

YOUTH ECO-FEMINIST COMMUNITY ACTION COURSE 2023-24

A RESIDENTIAL COURSE FOR
ADIVASI & RURAL YOUTH



COURSE OVERVIEW

Youth from rural and adivasi communities are directly affected by the climate crisis today. They are socially, economically and emotionally affected when their agriculture, forests, water bodies and other natural resources are destroyed. The immediate effect is on youth education and skills as many are dropping out of school and college to support their families. They are sometimes the only earning members of their families, migrating to other places for work and do not have proper health, social security, opportunities for skill-building and are slowly losing their intergenerational knowledge systems. They are also witnessing new challenges in their communities but do not have access to information or skills to find local solutions or bring together their community members for addressing their problems.

As a collective of civil society groups working with adivasi and rural youth in the country, we are witness to their distress. Yet we also see a vast potential for youth energy to be cultivated for fulfilling their aspirations and opportunities for growth, at personal and community levels. Many are increasingly looking for alternate spaces for learning and public engagement for building more sustainable social and economic models of development. By harnessing the natural resources and traditional knowledge practices with learning from constructive community projects and governance perspectives around the country, they could transform their ecosystems, communities and their own futures.

Why this course

Adivasi and Rural Youth have immense potential to become change makers in their communities and enable a transformative and sustainable future for themselves and their communities. Yet, access to learning, intersectional perspective building and understanding of community action methodologies is a challenge.

The Youth Eco-Feminist Community Action Course has thus been collaboratively designed to enable such a space for youth, through a learning-cum-praxis experience. It provides a platform for adivasi and rural youth to engage with theories of change that are practically tried by field practitioners, farmers, institutions and local communities. We believe that understanding of development dynamics from a gendered framework and challenging the structures of power and the politics of ecological resources from the lens of feminist ecology would help deepen the learning of youth to work towards a more sustainable eco-systems nurturing and community actions. Therefore, the title, Youth Eco-Feminist Community Action.

The course is a collective design by Dhaatri Trust, Keystone Foundation, Sakhi Trust and adivasi alliances/experts.

Designed For Whom

Rural and Adivasi youth from across the country between the ages of 18 and 30 can participate. The first cohort had 15 youth (5 Rural + 10 Adivasi) from 4 states in India (Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Telangana).

This is a full-time residential course with fellowship support and an opportunity for extensive field learnings from various NGO and technical organizations. The first cohort started in August 2023 with a ten-month long theoretical and practical learnings, including field assignments in their respective communities.

What the Course contains

Participants of the course engaged with a diverse group of activists, environmentalists, researchers, media professionals and educators to understand and develop their perspectives and local actions. Through these interactions, they are able to initiate dialogue, share experiences, document stories, art and music and develop ideas for incubating locally sustainable restorative efforts.

Course curriculum

Themes

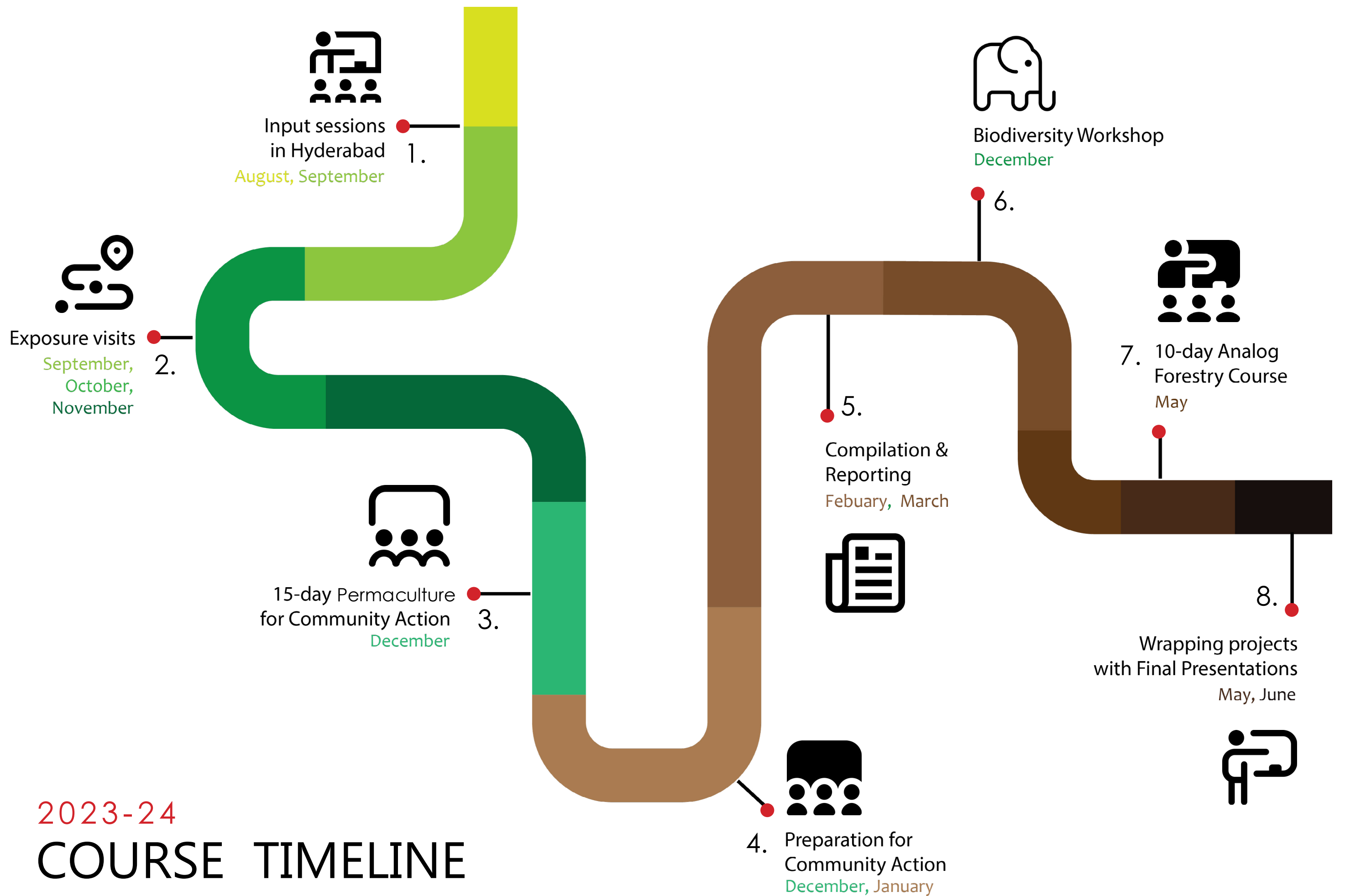
- **Social structures of caste, gender, indigeneity - Early human history timelines and indigenous peoples; historical and contemporary dynamics of social groups, oral histories vs mainstream narratives, social hierarchies of caste and gender vis-a-vis natural resources in India.**
- **State, laws and governance:** Understanding the Constitution, special laws and legal safeguards for Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and Women; structures of the state, governance institutions, processes of civic engagement in scheduled areas, customary institutions in adivasi societies, gender and natural resources governance.
- **Land governance, women's land entitlements, inheritance laws, sustainable land use, natural farming, permaculture and women's role in agrarian economics, knowledge practices of land and commons.**
- **Action Research methods and barefoot documentation:** Purpose of grassroots research, Methods of community profiling, primary data collection, documenting oral histories, community stories, ethnographies, problem identification and community based social and ecological research, participatory rural appraisal, baseline surveys, focussed group discussions, case studies, data analysis and actions based on problem analysis - from a gender equality lens and with women's entitlements, status, perspectives and knowledge as the centre of research methodologies.
- **Deconstructing gender:** Understanding the dynamics of gender constructs, violence against women, discrimination, power, sexuality, language; unpacking women's work and ecological engagement and women's roles, status across adivasi and dominant social groups and women's experiential knowledge practices.
- **Forests and governance:** Forest rights of local communities, the history and politics of forest governance and constitutional entitlements under forest laws from a gender lens, customary forestry and conservation practices, forest based knowledge of women and intergenerational learnings.
- **Resource extraction and gender impact assessment, women's leadership Creative tools of representation and self-expression:** using media tools for self representation; restoring cultural expression and oral narratives for self expression and community engagement.
- **Community Action:** Understanding and mapping community issues, conflicts and problems; Grassroots community engagement, introduction to tribal self governance, panchayats, mobilising community participation, Women's participation, leadership and the power of collectives, grassroots strategies for representation, lobbying and advocacy; sustainable livelihoods and community led economic strategies, enabling democratic processes of community representation, youth as community change agents and catalysts for gender equity.
- **Culture and Knowledge :** Adivasi cultural ecology, art, spirituality, language and music as forms of expression of knowledge, identity and philosophies of spiritual economics.

- The course has a combination of theoretical inputs and classroom analytical sessions, in depth training and learnings from mentor organisations through extensive travel across different states, practical thematic workshops, field assignments and field visits to diverse organisations.
- The pedagogy of classroom sessions include learnings from legal experts, gender experts, public health practitioners, NGOs working on specialised fields of education, livelihoods, farm technology, forestry, tribal and dalit rights and others.

- Practical sessions include theatre, art, video and audio documentation, film screenings, intensive field training on application of the Forest Rights Act, biodiversity mapping, permaculture and analog forestry.
- Field Visits to several NGOs working on a broad spectrum of social issues and strategies including forest rights, dalit rights, sustainable agriculture, livelihoods through cooperatives and women's collectives, reviving adivasi language, art and culture, urban actions with the marginalised, youth rights and women's rights platforms.
- Field visits to governance institutions, universities, schools, alternate education centres, museums and other institutions.
- Individual Field assignments include conducting baseline assessment of socio-economic and ecological situation, reviving community governance, engagement with local bodies and documenting community stories.
- A focus area in Cohort I was understanding the Energy Equity demands of women in the rural areas vis-a-vis the policies and programmes on energy finance and gender. Another critical field assignment was on the forest rights entitlements of women.



Artwork by
Bheemrao Athram(youth participant)



2023-24

COURSE TIMELINE

Resource Experts and Mentor Organisations that contributed to Cohort 1:

A Map of organisations and places that were covered in Cohort 1

Tribal Experts and Knowledge Keepers: training on Gond and Warli Art, Biodiversity and Healing Practices.

Exposure visits: Palle Srujana, MV Foundation, SAFEE Foundation, DDS, Aranya, Sakhi, Keystone, Adivasi Ekta Parishad.

Introduction to participatory rural appraisal and tools for community profiling through baseline surveys, building questionnaires, conducting interviews .

Introduction to research methods and ethics, collecting and documenting oral histories.

Biodiversity Workshop on Medicinal Herbs and Documentation for Community Forest Rights at Umaphatikuntha, Adilabad.

Training on writing reports, letters and representations to concerned authorities for lobbying.

Two weeks residential permaculture course at Aranya Farms.

Analog Forestry: Training to Youth on Forest Health and Biodiversity Assessment.

EXPOSURE VISITS

Gujrat

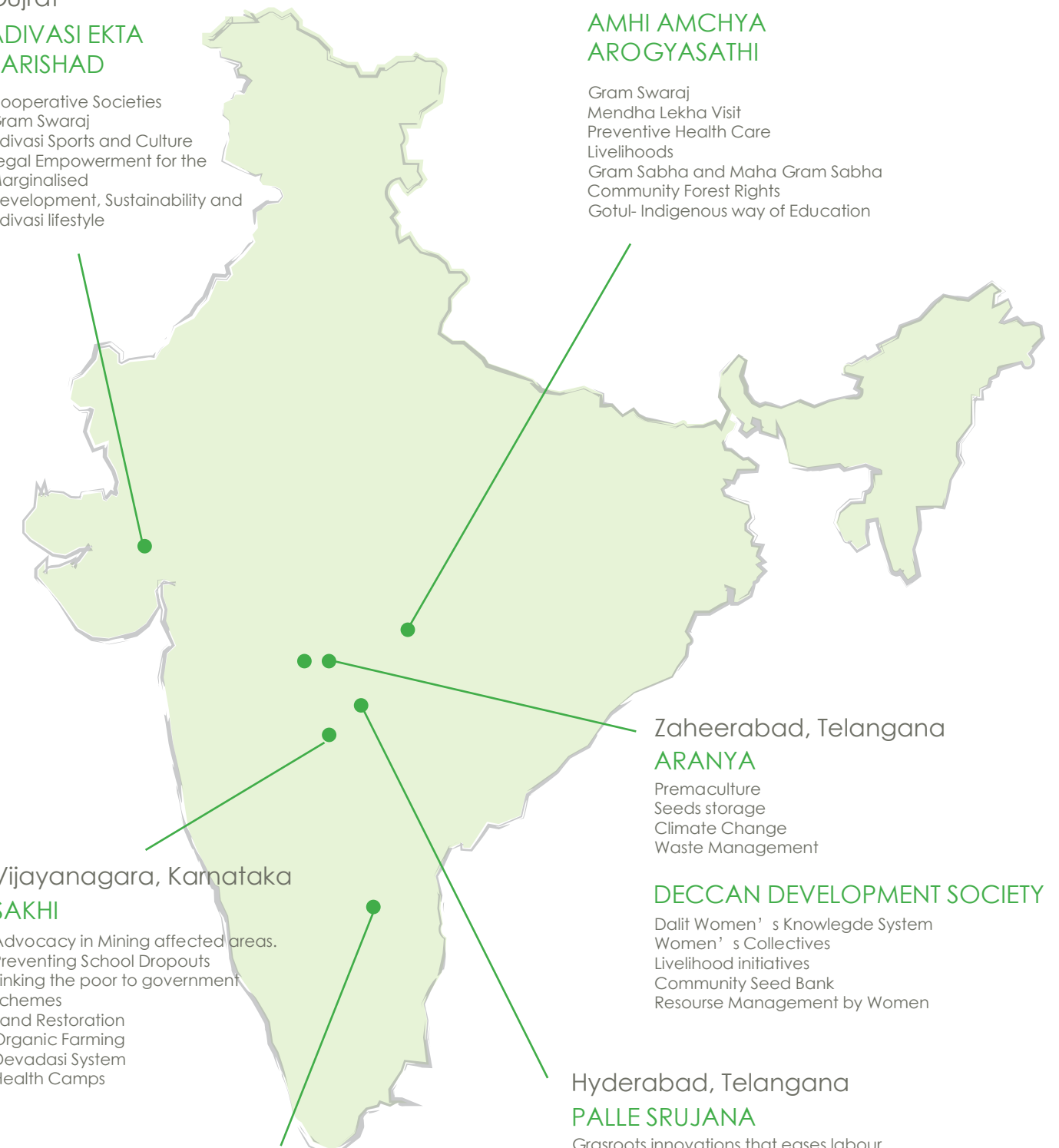
ADIVASI EKTA PARISHAD

Cooperative Societies
Gram Swaraj
Adivasi Sports and Culture
Legal Empowerment for the Marginalised
Development, Sustainability and Adivasi lifestyle

Gadchiroli, Maharashtra

AMHI AMCHYA AROGYASATHI

Gram Swaraj
Mendha Lekha Visit
Preventive Health Care
Livelihoods
Gram Sabha and Maha Gram Sabha
Community Forest Rights
Gotul- Indigenous way of Education



Vijayanagara, Kamataka

SAKHI

Advocacy in Mining affected areas.
Preventing School Dropouts
Linking the poor to government schemes
Land Restoration
Organic Farming
Devadasi System
Health Camps

Zaheerabad, Telangana

ARANYA

Permaculture
Seeds storage
Climate Change
Waste Management

DECCAN DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

Dalit Women' s Knowlegde System
Women' s Collectives
Livelihood initiatives
Community Seed Bank
Resourse Management by Women

Hyderabad, Telangana

PALLE SRUJANA

Grasroots innovations that eases labour
Recognition for local entrepreneurship

MV FOUNDATION

Right to Education
Community-led monitoring strategies

SAFE FOUNDATION

Prevention of violence against women and children
Education as a strategy for safety at informal urban settlements

Kotagiri, Tamil Nadu

KEYSTONE FOUNDATION

Biodiversity Mapping
Protected areas
Climate change
Self-profiling, ethnography of Adivasi communities
Community Radio
Farmer Producer Organisations
Forests Rights





Workshops in Hyderabad



3 day workshop on Theatre of the Opressed



7 day Art workshop on Gond and Warli Art



5 day Media training Workshop on Photography, Videography, and Editing

Field Assignments of Cohort 1

- 15 day residential permaculture course at Aranya Farms

The youth got an opportunity to participate in a 13-day-long permaculture design course with Aranya Agricultural Alternatives. Given that most of them come from agriculture families, they were keen on learning the permaculture techniques. They practically learned permaculture techniques such as water harvesting, making trenches, soil-testing, plowing land, storing seeds, crop designing, integrated pest management, and others. They also received completion certificates at the end of the course. They were also able to create their crop-design plan customized for their own land based on the soil type, land elevation, resource availability and so on. In addition, They made the mother culture of Kambucha and Garlic soda which they learnt in Aranya farms.



● 3 day biodiversity workshop at Umapatikuntha, Adilabad

In the effort towards getting community forest rights recognised, we conducted a Biodiversity workshop to identify forest resources, medicinal plants, water resources and in one of the villages of our youth in Adilabad. This training helped the youth to collect evidence for putting claims for CFR deeds. Nirmala Kerketta from Jharkhand, a Fellow and Trainer at Dhaatri has facilitated this workshop. Youth, Nirmala ji, villagers of Umapatikuntha and Representatives from local NGOs went for a forest walk to identify plant species and exchange knowledge about the use of forest resources.



● 10 day course on analog forestry at keystone foundation

In addition, we have organised a workshop on Analog Forestry workshop at Keystone Foundation facilitated by Dr. Sharada Ramadass. This helped the youth to look at traditional practices that are interlinked with forest health and livelihoods for the community.



● Community Action

Baseline Survey

To let the participants jump into their community action, we asked them to conduct a Participatory Rural Appraisal and Baseline Survey in their villages. Many of them were able to take permission from the village Sarpanch and elders and hold a village meeting to explain the purpose of the study. They successfully conducted a PRA exercise that is used to understand the village map and the resources available including their forest resources. This exercise is also useful for putting claims for Community Forest Rights under FRA Act 2006.

Following that, they started doing household baseline surveys to understand the basic history, demography, land status, issues in government schemes and so on. The youth from Adilabad are mainly focusing on forest rights in this study. Our youth are planning to claim Community Forest Rights in Adilabad by collaborating with Dhaatri and other local organizations. In addition, two of our youth from Gujarat are involved in organizing Adivasi Mahasammelan.

Energy Survey

A survey has been conducted by our youth in their villages to understand the Energy needs of women from the marginalized communities. Majority of them do not yet have access to even basic energy resources while they contribute the smallest carbon footprint. By losing their lands, forests and other resources in order to accommodate the setting up of energy transition projects, poor women's earlier access to traditional cooking resources have also become diminished and inaccessible. In doing so, they are not only financing the privileged to have greater access to the major chunk of energy produced, without themselves having access to even the basic energy requirements to maintain a decent form of living.

Petitions to the government

Our youth have filed 7 petitions to the local government regarding the issues in their community. Details of the same are given below:

1. Our youth from Hospete namely Lalitha, Santhosh and Hulugappa submitted a petition to the local government. Contaminated water consumption led to the hospitalization of people in Karinaganur village. Our youth carried out a survey on the same and submitted it to the government to take necessary action.
2. Maharaja has submitted a memorandum on the MGNREGA scheme on the issues related to lack of job cards for the beneficiaries and linkage of bank accounts to their job card.
3. Mesram Suguna & Rathnamala hailing from Umaphatikunta village have submitted 3 petitions to the Minister of Panchayat Raj & Rural Development of Telangana regarding the concrete road to their village, lack of drinking water facility and lack of toilets in their village.
4. Meshram Nageshwar hailing from Suryapeta village has submitted a petition to the Minister of Panchayat Raj & Rural Development of Telangana about the lack of toilets in their village.
5. Pendor Deepalaxmi hailing from Gadiguda village has submitted a petition to the Panchayat Office about the scarcity of drinking water in their village.



Outcomes of Cohort 1

Rights based approach and gender just lens

Access to network and field experts for community work

Evidence building and documentation

Confidence and communication skills

Voice and leadership for mobilizing local action

Lobbying with local administration.

Case studies and issue-based reports

15 energy surveys on women's energy needs
on 5 entitlements

7 baseline surveys and community profile reports

6 petitions submitted by youth

Learnings and Testimonies from the Youth of Cohort-1

*"Nature views us all equally, we must also see each other
as equals"*

N MAHARAJA, Valmiki Community, Karnataka

*"Throughout my journey, I have learnt how to work in a group. It doesn't
matter whether we don't know each other's language, or which state we be-
long to. So that's a very big positive I take away from here, that wherever I go,
I can adapt."*

- DIKSHA SHENDE, Mahar Community, Maharashtra

*"I have seen a lot of change in myself since joining the course. Lot of change in
my behaviour, the way I speak. I used to talk then as well, but I did not have
that "dareness" then. Now there is no fear, I can talk assertively whenever we
go to any office."*

*"I didn't know how the outside world was. Now that I have seen it, I want to
educate myself and do something for my community"*

- MESRAM SUGUNA, Gond Community, Telangana

*"One change in me is that I don't hesitate to ask questions anymore, it does
not matter if it is right or wrong. Now I don't look at anything linearly. Only
after looking at something from three four different angles can we comment
about it"*

*"When we would talk about gender, they would say boys should not talk
about these things. But we explained to them that only if we talk about it,
like menstruation, will we get sensitised and know how to respond better"*

HULUGAPPA, Valmiki Community, Karnataka



COHORT-1: Participants

“ Even though there’s a language barrier, we have been staying together like a family since the beginning. Quarrels, laughter, everything. Even later, we spent a lot of time with various organisations as part of our exposure visits. Even there, we received love as a family. That helped us do good work and learn from them. ”

- MEHUL PATEL, Dodhiya Community, Gujarat

“ I submitted a petition at the gram panchayat office regarding water issues in the village. All the villagers said there is a lot of change in you. They keep saying that it would be good if more women come forward like me. ”

- PENDUR DEEPA LAXMI, Gond Community, Telangana

“ I could never speak up before. I used to depend on others for any work – be it financial or paperwork. Only when someone was there with me, I would do those things. But now, regardless of anyone’s presence, I do everything on my own and finish the job. ”

- MESRAM RATHNAMALA, Adilabad, Telangana.

“ What we understood is that women too have rights. They too are equal to men. Hence, they should be given the same opportunity in all walks. They live like us, but they work harder than us. Hence they should get equal opportunities. Be it gram sabhas or elsewhere. In our community, they don’t have equal opportunities, but we have to make efforts to ensure that if not our generation, at least the coming generations have the same opportunities. ”

-ATHRAM BHEEMRAO, Kolam Community, Telangana

About the Youth

Cohort - 1 had 15 youth from Rural and Adivasi communities.

Age group - 18 to 30

Education 12th to Graduation

States - Telangana, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat

Community - Gond, Kolam, Naikpod, Dodhiya



1st row, left to Right: Bheemrao Athram, Nageshwar Mesram, Swati Patel, Ratnamala Mesram, Lalitha, Lakshmi Naineni, Hullugappa M, Sidam Ganapathi.

2nd row, left to Right: Mehul Patel, Diksha Shinde, Maharaja N, Suguna Mesram, Santhosh N, DeepaLaxmi Pendur.



GRADUATION DAY



Youth Presentations



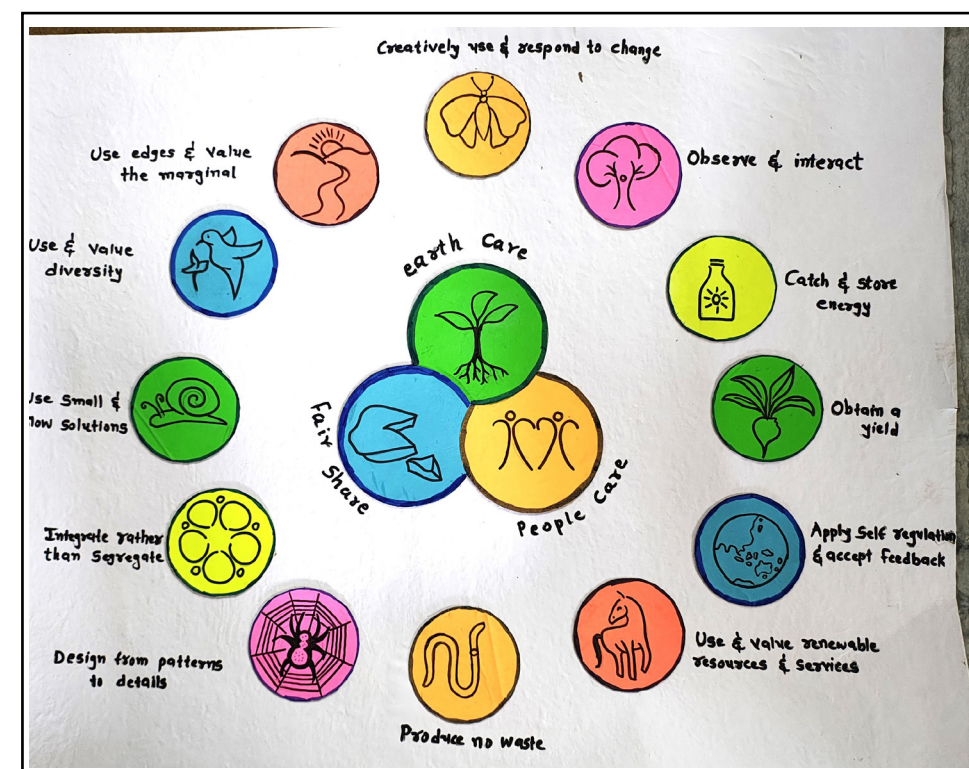
● 3D Model of Analog Forestry by Mehul and Swathi



● Seasonal chart of crops and forest produce in Adilabad Region



● 3D model of Permaculture design by Adilabad Team



● Principles of Permaculture design



● A model to demonstrate the cause and impact of the climate change in urban setting



● A map of a Participatory Rural Appraisal exercise at Umapathikunta village. It depicts the village map with its basic facilities, forest produce collecting points, water sources, forest, animals, plants and so on

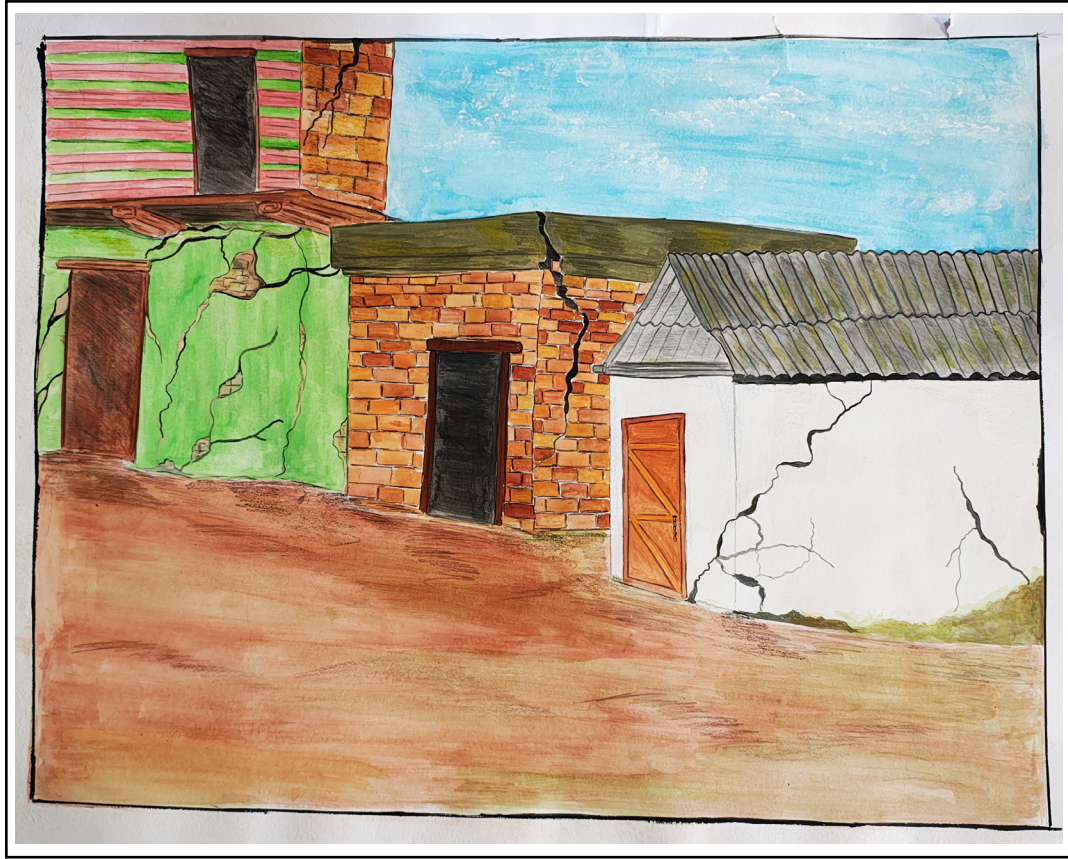


● Principles of Analog Forestry

Women's rights pertaining to climate change action



●



● Representation of mining and the cracked houses nearby due to blasting



Acknowledgement

We express our sincere gratitude to Equality Fund for fully sponsoring and to Women's Fund Asia for partially extending their support to this programme. In addition, we also would like to thank our partners, mentor organizations, collaborators, and resource experts for lending their time, resources and minds to run this 10-month-long programme.



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