governance contexts, this has serious implications. As governments increasingly rely on AI-driven tools for beneficiary identification, credit scoring, service delivery, and grievance redressal, gender bias embedded in algorithms can translate into exclusion, misidentification, or denial of entitlements—especially for rural

women, informal workers, and marginalized groups.

### AI Meets the Care Economy—And Misses It

One of the biggest blind spots of AI is unpaid care work. Activities like caregiving, fetching water, cooking, or community volunteering—largely performed by women—are poorly captured in datasets. When AI systems are used to model productivity, economic contribution, or “efficiency,” this invisible labour remains invisible.

The result? Policy tools powered by AI risk reinforcing a development logic that values what is measurable over what is meaningful. If care work does not count in data, it does not count in decisions.

### Why a Feminist Lens Matters

A feminist approach to AI does not mean rejecting technology. It means asking better questions:

- Who designs AI systems?
- Whose data is included—and whose is missing?
- Who benefits from automation, and who bears its costs?
- How do caste, class, disability, and geography intersect with gender in digital systems?

### From Gender-Blind to Gender-Just Technology

AI can be a powerful ally for gender equality—if it is designed and governed consciously. Used responsibly, it can help identify service gaps, personalize welfare delivery, and amplify marginalized voices. But without a gender lens, it risks becoming a high-tech mirror of old inequalities.

As institutions engaged in rural development and social transformation, the challenge before us is clear: the future of governance will be digital—but it must also be inclusive, ethical, and gender-just. The question is not whether AI will shape development, but whose realities it will recognize—and whose it will erase.



## Finding a New Rhythm after the Road Went Silent: Nayan Chandra Das's Tale of Resilience

**Sahana S.**

PGDM-RM Student, NIRDPR

sahanashanmugamoorthy@gmail.com



### A Passion for the Folk Soul

As a student of rural management, my eyes always seek the 'folk' essence of a village—the stories hidden in the local arts that define a community's identity. During my 28-day induction field visit to Bhagabatpur gram panchayat in Kendrapara district, Odisha, I was drawn to a small workshop filled with the scent of seasoned wood and the rhythmic tap-tap of a hammer, much like a child seeing the world for the first time. Here, I met Nayan Chandra Das, a 65-year-old soul filled with the spirit of a teenager, whose life is as finely tuned as the instruments he repairs. The place where I ran out of metaphors and oxymorons to describe the shadow of folk, which was seeking, like an eagle, to document.

This is a compelling story of resilience. Mr Nayan Chandra Das's journey from a truck driver in Kolkata, whose river of life changes with a random visit to a shop, and who is a guardian of rhythm in Odisha, is precisely the kind of "human interest" story that makes a rhythm stand out.

### From the Highway to the Harmonies: A Unique Origin

For many in the unorganised sector, their body is the only capital. Nayan's

story isn't what you'd expect. He didn't grow up as an artisan. Forty years ago, he was a driver in the chaotic streets of Kolkata - a job that demanded physical stamina and steady limbs. His life changed in an instant when a serious accident left him with a bone misalignment. For a driver, a misaligned frame is a career-ender. Suddenly, Nayan was a man without an asset. During our field visits, we often discuss 'vulnerability,' but for Nayan, it was a daily reality. The most moving part of Nayan's story is his period of "unemployment." Unable to drive, he found himself wandering the streets of Kolkata, eventually spending his days sitting in local instrument shops.

It's fascinating how life works—what started as a way to pass the time while he healed has become a 22-year career. He watched the masters, caught the "fever" for the craft, and eventually learned to both repair and play the instruments.



### The Emergence of "Adaptive Livelihood"

Nayan did not find his new path through formal vocational training. Instead, his transition was a result of informal observation and interest-driven skill acquisition. During his long recovery

in Kolkata, he spent his days at percussion workshops. This period was essentially an informal apprenticeship. He pivoted from being a general labourer (driver) to a skilled artisan” (instrument repairer). This shift represents a transition from physical capital to intellectual/artisanal capital, allowing him to sustain a livelihood that his physical injury could no longer prevent.

### The Craft: Precision in Every Pulse

Mr Nayan’s work serves as a bridge between West Bengal and Odisha, bringing specialised raw materials from Nadiya, Kolkata. He distinguishes his craft through a meticulous process:

- **THE SEED - Foundation of Clay:** He uses Matti (earthen pots) as the base, winding wires with extreme tension around the frame to ensure structural integrity for both Tabla and Mridangam.
- **THE STEM & BRANCH - The Architecture of Sound:** He fixes the Kiran (the playing surface) at both ends. To achieve the perfect resonance, he applies a unique, handmade paste—a mixture of Poha (flattened rice) and iron powder—at the centre.
- **THE LEAF & BLOOM - The Final Polish:** Using a smooth stone, he sharply grinds this mixture until it hardens, creating the iconic black spot at the centre of the Kiran, which gives Indian percussion its soul-stirring “ring.”

### A Livelihood of Passion

Let’s be honest—this isn’t an easy way to make a living. It’s a seasonal grind. Nayan mostly gets busy during the festival months when the local folk troupes and temples need their gear ready. It takes him 4 to 5 days of solid work to fix just one instrument, and at the end of it, he walks away with about ₹1000 in profit. As a development practitioner, I have always viewed livelihood through the lens of ways to earn an income. But Nayan is the one who proved me wrong in various structures and added more charms, like gems and pearls, to the folk essence of the village.

### Final Reflections

For me, documenting Nayan’s work wasn’t just about a livelihood study; it was about seeing how a person can lose their original path—in his case, driving—and find a new rhythm in the folk traditions of his community. In a world of digital beats, Nayan Chandra Das is a reminder that the most beautiful sounds are often made by hand, with a bit of clay, some iron powder, and a lot of heart. This writing is not only to demonstrate the livelihood, but also to focus on the key issue where the village is really losing its true colours and melodies. According to the report by Choudhury (2020) and Konyak et al. (2020) on Ethnographic Studies, 15–25 per cent of rural folk musicians relied on music as their primary livelihood. However, in contemporary India, less than 5 per cent of rural musicians are in survival mode. To cope with the Gandhian view of the village, citizens should promote and act as anchors to the individual still waiting for their drop of water to fall on their tongue and to quench their thirst for both livelihood and passion.



## NIRDPR Observes Mahaparinirvan Diwas in Memory of Dr B.R. Ambedkar



**Dr G. Narendra Kumar, IAS, Director General, NIRDPR, along with faculty and staff, offering floral tributes at the bust of Dr B. R. Ambedkar**



**Dr G. Narendra Kumar, IAS, Director General, NIRDPR, addressing the gathering**

**T**he National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, observed Mahaparinirvan Diwas 2024, marking the 70th death anniversary of Babasaheb Dr B.R. Ambedkar, with solemnity and respect at its campus in Hyderabad.

The programme was attended by G. Narendra Kumar, IAS, Director General, NIRDPR, along with senior faculty members, officers, and staff of the Institute. The observance reflected collective remembrance of Dr Ambedkar's life and his enduring contribution to the ideals of equality, social justice, and constitutional democracy.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Narendra Kumar recalled B. R. Ambedkar's lifelong struggle against social discrimination and his pivotal role in shaping modern India through the Constitution. He highlighted the relevance of Babasaheb's thoughts in contemporary public administration and called upon officials and staff to uphold the values of fairness, inclusion, and ethical conduct in public service.

A floral tribute was offered to the Dr B. R. Ambedkar bust located at the Dr Ambedkar Block, where faculty and staff paid their respects in a spirit of reverence. The observance also served as a moment of reflection, with employees reaffirming their commitment to integrity, social responsibility, and service to the most marginalised sections of society, drawing inspiration from Dr Ambedkar's vision.

**The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), an autonomous organisation under the Union Ministry of Rural Development, is a premier national centre of excellence in rural development and Panchayati Raj. Recognised internationally as one of the UN-ESCAP Centres of Excellence, it builds capacities of rural development functionaries, elected representatives of PRIs, bankers, NGOs and other stakeholders through inter-related activities of training, research and consultancy. The Institute is located in the historic city of Hyderabad in Telangana state. The NIRDPR celebrated its Golden Jubilee Year of establishment in 2008. In addition to the main campus in Hyderabad, this Institute has a North-Eastern Regional Centre at Guwahati, Assam, a branch at New Delhi and a Career Guidance Centre at Vaishali, Bihar.**



राष्ट्रीय ग्रामीण विकास एवं  
पंचायती राज संस्थान  
**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT AND PANCHAYATI RAJ**  
MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

RAJENDRANAGAR, HYDERABAD - 500 030  
PHONE: (040) 24008473, FAX: (040) 24008473  
E-MAIL: CDC.NIRD@GOV.IN, WEBSITE: WWW.NIRDPR.ORG.IN

**DR. G. NARENDRA KUMAR, IAS, DIRECTOR GENERAL, NIRDPR**  
**ASSISTANT EDITORS: KRISHNA RAJ K. S**  
**APARNA V. R**

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