

Swaraj संवाद

07 - 09, January 2025 | India Habitat Center, New Delhi







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7-9 January, 2025 | India Habitat Centre

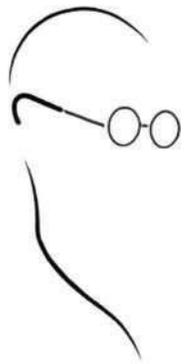
"I am because we are!"

Dialogue | Knowledge Exchange | Action | Collaboration

Swaraj Samvad brings together diverse voices, sector experts, and community leaders to spotlight tribal swaraj and climate resilience. It recognized the power of indigenous practices in tackling modern challenges of food security, farming, and energy. Through honest dialogue and deep listening, the platform fosters meaningful partnerships, shapes action plans, and strengthens the resolve to place tribal knowledge at the heart of climate solutions.

The key objectives of Swaraj Samvaad are:

-  Foster Collaborative Dialogue, Knowledge Exchange, and Action to Amplify Tribal Solutions and Aspirations
-  Map Regional Aspirations and Define an Agenda for 2030
-  Integrate Indigenous Knowledge into National Strategies
-  Build a CSO Collaboration with Swaraj



*Real Swaraj
will come, not by the
acquisition of authority by a
few, but by the acquisition of
the capacity by all to resist
authority when it is abused.*

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Plenary Session

Samudayik Swaraj (Community) principles and its linkages with Sustainability

Objective: To discuss and showcase different approaches and real-world experiences where community sovereignty (Swaraj) contributes to sustainable development.



Speaker
Reshma Anand
Regional Director,
Ford Foundation

Swaraj is not a gift; it is a daily consistent practice

We should look at people as partners (bhagedari), not just beneficiaries.

There is an utmost importance of incorporating successful youth mobilization models into swaraj strategies.



Speaker
Biswarup Banerjee
IKEA Foundation, India

Swaraj demands patience and passion

Swaraj and dialogue are two sides of the same coin.

The progress through constitutional mechanisms (gram panchayats, gram sabhas) are just a beginning; there is a need for continued effort, patience, and inclusive consensus-building.



Speaker
Dr. Rajendra Singh
Waterman of India

Jal is the entry point for all Swaraj

Swaraj is self-reliance rooted in self-respect, particularly at the village level.

Jal (Water) swaraj can meet regional water needs through conservation and optimal rainwater use.

In these challenging times, swaraj must still be pursued with struggle and love for people.



Speaker
Maansingh Ninama
Convenor - Krishi Evam
Adivasi Swaraj Manch

Need to strategically spread Swaraj Sandesh

Over the past 25 years, we have strengthened the principles of swaraj in farming, seeds, forests, and water.

Initiatives like *Swaraj Sandesh Yatras* have helped disseminate these messages across larger level

Communities now embrace seed swaraj, planting confidently without depending on external seed sources.

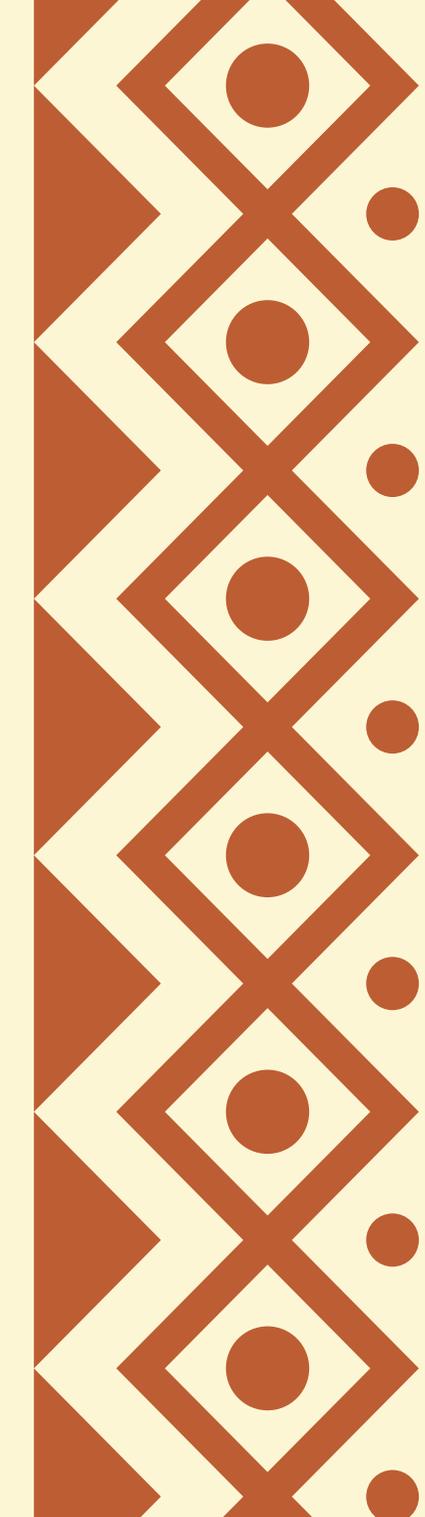


Moderator
Jayesh Joshi
Secretary, Vaagdhara

When we work courageously, then only Swaraj can be realized.

Common agreement

- Emphasis on identifying and including those often excluded, especially women and youth.
- Youth Engagement is crucial for promoting sustainability
- From listening, learning, to co-creating shared goals.
- Creating common agenda shared visions instead of fragmented or competitive efforts.



Thematic Session 1

*Mitigating Climate Change through
agroecological and energy practices*

आवाज़ ज़मीन से ...

Voice from the Soil | Power of the People

Padma Shri Popatrao Baguji Pawar

Thirty-five years ago, Hiware Bazar, Maharashtra, struggled with drought, poverty, hunger, migration, and alcoholism. Today, it stands tall as a model of swaraj, self-reliance, and collective transformation.

-  No political power. Only people power.
-  Water where there was none.
-  Green where there was dust.
-  Productivity where there was despair.
-  No liquor. No migration. No farmer suicides.

Under the visionary leadership of Popatrao Pawar, the journey of Hiware Bazar is more than a story. It is a movement that has now sparked change in tribal belts and suicide-hit villages across India.



Sovereignty components of seed, soil, water, and energy as a Pathway to Climate Resilient Agriculture

The Wicked Challenge

Present-Day Agriculture & Climate Crisis are alleviated through Industrial, high-input agriculture, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions.

BUT

Agriculture also presents an opportunity for climate change mitigation.

Common agreement

Localized, farmer-friendly policies
Yes, It should address regional needs and ecological realities

Protecting farmers' rights
Fair pricing (MSP), land tenure security, access to credit, and strengthening cooperatives

Public-private partnerships for scaling solutions

Expert interventions in redefining Value Chain
Marketing experts and food technologists to enhance value chains and market access for farmers.

Smart agricultural technologies
Their practical demonstrations and incentives is also needed!



Speaker
Dr. S.K. Sharma,
Assistant Director General (HRM), ICAR

Holistic, integrated approaches to farming
don't create new problems while solving existing ones.

Community participation and youth involvement in designing and sustaining resilient agricultural models

Rural digital infrastructure
Internet access and agro-tech centers, to support innovation and capacity-building



Speaker
Kavita Gandhi
Country Representative, Swiss Aid, India

Self-reliant and resilient food systems
Recognition of seed banks, agro-ecological practices, and traditional knowledge systems

Promote underutilized crops and foster local consumption patterns

Sovereign and sustainable use of soil, water, and energy



Speaker
Krishna Prasad
Director, Sahaja Samrudha

Promotion of neglected and underutilized crops (e.g., millets, roots, tubers, indigenous fruits)
From a nutrition perspective, it is an opportunity food too! - Particularly in the face of erratic rainfall and climate uncertainty

Farmer control over seeds.



Moderator
Nivedita Varshneya,
Regional Advisor, Welthungerhilfe India,

Efforts to promote neglected foods are gaining traction, with some being referred to as "opportunity foods."

Potential Solution



Agroecology as a Regenerative Pathway



Building Community Resilience & Community Sovereignty in Practice



Reviving Regenerative Traditions



Collaborative Action & Knowledge Sharing



Exploring Climate Solutions through Water and Soil Health in Tribal Ecosystems

The Wicked Challenge

Unplanned human activities and climate change have led to degraded soil and reduced water availability in tribal and hilly regions, threatening both livelihoods and ecological balance.

BUT

Reviving indigenous tribal practices rooted in agroecology offers a regenerative path to restore soil health and water-use efficiency, while building community resilience to climate change.

Common agreement

- **Tribal communities** as key contributors to climate resilience through traditional agricultural and ecological practices.
- **Chaukha system** of Lapodiya, Rajasthan, is a commendable model for enhancing soil moisture using three land models: undulating, minimum slope, and even slope.
- **"3Ms"—Matter, Soil Moisture, and Soil Microbial Life**—were emphasized as essential for sustainable agriculture.
- **Indigenous production-consumption systems** as vital to community resilience and sustainability.
- **Multi-cropping** systems ensures household-level food and nutrition security.
- **Social metabolism** as a guiding concept to harness community-driven, sustainable development.



Speaker
Dr. Rajeswari Raina
Professor, Shiv Nadar University

Emphasised two lessons: living within nature's nested circles and promoting indigenous production-consumption systems.

Compared local knowledge systems with global climate science.

Introduced the "3Ms"—Matter, Soil Moisture, and Soil Microbial Life.

Advocated for multi-cropping systems to ensure food and nutrition security at the household level.



Speaker
Padma Shri Laxman Singh
Gram Vikas Nav Yuvak Mandal, Lapodiya

We need to preserve soil health in Tribal Ecosystem

Chaukha system is a proven model to improve soil moisture.

We use three models of Chaukha System to address different land types (undulating, minimum slope, even slope)



Moderator
Shraman Jha
CEO, Hindustan Unilever Foundation

Leveraging social metabolism

Sustainable solutions exist within our communities, particularly those of tribal populations.



The Wicked Challenge

Rural and tribal ecosystems, livelihoods, and agricultural sustainability are increasingly threatened by climate change. Fragmented civil society efforts and the inadequate integration of indigenous knowledge and traditional practices into mainstream climate action add to the challenge.

BUT

Reviving indigenous knowledge, Civil Society collaboration, and Policy Engagement presents a sustainable, low-cost solution for resilient agriculture.

Civil society action for innovations community driven solutions for ClimateResilient Agriculture

Common agreement

Local knowledge is essential
All three emphasized using or reviving indigenous knowledge

Community-centric approach
Whether through clusters, partnerships, or gram sabhas, the community was the central actor

Climate resilience + livelihood improvement
All aimed to make agriculture both climate-resilient and economically sustainable

Flexibility and contextual design
All acknowledged that strategies must adapt to the local geography, culture, and socio-economic conditions

Innovation through partnerships and collaborations



Speaker Rucha Limaye,
Senior Analyst, SELCO Foundation

We work for climate resilience and future mitigation is important - a mid way to separate the two ideas of **climate adaptation and climate mitigation**

Follow a two-way learning process:
SELCO partners

Sustainable agri practices - use local knowledge to create climate smart solutions through renewable energy and appropriate technology



Speaker Ashish Kothari
Indian Environmentalist

Deccan Development Society - empowering dalit women through collectives, revived traditional agricultural practices (grew millets), 5000 families achieved eco-sovereignty

Awareness of indigenous knowledge and not discounting foreign/modern knowledge either

Radical Democracy - maha gram sabha [gadchiroli, maharashtra], federation of 90 villages, working towards gram swaraj - **protecting biodiversity, empowering local communities, increasing income**



Speaker Ekta Jaju
Executive Director, SwitchON Foundation

Reduce emissions of agricultural practices and make them more climate-adaptable, also increase income

Creating self-reliant clusters through a Farm-to-Fork ecosystem:
Cluster (ideal size: ~1000 acres; flexible to geography) - CRA cropping, biolabs, processing units, and seed labs can ensure self-reliance of these clusters in 3-5 years



Moderator Sabyasachi Das
National Coordinator, RRA Network

From decentralized energy to federated governance, innovation is driven through networks and partnerships

Potential Solution



Community Sovereignty is Central



Scalable but Contextual Models



Decentralization and Commons



Integration of Knowledge Systems

The Wicked Challenge

Small-scale farmers face sustainability threats from land degradation, poor soil, water scarcity, and climate change, with their remote, dispersed nature making large-scale support difficult

BUT

The agroecology approach blends science with Indigenous practices to create sustainable, locally adaptive farming. It revives tribal knowledge and fosters collaboration to build a climate-resilient, equitable, and community-led agricultural model.

Common agreement

Policy Gaps & Misalignment

Absence of convergence between ministries
Fertilizer/water subsidies dominate over agroecological funding

Indigenous and natural farming practices need to be mainstreamed and supported

Need for community-driven biomass banks, policy literacy, and fund control at grassroots

Mass mobilisation is needed to shift narratives on Government policies

Scoping policy actions for adoption of agro-ecological movement as sustainability and climate resilient community



**Speaker
Abhishek Jain**
Director, CEEW

"What is the current ideology or 'vichardhaara' of policy makers in India?"

Gaps in current policy ideology

Policies generally gain their direction through budgetary decisions - budgetary allocation for Agro ecology adoption needs to be alleviated

Mass-level demand change to counterbalance elite policy lobbies



**Speaker
Pramel Gupta**
National Anchor, NCNF

CSOs in policy formulation and adoption of natural farming should be in focus

CSOs should lead in policy formulation and adoption of natural farming through evidence-based, field-driven inputs

The national coalition on natural farming (NCNF) provides evidence and examples on how CSOs can collaborate and provide/feed their insights into the policy formulation process

NCNF and IIT Delhi research on motivation & cluster viability



**Speaker
Kapil Shah**
Founder Director, Jatan Trust

"Feed the soil so that the soil can feed us"

Soil health and biomass is paramount

Increasing organic carbon in soil (goal: 0.7-1%)

Proposed 10% of farmland should be used to feed the soil

Advocated for livestock integration and biomass banks at community level



**Moderator
Subrat Das**
Program Officer,
Ford Foundation

CSOs need more formal space and recognition in policy circles

Potential Solution



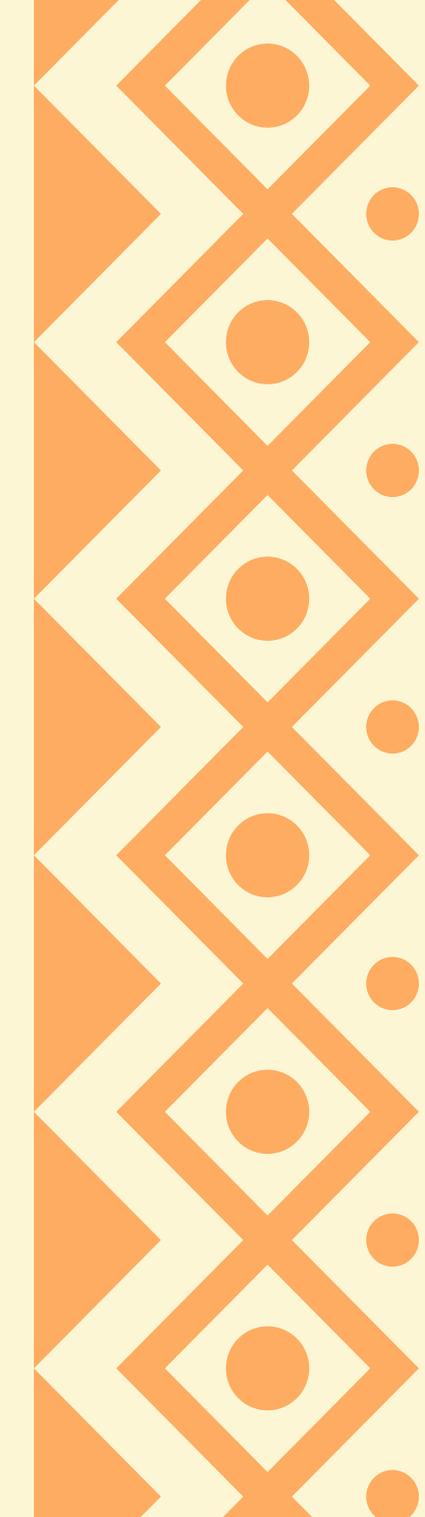
Policy Realignment:
From Sarkar to Swaraaj



Amplify CSO Voice



Empower Communities



Thematic Session 2 :

*Cultural and social well-being through
circular lifestyle of Indigenous
Communities*

आवाज़ ज़मीन से ...

Voice from the Soil | Power of the People

Padma Shri Chami Murmu

"We were once told the forest is not ours to protect. But we made it ours—tree by tree, village by village."

For over 30 years, Chami Murmu and her all-women collective have planted nearly 3 million trees, reviving not just forests, but hope, identity, and dignity in tribal communities.

👣 From Forest to Fellowship: What began with a few saplings on barren land is now a movement rooted in circular living—where waste is wisdom, and tradition is transformation.

👏 Empowerment through Ecology: As patriarchal norms tried to clip wings, Chami's leadership turned plantation drives into platforms for women's emancipation, nurturing self-reliance, sisterhood, and sustainability.



Capturing components of circular living practices and achieving climate resilience livelihoods

The Wicked Challenge

Indigenous knowledge, though sustainable, is often overlooked due to modern development models. Effective revival demands coordinated efforts, institutional support, and long-term collaboration rooted in community sovereignty and traditional wisdom.

BUT

Tribal and rural communities already embody knowledge systems naturally aligned with circular economy principles.

Common agreement

Circularity is local and indigenous by nature, not imported or technical alone.

Current systems (agriculture, housing, consumption) are extractive and centralized.

Emphasis on local materials and decentralized production.

Need for policy and systemic change: not piecemeal but ecosystem-wide.

Cultural revival and rethinking value chains are essential.

Circular economy should be accessible, affordable, and community-driven.



Speaker
Sukanta Bhattacharya
Strategic Lead -
Performance, Gram Vikas

Indigenous practices are often seen negatively, but hold value.

Tribal food systems have been altered significantly.

Government programs promote monocultures (e.g., cashew, sunflower).

Public Distribution System (PDS) remains grain-focused (rice/wheat), limiting diversity.

NTFPs (Non-Timber Forest Products) are underutilized.

There is a need for systems thinking to understand circularity holistically.



Speaker
Vikas Hosoor
Consultant Soil farming and
Localisation, Rainmatter
Foundation

“Beej se Bhojan tak” (Seed to Food)

- Pre-industrial agriculture was circular; industrialization disrupted this.
- Agricultural input systems should be localized and low in energy intensity.

Subah se Shaam tak” (Daily Consumption)

- Local retail has shifted to centralized, packaged goods—causing environmental harm.
- Local production and materials should be reintegrated.

Makaan se Mandir tak” (Built Environment)

- Construction uses non-local, resource-intensive materials.
- Need to align housing aspirations with local materiality.
- Emphasized localized value chains and alternative paradigms (R&D, frameworks, measurement).
- Example: Timbuktu – local circular model in soap/detergent production.



Moderator
Anshuman Das
Lead Expert - Agroecology
and Food Systems,
Welthungerhilfe India

Circularity is not just a trendy buzzword but rooted in indigenous practices. It is -

- Not linear (take-make-dispose)
- Not just recycling
- Not a techno-fix or consumption-maximization model
- Not input or cost-intensive

Potential Solution



Reclaim Circularity from Indigenous Wisdom



Reform Key Sectors
Agriculture
Daily Consumption
Infrastructure



Local Value Chains and Aspirations Must Align



Structural and Policy Support Required



Inclusivity in Implementation



Reimagining and reviving community and individual sovereignty actions of circular living for Climate Resilient Development Pathway

The Wicked Challenge

Unplanned human activities and climate change have led to degraded soil and reduced water availability in tribal and hilly regions, threatening both livelihoods and ecological balance.

BUT

Reviving indigenous tribal practices rooted in agroecology offers a regenerative path to restore soil health and water-use efficiency, while building community resilience to climate change.

Common agreement

- **Critique of market-driven development:** Concerns about how markets are displacing community-based practices and sovereignty.
- **Failure of PESA implementation:** Despite being a landmark legislation, it has failed on the ground.
- **Importance of community-led solutions:** Solutions rooted in local governance and traditions (like Gram Swaraj) are more effective for climate resilience.
- **Disillusionment with carbon credits:** The mechanism was viewed as externally driven and not benefiting communities.



Moderator
Biraj Patnaik
Executive Director,
National Foundation of
India

PESA Act's implementation needs to be re-looked.

Its original goals have been diluted by vested interests

Potential Solution



Strengthen Implementation of PESA Act



Promote Gram Swaraj as a Climate Action Model



Transition from Commercial to Protective Forests



Redesign Climate Finance to Reward Local Custodians



Foster Ground-Up Philanthropy and Partnerships



Speaker
Sreejan Dutta
Manager - Venture
Philanthropy, LGT Wealth
India

Local community sovereignty in climate action is important

Converting commercial forests into protective forests is a good strategy - tribal-inhabited areas have more intact forest cover

Carbon credit systems are ineffective for local communities

Philanthropists should listen to communities and their ground-based learning



Speaker
Gangabhai Paikra
President, Chaupal Gramin
Vikas Prashikshan Sansthan

The increasing market-dependence in tribal societies is worrisome, resulting in excessive buying, debt, stress and eventual loss of land.

Climate change impacts on tribal life is concerning

Gram Swaraj (village self-rule) as an alternative framework for life



The Wicked Challenge

The erosion of traditional circular lifestyles in tribal communities is escalating due to industrial development models, necessitating a large-scale civil society movement, and the revival & adaptation of indigenous practices for climate resilience.

BUT

There is an untapped potential of tribal and rural communities to lead climate-resilient development through their embedded circular practices, if supported by collaborative and locally informed actions.

Exploring the Intersection of Circular Living within Indigenous practices for Social, Economical, Cultural and Governance as part of climate resilient sustainability

Common agreement

Rural knowledge is undervalued but critical for sustainability.

Urban-centric development harms indigenous practices.

Sustainable change must emerge from within rural communities.

Circular practices are inherently embedded in indigenous traditions.

Biodiversity, seed sovereignty, and traditional food must be prioritized.



Speaker
Subrata Singh
Executive Director,
Foundation For Ecological Security

Apna khan paan, apna samman

There is a myth of urban superiority and rural loss of dignity.

Globalisation and nationalisation are slowly eroding our local practices.

There is a need to restructure local food systems and reclaim cultural identity.

We should be mindful of the myth of refined oil narrative and sustainability tokenism.



Speaker
Deepak Sharma
Development Expert

Gyan dene jayenge to mushkil hogi, explore karne jayenge to nahi hogi

Think Indigenous Actions and apply Circularity + Swaraj at the community level

Every indigenous actions gives three benefits- Cultural linkages, ecological and social benefits

Need to enhance biodiversity and seed sovereignty (Beej Swaraj).

Promoted Hangdi Kheti as a resource-efficient traditional method.



Moderator
Anshu Gupta
Co-Founder, Goonj

Shehr Gaon se sikhna nahi chahte...Yadi nal ko zinda rakhna hai to talab ko zinda rakhna hoga.

Women and rural people must drive circular change

Potential Solution



Recognize and Restore Dignity to Rural Knowledge - Incentivize Sustainable Practices



Empower Farmers as Change Leaders



Shift Narratives through Education and Media



Strengthen Collaborative Governance

The Wicked Challenge

Small-scale farmers, vital to food production, face mounting ecological and economic challenges while their sustainable practices erode under a market-driven system with little institutional support.

BUT

Reviving Indigenous knowledge and circular community practices through multi-stakeholder collaboration can drive climate-resilient agriculture and inclusive development.

Common agreement

Indigenous practices are effective but undervalued in policy and science

The dominant systems (governments, corporates, scientific institutions) undermine traditional knowledge.

Emphasis on reclaiming indigenous knowledge and community-led empowerment.

Need for collaborative, multi-stakeholder engagement, especially involving CSOs and tribal leaders.

Alarm over the erosion of traditional agricultural systems due to external market forces and lack of policy support.

Multistakeholder joint action for indigenous practices and processes at local, regional, and national agenda



Speaker
Mayfereen Rynthiang
President, Grassroot Shillong

The term "indigenous" is often misused, while ironically absent from crucial policy documents on water, forests, etc.

Indigenous people face the consequences of climate change without causing it

National government's control over underground resources (e.g., uranium mining) despite local stewardship of above-ground resources

The scientific community is hypocritical for questioning indigenous knowledge while failing to address climate change

There is a need for evidence-based policymaking that centers indigenous realities



Speaker
Jaipal Singh Kaushik
Development Expert

Indigenous agricultural practices like land levelling, vermicomposting, and multi-cropping on small plots (1-2 acres) are ideal practices, their decline is concerning

Five global companies dominates seed production, posing a threat to indigenous farming, tweaking consumption patterns.

There is a need for critical study on microfinance institutions and agro-economies.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) should partner with tribal leaders for sustainable agri-practices and improved agro-economies.



Moderator
Shirish Joshi
Consultant
Organisation Design
and Strategic HR

The scientific community has historically taken away the intellectual rights of indigenous people, and a collective effort is needed to reclaim these rights

Potential Solution



Evidence-Based Policymaking



Reclaiming Intellectual Rights



Revival of Traditional Agricultural Practices



Engagement of CSOs and Tribal Leaders



Spiritual and Community-Centered Knowledge Systems



Plenary Session

Sovereignty Sustainability and Climate Change Resilience

Objective: To explore the role of philanthropy and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in advancing sovereignty, sustainability, and climate resilience by promoting indigenous lifestyles and fostering equitable, community-centered development



Speaker
Sameer Shisodia
CEO, Rainmatter Foundation

Representing the place and people is Swaraj

Climate change must be understood through lived experiences

Decision-making needs to shift to communities, especially those with indigenous knowledge

Success in climate efforts is not measurable in typical terms — it's about starting a movement

We should be mindful of rigid project control by funders - focus on tools and processes, not just outcomes

If funders don't align with your goal, move on



Speaker
Shraman Jha
CEO, Hindustan Unilever Foundation

CSR is evolving, rooted in Gandhian values of profit with purpose.

There is an ongoing debates about social license to operate among corporates.

Co-creation — corporates should work with NGOs using their ground knowledge

India's CSR law as a way to cultivate voluntary corporate responsibility, not just taxation

Agree that "Grassroot actions do not fit into CSR". There should be equal, respectful partnerships that embody Swaraj.



Speaker
Shaifalika Panda
Trustee and Founder CEO, Bansidhar and Ila Panda Foundation

We work with 300-400 villages, with 70% indigenous beneficiaries

Emphasis on education and capacity building for community ownership

There is a need for contextual, geography-specific solutions — cannot consider the designs from Tier-1 cities as-it-is

There should be flexibility in timelines and funding — different villages evolve at different paces

Call for a mindset shift among funders, NGOs, and communities

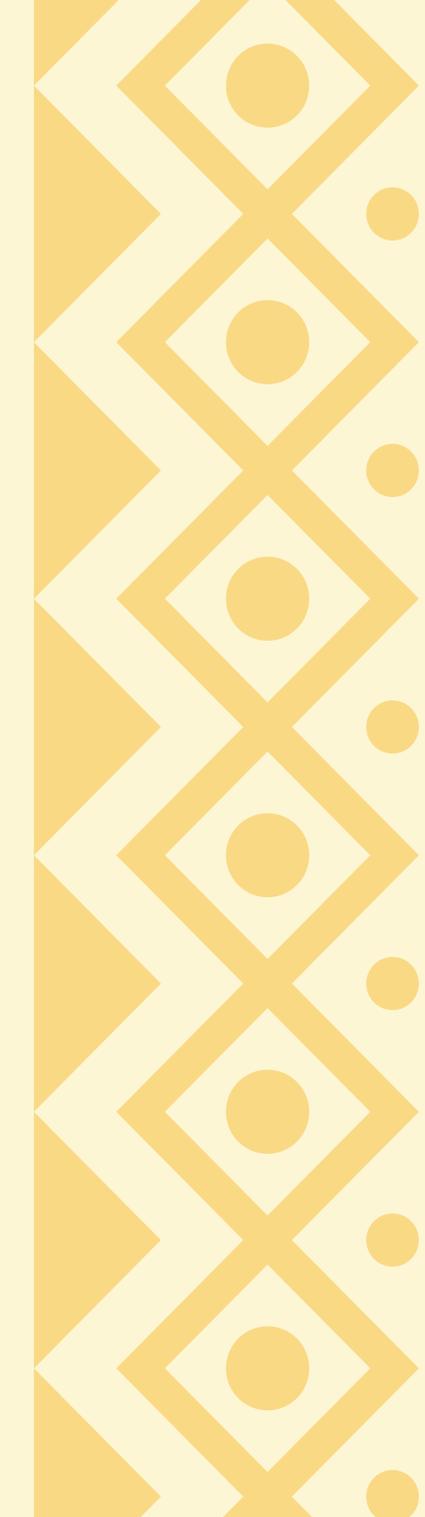


Moderator
Deval Sanghavi
Co-founder and Partner, Dasra

India's comprehensive law on CSR is a positive step, as only a few nations have such wide-reaching legislation

Common agreement

- Emphasis on shifting power and decision-making to local communities
- Effective climate resilience and development require adaptive planning and patient timelines
- Traditional funding models and outcome-based metrics don't fit the realities of climate action
- The relationship between funders and implementers must be based on mutual respect and co-creation, not top-down control



Thematic Session 3:

*Preserving Indigenous Knowledge -
Promoting Traditional Health and
Nutrition Practices*

आवाज़ ज़मीन से ...

Voice from the Soil | Power of the People

Padma Shri Pataet Kumar Sahu

"When forests vanish, so does our health, our heritage, and our harmony with nature."

From the heart of Western Odisha, Shri Pataet Kumar Sahu has dedicated over 40 years to protecting biodiversity and reviving traditional medicine. As a Vaidya, he has:

- 🌿 Cultivated a 1.5-acre herbal garden with 3200 rare herbal species
- 📖 Established an Ayurvedic Library housing 921 invaluable books
- 🌱 Educated youth to conserve indigenous plant knowledge
- 🐘 Raised concerns over forest loss and wildlife displacement

His voice echoes the wisdom of the soil—reminding us that health is rooted in nature, and knowledge must be nurtured like a seed.



The Wicked Challenge

Is the food we are growing today accessible and affordable for all? The decline of traditional, sovereign living among tribal communities has increased their vulnerability to health and climate challenges by weakening local health systems, dietary diversity, and ecological resilience

BUT

Reviving indigenous knowledge in 21st Century and cyclical health practices of tribal communities offers sustainable, low-cost solutions to strengthen climate resilience, nutrition, and nutritional swaraj (self-reliance).

Sovereignty Practices in relation to sustainable biodiversity, nutrition, and health outcomes

Common agreement

Climate-resilient food systems require crop exchange, seed banking, and cryopreservation.

Stakeholder collaboration is critical, researchers, farmers, communities, and policymakers must work together for Heterogeneity and high yield.

Mainstreaming local varieties and helping in scaling, by creating biodiversity hotspots.

COVID-19 has reinforced the importance of local food systems and self-reliance (swaraj).

Indigenous practices offer invaluable insights for resilient, equitable, and sustainable development. We must listen, learn, and collaborate with Indigenous communities to build a healthier and food-secure future



Speaker
Sanjay Patil
Chief Thematic Programme Executive, BAIF

Nutritional and agricultural security cannot be treated in silos

Monocropping and monovarietal agriculture, driven by technology and markets, have led to the homogenization of our diets

India has over 4 lakh plant species, yet only 30,000 are considered edible with just 200 crops as active

Crop diversity is rapidly declining - 50+ varieties of crops like rice, has shrunken only 6-7

Very little research integrates Indigenous knowledge with formal scientific conservation

Nutritional security is tied to soil health and livelihood security

Need for indigenous wisdom and technological advancement



Speaker
Bhavani RV
Senior Advisor (Food & Nutrition), Coalition for Food and Nutrition Security (CFNS)

Indigenous communities pass down practices that embody sustainable development and living in harmony with nature

Local vegetables, tubers, leafy greens, and even edible weeds are rich in micronutrients

Seed banking and seed exchange at the village level support nutrition and biodiversity

Certain varieties, like salt-tolerant crops found post-tsunami, show promise in climate resilience; Sahiwal, Gir, and Banni buffalo are highly adapted to harsh climates and should be conserved

Sacred groves and traditional healers have historically preserved medicinal plants

Poshan Vatikas (nutri-gardens) should focus on locally grown, nutrient-rich crops



Moderator
Murari Goswami
Development Expert

Best practices to bring the collaborative action needs to be adapted across the country

Potential Solution



Academic focus on Indigenous knowledge



Robust platforms to promote indigenous knowledge



Promoting Heterogeneity in crops, livestock at policy level



Collaborative Action & Knowledge Sharing



Community Actions and Climate Resilient Health System

The Wicked Challenge

Climate change is straining health systems in low- and middle-income countries by heightening risks for vulnerable groups and threatening infrastructure resilience.

BUT

Indigenous knowledge systems offer sustainable, community-led solutions for climate-resilient health and governance through ecological harmony and collaborative revival

Common agreement

Rising health challenges are a pressing issue. Climate change is directly affecting human health.

The importance of community action and human agency in health improvement.

The need to preserve traditional knowledge, especially medicinal plants.

A call for sustainable and climate-resilient health systems.

Emphasis on integration of health and environment in public planning.



Speaker
Dr. Ritu Priya, Mehrotra
JNU

Health is Wealth

There is a need to understand health issues in the context of climate change by "**healthy swaraj samvad**" (community dialogue for health sovereignty)

Highlighted temperature rise is a key issue of climate change. The prevalence of waterborne diseases like diarrhoea will increase

There is a need to redesign our homes to be climate-resilient

The overdependence on doctors, pushing us all away from sustainable healthcare systems



Speaker
Jatindra Kar
President - Aswini Kumar
Kalahandi Vaidya Sangh,
Odisha

The value of traditional medicinal knowledge using medicinal plants is undervalued. It needs exploration

There is a need for the preservation of medicinal flora from destruction

Article 48A of the Constitution emphasises environmental protection and conservation of forests and wildlife



Moderator
Dr. Narendra Gupta
Senior Advisor, Prayas

With growing health challenges, the value of disease-free living, and the role of individuals and traditional practices becomes highly critical in improving health outcomes.

Potential Solution



Community Engagement



Sustainable Healthcare Models- Healthy Swaraj Samvad



Climate-Resilient Housing



Use and Preservation of Traditional Medicine



The Wicked Challenge

Harmonising indigenous practices with modern sustainability efforts while preserving community autonomy and resilience amid climate, economic, and governance pressures is a challenge

BUT

Indigenous communities hold ecologically sustainable practices that, when revived and shared, can lead climate-resilient development and inspire region-wide solutions

Capturing and Co-creating sovereignty knowledge, skills, and practices from various climate hot-spots/indigenous groups

Common agreement

Indigenous knowledge is fading due to modernization and changing aspirations

Behaviour change is critical - short-term urgency won't work

Youth engagement is a challenge - pride in local culture and rethinking aspirations is necessary

Community participation and co-creation are essential for sustainability

We should follow a *non-linear, empathetic, and community-rooted* approaches



Speaker
Deepak Sharma
Development Expert

Indigenous knowledge is fading due to westernized consumption habits. There is a need to keep patient and have sensitive engagement to capture knowledge

Food walks - rediscovering and extension of undercultivated indigenous crops.

Created Kisan Diaries with farmers to record local knowledge (soil type, land size, irrigation).

Co-creation is a behavioural change process - individual to community. Youth should be encouraged & instill pride in their local culture



Speaker
Sachin Jain
Founder, Vikas Samwad

Swaraj is a relationship between people and nature

We need to be mindful of deteriorating village consumption patterns using Kaushambi example

Narrative is more important than knowledge

Urgency is not the answer - **behavioural change and continuous dialogue are key to sustainability**



Moderator
Devjit Mitra
Director, Socratus Foundation

Using **creative tools** beyond conventional research methods to capture indigenous knowledge

Potential Solution



Behaviour Change Models



Creative Narratives



Cultural Pride Building



Continuous Communication



The Wicked Challenge

Reviving traditional health systems is challenging due to fragmented communities and policy gaps, and requires a coordinated, preventive, community-led approach to address widespread health issues.

BUT

A sovereignty-led revival of indigenous, community-based health systems—centered on women, elders, and local health workers—offers a sustainable, low-cost alternative to treatment-heavy healthcare models.

Piloting revival and evolving policy initiatives over sovereignty led food, nutrition, and health system

Common agreement

- Community-centric approach**
Importance of grassroots engagement and empowerment
- Critique of existing policy paradigms**
- Need for systems change**
Structural transformation rather than quick fixes
- Value of indigenous knowledge**
Revival and respect for local traditions and food systems
- Against commodification**
Stand against viewing health and food as services/products
- Power structures matter**
Caste, gender, and historical positioning as key barriers to equity.



Speaker
Mallika Biddappa
Lead Knowledge Management, KHPT

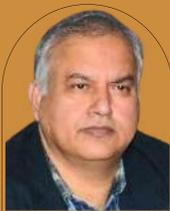
Community engagement is essential to public health

- Highlighted the triangular relationship between power imbalances, social exclusion, and vulnerability, urging community participation to break it
- Advocated for process-oriented policy and attitudinal change before behavioral change
- Stressed the importance of local governance, systems thinking and community co-ownership of problems - Enhanced indigenous knowledge, grassroots data collection, and a Decision Support System (DSS) owned and accessed by communities
- Critiqued the limited service delivery model of health, urging inclusion of social determinants and micro-contexts
- Called for respect for indigenous practices and collaboration as an end rather than a means



Speaker
Anshuman Das
Lead Expert - Agroecology and Food Systems, Welthungerhilfe India

- The Pahadiya tribe example - PDS rice has disrupted their millet-based food culture, causing malnourishment
- Critiqued the Green Revolution paradigm and commodification of food, especially via **rice-centric and export-focused policies**
- Stressed that food is cultural and relational, not just a product
- MSP discourages crop diversification, leading to a loss of nutrition and biodiversity
- Pseudo-diversity due to dominance by 20 companies in the food market
- Need to Call for the localisation of production and consumption, and grassroots food sovereignty initiatives



Moderator
Narender Kumar
Chief Functionary, Shivi Development Society

By multistakeholder collaboration we can strengthen the community health management system

Potential Solution



Empower communities to co-own health and food systems



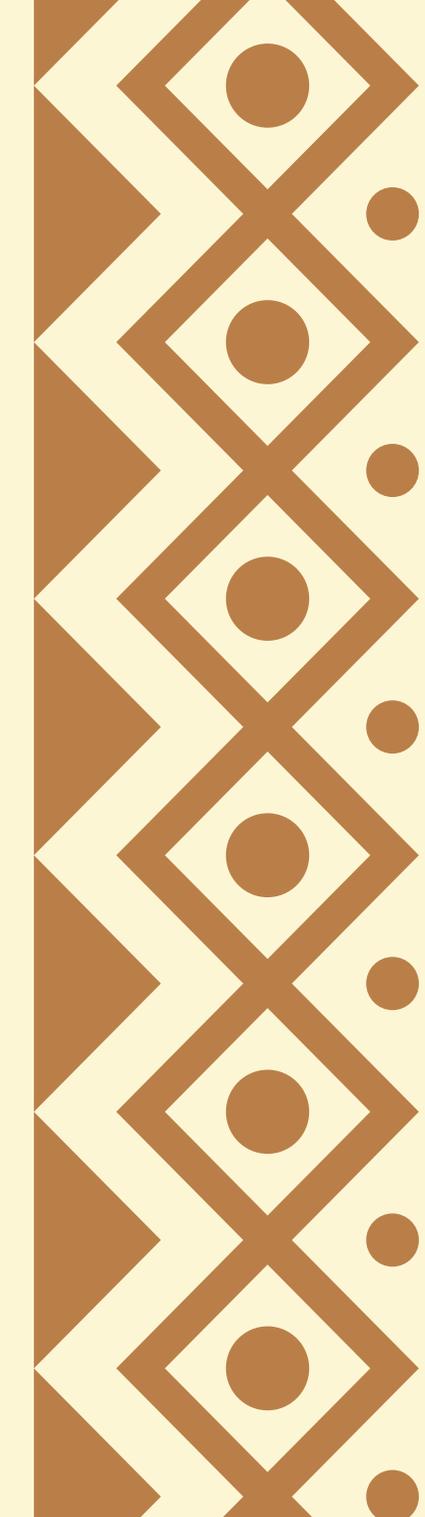
Redesign public systems like PDS and MSP to support localized, diverse, and culturally rooted food practices



Shift policy focus from risk to vulnerability, integrating social determinants and micro-contexts into health frameworks



Develop community-led data platforms (like DSS) to enable evidence-based, inclusive decision-making from the ground up



Thematic Session 4:
*Enabling Community Leadership for
Driving Sustainable Changes*

आवाज़ ज़मीन से ...

Voice from the Soil | Power of the People



Anita Damor

"We changed minds, one truth at a time."

🔥 While many spoke of preserving indigenous knowledge, Anita brought light to a different reality — challenging deep-rooted superstitions. In villages where breastfeeding was once shunned due to harmful beliefs, Anita and her fellow women activists stepped in. Through persistence, empathy, and dialogue, they transformed misinformation into empowerment — one mother, one family, one village at a time.

🗣️ This is leadership from the soil — resilient, rooted, and real.

It's time we listen.

It's time we act.

From the ground up.



The Wicked Challenge

Leadership development often overlooks community-rooted Indigenous leaders and women; and fails to integrate their knowledge, collaborative dialogue, and grassroots voices—hindering progress toward the SDGs

BUT

Leveraging local leadership, Indigenous practices, and community-led governance offers a powerful pathway to scale climate resilience and sustainable development through collaborative, sovereignty-driven approaches.

Engaging with policy and program dialogue on practices for community involvement in Sovereignty led Sustainable and Climate Resilient Development

Common agreement

Women need both opportunity and agency.

Gender norms, disabling spaces, and male-dominated decision-making restrict women's mobility and leadership.

Gender equity must be inclusive and rotational.

Local knowledge systems offer viable climate solutions. Representation (33% reservation for women) can empower indigenous women to lead local climate resilience efforts.

Marginalized groups must be included in both philanthropic and policy spaces.

True self-governance must ensure community control over resources and leadership that reflects the diversity of the population.



Speaker
Radha Chellappa
Executive Director, IWWAGE

Achieving swaraj (self-governance) necessitates recognizing and addressing the everyday challenges of women

Climate-induced migration raises significant safety and security concerns, especially for adolescent girls. - families resort to child marriages

Women, often left behind while men migrate for work, leading to increased care burdens and health issues

Women possess traditional knowledge and sustainable practices but

Adaptation to climate-induced changes requires mobility and skill-building, which is inaccessible to women



Speaker
Ashif Shaikh
Co Founder, Jan Sahas

True commitment towards climate resilience should remain rooted in community-centric action rather than funding trends

Drought-driven migration affects 200–250 million people globally. 66% of migration is climate-induced, yet most welfare schemes don't address climate as a root cause

India has ~7,000 central and state welfare schemes, but migrants face systemic exclusions

In Delhi, heatwaves led to a ban on 18 occupational trades. There's a proposal placed to pay ₹6,000 to daily wage workers during extreme AQI levels

Climate challenges require multi-stakeholder action



Moderator
Jagadananda
Mentor & Co-Founder,
Centre of Youth &
Social Development

NGOs, government, industry, philanthropy, and communities must collaborate

Potential Solution



Extension of local knowledge systems



Rotational, leaderships from the margins



Multi-stakeholder approach



Community-Centered Knowledge Systems



Evolving framework to empowering indigenous communities by cultivating sovereignty for sustainable climate solutions

The Wicked Challenge

Modern development often overlooks indigenous ecological wisdom and self-governance, leading to climate vulnerability, social disparities, and a lack of support for locally rooted, sustainable solutions.

BUT

Indigenous communities, rooted in traditional knowledge and cultural heritage, can lead scalable, low-cost, and sustainable climate solutions through sovereignty-led, community-driven approaches.

Common agreement

Need for systemic change

Stress on rethinking frameworks to empower indigenous communities and move beyond fragmented efforts

Decentralization and local governance

Emphasis on local institutions, grassroots involvement, and community sovereignty

Integrating Indigenous Knowledge

Critique of current models

Challenging mainstream, urban-centric, or crisis-driven narratives

Sustainability through inclusion

Youth involvement, urban poor inclusion, and ecology-economy alignment



Speaker Devjit Mitra
Director, Socratus Foundation

The crisis-oriented climate narrative generates fear: Called for rethinking climate change as a grammar—a system of meaning, not just crisis

Proposed a shift to a “flourishing orientation” focused on enabling regions to thrive

Advocated for a place-centered (rather than people-centered) framework



Speaker Aruna Tirkey
Director - Ajam Emba Private Ltd.

Positioned food systems as a framework for community connection

The exclusion of the urban poor from food systems and related frameworks should be curbed



Speaker Sanjay Singh
Secretary, Parmarth Samaj Sevi Sansthan

Understanding climate issues at the ecosystem level

There is a need for strengthening local governance and integrating indigenous knowledge into policy

Call for transnational and pilot research, documentation, and dissemination of best practices

Strengthening the link between democracy and sustainability

Potential Solution

Shift climate narratives from fear-based crisis talk to a flourishing, place-centered approach

Strengthen local governance by empowering Panchayats and integrating indigenous knowledge

Build inclusive models through stakeholder dialogues, youth engagement, and reflecting lived experiences in frameworks

Align ecology with economy by promoting responsible consumerism, redefining profit, and adopting ecocentric development models

Ground institutions and think tanks in community realities, enabling academics and NGOs to co-create solutions with policymakers



Moderator Anant Bhagwati
Partner, Bridgespan

Sovereignty-led sustainable development is closely linked to leadership building, particularly through strategic and thought leadership



Explore Potential of Sovereign Principles led Enterprising Actions for Youth Engagement in Sustainable Actions like Green-Energy, Agroecology, Circular-Living, Food & Nutrition, and Climate Resilient Health System

The Wicked Challenge

Climate change threatens Indigenous communities by disrupting their traditional, eco-aligned systems, highlighting the urgent need to restore decentralized governance and Indigenous knowledge for resilient development.

BUT

Reviving indigenous knowledge and community sovereignty offers an inclusive, low-cost, and sustainable path to climate resilience through time-tested practices and civil society collaboration.

Responses from Open Discussions

Farmers open to organic farming, but low demand is a barrier.

Funds are allocated but unused by the panchayat; trained youth can hold panchayats accountable

Eco/agritourism can help train youth to generate income sustainably while preserving the local environment and community ties

Youth as volunteers can conducted surveys to understand the issues at the village level - lack of sewer systems, water, no roads etc.



Moderator
Avneet Kaur
Principal, Bridgespan

Youth engagement in sustainable practices through enterprising actions rooted in sovereign principles—spanning green energy, agroecology, circular living, and climate-resilient health systems.

Potential Solution



Promote assisted entrepreneurship by supporting first-time rural entrepreneurs with mentorship and resources



Strengthen financial inclusion through climate financing models like umbrella loans and mobile business schools



Build local capacity by training youth in sustainability, governance accountability, and enterprise skills



Create demand for organic and green products through branding, marketing, and consumer education



Encourage eco-based livelihoods like agri-tourism to generate income without harming the environment



Speaker
Anagha Kamat
Founder, KickStart Girls,
Mann Deshi Foundation

Never provide poor solutions to people.

Working with tribal and rural women in Maharashtra, expanded work to youth in 2019

The people have recognised disruption in agricultural patterns (sowing and harvesting) -

Agenda of Mann Deshi:

1. Climate financing - umbrella loans designed for street vendors, mortgage gold in banks to buy fodder for their animals, "business school on wheels", "best out of waste" - creating green business.
2. Educating the youth - at school level itself, community radio show. The youth have been encouraged to study the soil of the land.



Speaker
Shirish Joshi
Consultant Organisation
Design and Strategic HR

Fund the entrepreneur, not the project

Project with BAIF in collaboration with EU - uplift 3000 people from BPL in 11 districts - 800-950 people started enterprises with the help of this scheme

Cluster development officers gave power to the community to decide about the spending of the budget and the actions to be taken - successful because of the partnership and collaborative nature

There should be assisted entrepreneurship to help them establish themselves, at least for the first-level entrepreneur

NGOs also help with the capacity building of the marginalised



The Wicked Challenge

Achieving sustainable development is complex, requiring inclusive, culturally aligned leadership that navigates uncertainty and conflict while integrating ethical, community-driven approaches across diverse contexts.

BUT

The silver lining is the power of community-led, sovereignty-driven leadership to creatively address uncertainty, integrate Indigenous knowledge, and scale local solutions for achieving sustainable development.

Motivating and mobilizing - Community actions taking sustainable practices from local to global and vice-versa

Common agreement

Gandhian Principles as a foundation for sustainable community action

Empowerment from within - whether through individual training or community upliftment

Local knowledge and practices (like Gram Swaraj) are key to building global sustainability models

Importance of leadership development and social inclusion

Recognition of women and marginalized communities as agents of change.



Speaker
Uthara Narayanan
Co-founder & Chief Changemaker, Buzz Women

As a founder, my journey with Buzz Women has enabled 10 million underserved women to craft their livelihood

Believes in holistic approach to development: social, economic, and ecological transformation

There are ripple effect of change through inner strength training, community anchors, inspiration fellowship, and Buzz business initiative



Speaker
Sanjay Rai
National Secretary, Harijan Sewak Sangh

Swaraj was impossible without Gandhi

His notable initiatives were:

- Formation of Harijan Sevak Sangh (1932) and Kasturba Trust.
- Role in the Poona Pact and benefits for untouchables.
- Gandhi's acts of opening temples to Harijans.
- Core principles: truth and non-violence.



Moderator
Biraj Patnaik
Executive Director,
National Foundation of India

An indigenous practice related to the circular economy that we aim to reintroduce

Potential Solution



Reviving Gandhian values
Truth, non-violence, and upliftment of the marginalized as core to sustainable practices.



Redefining Gram Swaraj as Circular Economy
Promoting localized, regenerative, and culturally aligned development models.



Women-led transformation
Building inner strength and developing community leadership



Integrating indigenous practices into current development discourse for circular, resilient economies



Plenary Session

Role of narrative building in strengthening swaraj and sustainability

Objective: To explore how inclusive narrative building can strengthen Swaraj and sustainability by amplifying rural voices, promoting indigenous knowledge, and reshaping media practices for equitable and climate-resilient development.



Speaker
Nidhi Jamwal
Journalist

There is a diminishing space for rural India in mainstream media

Urban journalists often set rural narratives, leading to disconnect

Like, Santhal woman learning from YouTube, there is a big potential in rural aspiration

There is a need for capacity-building for rural journalists

Technology is a double-edged sword – how it's used is up to the individual

A ground-level storytelling by those affected is necessary



Speaker
Devanshi Vaid
Co-Founder, Director, India Development Review

Social media is powerful but needs careful and ethical use

There is a need for fact-checking, consequence mitigation, and media protection

The role of demystifying development and sustainability for broader understanding

Media must unlearn and relearn to stay relevant and responsible.



Speaker
Bharat Dogra
Author and Journalist

Call for preservation of tribal knowledge and promotion of Swaraj

We need to be mindful of GM crops and corporate control over agriculture

There is a need to learn from conservative ideas - Swaraj to mitigate climate change

Grassroots innovations like Mangal Turbine being ignored despite media coverage

Pointed out the crisis of small media houses and low publication rates for meaningful stories.



Moderator
Meenakshi Gupta
Co-Founder, Goonj

Inclusive and conscious narrative-building can address poverty, climate crises, and inequality while amplifying marginalized voices



Strengthening Rural Narratives



Narrative Building for Sustainability & Swaraj



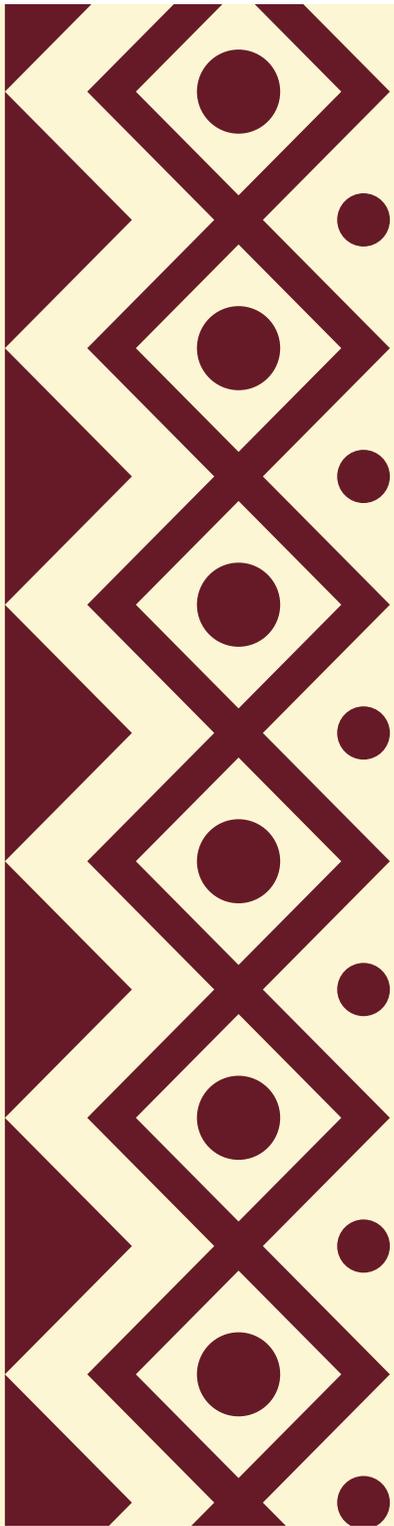
Reforming Media Practices



Promote responsible use of social media



Advocate for ethical policy narratives



Thematic Session:
Exploring Tribal Swaraj Across India

Regional Pathways to Climate Resilience through Swaraj



Theme	North + Central	East	West	South	Northeast
Swaraj & Dialogue	Inclusive leadership; natural farming; open dialogue	Traditional leaders; youth/women inclusion; local food, festivals, seeds	Local resource ownership; creative documentation; planning at block level	Decentralized governance; diverse farming; local terminology	Community-led development; traditional farming; reject external models
Leadership Building	Recognize grassroots leaders; empower CBOs	Community-relevant data; leadership from within; organic practices	Value-based leadership; localized education	Train empathetic leaders; include women, transgender voices	Traditional governance; agroecology and energy leadership
CSO Actions	Knowledge platforms, digital infrastructure, community Internet, and agro-tech hubs for rural innovation.	Organic farming; seed banks; local food; climate advocacy	Organize knowledge; revive community pride, farmer control over value chains and traditional marketing systems.	Seed Melas; traditional practices; align local-modern approaches	Indigenous land rights; promote local energy and eco-practices
Policy Actions	Support sustainable practices and marginalized voices	Multi-stakeholder platforms; cultural food; eco-friendly education	Local governance; community resource investment	Empathy in policymaking; 3Rs; farmer participation	Local language policies; eco-first agriculture; subsidy support
Other Stakeholders' Role	Engage youth; bridge rural-urban gap	Inclusive narratives across caste, gender, age	Evidence-policy sync; grassroots reporting	Include farmers in tech talks; networks for collaboration	Support local priorities; promote fair indigenous markets



Decentralization



Inclusion



Agroecology



Collaboration



Resilience

Key Takeaway: *Envisioning a future with Swaraj of seed, soil, water, and energy, community-led solutions, and climate resilience –a call to reclaim our food systems, regenerate our ecosystems, and reweave our social fabrics.*



Concluding Session



Speaker
Gagan Sethi
Founder, Janvikas and
Centre for Social Justice

I am because we are!

- ❖ Let's foster dialogues over pushing unilateral views
- ❖ Leaders should engage directly with communities
- ❖ Strategic Partnership for Swaraj initiatives like **Swaraj Shala** and **Swaraj Fund**, but avoid control or dictation in these platforms
- ❖ True Swaraj must align with people's aspirations, requiring clear .

Policy (Neeti) | Commitment (Nishtha) | Intention (Neeyat)



Speaker
Anshu Gupta
Founder, Goonj

- ❖ Dignity and respect for rural communities and their traditional skills.
- ❖ The toxic labelling of rural populations as 'unskilled' undermines their profound indigenous knowledge and craftsmanship.
- ❖ The ignorance/arrogance of sabotaging alternative learning methods, especially for adolescents should be curtailed; in fact, recognition and appreciation of diverse learning styles and practical intelligence in rural contexts will be the true meaning of **Swaraj!**



Speaker
Jagadananda
Mentor & Co-Founder,
Centre of Youth & Social
Development

- ❖ Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Swaraj: empowering people to resist misuse of authority
- ❖ Swaraj in agro-ecology, health, soil, and energy is important for climate action.
- ❖ **Unity and collective action should be strengthened:** calling for urgent focus on PESA rules and strengthening Panchayati Raj.



Speaker
Jayesh Joshi
Secretary, Vaagdhara

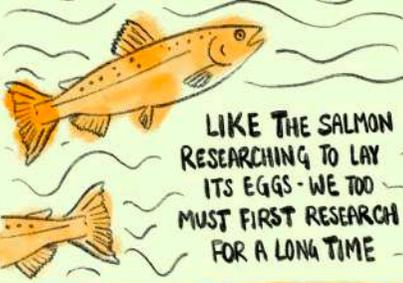
- ❖ Swaraj is deeply woven into tribal lifestyles in the form of their values of self-reliance and harmony with nature.
- ❖ Swaraj Samvad as a guiding North Star for collective action.
- ❖ Partner CSOs should take this dialogue forward in their own contexts and regions.
- ❖ Strengthening dialogue between families, villages and panchayats, across generations, between human and nature, among Communities (**Samaj**), Governments (**Sarkar**), and Markets (**Bazar**) is essential.
- ❖ By strengthening such dialogues, the spirit and significance of Swaraj will be established naturally.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: SWARAJ SAMVAAD 2.0



To reclaim Swaraj as community stewardship, we must initiate the **Swaraj Movement** as a multifaceted movement reaching out to various stakeholders through **Samvad** (Dialogue) initially and later co-creating a free-access Swaraj Repository. It will require the creation of two wheels of **Netratva** (leadership) through **Swaraj Shala** and **Sansadhan** (resources) through the Swaraj Fund.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



LIKE THE SALMON RESEARCHING TO LAY ITS EGGS - WE TOO MUST FIRST RESEARCH FOR A LONG TIME



GOOD GOVERNANCE CAN NOT REPLACE SWARAJ

HERE WE ARE 500 PEOPLE COME TOGETHER!



EVERYONE IS BORN WITH DIGNITY

Swaraj संवाद

WE NEED TO WORK ON LANGUAGE

AS THE BANTU IDEA SAYS:

WE NEED TO LEARN TO: LISTEN AND TRUST

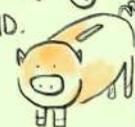


I AM BECAUSE YOU ARE WE ARE



FORM KNOWLEDGE REPOSITORIES. NO IPR. SHARE IT!

BUILD A SWARAJ FUND.



JAI BHIM

WHO IS A DONOR AND WHO IS A BENEFICIARY?

THEY BOTH GIVE WHETHER RESOURCES OR TIME.



HOW IS A FARMER UNSKILLED?

CAN ANYONE GROW CROPS WITHOUT SKILLS?



WHAT IS SWARAJ?

ACQUISITION OF CAPACITY BY ALL, TO RESIST AUTHORITY WHEN IT IS ABUSED. - GANDHI



PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

NARRATIVE BUILDING

IS THE NEED OF THE HOUR

WE MUST CHALLENGE OUR OWN NARRATIVES

WE NEED TO USE LANGUAGE TO EXAMINE

POWER STRUCTURES



AND BACK OUR WORDS WITH ACTIONS

FOR EXAMPLE: WE REALIZE AS WE SEE IT THAT THE PANEL SHOULD HAVE HAD WOMEN ON IT.

THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING.



NOBODY IS A SOLO PLAYER

WE ALL NEED MORE

COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

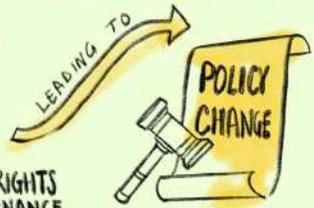
AND TO ADDRESS



BASIC NEEDS.



TRIBAL RIGHTS & GOVERNANCE.



POLICY CHANGE



Swaraj Samvad 2025