

Empowering and greening

ANNUAL REPORT BY VAYAM



Highlights of this year

- Vadpada bids a heartfelt farewell
- 50 villages Gram Sabhs receive recognition in Government Gazette
- Fellowship for village youth leaders
- Conservation with 83% survival rate of newly planted trees
- Thousands of plates full of the greens from forest

Flagship projects



Padopadi Swarajya

Capacity building of democratic institution at the grass roots level; 3rd batch of Gram Sabhas inducted.



Jana Vana

With recognised Community Forest Rights, village assemblies are now conserving a people's forest.



Su-poshan

With a pond and mini veggie farm, hundreds of families improve their home grown nutrition.



ANNUAL REPORT 24-25

PREFACE

Dear friends of Vayam,

It is indeed a pleasure to share our 17th annual report. Like all mature teens, we have new ideas sprouting and old themes maturing. Jan Van – our current initiative of connecting people and forests has demonstrated a great success and has tested our strengths to meet the challenges. The survival rate of newly planted trees has pleasantly surprised us.

Our experiments with empowering Gram Sabhas – the people’s assemblies is now time tested and we could develop a Standard Operating Procedure for empowerment. In our initial years, we spent at least three years of intense capacity building inputs with every village. Now that period is chiseled to two years. Wadpada, a village in our last batch hosted a heart touching farewell for our team. The idea that the village shall now march on its own and Vayam as a friend can watch and be available in need – has clicked! This has helped us switch our focus to the next batch of villages.

Su-poshan – the home-grown food response to malnutrition has succeeded and sustained. We have the next batch of farmer families joining Su-poshan growing and eating fresh vegetables for nearly six months after monsoon.

Grooming leaders has been at the heart of Vayam. We have a new program this year in our basket: Shishyavritti - A fellowship for village youth leaders – learning hands-on – the laws and the ways of communicating with the frontline bureaucracy.

More stories when we meet...

Yours truly,

- Milind
(Secretary, Vayam)

PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

JANA VANA

Jana Vana project believes in the symbiotic connection between people and forests. Vayam has mobilized village communities to acquire Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRR) under the Forest Rights Act. The villages while taking rights also took the responsibility to conserve, manage, protect, and regenerate the forests. Vayam helped through Jana Vana project providing planning and funds to the participant villages. This project has plantations of varied tree species over two types of lands: individually owned (IFR) and community owned (CFR). Both are enriching the green cover and shall deliver ecological dividend to humanity.

Details	IFR	CFR
Land Size	~50 acres	~25 acres

No of sites	7	4
Plantation size	4150	2918
Survival Rate	90%	72%
Nature of Interventions for developing water sources	Jalkund	removable bund, well
Water resource development quantity	52	3
Meetings Held (Individual beneficiaries and community level committees)	57	23
Average Attendance(%)	77%	78%
Employment Generation (wages)	Rs. 2,92,650	Rs. 13,14,135
Dropout Rate	0	0
Awareness Programs : Forest Food Festival	7	3
Paltha	NA	4



PALTHA

Paltha is a tradition of pooling voluntary labour to help any villager in need. Vayam has inspired people to take it to next level: A Paltha for Dhartari (mother earth) – where people devote one day of voluntary labour for conserving the Earth. Some Paltha events had villages offering voluntary labour to other villages as well.

Name of the village	Forest Food Festival		Paltha:	
	Participation in numbers	Food diversity in numbers (No of wild edible species)	Participation in numbers	Nature of work
Bejpada	28	12	42	Maintenance work, Watering the plants, cleaning etc.
Chichwadi	42	20	68	
Devicha Pada	41	14	38	
Khairmal	-	--	0	

Vanavasi Pada	88	19	NA	NA
Barda pada	29	6	NA	NA
Bormal	19	14	NA	NA
Ranpada	-	-	NA	NA
Sadadpana	45	17	NA	NA
Vazrepada	22	6	NA	NA



FOREST FOOD FESTIVALS

Ran-bhaji Mahotsava (or forest food festivals) are becoming a village custom. These festivals are organized by the village for the village – aiming at transferring the knowledge of forest food to the generation next. Unlike some other such festivals, Vayam does not promote marketing of the already depleting forest food.

WATER RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

As a part of Jana Vana project, water sources we developed along with the people.



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Name of the village	Type of water structure	Status	Estimated Capacity
Khairmal	Removable bund	Completed A leakage identified last month. Will be repaired soon.	148000 L
Chinchwadi	Revival of ancient water tanks	Completed	80000 L
	Water storage tank	Completed	10000 L
	Drip irrigation	Completed	NA
Devicha pada	Gunny Bund (Temporary)	Completed	78000 L
	Well	Completed	113000 L
Bejpada	Water storage tank	Completed	10000 L
Bardapada	Well	Completed	113000 L

PADOPADI SWARAJYA

Total meetings	Attendance*(Ave)	Women participation (Ave)	Proceedings completed
98%	27	43.71%	87%

Padopadi Swarajya is our project strengthening the Gram Sabha – the micro unit of democracy at village level; where people – i.e. all the voters – can directly participate and decide. The target of holding regular Gram Sabhas (9 to 12 in a year) has succeeded. Every village has a few persons who can now write proceedings; thus reducing the dependence on government appointed secretary.

Issues	Number of villages	Results
NREGA	29	Pending wages/new registrations
IFR	6	New claims*
PDS	12	online registration/new registration
Primary school related complaints	6	School infrastructure/ appointment of the teacher

Gram Sabhas have identified issues of priority and have worked tirelessly to solve them. Getting wage-work in NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), filing flawless legal claims for the IFR (individual forest rights), and securing food grain supply under the PDS (Public Distribution System) have been some such issues; that the Gram Sabhas could work on.

Gram Sabhas participating in the project scored a good rating on all tasks related to NREGA:

NREGA plan(%)	Rojgar Diwas (%)	Demand for work(%)	Demand for Shelf(%)	Integrated village development Plan(%)
100%	100%	100%	87%	100%

The project includes hand-holding of Gram Sabha members in meeting and communicating government officers. Submitting letters, giving follow up reminders, and pursuing offices to get work done – is all part of this training. People gradually become confident in handling government. They have met:

• Sub Divisional Officer	revenue matters and FRA implementation
• Tehsildar	Implementing NREGA
• BDO	implementing development works through Gram Panchayat
• Agriculture Officer:	implementing agricultural schemes
• APOs	Getting work under NREGA
• Gram Sevak	Gramsabha meetings and disbursing PESA fund
• Gram Rojgar Sevak	Generating work
• PESA mobilizer	facilitating Gramsabha meeting and followup with GramPanchayat

Gram Sabha representatives had total 102 meetings with the officers mentioned above

FOLLOWING ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF WHAT VILLAGES ACHIEVED:

Vaghyachi Wadi and **Garmal** people fought for their right to employment.

Ambyacha Pada proactively resolved the issue of water distribution and stood up to a village leader who was trying to grab the resource through misuse of power.

Aavlichya Pada, **Sutar Pada**, and **Tandel Pada** consistently pursued the issue of the PESA fund and eventually won their battle against a *Gramsevak* (Panchayat Secretary) who was reluctant to transfer the funds.

Dhayti Pada, **Bardapada**, **Kakadpana**, and **Behedmal** had been deprived of employment for years. People couldn't even recall the last time they got work without leaving their village. This year, they received 24 days of employment—and they still have three months before the monsoon begins.

Vijpada demanded their rightful share in the Gram Panchayat funds and succeeded in getting the pipeline repaired. It wasn't easy for this small hamlet, but perseverance and a strong belief in democratic rights helped them achieve it.

Dhamodi Gram Sabha recognized the importance of selecting the right people for the right responsibilities. They appointed two capable individuals to the committee managing the PESA fund. This wouldn't have been possible without awareness and knowledge.

Katkaripada stood firm when the *Gramsevak* tried to intimidate them using the RTI Act. Vanasu, speaking on behalf of the village, told him that the Gram Sabha had maintained all records transparently. "We're not afraid of such things," they said.

Ubhi Dhond Pada is a remote village with poor road connectivity. For a long time, the *Anganwadi Sevika* didn't provide daily meals to children and pregnant women. The Gram Sabha followed up persistently, ensuring that

the *Sevika* visited the village regularly and fulfilled her responsibilities. They even filed a complaint with the Department of Women and Child Development. The *Sevika* learned her lesson.

There are many more such moments—of awareness, confidence, self-esteem, and deep concern for community well-being. **Team Vayam** is proud to have witnessed this change and to have played role as a catalyst in the process.

SUPOSHAN



Suposhan includes a mini vegetable farm (20 sq.mt.) and a small pond (with geomembrane mulching). We also support farmers with some seeds and saplings. Farmers contribute traditional seed varieties and labour. The aim is to ensure fresh vegetable intake in the family’s daily nutrition at least for four months after the monsoon.

Metric	Value
Total Jalkund (pond) Beneficiaries	252
Active Jalkunds till March end	98.8%
New beneficiary Villages	62.5%
Bhajiwadi Beneficiaries	330
Farmers Cultivating untill February	64.54%
Total Plants Irrigated other than kitchen garden	2,841
Average Training Attendance	59.52%
Seed Distribution Event Attendance	86%
Types of Seeds Distributed	14
Highest Earnings from Vegetable Sales	₹20,000

The results have been phenomenal. Farmers have worked hard and gained tremendous output.

Return on investment	366.32%
High Profitability:	9 farmers
Moderate Profitability:	9 farmers
Low Profitability:	5 farmers
Observations	
Every farmer added more than double amount to organizations share.	
No farmer has booked losses	
78% of the farmers are successful in getting good profit on their investments.	

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Vayam team conducted special customised trainings

1. For Gramsevak and forest officials on Community Forest Resource Management plans (in Nashik district, for 104 CFR-holding villages across three tehsils. This was conducted on request by the District Collector.
2. For villagers and staff of NGO Watavaran Foundation (40 participants) on law-based empowerment and CFR management

REFLECTIONS FROM THE PAST YEAR

The Gram Sabha institution building plays a vital role in strengthening the roots of democracy, which in turn accelerates the development process at the local level.

Works done by GramSabha

- **32 villages, 303 weeks of work, 1526 labour employed in NREGA**
- **Making local officials attend their duties**

Upholding individuals’ rights: Gram Sabha can make the government listen to an individuals

To ensure the long-term success of conservation efforts, communities require consistent capacity-building support.