



Janarth Adivasi Vikas Sanstha



## 6.1 Biodiversity Enhancement and Eco Restoration of Community Forest Resource Lands Employing a Diversity of Life Sustaining and Economic Plant Species

**Janarth Adivasi Vikas Sanstha, Shahada, Dist. Nandurbar**

### A leap from 1800 hectors to 6210 hectors for eco restoration!

During 2000 the villagers from Bhute and Virpur in Shahada block of Nandurbar district felt the need to protect community forest. They formed village level joint forest management committees. They began to protect community forest, which consisted total 1800 hectors of forest land. They formed groups and alternately patrolled so that nobody would cut the trees. Women also were part of these groups. During the meetings they would say that just like we take care of our children, we are protecting the jungle. In case the villagers found anybody cutting wood, they would stop him; scold him and at times even make him to pay penalty. They joined Maharashtra level federation of joint forest management committees and began to attend the periodical meetings of federation. One meeting of this federation was organized in Shahada.

During these years they met Dr. Madhav Gadgil and came across the MGB project being proposed by him. This initiated their travel towards scientific recording of the bio-diversity in the community forest through training. They prepared biodiversity registers; prepared maps of local area.

The villagers from Bhute and Virpur aspired and waited to be part of MGB project. Somehow, the project got postponed. And in the meantime, the Forest Rights Act came into existence in 2006 followed by rules to implement the Act. Majority of the people in the neighborhood wanted individual entitlement, whereas villagers of Bhute and Virpur strongly claimed right over community forest, which they were protecting for so many years. Pressure from all corners began acting on Virpur and Bhute village people. The people from neighboring villages cut down the forest protected by them. They approached the Collector, the DSP and the forest department, but in vain. Individual ownership won the battle.

In 2013 the hopes of revival of MGB project dawned. Till then the Bhute villagers were depressed and backed out from the project. 30 families in Virpur villages decided to participate in the project with support from Janarth Adivasi Vikas Sanstha (JAVS). Village meeting was organized and tacit support was given by villagers.

Continuous follow up of demand of community forest rights was done by JAVS and Virpur villagers. In 2015, saplings were planted in the claimed community forest land. It was in the month of September. Though late, it gave message to forest department and revenue department. The efforts bore fruits in form of support by SDO.

The SDO had sanctioned community forest rights of Nagziri and Kotbandhani villages. The area covered was around 6000 hectors of forest land. He gave rights with the hope that forest cutting for private plots would diminish. Continuous efforts by Janarth and Virpur villagers had impressed him. He suggested that Janarth and Virpur villagers should take responsibility of protection and conservation of this community forest land. Janarth has good relations with Kotbandhani and Nagziri villages (through health activity and trainings of GPs).

In April 2016, Gram Sabhas of these two villages, in the presence of SDO, Forest department officials, passed a resolution that Janarth should take responsibility of supporting protection and conservation of community forest land.

In 2018, Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra was abolished and ownership of land owned by FDCM was transferred to Forest Department. In June 2018, community forest rights on 210 hectors were granted to Virpur villagers. Story we started from protection of 1800 hectors of forest land, after 16-18 years, again had a new beginning of responsibility of protection and conservation of 6210 hectors of community forest land.

### Natural Forest and Planted Forest

Virpur villagers were still waiting to get entitlement over community forest land. But they were determined to afforest the community forest land protected by them for the last 15 years. They planted the saplings from the village nursery, as well as those they received from Forest department, Social forestry department and Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra. After the planting was over, the next issue faced was watering the saplings. To discuss the problem, a village meeting was called. The villagers gathered and Karamsing narrated the problem. The villagers began to think over it. However, one person was confused. He asked, "While we were protecting the forest for so many years, we found that new trees were growing each year, though we did not water them. So what is the need of giving special attention to water these saplings that we planted now in the same forest? These too will grow like the earlier ones." Some of the villagers were also getting tuned with his thought.

Karamsing then explained to them the difference, "Though we find that the natural forest is growing, all the saplings sprouted naturally in the forest, do not survive. They have to fight with the surroundings and prove them fittest. Some succeed, but roots of some seedlings do not reach the water and get dried without our knowledge. Some of the saplings planted by us may face the same disaster, if not watered. Only watering them regularly, will help them all survive the situation." This started discussion amongst the villagers until the point reached everyone. Then they began to think over the watering issue.

They decided to dig further deep the well that was at Sabadipani in Virpur forest. This was in the year 2016. They took the water in pots and watered the plants. In 2017, further 8000 saplings were planted and the water of Sabadipani well was not sufficient for them. The villagers again thought over the issue and decided that though the village had yet to receive entitlement over community forest land, they will use the PESA funds to help the plants survive.

The village had a big tank for drinking water and other purposes as well. It contained water in excess. So the villagers decided to take the water through a 1000 feet long pipe line, store it in a tank of 1000 Liters capacity. When this plan materialized, villagers from a habitat complained that they are not getting sufficient water. The villagers thought over this problem. They calculated the water required per person and also per animal and found that there was enough water for usage of the villagers as well as for the plantation in forest. They found that pipes taking water to the said habitat was broken and so enough water was not reaching in the habitat. They replaced the pipe, changed the route of pipe line, which solved the problem and there was sufficient water for all.



(1) Gramsabha of Nagziri with Gov. revenue and Forest officials



(2) Watering seedlings in Virpur community forest



(3) The (white coloured) tank of 1000 ltrs. for watering seedlings (thro' PESA fund)