

Seed Conservation: Women Led Seed Banks

Cater to Farmers

In the forest fringe villages of Odisha, women's leadership in conservation reaches beyond forests into the very heart of local food systems. At Raisar village in Daspalla block, a women-led community indigenous seed bank stands as a powerful example of this stewardship. Here women are preserving traditional paddy, millet, and legume varieties that have sustained communities for generations and now offer vital solutions in an era of climate uncertainty.



The Raisar seed bank, as it is fondly called, is collectively managed by 27 women members and supports nearly 750 farmers across 18 villages. It now safeguards 64 indigenous paddy varieties and 35 indigenous millet and pulse varieties; each seed being a symbol of resilience and hope. Individual women seed guardians further strengthen this effort. In Burlubaru village, Tumudibandha block, Smt. Kudeladu Jani has preserved over 30 traditional seed varieties, including diverse millets.

Her work has been documented by the Government of Odisha and recognised at the district-level Mandia Diwas, an annual event to celebrate millets, in November 2025. [2025](#).

Impact

Through women-led seed conservation initiatives farmers are gaining access to resilient, locally adapted seeds that reduce dependence on external inputs and strengthen food security. Hundreds of households now benefit from climate-resilient crops, improved soil health, and revived agrobiodiversity. Equally important, women have emerged as custodians of knowledge and leaders of change—preserving heritage, strengthening livelihoods, and sowing resilience for future generations



Compassion in the Canopy: Women as the heart behind forest care

In the forest landscapes of Daspalla block in Nayagarh district, Odisha, conservation is guided not only by rules and rights, but by compassion. Under NIRMAN's programs, women have emerged as forest protectors whose care extends beyond trees to the birds and animals that share the forest.

As forest protection improves wildlife populations are slowly returning. Animals and birds often wander into agricultural fields disturbing crops. Yet the women do not see this as a problem. "Just as we are children of the forest, they too are," they say. "They are our brothers and sisters, and it is our duty to live with them." This belief transforms tolerance into stewardship and coexistence into responsibility.



"We feel thirsty in the heat," one woman explains, "so the birds must feel the same. These pots help them survive."



During the harsh summer months their compassion translates to action. Women worry about the thirst of birds and animals in the drying forests. They place earthen pitchers filled with water at strategic points and create small waterholes by bunding forest streams.

These acts of care often come at a personal cost. In villages across the Daspalla forest range, women forgo seasonal livelihoods such as mahua flower collection to focus on protecting wildlife. They remain vigilant against forest fires knowing how devastating flames can be for animals unable to escape. This quiet dedication reflects a deeper ethics of conservation; one rooted in empathy, sacrifice, and shared survival. In Daspalla, women are not just protecting forests; they are nurturing life itself, reminding us that true conservation begins with compassion.

Impact:

Women-led compassion-based conservation has strengthened human, wildlife coexistence, protected wildlife during harsh summers, and reduced forest fire risks fostering healthier forests and a shared culture of care and coexistence.



Forests as a Source of Food: Women Nurturing Living Food Forests

For generations, forests have been more than landscapes for communities in Odisha they have been living pantries, pharmacies, and places of care. In Daspalla block of Nayagarh district, this deep-rooted relationship is being renewed through women-led food forests that blend traditional knowledge with agroecological wisdom.

In Ranijhari village of Duda Panchayat, women have long gathered forest tubers, guided by an understanding of their nutritional and medicinal value. Building on this heritage, agroecological practices were introduced and readily embraced revealing a simple truth: when nurtured with care, forest orchards can provide diverse, reliable nutrition while restoring forest health.

Through its programs NIRMAN has strengthened this approach by promoting food forest orchards across community forest resource (CFR) areas. In Bidapaju Gramasabha, women and men now collectively manage forest orchards clearing invasive weeds, tending to tree bases, and transforming neglected forest patches into productive landscapes.

Inspired by these successes the CFR-holding Tilabari Gramasabha expanded food forests with amla, baheda, harida, jackfruit, mango, berries, tubers, and leafy greens ensuring year-round nutrition and ecological balance. Women have also strengthened forest-based livelihoods through collective turmeric cultivation.



In Uparadikiri and Krishnanagar villages, women led Self-Help Groups have cultivated turmeric on five acres, securing a ₹18,000 subsidy through convergence with the Horticulture Department. Together these efforts show how women-led stewardship can restore forests, nourish communities, and turn collective action into lasting resources.

Impact

Food forests and collective cultivation have improved household nutrition, strengthened food sovereignty, and created new income opportunities for women. Communities are restoring forests while meeting their own needs proving that when women lead, forests flourish not only as ecosystems, but as sustainable sources of food, dignity, and resilience.



Green Guardians: Women directing forest conservation and resilience

Across the forested landscapes of Daspalla and neighboring regions communities are reclaiming their forests not just as resources but as rights. Through NIRMAN's work on forest rights and community governance, a quiet transformation is unfolding, led decisively by women who have stepped forward as custodians and decision-makers of their commons.

With sustained facilitation 1,386 individual forest rights and community forest rights over 23,425 acres have been secured across 177 villages. These legal gains have translated into action on the ground. Women-led Gram Sabha Samuhas now frame rules, monitor forests, and enforce collective decisions. In Mutukuli village women confronted illegal tree felling, stopped the activity and pursued legal recourse successfully securing ₹5.3 lakh in compensation. The moment marked a shift from vulnerability to authority.

Beyond rights protection women are shaping everyday conservation. They map biodiversity, prevent forest fires, and create water sources for wildlife combining traditional knowledge with collective governance to restore ecological balance and climate resilience.



Conservation here is closely linked to livelihoods and food security. Women-managed indigenous seed banks now safeguard 64 native paddy varieties, 35 millets, and 23 pulses, supporting nearly 24,000 farmers with climate-resilient seeds. Alongside this, women-led food forests of amla, jackfruit, tamarind, turmeric, and other species are reviving degraded landscapes while nourishing families.

Impact:

Women-led forest governance has strengthened legal rights, restored biodiversity, and reduced forest degradation across hundreds of villages. Communities now benefit from improved food security, sustainable livelihoods, and greater climate resilience, with women emerging as Green Guardians protecting forests as living systems vital to culture, survival, and future generations.



Protecting Coastal Communities: Women Decide on Mangrove Restoration



With determination the women established a nursery of 10,000 mangrove saplings across four species enough to restore nearly 25 acres of degraded coastline. The initiative is fully supported by NIRMAN demonstrating the strength of local commitment backed by informed facilitation.

For these women mangroves mean more than protection; they represent renewal, dignity, and opportunity.

Along Odisha's fragile coastline, memories of the 1999 Super Cyclone still guide community action. Where mangroves once stood firm, villages survived protected from raging winds and surging seas. In Keutajanga village of Astaranga block, this lesson inspired tribal and Dalit women to lead change.

They formed the Maa Keluni Luna Jangal Surakhya Committee, committing to restore mangroves as a natural shield for their homes and livelihoods. Recognising this leadership NIRMAN piloted a community-led mangrove restoration model with technical guidance from 'NEWS from Nature' of the Sundarbans and consent from local leadership. Species were carefully chosen to match local soil and coastal conditions.



Impact

The mangrove nursery strengthens coastal resilience by buffering cyclones and sea intrusion while restoring ecosystems that support fisheries and revive saline-affected agriculture. Women now stand at the frontline of coastal protection safeguarding lives, livelihoods, and the future of their communities.



Backyard Poultry: Small Beginning, Long-Lasting Change

In the quiet forest village of Raimada opportunity arrived not as a grand intervention but as a modest backyard poultry shed. For Tila Sethi a landless mother of seven this small structure became the starting point of a remarkable transformation.



Supported by NIRMAN through the SHIVIA Poultry Development Project, Tila began with a simple yet powerful toolkit: a few chicks, essential feed, and hands-on training in low-cost poultry management including the preparation of homemade feed. What she brought to this effort was patience, discipline, and care. Under her attentive rearing the birds thrived.

Impact

In time, Tila sold poultry worth ₹53,450, generating a net profit of ₹40,450. More than financial gain the income brought stability and dignity to her household. It enabled continued education for her children, met critical medical expenses for her father-in-law, and improved family nutrition through regular access to eggs and meat.

The ripple effects extended beyond Tila herself. Inspired by her success, her husband entered poultry trading, creating a second income stream and strengthening the family's economic resilience. What began as a backyard activity evolved into a shared livelihood.

Today, Tila looks forward with confidence. She plans to expand her poultry shed and move toward full independence. Her journey is a powerful reminder that when timely support meets determination even a small livelihood intervention can transform lives and quietly shape a better future for entire communities.



From Struggle to Stability: Goat Rearing as Pathway to Dignity

In the village of Uparadhikiri, Urbasi Majhi's life was once defined by uncertainty.

A small farmer and mother of three, she struggled to support a family of five on an annual income of just ₹20,000, earned through marginal farming, forest produce collection, and daily wage labor.

With limited opportunities and rising costs, the dream of providing quality education for her children often felt beyond reach.

In 2022, a turning point arrived through the KKS BMZ program implemented by NIRMAN. With project support of ₹7,000 and her own contribution of ₹3,000, Urbasi took the first step into goat rearing, starting with two female goats.

Alongside this investment came something equally valuable; training in animal health care, balanced feeding, low-cost shed construction, and access to scientific breeding practices. Knowledge replaced hesitation and confidence began to grow. With care and consistency Urbasi's small effort flourished. Within three years her herd expanded from just two goats to eleven, transforming a fragile livelihood into a dependable enterprise.



Impact

This year alone Urbasi sold five goats for ₹35,000, an amount that she proudly invested in her children's higher education. Goat rearing has moved beyond a supplementary activity to become a sustainable source of income, stability, and self-reliance for her family.

Urbasi's success has rippled through her village. Other women inspired by her journey are now adopting goat rearing as a livelihood option of their own. Her story reflects more than economic progress. It speaks of renewed confidence, strengthened aspirations, and the quiet power of women-led change. One goat at a time Urbasi is building a future rooted in dignity, resilience, and hope.



Nutri Garden as a Lifeline for Woman-Headed Households

Dehingia Gaon in Khwong block, Dibrugarh district of Assam is a village where survival depends largely on daily wage labor and small farming. For woman-headed households, rising food prices and irregular incomes make nutrition security especially fragile.

Ms. Sunamoni Chetia's family embodies this vulnerability. Divorced and living with her elderly mother and twelve-year-old son her household lost its sole earning member last year to blood cancer. The emotional loss was followed by severe economic distress. With no steady income buying vegetables became unaffordable and daily meals were reduced in both quantity and quality—putting the child and the elderly at serious nutritional risk.

Recognising this acute vulnerability, NIRMAN supported Ms. Sunamoni through the Nutri Garden initiative under the HDFC–HRDP program.

She received seasonal vegetable seeds, organic compost, simple cultivation guidance, and regular handholding. Using a small backyard plot of 550 sq ft, Ms. Sunamoni, with help from her mother, established a garden growing eleven varieties of vegetables.



'Taking care of my child and my elderly mother with no regular income was very stressful. The Nutri Garden has reduced one daily worry from my life.' -
Ms. Sunamoni Chetia

Impact

Within weeks, the Nutri Garden began supplying fresh vegetables for daily meals—at no cost. Household food expenses declined, diets improved, and nutrition for the child and elderly member stabilised. More than food, the garden restored dignity, confidence, and a sense of control at a time of crisis.



From Monocropping to Abundance: Pushpanjali Mallik's Farming Journey

In the quiet village of Pehelaju Takeru in Odisha's Nayagarh district, Pushpanjali Mallik's one-acre farm tells a story of transformation. Like many smallholders she once relied on monocropping—paddy and brinjal grown with chemical inputs—yielding low returns, declining soil health, and limited nutrition for her six-member family. Her annual income stood at just ₹48,000.



The shift began when Pushpanjali engaged with NIRMAN's capacity-building initiatives. Through training in natural farming, financial literacy, and group management, she learned the value of mixed vegetable farming and low-cost, soil-friendly practices. Encouraged she diversified her land with pulses, vegetables, fruits, and allied activities such as goat rearing, desi poultry, and azolla cultivation. Simple innovations like bamboo trellises helped maximise yields from climber crops.

Earlier, I grew only brinjal with chemical inputs and earned very little. After NIRMAN's training, I shifted to mixed vegetable farming using natural methods. Now my farm feeds my family, brings extra income, and has increased our earnings by about 20%. With support from my SHG and the agriculture department, I even started building a new house. I feel proud to contribute more to my family and community.

Impact

Today, Pushpanjali produces 12–13 quintals annually across seasons. Her household income has increased to about ₹64,000 per year, while her family now enjoys year-round dietary diversity. Surplus produce is sold in local markets through the FPO, and to aggregators—turning subsistence farming into a source of stability. Beyond her own farm, Pushpanjali has inspired and guided ten women from her SHG to adopt mixed farming. Supported by seed capital from the agriculture department, her journey reflects how knowledge, collective support, and diversification can turn small farms into assured livelihoods.



Harvesting Rain for Resilience



In the climate-vulnerable landscapes of rural Odisha NIRMAL has transformed rainwater from a fleeting seasonal phenomenon into a foundation for long-term resilience. Through a holistic rainwater management system combined with landscape restoration, communities are reclaiming control over water, land, and livelihoods.

NIRMAL promoted decentralized rainwater harvesting structures, graded bunds, sub-surface dykes, ponds, gully plugs, and land development measures across 2,500 acres of farmland, benefiting over 1,800 households.

These interventions significantly improved in-situ soil moisture, enhanced soil fertility, and stabilized agricultural production in rain-fed areas.

In Baijhari–Ranjhari (Duda GP, Daspalla), community forest committees restored seasonal streams through gully plugging,

ensuring year-round water availability while strengthening forest regeneration and wildlife habitats.

Impact:

- 11.5 lakh cubic meters of green water conserved, strengthening soil moisture and crop resilience
- 1.2 lakh cubic meters of blue water stored in ponds, improving water availability for domestic use, livestock, and ecosystems
- Reduced runoff and soil erosion, leading to improved groundwater recharge and land productivity.

Landscape restoration was reinforced through community forest governance. With NIRMAL's facilitation, 168 villages secured community rights (CR) and community forest resource rights (CFRR), bringing over 27,000 acres of forest land under collective stewardship. This resulted in healthier forest catchments, enhanced spring revival, and sustained water flows downstream.

By integrating such water conservation measures into GDP and Adi Karmayogi planning, NIRMAL institutionalized climate-resilient agriculture, drinking water security, sanitation, and forest protection within local governance.



Tabeda Village: From Water Scarcity to Agricultural Prosperity



Nestled in the hilly terrain of Takeria Panchayat in Daspalla block, Nayagarh district, Tabeda is a small hamlet of just 13 households. For decades the village struggled with acute water scarcity, poor road connectivity, and lack of electricity. Agriculture depended entirely on erratic rainfall, leading to repeated crop failures and persistent livelihood insecurity.

This narrative began to change with the launch of the KKS–BMZ project, facilitated by NIRMAN. A village development committee (VDC) was formed to strengthen community participation and local decision-making. During a special Gram Sabha held on 15 August, villagers collectively identified water as their most urgent priority.

With VDC endorsement NIRMAN supported the community in engaging the Block Development Officer, resulting in approvals for 10 Indira Awas houses, an electricity feasibility survey, and technical assistance for water infrastructure. Under the project, a solar-powered water harvesting structure measuring 100 × 50 × 10 feet was constructed at a cost of ₹5.5 lakh, supported by two 1 HP solar pumps.

Impact:

The solar-powered water harvesting system transformed Tabeda's rain-dependent agriculture into a reliable, year-round livelihood source. Assured irrigation across 15 acres reduced crop losses, enabled multiple cropping cycles, and increased household incomes. Access to water also strengthened food security, reduced seasonal distress, and enhanced the village's resilience to climate variability. Beyond agriculture, the intervention triggered broader development outcomes; improved housing, electrification planning, and stronger community institutions positioning Tabeda as a replicable model of sustainable, community-led rural transformation.