

COMMUNITY-LED LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT TOOL

Reading the Village Whole

A National Consolidated Report on the Community-Led Landscape Assessment Tool (LCAT) Pilots

Uttar Pradesh · Madhya Pradesh · Chhattisgarh — 51 villages, 18 districts, one shared way of seeing



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51
VILLAGES

18
DISTRICTS

8
LIFE-ELEMENTS

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Acknowledgements

This report is, first and foremost, a record of what fifty-one villages chose to say about their own landscapes. It exists only because of the people who gave their time, their memory and their trust to the two days of each assessment.

To the participating communities

Our deepest thanks to the women, men, youth and elders of the thirteen villages of Jhabua, Alirajpur, Dhar, Barwani, Dewas and Sehore in Madhya Pradesh; the thirteen villages of Aligarh, Lakhimpur Kheri, Basti, Sultanpur, Prayagraj, Hamirpur and Banda in Uttar Pradesh; and the twenty-five villages of Bastar, Dantewada, Kondagaon, Kanker and Rajnandgaon in Chhattisgarh — who sat through the circle, walked the transects, argued the trendlines, and curated the wall of commitment. The knowledge, observations and priorities in this report are theirs; we have tried only to carry them faithfully onto the page.

To the field facilitators and ground teams

Thank you to the facilitators who built the trust that readiness requires, guided the eight groups across each landscape, and translated between Hindi, Chhattisgarhi, Halbi, Bhatari and the local tongues of Bundelkhand, Awadh, Nimar and Malwa — so that every voice in the room could be recorded in its own words.

To the Panchayati Raj Institutions and local governance bodies

We are grateful to the Gram Panchayats, Gram Sabhas, PESA committees and Forest Rights Committees whose openness allowed these assessments to connect community diagnosis to the formal planning cycle — the GPD and VPRP — where village demands legally meet public resources.

To the SHG networks and community institutions

The self-help groups, Village Organisations and Cluster Level Federations across the three states — including the Bihan network in Chhattisgarh and the UPSRLM and MPSRLM platforms — anchored mobilisation in every village and are the single most bankable delivery asset this pilot identified.

To Billion Next

For consolidating the findings across the fifty-one village assessments and for their help in documentation.

To our funders and learning partners

Including the Rainmatter Foundation, whose flexible, learning-oriented support significantly enriched this work.

This report is offered in gratitude to everyone named and unnamed above — with the hope that it returns something useful to the villages whose testimony fills its pages.

“This is the first time we have looked at our village, and all that has changed in it, together — as one community.”

A self-help-group member, LCAT field conversations

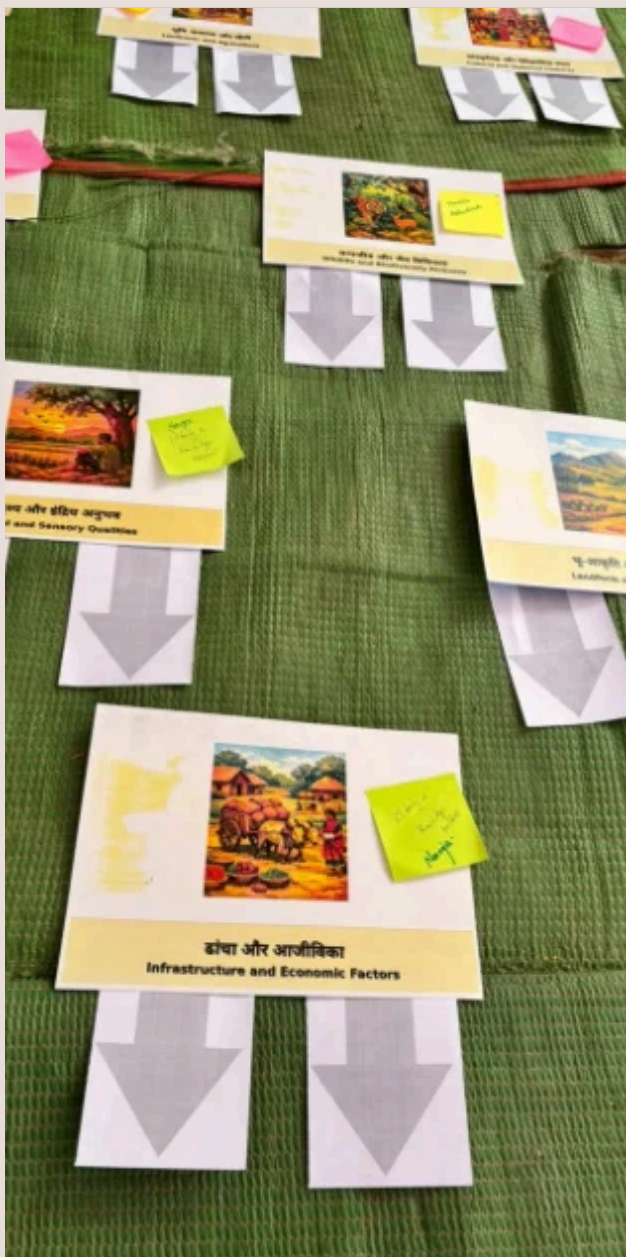


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02

Executive Summary

"Six life-elements are declining while two are improving." The headline finding, strikingly consistent across all three states.



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

What happened, and why it matters

Between February and May 2026, fifty-one villages across eighteen districts of three Indian states — 13 in Madhya Pradesh, 13 in Uttar Pradesh, and 25 in Chhattisgarh — carried out a structured, two-day reading of their own landscapes using the Community-Led Landscape Assessment Tool (LCAT) developed by Transform Rural India. The tool, adapted from Natural England's Landscape Character Assessment framework and re-rooted in rural India, asks a village to score itself across eight interconnected "life-elements" — Landform & Topography, Hydrology, Land Cover & Agriculture, Wildlife & Biodiversity, Infrastructure & Economy, Cultural & Historical Features, Visual & Sensory Qualities, Community & Governance — and then convert that shared reading into a prioritised, tiered action plan that feeds directly into the village's formal planning instruments (GPDP and VPRP).

The headline finding is strikingly consistent across all three states: six life-elements are declining while two are improving. The natural and cultural systems — water, soil, forests, wildlife, culture and the sensory landscape — are falling. The built and institutional systems — infrastructure and community organisations — are rising.

The village has grown "rich in cash but poor in life-support." The village body is growing a stronger skeleton while its circulation weakens.

As one Chhattisgarh community summarised its own predicament

Three findings matter most for anyone considering where to invest, what to fund, or how to redesign policy. They are set out on the following pages.

Six down, two up — the pilot's shared reading

Direction of travel for each of the eight life-elements, consistent across Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

▼ Declining NATURAL & CULTURAL SYSTEMS — SIX OF EIGHT

Landform & Topography the shape of the land — hills, slopes, soils	Hydrology rivers, springs, ponds, wells and the water table	Land Cover & Agriculture fields, crops, pastures and what they yield
Wildlife & Biodiversity forests, birds, bees and wild kin	Cultural & Historical sacred groves, festivals, stories and shrines	Visual & Sensory what is seen, heard, smelled and felt

▲ Improving BUILT & INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS — TWO OF EIGHT

Infrastructure & Economy roads, markets, power and livelihoods	Community & Governance institutions, the panchayat and collective rules
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Wildlife and biodiversity declined in every single village across all three states. No other element is unanimous.

Three findings that matter most

01 **Communities have already diagnosed the system.**

Villages do not narrate water, soil, wildlife and culture as separate problems; they narrate them as one cascade — forest loss → broken recharge → deeper borewells → chemical dependence → rising costs → migration. They also name the policy drivers with precision, from paddy MSP in Chhattisgarh to the absence of price support for fruit trees in Madhya Pradesh.

02 **A large share of the climate agenda is affordable today.**

Every village plan sorts its demands into tiers by what each action needs to begin. The first tier — Gram Sabha resolutions, shramdaan desilting, seed banks, no-burn norms, community protection rules — requires no external funds at all, only a mandate. The remaining tiers become precise, named convergence asks rather than vague grievances.

03 **The delivery engine already exists.**

Approximately 1,000+ self-help groups across the fifty-one villages (roughly 230+ in MP, 280+ in UP, 500+ in CG — approximate sums from the village reports) form a ready-made channel for green enterprise, restoration-as-livelihood, and last-mile climate finance. What these institutions lack is not capacity but a formal mandate over natural resources.

For ecosystem players, impact investors and policy decision-makers, the pilot converts fifty-one villages' testimony into an actionable pipeline: named value chains with existing SHG bases, identified financing gaps (maintenance, transition, demand-management), and governance instruments (PESA, FRA, measurable community "Sankalps") that dramatically reduce the cost of last-mile implementation.

Income Prosperity**1 Vermicompost & bio-inputs (Jeevamrit, Beejamrit, neem pesticide)**

STATES

MP, UP, CG

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

Named in effectively all 51 villages; converts the universal organic-farming demand into women's enterprise; substitutes purchased chemicals with local product

2 NTFP value addition — mahua, tendu, imli, chironji, honey, gond

STATES

MP, CG, UP (Vindhyan/Bundelkhand)

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

The forest belt's second economy; solar drying + grading + SHG aggregation recovers margin currently lost to intermediaries; TRIFED/Van Dhan-ready

3 Millet cultivation & processing (jowar, bajra, kodo, kutki, ragi, sawa)

STATES

All three

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

Water-thrifty, climate-resilient, culturally loved; Shree Anna / Millet Mission / ODOP-ready; ties to school feeding and nutrition

4 Livestock, dairy, goatery & backyard poultry

STATES

All three

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

Income plus the manure (gobar) cycle — a value chain that is also soil policy

5 Plantation, native nurseries & agroforestry

STATES

All three

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

Fodder, fruit, fuelwood and recharge together; nurseries are an SHG business in themselves

6 Fisheries in restored ponds & dabris

STATES

All three

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

Income deliberately timed to arrive with water restoration, not before it

7 Crop-residue value chains — compost, fodder, mulch, mushroom, pellets

STATES

UP (Doab/Terai), MP, CG

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

Makes the no-burn norm pay; converts the October smoke season into an SHG income line

8 Solar enterprise bundle — irrigation, drying, rooftops, street lighting

STATES

All three

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

The most-cited DRE ask; caution built in by the communities themselves: pair solar pumping with water budgeting

9 Leaf-plate & eco-product enterprise (sal dona-pattal, cloth bags)

STATES

CG, UP, MP

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

Biodegradable, forest-compatible, culturally native; replaces plastic with a product the villages themselves remember

10 SHG micro-enterprise & collective marketing platforms

STATES

All three

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

The ~1,000-group base is the pilot's single most bankable asset; haat-linked aggregation (e.g. Chindnaar's 0-km market)

11 Water-harvesting & restoration works as local employment

STATES

All three

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

MGNREGA-compatible: the recharge agenda doubles as a wage agenda

12 Lac cultivation on host trees

STATES

CG

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

High-value, forest-compatible enterprise that pays households to keep trees standing

13 Beekeeping & pollination recovery

STATES

MP, CG

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

Income aimed squarely at the vanished honeybee; addresses the pollination collapse behind hand-pollinated crops in UP

14 Heritage & eco-tourism — Koldihwa rice-heritage trail, 400-year Kushti Dangal, migratory-bird conserved area

STATES

UP, CG

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

Underused cultural and biodiversity assets converted to livelihood; species-return adopted as a public success metric

15 Green mobility enterprise — e-rickshaws, battery vehicles

STATES

UP, CG

WHY IT IS INVESTABLE

Youth enterprise on the improved road base; forward-looking air-quality demand from the villages themselves

Health & Nutrition

Top 5 community demands

1 **Bring back the lost grains (mota anaaj) – millet and pulse revival with seed banks, milling and school-feeding linkage**

Framed explicitly as a diet–body–disease reclaim (Pathra, Rehunchi, UP); named across all three states

2 **Chemical-free food – organic transition to stop “eating poison”**

“Now we are eating poison itself” (Ratanpur, MP); Singha Kala (UP): gobar-fed crops were “healthy, disease-free”; Hidpal (CG) stands as the chemical-free proof point

3 **Safe drinking water & water-quality testing**

Iron-tasting borewell water (Bardevari, CG); filtered river water as drinking supply (Choknar, CG); “test where taste changes” (Belhat, UP)

4 **Health outreach where facilities are absent – NHM screening, sub-centre access, verification of community-attributed illnesses**

Villages report rising “BP, sugar,” skin disease, dengue in villages with no sub-centre; these are community-attributed signals warranting public-health verification, not clinical findings

5 **Kitchen gardens, orchards & badi revival**

Fruit-tree schemes (Maa ki Bagiya / Ek Bagiya Maa Ke Naam, MP) reintroducing fruit into household diets against the MSP-cereal tide

Local Governance

- 01 Embed LCAT findings in the formal planning cycle.** Nearly every village demands its landscape diagnosis to enter the GPDP–VPRP, which currently contains no requirement to read local landscape or vulnerability at all.
-
- 02 Self-restraint over water — an extraordinary demand.** Villages across all three states ask for collective rules over their own extraction: borewell registration, spacing and discipline, water budgeting, and community water committees. No current scheme prices this kind of governance.
-
- 03 Activate dormant legal powers.** In Chhattisgarh, PESA and the Forest Rights Act already vest Gram Sabhas with authority over minor forest produce, planning and local resources — yet no borewell, grove or grazing rule in the pilot currently runs on them. “The cheapest financing available is a resolution.”
-
- 04 Maintenance as a first-class investment.** From Naharpura's dry tank (MP) to Rehunchi's 28 failing taps (UP) to Borgaon's non-functional Jal Jeevan Mission connection (CG): capital without upkeep produces monuments, not water.
-
- 05 Measurable Sankalps — a governance invention worth scaling.** UP villages adopt five-year public commitments with species and culture as metrics: the return of the Neelkanth, the Sarus crane landing again, ponds back “toward the remembered 18,” the Kajri-Alha sung again at Panchami.
-
- 06 Give the strongest institution the hardest problem.** SHG networks are powerful on credit and welfare but have no formal NRM charter; the villages are effectively asking for their strongest institutions to be handed water, soil and forest.
-

Climate Action

Adaptation and
mitigation demands

Adaptation

PRIMARY DEMANDS

Water restoration & recharge (the #1 demand nearly everywhere); borewell discipline & demand management; drought-resilient traditional crops; drainage re-engineering; wildlife-conflict mitigation; disaster-risk planning

ILLUSTRATIONS

Richi's village-invented building code — mandatory soak pits for every pucca house (MP); Gangauri's ask to reinstate the khal drainage channels with culverts under the concrete roads (UP); Sukhedi's forest ponds so thirsty tigers stop at the forest edge (MP)

Mitigation

PRIMARY DEMANDS

Tree and forest restoration ("cut one, plant ten"); ending residue burning via value chains; solar & clean cooking; biogas on the rebuilt gobar base; organic transition reducing chemical inputs; waste management

ILLUSTRATIONS

Mor's self-invented replanting ethic (MP); Pakhodna's parali-to-pellets youth enterprise (UP); sacred-grove protection by Gram Sabha resolution — "the cheapest conservation instrument the state owns" (CG)

The communities rarely use the words "adaptation" or "mitigation." Adaptation is articulated as memory and repair ("we want to see it green again"); mitigation lives inside stewardship — the rested pasture, the protected grove, the desilted tank.

Gender

Key shifts and
education observations

From behind the ghonghat to the Gram Sabha. The most consistent shift across all fifty-one villages: women who once observed the village from behind the veil now anchor ~1,000+ SHGs, run enterprises, and — in Chhattisgarh — hold formal office as Sarpanches and PESA committee members.

From victims of change to managers of the landscape. In UP, male out-migration (70–80%+ of households in the Banda villages, community-reported) has made women the de facto managers of land, water, livestock and fuel; women-led Jal Chaupals monitor water monthly; in Rehunchi, women contributed 51% of chart-group voice — the series' highest.

The participation–authority gap. Dedla's women (MP) name it precisely: participation has risen while decisions remain largely with men. In Cha Tolagaon (CG), women are present in meetings but “not yet equal in final decisions.” Membership has outpaced authority; management has shifted to women while land title and formal standing largely have not.

Assets beginning to move. Land is increasingly registered in women's names in Naharpura (MP) — an early structural signal.

Education observations. Female literacy gaps remain wide in parts of MP (Dedla ~52% female vs ~83% male; Chikali ~49% vs ~72% — community/report figures, verify against Census data), and closing them is itself named as a village demand. A counter-signal from CG: girls in Bargaon now leave the village for higher education. Safety shapes mobility: Chikali's women report “at night we are afraid to step out of the house.”

04

Introduction to the LCAT

The Community-Led Landscape Assessment Tool

"Can we help a village document what it has lost — and read itself whole — before we ask it what to build?"



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

When a Landscape Stops Making Sense

Climate change, the people–place bond, and why village plans keep missing both

An elderly farmer, asked what had changed in his village over the years, did not begin with temperature or yield. He began with a smell.

“Ten years ago, when the rain fell, the soil would give off that earthy fragrance after the first shower. Now even that is gone.”

— an elderly farmer, recorded during LCAT field conversations (Transform Rural India, n.d.)

He was not describing agronomy. He was describing loss. And there is a word for it. The environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht coined *solastalgia* (Albrecht, 2005) to name the distress of watching your home landscape change around you while you still stand within it — a homesickness felt without ever leaving home. Nostalgia mourns a place you have left behind; solastalgia mourns a place that has left you.

For a long time, climate work in rural India has treated this kind of testimony as soft data — anecdote, background colour, the poetry quoted before the “real” numbers begin. This document takes the opposite view. Carefully documented, solastalgia is among the most rigorous datasets a warming country can build, precisely because it records what satellites cannot: the disappearance of a fragrance, the absence of a once-dependable cool wind, the silence where a bird's call used to be. These are early-warning signals of systemic stress, delivered in the only language that long-term landscape memory speaks.

Why place holds people — and why that matters for planning

To understand why a lost fragrance matters, we have to take the bond between people and place seriously. The human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan called this attachment *topophilia* (Tuan, 1974) — the affective tie between human beings and their physical environment. In rural India, this is not sentiment; it functions as infrastructure. A farmer's sowing calendar, a pastoralist's grazing route, a household's instinct for when to plant and when to wait, a community's festivals and its sacred groves — all of these are tuned to the rhythms of one particular landscape. When the rhythms hold, a person can read their own place fluently. Climate change, at its most intimate, is the breaking of that fluency.

The social psychologist Kurt Lewin gives the same insight a sharper edge. His field theory holds that behaviour is never the product of a person alone; it emerges from the person and their environment together — famously compressed into the formula $B = f(P, E)$: behaviour is a function of the person and their environment (Lewin, 1936; Lewin, 1951). Every person acts within what Lewin called a *life space* — the whole field of place, relationships and possibilities as they experience it.

The consequence for climate work is direct: adaptation is, in the end, a change in behaviour — sowing differently, storing water differently, tending a commons differently — and behaviour cannot be changed by working on the person alone while ignoring the place, or on the place alone while ignoring how its people actually experience it.

Three thinkers, then, converge on one lesson. **Tuan** tells us why place holds people; **Albrecht** tells us what it feels like when place lets go; **Lewin** tells us why no plan for changing what people do can succeed without reading the place they do it in.

FIGURE 1

Why the people–place bond is the starting point

TOPOPHILIA

Yi-Fu Tuan, 1974

The deep attachment between people and their home landscape. In rural India it works like infrastructure: sowing calendars, grazing routes, festivals are all tuned to one particular place.

SOLASTALGIA

Glenn Albrecht, 2005

The distress of watching your home landscape change while you still stand within it — homesickness without leaving home. Documented carefully, it is early-warning data.

FIELD THEORY

Kurt Lewin, 1936 / 1951

Behaviour is a function of the person and their environment, $B = f(P, E)$. What people do — and can change — cannot be read apart from the place they act within.

Three thinkers, one lesson: the people–place bond is where climate planning must begin.

Listen, with these three ideas in hand, to a second farmer a few villages over:

“Earlier we could look at the sky and know when to sow. Now we check the weather on the phone — and the phone, too, gets it wrong.”

— a farmer, LCAT field conversations

This is a quieter grief than a ruined harvest. It is the loss of the capacity to read one's own land. Stranded between a sky that has become unreadable and an app that is unreliable, the farmer is left disconnected from the very place that once oriented his entire working life. That disconnection — between people and the landscapes that hold their knowledge, identity and livelihood — is the human face of the climate crisis in rural India.

The weather that broke its word

This is not a scattering of unlucky villages; it is fast becoming a national condition. According to the report *Mapping India's Climate Vulnerability: A District Level Assessment* by Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), roughly three in four Indian districts are prone to severe hydro-meteorological disasters — floods, droughts and cyclones (CEEW, 2021) — and more than eight in ten Indians now live in districts highly vulnerable to such extremes.

3 in 4

Indian districts prone to severe hydro-meteorological disasters

8 in 10

Indians live in districts highly vulnerable to such extremes

40%+

of districts flipping between flood and drought — the “swapping trend”

Source : CEEW's *Mapping India's Climate Vulnerability: A District Level Assessment*

More unsettling still is what CEEW calls the swapping trend: a large share of districts — upward of 40 per cent — are flipping between flood and drought (CEEW, 2021), so that places once reliably dry now flood, and places once reliably wet now parch. The old categories by which a community planned its year — this is a dry tract, that is a wet one — are dissolving.

For rural households the blow lands on the most exposed surface of their lives. More than half of India's net sown area is rainfed, which means the monsoon is not weather but destiny. And the monsoon is changing in exactly the way that hurts most: CEEW's tehsil-level analysis finds that where the southwest monsoon is weakening, the decline concentrates in June and July — the precise weeks when kharif crops must be sown — even as many tehsils see more days of heavy, compressed downpour (CEEW, 2023). The water is arriving in the wrong shape: too little when the seed needs it, too much all at once when it does not. What the farmer experiences as “the rain has forgotten its appointment” is, in the aggregate, a statistically observable derangement of the season.

How villages already talk about adaptation and mitigation

Here is something the policy world persistently underestimates: rural communities already understand adaptation and mitigation — they simply do not use those words. Nobody in a village gathering says “adaptive capacity.” They say what an elderly woman said during one landscape conversation:

“There is no name or trace left of the forest in our village; in the future, we want to see it green again.”

— an elderly woman, LCAT field conversations

In a single breath she offers a diagnosis and a direction — a loss named, and a restoration demanded. This is how adaptation is articulated at the village scale: not as risk percentages but as memory and repair. The pastoralist who recalls that “the forests were dense, a beautiful wind kept blowing, no fan was needed, and good rain and harvest used to come” is not being wistful; he is describing a working ecosystem — canopy, wind, rain, yield — remembered as a single functioning whole, and implicitly specifying what a restored one would look like.

Mitigation, likewise, rarely appears under its own name. It lives inside stewardship: the customary rule that rests a pasture, the grove protected because it is sacred, the tank de-silted because the village always did so — practices that hold carbon, water and biodiversity without ever calling themselves climate action. As CEEW itself observes, communities may lack formal scientific expertise, but they embody traditional management practices that are among the most accessible, lowest-cost resources for building resilience — and adaptation and mitigation should be pursued for their co-benefits rather than in silos (CEEW, 2021).

The raw material for climate action, in other words, is already present in the village. What is missing is a structured way to gather it, weigh it, and connect it to the machinery of planning.

Three gaps between climate planning and the village

Why hasn't that connection happened on its own? Because between the science of climate change and the lived reality of a village stand three stubborn gaps.

The normative gap

There is, quite simply, no rule that asks a village plan to look at climate. The formats that govern village planning — the Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) and the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) — contain no requirement for a structured reading of the local landscape or its vulnerability. Higher up, national and state climate frameworks have historically leaned toward disaster relief and response rather than anticipatory adaptation, and state action plans rarely spell out a role for the decentralised tiers — districts, blocks, panchayats — where adaptation must actually happen (CEEW, 2025). A village that wanted to plan for climate would find no template inviting it to.

The limits of distant science

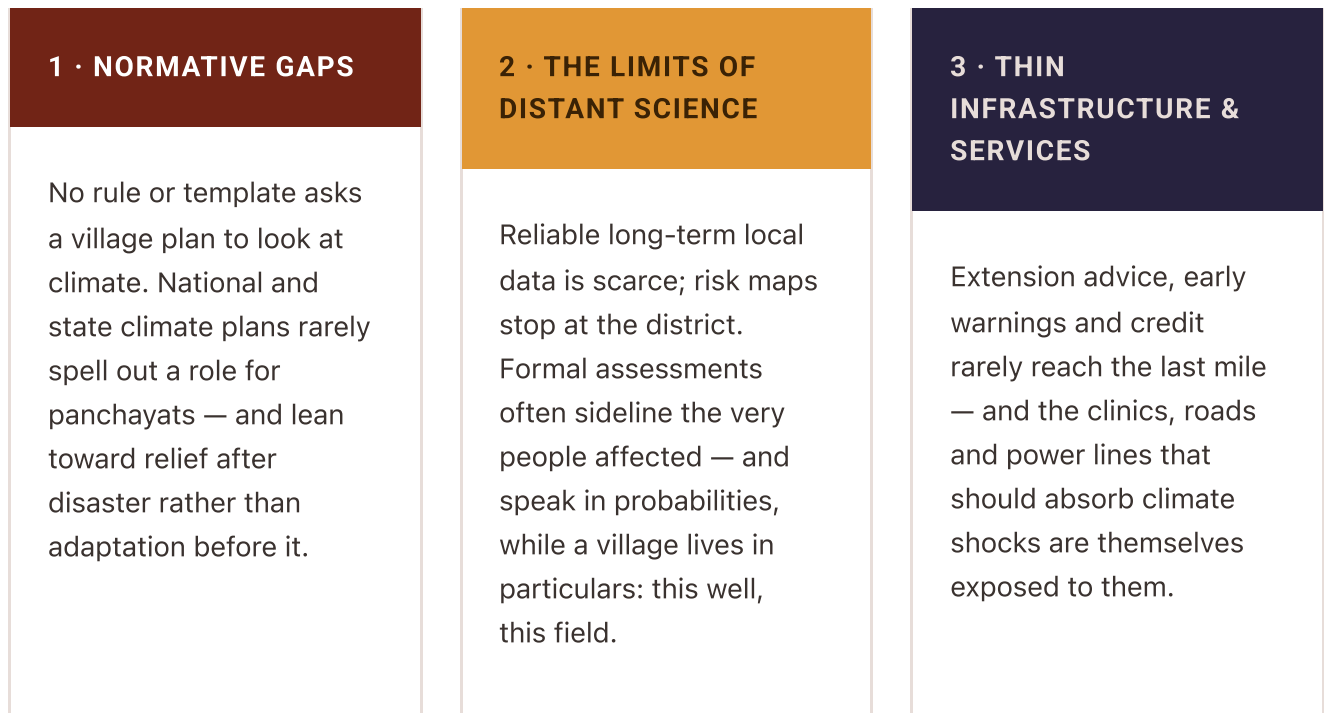
Formal climate assessment struggles to reach the village on its own terms. Robust analysis needs decades of continuous local data, and such data is largely absent below the district level; the literature is blunt that the lack of local disaster and climate data constrains vulnerability reduction on the ground (CEEW, 2020). Risk maps stop at the district boundary, while a village lives in particulars — this well, this slope, this field. And the assessment process itself, CEEW notes, tends to marginalise the very people affected by climatic shifts (CEEW, 2020). The result is a strange asymmetry: the people with the longest, finest-grained record of local environmental change — the people who remember the fragrance — are the ones least consulted in measuring it.

Thin infrastructure and services

Even where knowledge and will exist, the delivery systems are frail. Extension advice, early warnings, credit and insurance thin out toward the last mile. And the infrastructure that should absorb climate shocks is itself exposed to them: health facilities across a large share of districts already face high climate risk, and roads, power and water systems fail together in the very events they are needed for (CEEW, 2025). A village asked to adapt is often asked to do so with instruments that break in the same weather.

FIGURE 2

Three gaps between climate planning and the village



Left in these gaps, village planning turns ad-hoc: scheme by scheme, reacting to events, blind to the landscape as a whole.



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

Planning by inventory — and the double disconnection

Left in these gaps, rural India's planning response has too often been ad-hoc — reactive, fragmented and, in a word that recurs through the field literature, climate-blind. Village plans are frequently drawn up without any structured reading of the village's own landscape: water works scheduled scheme by scheme rather than against a village water budget; natural-resource works unanchored in any regeneration logic; livelihood plans that never pause to ask whether a crop still fits a changing climate.

This is planning by inventory rather than by understanding, and its cost is not merely inefficiency. Ad-hoc planning treats heat and water stress as a series of discrete events — a bad year, a dry spell, a flood to be relieved — rather than as a systemic condition reshaping the whole landscape at once. A pond is deepened in one corner while the catchment that feeds it degrades; a plantation rises where a grazing corridor used to run. Each intervention is defensible alone; together they fail to add up.

So we arrive at a double disconnection, and it is the central problem this framework exists to address. On one side, people are being severed from the places that hold their knowledge and identity — the farmer who can no longer read his sky, the elder who can no longer find the forest she grew up beside. On the other, planning itself has become disconnected from this lived reality, organising itself around schemes and entitlements rather than around the living landscape those schemes are meant to serve. The two disconnections feed each other: a plan that does not begin from what a community has actually lost can hardly hope to restore it.

And yet the same grief that signals the crisis also points to its repair. When the farmer mourns the lost fragrance of rain on dry earth, he names a target for restoration. Grief, documented, becomes direction.

Can we help a village document what it has lost — and read itself whole — before we ask it what to build?

The question the rest of this document answers.

The eight life-elements

The exercise begins with a circle drawn on chart paper: this is your village — the whole. Around it, eight words — the village's eight life-elements, explained with an image that does more work than any definition: the elements are like the parts of a body — each one matters for the health of the whole, and none can be hurt without the others feeling it.

THE VILLAGE

one living body — each element an organ, none can be hurt alone

1

Landform & Topography

The shape of the land — hills, slopes, soils

2

Hydrology

Rivers, springs, ponds, wells and the water table

3

Land Cover & Agriculture

Fields, crops, pastures and what they yield

4

Wildlife & Biodiversity

Forests, birds, bees and wild kin

5

Infrastructure & Economy

Roads, markets, power and livelihoods

6

Cultural & Historical Features

Sacred groves, festivals, stories and shrines

7

Visual & Sensory Qualities

What is seen, heard, smelled and felt

8

Community & Governance

Institutions, the panchayat and collective rules

Adapted by Transform Rural India from Natural England's Landscape Character Assessment, re-rooted with a climate-resilience lens and an equity-and-memory lens.

Read separately, each is a familiar category. Read together — and this is the tool's insistence — they describe a single working system. The classic illustration is the sacred grove whose canopy cools the three fields beside it: lose the canopy and you lose the microclimate; lose the microclimate and yield slips; lose the yield and the young look toward the city; and because the grove was never only trees, its loss severs a cultural anchor at the same moment it severs an ecological and economic one.

The tool's lineage runs back to a well-established methodology: it is adapted from Natural England's Landscape Character Assessment framework ([Natural England, 2014](#)), a structured way of reading the distinctive character of a place that has long been used in the United Kingdom. But Transform Rural India has not simply imported it. The framework has been deliberately re-rooted in the rural Indian context, with two added commitments.

ADDED COMMITMENT 01

A climate-resilience lens

So that reading the landscape also means reading its vulnerability — its trends, its stresses, its likely future.

ADDED COMMITMENT 02

An equity-and-memory lens

So the assessment can capture the intangible assets official datasets routinely miss — sacred groves, grazing routes, oral histories, the cooling shade of a particular stand of trees.

These are the very assets that carry a community's identity and a landscape's resilience, and they are the first to vanish from a spreadsheet.

When one system fails, the others follow

This insistence on the whole is not a methodological preference; it is forced by the nature of climate stress itself. An erratic, compressing monsoon, intensifying heat, deepening water stress and a multi-hazard exposure in which the same district now swings between flood and drought ([CEEW, 2020](#); [CEEW, 2023](#)) do not respect the tidy boundaries between water, soil, forest, crop and culture. A single dry spell is at once a hydrological, agricultural, economic and health event. Climate change travels along the connections — so reading the village as one system is simply reading it the way the climate already acts on it.

Consider an example the field teams return to often — the sacred grove whose canopy quietly cools the three fields beside it. On a conventional inventory, that grove might appear, if at all, under “culture”: a heritage line item. But trace the cascade.

FIGURE 4

How one loss travels — the sacred grove cascade



Figure 4 · The grove cascade: how one loss travels across the life-elements. One quiet failure crosses five of the eight life-elements — so an assessment that reads elements separately will always miss the thing that matters most.

Lose the canopy, and you lose the microclimate that kept those fields a few degrees cooler and a little more moist. Lose the microclimate, and soil moisture and yield begin to slip. Lose the yield, and a household's income contracts and its young begin to look toward the city. And because the grove was never only trees — it was a place of worship, of gathering, of memory — its loss severs a cultural and social anchor at the same moment it severs an ecological and economic one. A single quiet failure has propagated across five of the eight life-elements at once.

The cascade runs the other way too, and faster under climate stress: a spring that dries before the monsoon means the June–July sowing fails, which pushes the young toward distress migration and lets the festivals tied to the harvest fade. And throughout, it is women who walk further for water and bear the compounding burden; as Transform Rural India's field documentation emphasises, climate stress presses hardest on smallholders, the landless, women and marginalised groups, who have the least cushion to absorb it (Transform Rural India, n.d.). A vulnerability that looks “single-system” on paper is, in lived reality, almost never single-system at all.

Ground-up, narrative, community-led — three commitments, not slogans

What makes the LCAT unlike a survey is not the eight categories; it is the posture. Three commitments define it.

GROUND-UP

with memory, not
a form

The assessment starts from a structural absence: there is no baseline.

Without a structured reading of the village as a landscape, every plan is built on a blank, and blanks get filled by habit, by the loudest voice, and by whatever scheme happens to be available. The LCAT fills that absence not with satellite images or district statistics but with the lived knowledge of the people who walk the land every day and have watched it change. Its opening question is disarmingly simple: in the last five, ten, twenty years — what has changed in the landscape of our village?

NARRATIVE

testimony is
treated as
evidence

For each element the community builds a trendline — past, present and projected future — so that change becomes visible and specific: not “the weather is bad” but the sowing rains arriving three weeks late, the pond drying a month earlier, the mahua dropping before its season. Alongside the trendlines run the community's own narratives: the fragrance gone from the first rain, the roof grown too hot to sleep on, the forest whose name and trace have vanished. In the group work, one facilitator holds the conversation while another writes down every word — each story, each example, who said it and where. As the practitioner training puts it: we are not writing a summary — we are building evidence.

COMMUNITY- LED

led by the village,
not done to it

Villagers themselves form the groups, walk the transects, argue the trends and rank the priorities; facilitators arrive as listeners carrying questions, not officers carrying answers. This is not a courtesy; it is what makes the result durable. A plan handed down can be ignored; a reading a community has produced together is owned, defended and acted upon.

“This is the first time we have looked at our village, and all that has changed in it, together — as one community.”

— a self-help-group member, LCAT field conversations (Transform Rural India, n.d.)

Seen this way, even loss can be re-read as opportunity. The mahua tree that now drops its flowers prematurely is, on one reading, an ecological casualty. But mahua is also the spine of a livelihood — and so are millets, lac, honey and a host of other forest produce.

These are the village's green value chains: the very commons that climate stress is drying up are the chains through which rural prosperity could be rebuilt, if they are mapped, protected and invested in as one integrated system rather than scattered commodities. When the landscape is read whole, ecological restoration and livelihood stop being two separate sentences and become one.

How a village actually performs that reading — over two carefully designed days — is the subject of the next chapter.



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

How the two days unfold

The work begins before the two days do: a village is chosen for readiness — active SHGs and village organisations, rapport built through earlier engagement — and eight to ten local influencers (elders, women leaders, youth, panchayat representatives) are oriented in advance. A transect walk is done beforehand, gathering memory in passing talk; as the practitioner training observes, the truest things are often spoken not on a chair, but on the road.

DAY ONE

Learning to see

Day One opens with an ice-breaker that is quietly radical: every person present shares one environmental change they have noticed in the last five years — before any framework is introduced, every voice has contributed a data point. The circle and the eight elements follow, explained in the village's own tongue. The gathering then forms four groups, two life-elements per group, each deliberately mixing elders, women, youth and the landless. The groups walk — the water group to the ponds, the agriculture group to the fields, the biodiversity group to the forest edge — documenting at least three observed effects each.

DAY TWO

From seeing to deciding

Day Two turns observation into judgement. Each group draws a trendline — past, present and projected future — and all eight charts are arranged on one wall: the village, for the first time, laid out as one picture. The gathering then re-divides by social position — women, men, youth, elders — so equity issues surface that a mixed discussion would smooth over. Consensus follows: if these trends continue, what happens in ten years — and why must we change now? The day closes with each villager pressing an inked palm onto a wall cloth — a wall of commitment.

This is not decoration: Lewin's group-decision research found people far more likely to change behaviour when the decision is reached together than when they are individually advised.

Three commitments define the posture throughout: it is ground-up (the community is the assessor, not the assessed); it is narrative (testimony is treated as evidence — “we are not writing a summary, we are building evidence”); and it is community-led (facilitators arrive as listeners carrying questions, not officers carrying answers).

FIGURE 5

The assessment at a glance — from readiness to plan

BEFORE THE GATHERING	Trust first: active SHG–VO–CLF platforms · village readiness agreed with community institutions · 8–10 local influencers oriented · transect walk done, stories gathered on the road
DAY 1 — LEARNING TO SEE	Welcome & ice-breaker — each person names one change they have noticed · the circle & the eight life-elements · eight mixed groups form (elders, women, youth, landless) · element walks across the village · evening plenary: first findings on the wall
DAY 2 — FROM SEEING TO DECIDING	Each group draws a trendline: past → present → projected future · presentations build the ‘wall of the whole’ and its interlinkages · women, men, youth and elders map impacts separately · consensus on priority action domains · a collective pledge to act
WHAT THE VILLAGE HOLDS	A Landscape Character Profile in the village's own words · an element-wise scorecard of what is declining, holding or improving · a prioritised, tiered action list
INTO THE PLANNING CYCLE	Findings feed the village's VPRP and GPDP — as situation analysis, tiered action plan and Gram Sabha priorities — anchoring convergence with MGNREGA, watershed & forestry programmes

Figure 5 · The assessment at a glance — from readiness to plan.

Equity by design, not by accident

It would be easy for an exercise like this to be captured by the confident and the powerful — that is what happens, by default, in most village meetings. The LCAT is built against that default, and the safeguards are structural rather than rhetorical. The gathering divides into separate conversational spaces — elders; women of the self-help groups; youth; mixed groups — precisely so that no voice is averaged into silence: not the woman's experience of vanishing water, not the elder's memory of the forest, not the young person's fear of tomorrow, not the landless person's burden that no one sees (Transform Rural India, n.d.).

The powerful faces stay out

The sarpanch and the village secretary are kept out of the small groups, so no one shrinks an answer out of deference or fear.

The quietest person is invited

The quietest person is gently invited to speak, so the loudest voice never becomes the only one.

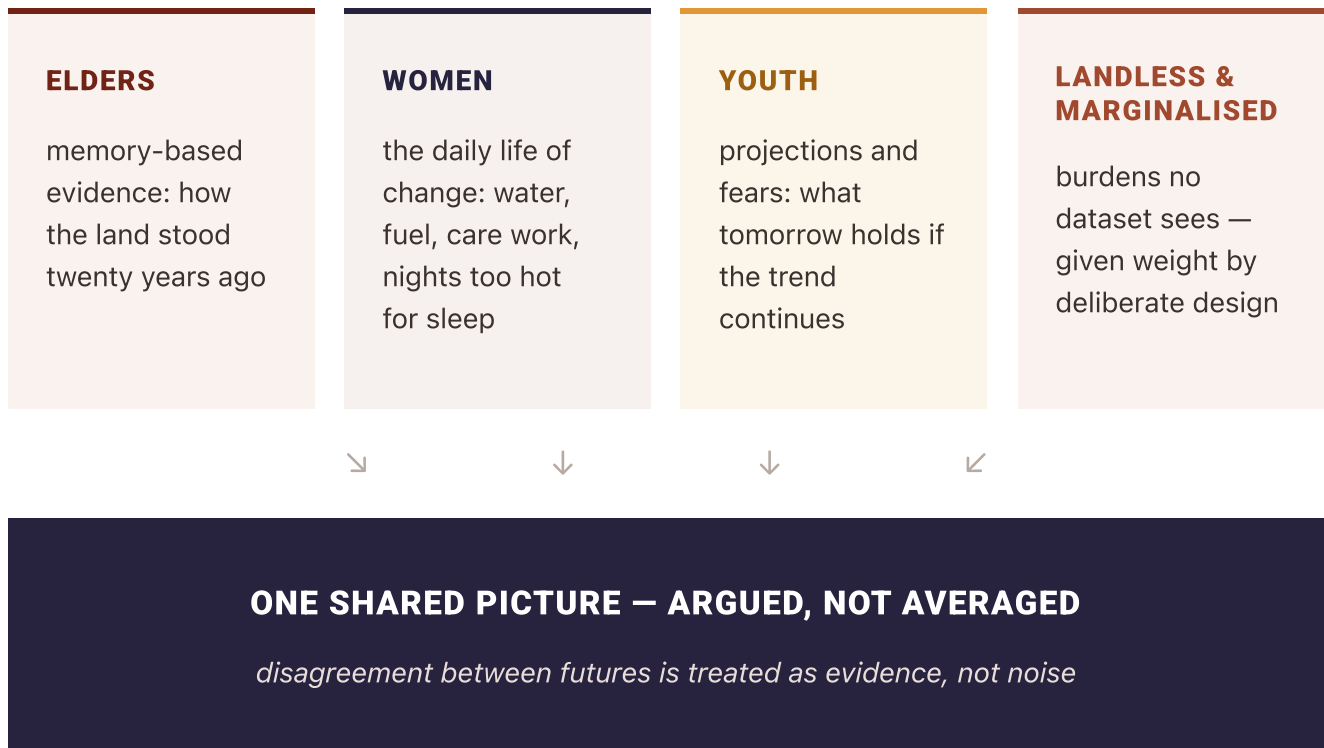
Care is taken throughout that Dalit, Adivasi, women's and landless voices carry weight — because these are the people on whom climate stress presses hardest, and the people whose knowledge of its daily texture is finest. The facilitator's own discipline completes the design: the task is not to give an opinion but to make room; every question stays open; no answer is tilted toward.

Different eyes, different futures

Something remarkable happens when a village is helped to look at itself through deliberately different eyes. The elders, reading from memory, often see decline — the forest that was, the wells that never failed. The youth, reading from projection, may see either promise or foreboding — a road that could bring a market, or a water table that will be gone before they inherit the land. Women describe a future measured in hours: how much further the walk to water will be, how many more nights too hot for sleep. The landless see futures the landed do not.

FIGURE 6

Four vantage points, one shared picture



These are genuinely different futures for the same village — and the LCAT's crucial move is to treat the friction between them as evidence in its own right, rather than a disagreement to be smoothed away. The debate surfaces paradoxes a single-sector plan would miss: heavier downpours yet less water in the well; a new road yet a shrinking commons; a larger harvest on paper yet a household that feels less secure. Naming these contradictions openly guards the community against the tempting but false fix, and points toward the deeper, systemic cause.

From individual to collective consciousness

The deepest design principle of the method is also its quietest. Left to its default, village planning easily becomes a queue of extractive demands — each household pressing its own claim on whatever scheme is available, each request drawing a little more from a commons already thinning. The LCAT is structured, at every step, to move the room from *my problem* to *our landscape*: the opening ice-breaker pools individual observations into a shared record; the wall of the whole makes the interconnections undeniable; the segmented discussions ensure the “we” being built includes everyone; and the final consensus asks the village to prioritise not household benefits but shared systems — the drying spring, the failing canopy, the soil no single family owns. Felt needs are not abolished; they are pooled and turned outward — from extraction toward restoration.

There is good social science behind this choreography. Kurt Lewin's studies of group decision-making in the 1940s found that people were far more likely to actually change everyday behaviour when the decision was discussed and reached together in a group than when they were individually advised or lectured ([Lewin, 1951](#)). A resolution a village has argued its way to — and sealed with its own inked palms — has a durability that no instruction from outside can match. The pledge wall is not decoration; it is the moment individual consciousness becomes collective commitment.

That commitment is then made practical through a final act of sorting: every priority is placed in one of three tiers by who must act. First, what the community can do itself — the labour, stewardship and shared discipline that need no outside sanction, from protecting a grove to reviving a customary grazing rule. Second, what it can do with low support — a modest input, a technical nudge, a small convergence with an existing programme, within easy reach of the panchayat. Third, what requires external support — the larger works needing scheme-based convergence, line-department budgets or higher sanction.

This tiering is what turns a wish-list into a plan: it protects the community's own agency while making its demands on the state precise, sequenced and accountable.

From wish-list to plan — three tiers of action

TIER 1 · WHAT WE CAN DO OURSELVES

labour, stewardship and shared discipline — protecting a grove, reviving a grazing rule

TIER 2 · WHAT WE CAN DO WITH SMALL SUPPORT

a modest input, a technical nudge, a small convergence within the panchayat's reach

TIER 3 · WHAT NEEDS EXTERNAL SUPPORT

larger works through scheme convergence, line-department budgets and higher sanction

Figure 7 · Three tiers of action: agency first, precise demands after. Tiering protects the community's own agency — and makes its demands on the state precise, sequenced and accountable.

By the end of the two days, the village holds three concrete things: a **Landscape Character Profile** — its own reading of itself, in its own words; an **element-wise scorecard** of what is declining, holding or improving; and a **prioritised, tiered action list**. None of these is a report for a shelf. Where they go next is the subject of the conclusion.

A Climate Lens for the Planning Cycle

How a village's reading of itself becomes the way it is administered

The LCAT does not run parallel to government planning; it brings a climate lens into it. Its importance lies less in producing one more document than in inserting a structured reading of vulnerability precisely where administrative planning has been blind to it.

The three outputs of the exercise feed directly into the village's existing planning cycle: the landscape profile becomes the situation analysis with which the GPDP–VPRP process begins; the tiered action list feeds the community and departmental action plans, separating what the village will do itself from what it will demand; and the climate and biodiversity priorities enter the Gram Sabha's vision — giving panchayat representatives, for the first time, a shared evidence base with which to negotiate convergent, climate-resilient works with line departments, from MGNREGA and watershed programmes to forestry and agriculture.

“The government makes its schemes for itself — not for us.”

— an elder in one assessment

The LCAT's answer is not to reject the schemes but to reverse the direction of fit — bending the schemes around the village's own reading of its landscape, rather than the village around the schemes.



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

FIGURE 8

Where the assessment lands — into the village planning cycle

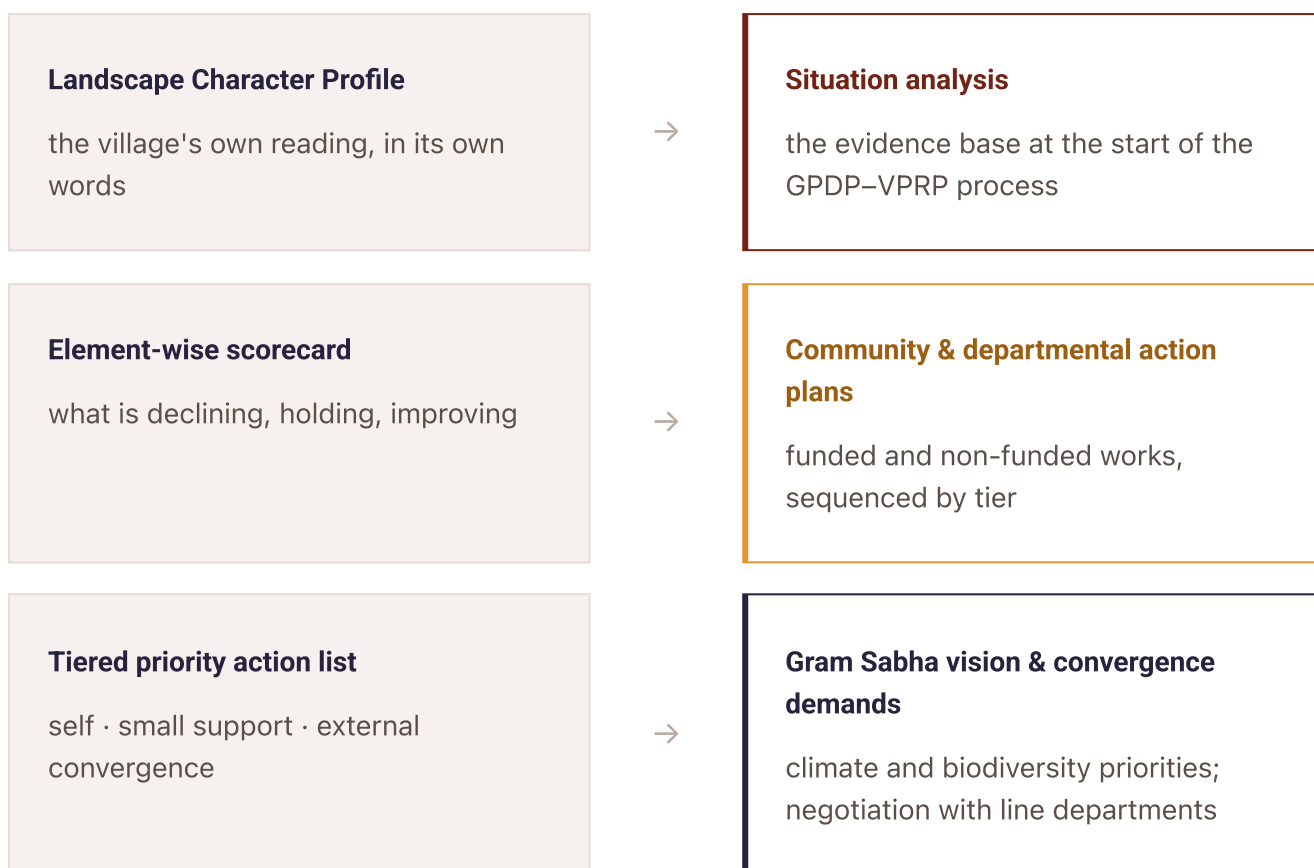


Figure 8 · From assessment to administration: LCAT outputs entering the GPDP-VPRP cycle. The climate lens stops being an external aspiration and becomes a routine feature of how a village is administered.

A restorative landscape lens

Alongside the climate lens comes something subtler. Planning by inventory asks, “what can we get?” Planning from a whole-landscape reading asks, “what must we bring back, and in what order?” — the catchment before the pond, the canopy before the crop, the spring before the pipeline. Restoration becomes the organising principle rather than an afterthought, and the village's demands on the state become demands for repair of systems rather than accumulation of assets.

What the tool ultimately does, then, is heal the double disconnection with which this document began. By treating memory and grief as legitimate data, it reconnects people to the places that hold their knowledge. By reading the village as one living system — and carrying that reading into the administrative machinery — it reconnects planning to lived reality. The grief becomes a map; the map becomes a plan; and the plan, for once, knows which pond to deepen and which canopy to restore — because it began with what the village itself has named as lost.

05

India's Climate Context

"The water is arriving in the wrong shape: too little when the seed needs it, too much all at once when it does not."



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

The national picture

Figures in this section draw on CEEW studies referenced in the pilot documentation; they are approximate and should be verified against the latest published editions before formal citation.

India's rural economy sits on a foundation that climate change is actively destabilising. More than half of India's net sown area is rainfed, which means that for the majority of farming households the monsoon is not weather but destiny. And the monsoon is changing in exactly the way that hurts most: CEEW's tehsil-level analysis finds that where the southwest monsoon is weakening, the decline concentrates in June and July — precisely the weeks when kharif crops must be sown — even as many tehsils see more days of heavy, compressed downpour (CEEW, 2023). The water is arriving in the wrong shape: too little when the seed needs it, too much all at once when it does not.

Half of net sown area

More than half of India's net sown area is rainfed — the monsoon is not weather but destiny

15–20%

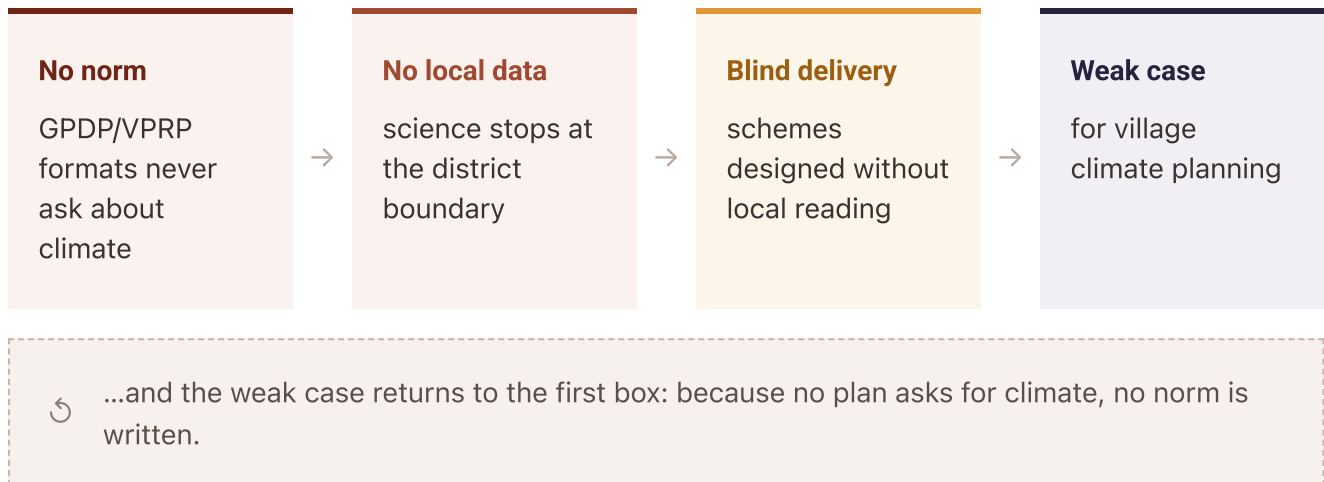
Cited evidence suggests each 2°C rise in annual mean temperature can cut agricultural productivity by approximately this much — a figure to verify from the underlying literature

The vulnerability figures are stark, if approximate: roughly three in four Indian districts are prone to severe hydro-meteorological disasters — floods, droughts and cyclones — and more than eight in ten Indians live in districts highly vulnerable to such extremes (CEEW, 2020; 2021). More unsettling is the swapping trend: upward of 40% of districts are flipping between flood and drought regimes, dissolving the very categories (this is a dry tract, that a wet one) by which communities planned their year.

Why does this demand community-level action, rather than only national programmes? Three gaps, identified in the LCAT framework, compound each other — and they compound in a loop.

FIGURE 9

The self-reinforcing loop that keeps village planning climate-blind



LCAT CUTS IN HERE

structured documentation of what communities already know

↖ entering at the data gap — replacing absent local records with the village's own structured reading, and so breaking the loop.

The normative gap — no rule asks a village plan to look at climate; state action plans rarely spell out roles for the district, block and panchayat tiers where adaptation must actually happen.

The limits of distant science — robust assessment needs decades of continuous local data that largely does not exist below the district level; the people with the longest, finest-grained record of local change are the least consulted in measuring it.

Thin delivery — extension, early warnings, credit and insurance fray toward the last mile, and the infrastructure meant to absorb shocks is itself exposed to them.

Under VB GRAM G, one of the proposed reforms is the creation of a Rural Asset Registry, which will document public assets created by different departments and inform the preparation of the Viksit Gram Panchayat Plan (VGPP). While the Asset Registry primarily answers the question, "What assets already exist in the village?", LCAT complements it by answering, "How is the landscape functioning, what ecological changes are communities experiencing, and where should future investments be prioritised?"

Meanwhile, communities already understand adaptation and mitigation — they simply do not use those words. Adaptation is articulated as memory and repair; mitigation lives inside stewardship. The raw material for climate action already sits in the village — as memory, norm, demand and practice. What has been missing is a structured way to gather it, weigh it, and connect it to the planning machinery. That is the LCAT's job.

5.2 · PART 2

Climate variability and vulnerability in the three pilot states

District-level Climate Vulnerability Index values for the pilot districts are deliberately not quoted here; they should be read directly from the CEEW reports before citation. The characterisations below combine the pilot's community testimony with the directional findings of the research literature supplied with the project.

Madhya Pradesh

The pilot's western arc spans three belts — the tribal Jhabua Hills uplands, the Nimar plain along the Narmada, and the black-soil Malwa/Vindhya plateau edge. CEEW's tehsil-level monsoon work places north-western Madhya Pradesh among regions showing declining post-monsoon (Oct–Dec) rainfall, with rain increasingly arriving as short, heavy bursts — precisely the pattern the villages describe from the ground: not simply “less rain,” but rain that no longer keeps its appointments. Community-reported groundwater declines are extreme (approximately 80–90 ft a generation ago to ~800 ft in Sukhedi, Dewas), and every village reports hotter summers and a shrinking cool season.

Uttar Pradesh

The pilot's ecological range is the finding: from the water-rich Terai under the Himalayan foothills, through the Doab and Awadh plains, to the Vindhyan edge and drought-scarred Bundelkhand — a semi-arid tract of black cotton soil, one uncertain monsoon, the pilot's steepest reported water declines, and its heaviest out-migration (70–80%+ of households in the Banda villages, community-reported). Climate stress in UP is not one story but one mechanism — extraction outrunning recharge as the rainfed calendar breaks — expressed at five different speeds. Communities report the monsoon arriving roughly fifteen days late, summers approaching ~47°C, hailstorm and locust cycles, and unseasonal harvest-time rain.

Chhattisgarh

The forest state: four of five pilot districts sit on the Bastar plateau's sal-and-mixed-forest country, with a living NTFP economy, sacred groves, and PESA/FRA legal standing most Indian villages lack; the fifth (Rajnandgaon) lies in the plains rice bowl. Here the communities are unusually explicit about the driver: paddy — MSP plus PDS rice making monoculture the rational household choice, with borewells racing downward behind it (one village, Choknar, kept dated notes: approximately 90 ft in April 2024 to ~120 ft in April 2025). Rainfall is reported increasingly off its calendar, with ponds, streams and wells drying earlier each summer.

Across all three states, the forward look is the same in plain terms: more of what the villages already feel — more erratic and intense rainfall, longer and hotter dry spells, and continued groundwater decline wherever extraction outruns recharge.

None of the fifty-one communities asked for a projection. Their question is why the plans made in their name do not yet treat the landscape as one connected system.



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

06

State Summaries and Findings

6.1 Uttar Pradesh

6.2 Madhya Pradesh

6.3 Chhattisgarh



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

Uttar Pradesh

From the Terai to Bundelkhand

“Once the village had a great pond and fifteen to twenty smaller ones, and wells from which the women drew water. Now the ponds have shrunk and turned foul, the wells are filled in, and house after house has its own handpump, borewell and motor.”

— Elderly group, Gangauri, Basti

13

VILLAGES

7

DISTRICTS

280+

SHGS

Apr–May

2026



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

Overview

Thirteen villages · Seven districts · April–May 2026. The UP pilot spans the widest ecological range in the series: the water-rich Terai (Lakhimpur Kheri), the Doab/western plain in the shadow of the rising Jewar International Airport (Aligarh), the Awadh plain of ponds and orchard belts (Sultanpur, Basti), the rocky Vindhyan edge — home to the Koldihwa site, among the earliest documented evidence of rice cultivation in the subcontinent (Prayagraj) — and semi-arid Bundelkhand (Hamirpur, Banda).

Villages range from the artisanal economy of Bandhua Kalan (jewellery, bangles, copper-brass) to Belhat's 580+ Kol families. Migration is the state's shock absorber: ~40% of households in Karapithiya, ~60% in Devghat and 70–80%+ in the Banda villages send members out (community-reported). Roughly 280+ SHGs anchor collective life.

Five ecologies, one mechanism

Terai · Doab/western plain · Awadh plain
· Vindhyan edge · Bundelkhand

Migration as shock absorber

~40% Karapithiya · ~60% Devghat
· 70–80%+ Banda villages
(community-reported)

Thematic Trendlines — one red line, two half-truths

The cascade, in the communities' own sequence (Emiliya Khurd): drinking-water shortage → farming destroyed → birds and animals dying → plants withering — with a distinctly UP terminus in the body and the bus ticket: 70% of Rehunchi households preferring bought outside food, 80%+ of working-age people gone to the cities — an “outsourcing of daily life.”

Landform & Topography ▼ declining in ~half

The plain endures; its micro-geography does not — teelas (hillocks) levelled, khal drainage channels swallowed by fields and sealed under concrete roads, rocky pathar levelled into farmland. The land is being smoothed of the features that once routed and held its water.

Hydrology ▼ 11 of 13

The signature UP paradox: a private solution to a common decline — 100% private-submersible irrigation in Pakhodna, 139 machines in Ranjit Gadhi. Each is individually rational; collectively they are the “deepening of water” (jal ki gehraai). Ponds silted, encroached, or farmed over entirely.

Land Cover & Agriculture ▼ 10 of 13

Mixed grain (kodo, sawa, mejhuma, jowar, mahua) narrowed to wheat-paddy-sugarcane; chemicals adopted partly because migration created labour scarcity (Gangauri's own diagnosis); soil turning zameen banjar — salt-crusts, earthworm-empty.

Wildlife & Biodiversity ▼ all 13 — the pilot's universal red line

The missing named like a census: vulture, Neelkanth, sparrow, otter, jackal, the earthworm itself; Sarus crane down to 2–3 sightings a year; nilgai and boar into the predator gap. Endpoint made visible: cucurbit farmers in Ranjit Gadhi now pollinate by hand.

Infrastructure & Economy 🏠 genuinely mixed

Roads, taps, schools are real and celebrated — but services rose while livelihoods thinned (Pathra: “↑ services / ↓ livelihoods”); wages up from ₹50–60 to ₹500 (Bailha) while costs rose faster; a veterinary clinic converted into the Panchayat Bhawan.

Cultural & Historical ▼ 10 of 13

The Kajri-Alha stopped at Panchami; wedding songs falling silent; Nautanki gives way to the DJ; the Chaupal survives with 2–3 elders. Yet Belhat's 400-year Kushti Dangal still draws cross-state crowds — culture declining as practice while surviving as asset.

Visual & Sensory ▼ 10 of 13

Field-boundary tree lines vanished; October–November stubble smoke the new season-marker; the Belan river odorous where it was once holy; the soil's own smell changed (Belhat).

Community & Governance ▲ improved/mixed everywhere — but split

Formal institutions rising while informal ones thin: ~280+ SHGs, women's voice growing (51% of chart-group voice in Rehunchi), ghunghat barrier visibly cleared in Koraon — while the Khuli Baithak thins and the smartphone is named as the solvent (Pakhodna's own diagnosis).

1 Restore the ponds, tanks and wells (talab ki khudai)

Near-universal and almost always first-ranked: ponds back “toward the remembered 18” (Bandhua Kalan); the great tank and 15–20 ponds (Gangauri); a pond re-excavated where none now exists, ready for fish (Karapithiya)

2 Recharge the ground and discipline the machines

Soak pits and rooftop harvesting — paired with the harder ask: register, meter or space the private submersibles (Pakhodna's flagship)

3 Return to organic/natural farming

All 13; Pakhodna's target: 30% of land under natural farming; Singha Kala's clear diagnosis: gobar khad gave less yield but healthy, disease-free crops

4 Plant the trees back — orchard belts, bunds, lanes

All 13, species named from memory (imli-aam-mahua); Ranjit Gadhi's pledge: every household plants two native trees this monsoon

5 Bring back the lost grains (mota anaaj) with seed banks

Framed explicitly as a diet–body–disease reclaim (Pathra, Rehunchi); tied to SHG milling and processing

6 End the burning — parali and residue value chains

Zero-burning Gram Sabha resolutions paired with enterprises (mushroom, pellets, fodder) that make the straw worth more unburned

7 SHG-led green enterprise to slow migration

On the ~280-SHG base, with migration mitigation as the explicit objective

8 Livestock revival, veterinary care & solar energy

Rebuild the herd and gobar economy (restore the converted vet clinic — Bandhua Kalan); solar pumps against a 4–8-hour electricity day, always paired with water discipline

Unique Probes — signals worth investigation or investment

The veterinary sub-centre converted into a Panchayat Bhawan

BANDHUA KALAN

One building conversion quietly disabled a whole livestock economy; a cautionary tale about infrastructure accounting.

Unsettled forest-land compensation on ~700–800 bighas

PATHRA

The series' only upward ecological trend, bought at an unresolved cost to the very community now asked to protect it.

Airport-driven land speculation

RANJIT GADHI

With Jewar rising, an estimated 8–12% of farmland converted or earmarked in a decade; the village asks for a land register and Gram Sabha deliberation.

A Community Conserved Area for the migratory “Ram Pyari”

BELHAT

50–100 wintering birds as a conservation and eco-tourism asset, with the Sarus crane's return adopted as a five-year public indicator.

Activate the Koldihwa rice-heritage site

DEVGHAT

World-class heritage sitting unmarked in the panchayat; no signage, no livelihood.

Reinstate the khal with culverts under the RCC roads

GANGAURI

A community asking for its erased drainage geography back as designed infrastructure.

Cross-border UP–MP convergence

REHUNCHI

Dual-state SHG networks and joint riparian restoration of the Run Nadi; turning a boundary into an asset.

Measurable Sankalps and Landscape Committees

ACROSS THE UP VILLAGES

Five-year public commitments with species and songs as metrics; governance innovation the whole country could borrow.

Green Value Chains

TOP 10 BROAD VALUE CHAINS

- 1** Vermicompost & bio-inputs (all 13)
- 2** Plantation, native nurseries & agroforestry (all 13)
- 3** Millet & pulse (mota anaaj) revival with SHG processing
- 4** Livestock, dairy & goat enterprise
- 5** Pond fisheries in restored waters
- 6** Crop-residue value chains (compost, fodder, mulch, pellets, mushroom)
- 7** Solar irrigation & rooftops (paired with water discipline)
- 8** NTFP processing (mahua, tendu, chironji, gond, ber, imli)
- 9** Banana & sugarcane value addition (Terai)
- 10** Biomass-to-power / decentralised residue-to-energy

5 UNIQUE / NICHE VALUE CHAINS

1 · Metalcraft & bangle circular craft economy

Bandhua Kalan — PMFME/ODOP

2 · Kushti heritage tourism

the 400-year Dangal (Belhat)

3 · Koldihwa heritage eco-trail & migratory-bird eco-tourism

Devghat, Belhat

4 · Juda-banana (broom & mop) micro-industry

Gangauri — “the broom as shock absorber”

5 · E-rickshaw & battery-vehicle mobility enterprise

Karapithiya, Emiliya Khurd

Sensory Observations

UP's testimony is the pilot's most exact — communities described climate change not in millimetres of rainfall but in the colour of a pond, the silence at Panchami, the taste of well water, the smell of a river, and the height of their own sons.

SIGHT	Field-boundary tree lines all but vanished; salt crusting the black kali mitti; stubble smoke as the new Doab season-marker.
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SOUND	The state's musical registry falling silent by name — Kajri-Alha, Sohar, Nautanki — giving way to the DJ; Karapithiya has already drafted community norms on DJ volume near the temple, school and elders.
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TASTE	Grain once shuddh (pure); well water that now comes up “stony”; 70% of one village preferring bought food.
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SMELL	The Belan — once clean enough for Mahashivratri puja — now odorous with household discharge; and Belhat's quietly devastating line: the smell of the soil itself has changed.
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TOUCH	Summers reported approaching ~47°C; the earthworm gone from the hand's memory of the soil.
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The most extraordinary account is Pathra's, where elders link the diet shift from mota anaaj to chemical-grown staples with a reported fall in average male height and the arrival of diabetes, blood pressure and cancer — illnesses their generation “did not name.” **This is testimony of great rhetorical force, not a measurement; it cannot be verified from these materials and should not be quoted as data.** The right response is the one the plans route: NHM outreach, screening and water-quality testing.

The counterpoints are equally honest: Singha Kala names the pucca house and the toilet as safety and dignity (one cooking fire once burned whole thatched neighbourhoods); Bailha's proudest finding is social — caste discrimination visibly reduced, all communities now sitting and eating together. The household's sensory world has improved while the landscape's has emptied.

Gender Analysis — Gender at Work framework

In the thirteen UP villages, the gender question begins with an absence: men have left — for Noida, Delhi, Surat, Mumbai — in numbers large enough to reshape the village's demography, and the women who remain have become the de facto managers of land, water, livestock and fuel. Yet the institutions that govern those resources have not caught up: management has shifted to women while title, standing and entitlement largely have not.

	INFORMAL	FORMAL
INDIVIDUAL	Q1 · Consciousness & Capabilities Women who once sat silent under ghunghat came, over time, to speak most articulately (Belhat, Devghat); ghunghat barrier visibly cleared in the Koraon villages; women contributed 51% of chart-group voice in Rehunchi — the series' highest; girls in Bargaon now leave the village for higher education.	Q2 · Access to Resources ~280+ SHGs anchor collective life (54 in Bandhua Kalan, 48 in Bailha, 43 in Devghat federated under CLFs); in Alragoura most women belong to one; SHG credit and enterprise incomes (vermicompost, processing, dairy); women-led Jal Chaupals monitoring water monthly.
SYSTEMIC	Q3 · Informal Norms & Practices Membership has outpaced authority — most decisions still rest with men and elders; the water commons that were also women's gathering places (wells, ponds) replaced by privately owned depth; male migration lengthens women's working day; a cooking-fuel disruption can send households back to fuelwood overnight.	Q4 · Formal Rules & Policies The women who actually run the fields hold neither the land's title nor a secure place in the Gram Sabha that allocates its water; the plans' structural correctives — women-only pre-meetings before the Gram Sabha, reserved places, first access to schemes for women-headed households — aim to make agency accumulate rather than stall at the threshold of decision.

Reading the quadrants together: adaptation in UP cannot be designed for a village that has partly departed; it must be designed for the one actually present — recognising women as the managers they have become, restoring water as a commons rather than a private asset, and making the deliberative corrective structural.

1 · Water restoration & the machine question

TIER A — HOUSEHOLD / COMMUNITY · NO EXTERNAL FUNDS

Shramdaan desilting; household soak pits; women-led Jal Chaupal monitoring; pond-edge protection norms

TIER B — VILLAGE / PANCHAYAT · GP FUNDS, MGNREGA, NRLM SEED

Mechanised desilting & bund repair; rooftop harvesting on public buildings; water-quality testing where taste changes

TIER C — BLOCK / DISTRICT · SCHEME CONVERGENCE

Amrit Sarovar / PMKSY pond missions; khal reinstatement with culverts; Maudha Dam canal repair; submersible registration (Atal Bhujal); O&M of standing infrastructure

2 · Soil & the organic transition

TIER A — HOUSEHOLD / COMMUNITY · NO EXTERNAL FUNDS

Gobar/desi khaad on willing plots; community seed banks with elder custodians; no-burn resolutions

TIER B — VILLAGE / PANCHAYAT · GP FUNDS, MGNREGA, NRLM SEED

Vermicompost & bio-input units (NRLM); demo plots anchored on organic-surviving hamlets (Koldihwa, Nayi Basti)

TIER C — BLOCK / DISTRICT · SCHEME CONVERGENCE

PKVY/NMNF natural-farming clusters with transition support; Shree Anna millet chains with milling, market & school-feeding linkage

3 · Trees, forest & the biodiversity comeback

TIER A — HOUSEHOLD / COMMUNITY · NO EXTERNAL FUNDS

Two-trees-per-household pledges; SHG nurseries; Gram Sabha bans on cutting & hunting; school/Anganwadi bird censuses with species-return Sankalps

TIER B — VILLAGE / PANCHAYAT · GP FUNDS, MGNREGA, NRLM SEED

Native nurseries as enterprise; fenced plantation blocks; orchard-belt demonstration; buffer hedges against nilgai/boar

TIER C — BLOCK / DISTRICT · SCHEME CONVERGENCE

CAMPA / Green India Mission restoration; the migratory-bird Community Conserved Area; settlement of plantation-land dues (Pathra); compensatory roadside plantation enforced

4 · Green livelihoods & migration mitigation

TIER A — HOUSEHOLD / COMMUNITY	TIER B — VILLAGE / PANCHAYAT	TIER C — BLOCK / DISTRICT
Pool production on existing enterprise bases; SHG induction of excluded households; youth skill mapping	Enterprise upgrades — processing, dairy, nursery, metalcraft (NRLM-SVEP, PMFME/ODOP); paddy-straw enterprises; skilling for returnees	FPO formation; artisan-cluster finance; heritage/eco-tourism activation; e-rickshaw enterprises; cross-border coordination (Rehunchi)

5 · Livestock, energy & the gobar economy

TIER A — HOUSEHOLD / COMMUNITY	TIER B — VILLAGE / PANCHAYAT	TIER C — BLOCK / DISTRICT
Stall-feeding norms; dung returned to fields; improved-chulha adoption	Para-vet/mobile-vet arrangements; dairy & goat aggregation; fodder on bunds	Restore the veterinary sub-centre; PM-KUSUM solar paired with water budgeting; Ujjwala saturation; GOBARdhan biogas at cluster scale

The through-line is the first column — but UP adds a governance invention worth carrying everywhere: **the measurable Sankalp**. A village that commits, publicly and on a five-year clock, to the return of the Neelkanth or the Sarus landing again beside the Ram Pyari has made the landscape's recovery a promise the whole village can hear, see — and hold its plan accountable to.

Madhya Pradesh

Six Down, Two Up

“When I came here as a bride, water would come after just a little digging; but today it is hard to find water even at 800 feet. People are in a race over who will drill the deeper borewell.”

— Village elder (Dadi), Sukhedi, Dewas

13

VILLAGES

6

DISTRICTS

230+

SHGS

Feb–Apr

2026



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

Overview

Thirteen villages · Six districts · February–April 2026. The MP pilot sits in the state's western arc across three landscape belts: the tribal Jhabua Hills uplands (Jhabua, Alirajpur — predominantly Bhil/Bhilala Adivasi villages; Naharpura is ~99.6% ST), the Nimar plain along the Narmada (Barwani, Dhar — strongly tribal, with brick kilns and quarries appearing at village edges), and the black-cotton-soil plateau edge (Dewas, Sehore — deep-borewell, triple-cropping agriculture and forest-and-pond Gond heritage).

Over 200 SHGs (approximately 230+ counting all groups) span the thirteen villages — from 5 in Sukhedi to 38 in tiny Naharpura. Different soils, different rivers, different gods and festivals — and yet essentially one trajectory.

Jhabua Hills uplands

Jhabua, Alirajpur — predominantly Bhil/Bhilala Adivasi villages; Naharpura ~99.6% ST

Nimar plain

Barwani, Dhar — strongly tribal, with brick kilns and quarries at village edges

Black-soil plateau edge

Dewas, Sehore — deep-borewell, triple-cropping agriculture and forest-and-pond Gond heritage

Water restoration was the single most common first-ranked demand — the #1 priority in 9 of 13 villages.



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

Landform & Topography ▼

The hills endure; the living skin on top is failing — soil elders remember as soft enough to form clods hardened under tractors and chemicals; commons quietly converted; concrete sealing soil that once drank the monsoon.

Hydrology ▼ with a cruel paradox

Access improved, sustainability collapsed: taps and borewells brought water to the home even as water under the home retreated — 80 ft to ~800 ft in Sukhedi, four year-round wells to one in Dedla, a perennial river dry by February in Sagonia. Recharge broke first; extraction accelerated into the gap.

Land Cover & Agriculture ▼ the “high-input, low-output” trap

The same arc everywhere: traditional mixed farming → hybrid seeds, urea and DAP → two-three crops a year → hardened soil, rising costs, falling profit. Dedla's farmers: even when the crop is good, “the farmer is going bankrupt” on his own inputs. When the livestock left, the gobar cycle snapped.

Wildlife & Biodiversity ▼ the sharpest fall

Losses named like family: the sparrow and honeybee (Ramgarh), the leopard now “only a memory,” vultures poisoned out of the sky, the firefly gone from the night. Conflict rises: in Sukhedi, tigers walk into the village in summer because the forest itself has run out of water.

Infrastructure & Economy ▲ genuinely — at a price

Roads, electricity, taps (JJM), schools where none stood — claimed with pride. The costs ride along: pumping bills from 750–800 ft, chemical-input debt, kiln smoke, youth migration to Indore, Bhopal and Gujarat.

Cultural & Historical ▼ the quiet grief

The DJ replaced the dhol; the chaupal sits unheeded; Ramgarh's most piercing line: “People do not stay happy any more.” Yet culture is also where resilience hides — Bhagoria still anchors Chikali; a renovated stepwell in Naharpura is still lovingly cleaned.

Visual & Sensory ▼ climate change you can feel

Less green, more heat; birdsong to engine noise; fruit that “lost its sweetness”; the flame-orange Palash bloom gone from the Sali horizon and kiln-haze in its place.

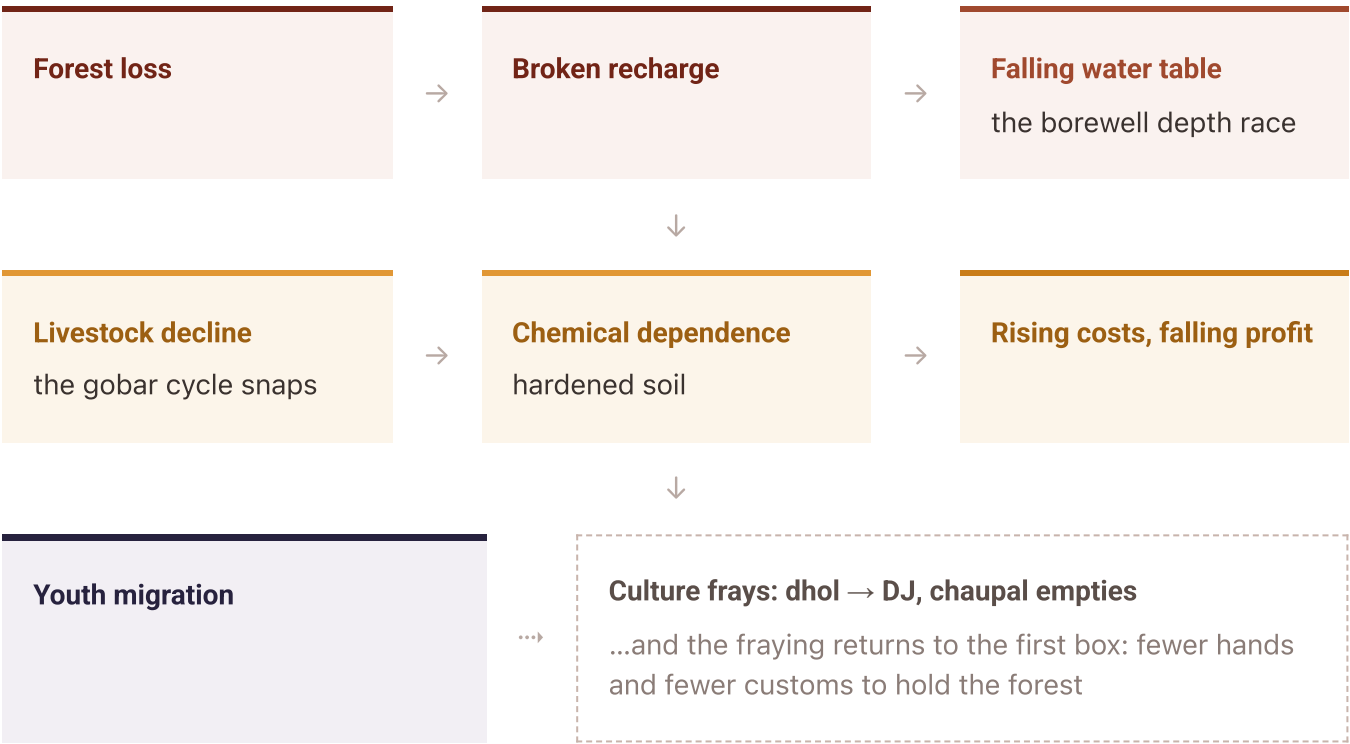
Community & Governance ▲ the engine of hope

The pilot's most consistent bright spot: 200+ SHGs, active Village Organisations, women moving from ghonghat to Gram Sabha, land increasingly in women's names (Naharpura), caste barriers softening. The caveat: these strong institutions have a weak mandate over natural resources.

FIGURE 10

The cascade, in the communities' own logic

Madhya Pradesh — as the villages themselves sequenced it



Bhimkund traces everything — water, soil, wildlife, even new illnesses — to a single root: the loss of the dense forest that once surrounded it. Culture does not sit outside this cascade; the same market logic that swapped gobar for urea also swapped the dhol for the DJ — and the communities said both things in the same breath.

1 Restore and recharge water bodies — desilt ponds, revive wells and stepwells, recharge pits, check dams

Universal; Richi's Panchayat wants soak pits mandatory for every pucca house; Naharpura simply wants "the water-holding pits" its grandparents dug rebuilt

2 Transition to organic/natural farming (jaivik kheti)

Named in all 13; Ekalbara already has 125 farmers transitioning via Krishi Sakhi support

3 Plant trees — bunds, commons, roadsides, degraded land

Species named with intent: Palash in Sali; teak-palash-mango-banyan in Mor; Peepal and Mahua for shade in Richi

4 Revive livestock to restore the manure cycle

The communities' own systems insight: no animals, no gobar, no soil — demanded as soil policy, not just income

5 Bring back millets and traditional crops

Jowar, bajra, kodo-kutki, indigenous seed banks — for water thrift, nutrition and identity together

6 Community water governance — budgeting, borewell discipline

Eight villages ask for collective rules over extraction — an extraordinary demand, because it is a demand for self-restraint

7 SHG-led green livelihoods & youth skilling to slow migration

Vermicompost, nurseries, dairy, value addition — the 200+ SHG base as the delivery engine

8 Restore grazing commons & embed ecology in official plans

Demarcate and replant commons (the land-base for demand #4); Gram Sabha NRM charters; LCAT findings into the GPDP & VPRP

Unique Probes — signals worth investigation or investment

Regulate river sand mining

MOR ON THE MAHI · TEMPLA ON
THE NARMADA

Communities have connected sand extraction to lost river recharge: “without sand the river no longer holds water.”

Mandatory soak pits for every pucca house and government building

RICHI

A village-invented building code: development must pay its own recharge debt. Immediately replicable state-wide.

Reverse pond encroachment

SUKHEDI

All six historic ponds became private farmland; restoration is as much a land-records and courage question as an engineering one.

Price security for fruit trees — the MSP problem

SUKHEDI, RICHI

Ancestral mango-mahua-guava orchards (Baags) were felled because wheat has MSP and trees don't; national price policy silently redesigning village ecology.

Forest ponds to keep wildlife out of the village

SUKHEDI

Community-invented climate-conflict mitigation, without a scheme or a circular.

Fix the infrastructure that already exists

NAHARPURA

The tank stands built but dry; maintenance demanded as a first-class investment.

Deep-pit idol immersion and riverbank protection

MOR, NAHARPURA

A community re-engineering its own ritual to protect its water.

Cultural revival as climate infrastructure

TEMPLA, RATANPUR, DEDLA, CHIKALI

Revive the chaupal and elders' authority; close the female literacy gap; build PM-Awas homes with alternatives so housing stops costing trees.

Green Value Chains

TOP 10 BROAD VALUE CHAINS

- 1** Vermicompost & organic-input production via SHGs (all 13)
- 2** Livestock & dairy — income plus the manure cycle
- 3** Plantation, agroforestry & nurseries
- 4** Millet cultivation & processing (jowar, bajra, kodo, kutki)
- 5** Water-harvesting works as local employment (MGNREGA-compatible)
- 6** NTFP value addition (mahua, tendupatta, gum, tamarind)
- 7** SHG micro-enterprise & collective marketing (all 13)
- 8** Forest-produce revival — gum, herbs, medicinal plants (Bhimkund)
- 9** Riverine-pond fisheries in restored water bodies (Sagonia, Ratanpur)
- 10** Biogas / gobar-economy extensions (Dedla, Chikali)

5 UNIQUE / NICHE VALUE CHAINS

1 • Palash-plantation products

Sali — restoring the landscape's visual identity as agroforestry

2 • Narmada backwater fisheries

Temla — a climate-created livelihood needing community management norms

3 • Beekeeping

Ramgarh, Naharpura — pollination recovery packaged as income

4 • Orchard & kitchen-garden chains via Maa ki Bagiya/Badi

Sukhedi — fruit trees against the MSP tide

5 • Eco-products

cloth bags & leaf plates (Ekalbara); solar enterprise bundle (Mor)

Sensory Observations

Technical monitoring in these villages is thin — but every village holds a dense, continuously updated record in another form: the memory of the senses.

SIGHT	Hills that were forested now barren; the Palash bloom gone with kiln-haze in its place; fewer stars, no fireflies; plastic where leaf plates once composted themselves.
SOUND	Ekalbara's report records that "the sounds of the forest have fallen silent"; the dhol and mandal replaced by hired DJ systems.
TASTE	Food cooked on firewood "simply tasted better" (Temla); "whatever we ate was full of taste — now we are eating poison itself" (Ratanpur); the cool, sweet well water lost to the tap and borewell.
TOUCH & HEAT	Concrete houses trapping summer heat where mud homes shed it; the felled shade trees; a shrinking "cool season."
SMELL	Chemical spray, residue smoke, kiln and quarry dust.

Communities extended the record into the body — new illnesses attributed to pesticide-laden food and lost clean air, skin disease from contaminated ponds, "BP, sugar" where "pure fruit" once was. **A note of care: these are community-attributed links, not clinical findings** — serious signals for district public-health verification, not established causal facts. And the ledger has two columns: Naharpura notes modernisation genuinely eased the body's old burdens; Dedla and Chikali's women name the tap as a real liberation from the daily water-carry. The conveniences have been gained by the household while the qualities have been lost by the landscape.

The practical case: sensory change is the cheapest, most democratic monitoring system a village owns. No instrument is needed to know whether the Palash bloomed, whether the fireflies returned, in which month the river went dry. A short, village-chosen list of sensory indicators, reviewed annually in the Gram Sabha, would let communities see and hear their plan working.

Gender Analysis — Gender at Work framework

The MP gender findings range from the intimate — a woman measuring an aquifer's collapse against the year she arrived as a bride — to the structural: whose name the land is held in, and who is present when a Gram Sabha decides about water. Mapped onto the [Gender at Work framework](#), MP's gains cluster in the upper-left quadrant — consciousness, capability, organisation — while the deeper structures below the line have moved far less.

	INFORMAL	FORMAL
INDIVIDUAL	Q1 · Consciousness & Capabilities Women who once observed the village from behind the ghoonghat now sit in 230+ SHGs, speak in the Gram Sabha, and describe landscape change with forensic precision (the Sukhedi dadi's 800-feet testimony); Krishi Sakhi cadres leading the natural-farming transition (Ekalbara's 125 farmers).	Q2 · Access to Resources SHG credit and enterprise incomes (vermicompost, dairy, tailoring, vegetables — 50 members engaged in Sali, 57 in Ekalbara); the tap named by women as liberation from the daily water-carry; land beginning to be registered in women's names (Naharpura).
SYSTEMIC	Q3 · Informal Norms & Practices Dedla's women name the gap precisely — participation has risen while decisions remain largely with men; night-time mobility constrained by fear (Chikali: "at night we are afraid to step out of the house"); female literacy gaps persist (Dedla ~52% vs ~83%; Chikali ~49% vs ~72% — verify against Census); caste barriers softening is the counter-signal.	Q4 · Formal Rules & Policies SHGs and Village Organisations hold no formal NRM charter — powerful on credit and welfare, nearly silent on water, soil and forest; who signs off on a borewell remains outside women's formal authority; women's land titling (Naharpura) is the early policy lever the plans propose to extend.

Awareness and capability have grown faster than authority. Every adaptive measure the assessments propose depends on sustained decisions taken season after season by the people who carry the consequences first. Closing the lower half of this framework is not a social addendum to MP's climate response; it is the mechanism by which that response will either hold or fail.

1 · Water restoration & recharge (#1 in 9 of 13)

TIER A — HOUSEHOLD /
COMMUNITY · NO EXTERNAL
FUNDS

Shramdaan desilting; Gram Sabha resolutions on borewell discipline & water budgeting; rebuild traditional water-holding pits; household soak pits by local norm (the Richi model)

TIER B — VILLAGE / PANCHAYAT ·
GP/15TH-FC, MGNREGA, NRLM
SEED

Recharge pits, percolation tanks, contour bunding via MGNREGA; repair of existing tanks & stop-dams; village water committees

TIER C — BLOCK / DISTRICT ·
SCHEME CONVERGENCE

Check-dam chains & riverbed works (Sagonia); Amrit Sarovar-type rejuvenation; PMKSY-Watershed; legal reversal of pond encroachment (Sukhedi); sand-mining regulation (district administration + PESA Gram Sabha powers)

2 · Organic farming & soil health

TIER A — HOUSEHOLD /
COMMUNITY · NO EXTERNAL
FUNDS

Revive gobar and household compost; stop residue burning by norm; seed-saving; willing-farmer demo plots

TIER B — VILLAGE / PANCHAYAT ·
GP/15TH-FC, MGNREGA, NRLM
SEED

SHG vermicompost units; soil-testing camps (KVK/ATMA); Krishi Sakhi support on the Ekalbara model

TIER C — BLOCK / DISTRICT ·
SCHEME CONVERGENCE

Certified organic clusters with transition bridging (PKVY/NMNF); millet seed banks, processing & market linkage (Millet Mission, ODOP)

3 · Tree & forest restoration

TIER A — HOUSEHOLD /
COMMUNITY · NO EXTERNAL
FUNDS

Community plantation with local seed; “cut one, plant ten” ethic; anti-hunting norms; intergenerational species documentation

TIER B — VILLAGE / PANCHAYAT ·
GP/15TH-FC, MGNREGA, NRLM
SEED

Village nurseries (Forest Dept + MGNREGA); grazing-common demarcation; sapling-survival care in the MGNREGA muster

TIER C — BLOCK / DISTRICT ·
SCHEME CONVERGENCE

CAMPA / Green India Mission block restoration; orchard revival at scale (MIDH / Maa ki Bagiya) with fruit-tree incentives answering the MSP problem; alternative construction materials alongside PM-Awas

4 · Livestock & fodder revival**TIER A — HOUSEHOLD /
COMMUNITY**

Stall-feeding norms; community fodder plots on protected commons; stubble as fodder, not smoke

TIER B — VILLAGE / PANCHAYAT

Fodder cultivation via MGNREGA; SHG animal-husbandry training; veterinary camps

TIER C — BLOCK / DISTRICT

Gokul Mission / National Livestock Mission dairy chains; biogas infrastructure closing the residue loop

5 · Green livelihoods & youth retention**TIER A — HOUSEHOLD /
COMMUNITY**

Direct SHG/VO meetings toward NRM roles; youth corps for plantation, water monitoring and wildlife watch; cultural platforms reviving the chaupal

TIER B — VILLAGE / PANCHAYAT

SHG green enterprises (NRLM-SVEP, RSETI); collective marketing to local mandis

TIER C — BLOCK / DISTRICT

DDU-GKY green skilling; PM-KUSUM paired with water budgeting; TRIFED/ODOP NTFP & millet chains; LCAT institutionalised in every GPDP–VPRP cycle

The through-line of the whole pilot sits in the first column: the communities' own first steps require no money at all — only the mandate.

Chhattisgarh

The Forest State Reads Itself

“Ten years ago, when the rain fell, a sondhi-sondhi khushbu — an earthy fragrance — would rise from the soil. Now, that fragrance is gone.”

— Elder, Barchegondi, Kanker

25

VILLAGES

5

DISTRICTS

500+

SHGS

Apr–May

2026



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

Overview

Twenty-five villages · Five districts · April–May 2026 · Five villages per district. In Chhattisgarh, the villages carry their ecology in their very names — and the names have started to outlive what they describe: Vanusari (from van, forest), Borgaon (village of ber trees), Bargaon (named for its banyans, now largely gone), Pharsigaon (after the traditional wood-cutting tool).

Four districts — Bastar, Dantewada, Kondagaon, Kanker — sit on the Bastar plateau: sal-and-mixed-forest country of rainfed paddy, a living NTFP economy, sacred groves (devgudi), and PESA/FRA legal standing most Indian villages lack (Barchegondi alone holds 698 hectares of forest and 120 household Forest Pattas). The fifth, Rajnandgaon, lies in the plains rice bowl — the most market-linked, least tribal and hydrologically the most drawn-down. The state holds the pilot's strongest institutional base: 500+ SHGs (approximately; 20–35 per village), the Bihan network, women Sarpanches, PESA Gram Sabhas and Forest Rights Committees.

The pilot's brightest counter-examples

Hidpal, Dantewada

A 100% tribal village reporting no chemical fertiliser use at all — the standing proof that the chemical-free trajectory can be held.

Daspur, Kanker

The pilot's most elegant theory of change, in the village's own words — institutions and ecology rise and fall together.

“When there was forest, the committee existed; now that the forest is gone, the committee is no longer active. If we protect the trees and plants, our committee will come back to life.”

— Daspur, Kanker

Landform & Topography ▼ most villages

The plateau's terrain actively re-engineered: hills cut and levelled into farmland (Binjam); uneven land that no longer holds its water — “when water comes... it flows away by cutting through fields, roads and ponds” (Chinchdongari).

Hydrology ▼ effectively all 25

The borewell race atop a rainfed civilisation: 2–3 machines per field (Choknar, whose dated notes show ~90→~120 ft in one year); 500–600-ft bores (Dhanelikanhar); iron-tasting water (Bardevari); a non-functional JJM tap (Borgaon).

Land Cover & Agriculture ▼ nearly all

The MSP-and-PDS paddy pull: mixed rainfed systems, millets and the NTFP calendar narrowing to irrigated monocrop paddy — soil “hard like a brick, and the earthworms are gone” (Daspur). Sonesar's partial reversal toward diversification is a thread worth pulling.

Wildlife & Biodiversity ▼ all 25 — the universal red line, for the third state running

Hunting and encroachment named plainly; the vultures gone from Barchegondi; chemical runoff killing the small fish and crabs of the paddy landscape — a food source and a food web erased together (Choknar).

Infrastructure & Economy ▲ ~20 of 21 tabulated

CC roads, pucca housing, electrification, haat access at 0 km (Chindnaar), solar street lights — real gains. The costs: input debt, borewell inequality (“those without one cannot raise the paddy crop”), youth migration.

Cultural & Historical ▼ nearly all

Godna (tattooing) and Mohari music fading; Sakarteen shrunk from fifteen days — yet the anchors hold: 7 sacred groves in Chipawand, 8 in Chhote Banjoda, the Gayta-Pujari institutions, Hidpal's Diyari calendar. Culture declining as practice while surviving as institution — a crucial difference from the other states.

Visual & Sensory ▼ all tabulated

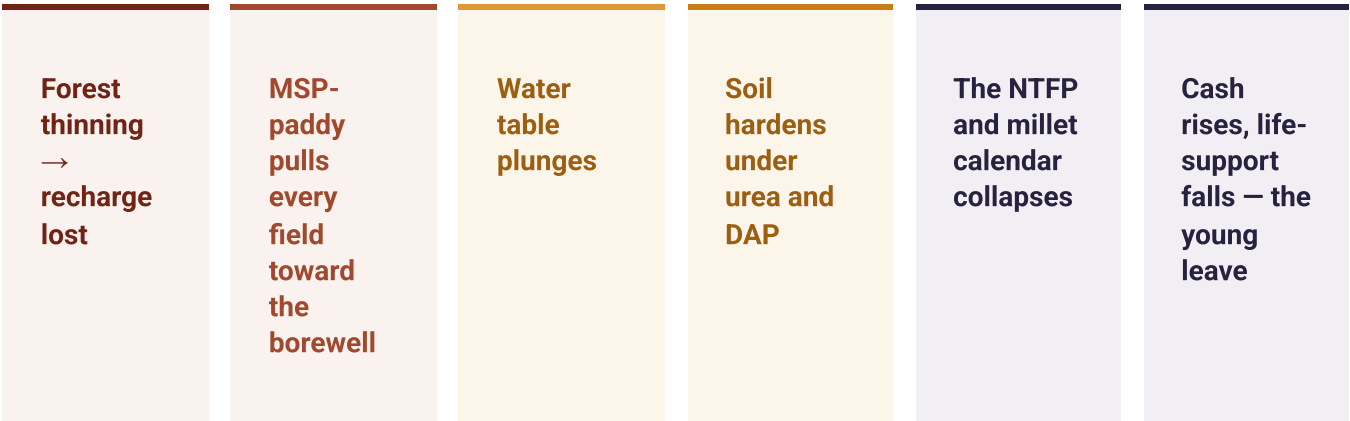
The pilot's most haunting finding: the petrichor is gone — the sondhi-sondhi khushbu vanished in nearly identical words two districts apart. A landscape losing its smell is a landscape whose soil biology is dying — the communities made that diagnosis themselves.

Community & Governance ▲ all tabulated

The strongest base in the three-state pilot: 35 SHGs in Chipawand, PESA Gram Sabhas, Forest Rights Committees, women Sarpanches, a PESA Justice & Peace Committee in Barchegondi. Daspur's insight: the institutions run on the resource itself.

FIGURE 11 · CHHATTISGARH'S CASCADE

It begins in the forest and ends at the bus stand — but its middle link is a price signal



Rich in cash, poor in life-support (Bardevari)



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

1 Water resource development — ponds, dabris, recharge, ridge-to-valley watershed

Universal and almost always first: Karpawand plans fisheries in 10 ponds; Sidesar wants its four never-drying ponds back from the single survivor

2 Forest protection and plantation

The plateau's first principle: community protection rules, plantation on degraded commons, defence of the sacred groves — with Daspur's committee revival tied explicitly to the forest's return

3 Soil health and organic farming

Reverse the “hard like a brick” trajectory — with Hidpal's chemical-free farming as the standing proof it can be done

4 Crop diversification and millet revival

Kodo, kutki and ragi back into a paddy-flattened calendar — the direct counterweight to the MSP pull

5 NTFP management and value addition

Mahua, tendu, imli, chironji, honey — collected, dried, graded and processed locally instead of sold raw; Vanusari's “second only to rice” mahua economy formalised

6 Borewell discipline and water budgeting

Community rules on drilling and irrigation in villages watching 2–3 machines per field

7 Livestock, integrated farming & fisheries in restored waters

Rebuild the herd and the gobar cycle; ponds stocked once they hold water again — income timed to arrive with restoration

8 SHG-led green livelihoods, waste management & river protection

The Bihan network's 20–35-group village bases turned toward vermicompost, sal-leaf plates, NTFP processing and solar-drying enterprise; an end to dumping in streams

Unique Probes — signals worth investigation or investment

Defend the chemical-free village before the chemicals arrive

HIDPAL

The pilot's only village reporting no chemical fertiliser use. The ask is preventive: certify, reward and supply this status — far cheaper than reversing everyone else's transition.

A drinking-water emergency response

CHOKNAR

A community sometimes filtering river water to drink, with a water table measurably down ~30 feet in a year: the pilot's clearest case for immediate, not planned, intervention.

"Our water reaches other places, but we face shortages"

DASPUR

A water-justice and allocation question no recharge pit can answer alone.

Bring back the vultures

BARCHEGONDI

Carrion ecology, carcass-disposal practice and pesticide load bundled in one indicator species, adopted as the community's own demand.

Sacred groves as formal plan assets

CHIPAWAND, CHHOTE BANJODA

Fifteen devgudi between two villages; protection by Gram Sabha resolution as the cheapest conservation instrument the state owns.

Borewell equity

CHA TOLAGAON

"Those without a borewell cannot raise the paddy crop": the water crisis named as a class line inside the village; shared or solar community irrigation as the equity answer.

Engineer the uneven land

CHINCHDONGARI

A village asking for contour and drainage-line engineering, not just storage.

Document godna and Mohari before they go • Fix the tap that exists

CHINDNAAR · BORGAON

Cultural archiving as part of a climate plan; and the JJM connection present but not functional — the maintenance gap given a household face.

Green Value Chains

TOP 10 BROAD VALUE CHAINS

- 1** Vermicompost & bio-inputs — the organic transition's raw material as SHG enterprise
- 2** NTFP value addition — mahua, tendu, imli, chironji, honey
- 3** Sal-leaf plates (dona-pattal) — biodegradable, forest-compatible, culturally native
- 4** Millet cultivation & processing (kodo, kutki, ragi)
- 5** Fisheries in ponds & dabris — income timed to arrive with restoration
- 6** Backyard poultry, goatery & piggery — the gobar base rebuilt
- 7** Solar drying — the cheapest value-addition step in the NTFP chain
- 8** Plantation, bamboo & nursery enterprise — restoration as an SHG product line
- 9** Solar irrigation for the dabri economy (paired with water budgeting)
- 10** Dairy & small-stock chains via SHG–FPO aggregation

5 UNIQUE / NICHE VALUE CHAINS

1 · Lac cultivation on host trees

pays households to keep trees standing

2 · Bamboo handicrafts & bamboo nursery

craft and restoration in one chain

3 · Mushroom cultivation

forest-floor economics under management (Choknar)

4 · Biomass briquettes

residue-to-fuel with a youth-enterprise frame (Pharsigaon)

5 · Mahua value addition & heritage-haat linkage

Chindnaar's 0-km market as aggregation hub; e-rickshaw mobility on the improving road base

Sensory Observations

Chhattisgarh's communities gave the most precise sensory testimony of the three states — precise enough that the senses can serve as the state's monitoring system.

SMELL

The sondhi-sondhi khushbu — the earthy fragrance after rain — reported gone in nearly identical words in Barchegondi (Kanker) and Margaon (Rajnandgaon); flowers and fruits that could once be identified “by smell from a distance — now, even on touching, we cannot recognise them” (Sonesarar).

TASTE

Wells that held sweet water year-round all dried; the universal borewells that replaced them deliver water that “tastes of iron” (Bardevari); at the extreme, a community sometimes filtering river water to drink (Choknar).

SIGHT

The named trees gone from the villages named after them — Bargaon's banyans, Bargaon's ber groves; the vulture's circle absent from the sky; sacred groves standing as green islands in the change.

SOUND

The Mohari fading from Chindnaar; festivals audibly shorter.

TOUCH & BODY

Earth that oxen kept “crumbly and soft” now “hard like a brick,” with the earthworms gone from it; “a mud house felt better than a palace”; godna, the tattooing that inscribed identity on the skin, fading with the generation that wears it.

The sensory record extends into diet and the food web: chemical fertilisers have eliminated the small fish and crabs of the paddy landscape — a protein source and an ecological signal erased in the same stroke. **These are community-reported observations, not laboratory findings** — they warrant water-quality testing and public-health follow-up. The counterpoints are real and claimed: CC roads, pucca houses, the haat at zero kilometres, and above all the women's institutional revolution. And the elders' nostalgia is honest about its own terms: “sources of income were fewer, so expenses were also fewer; we lived on local things” — a remembered sufficiency, not a remembered abundance.

Why the senses belong in the plan: no laboratory is needed to know whether the sondhi-sondhi khushbu rose after the first rain, whether a vulture circled this season, whether the well water is sweet again. The petrichor maps onto the organic transition (soil biology you can smell returning); the vulture onto pesticide reduction; sweet water onto recharge and borewell discipline. A village-chosen list of sensory indicators, reviewed annually in the Gram Sabha with the PESA resolution book beside it, would let each community smell, taste and hear its plan working.

Chhattisgarh's gender evidence carries a particular texture: this is a forest-dependent landscape, and women stand at the exact point where the forest's decline is felt and where its recovery must begin — walking further for fuelwood each year, and in doing so exerting pressure on the very resource that shelters them, a circuit the communities identified themselves. Chhattisgarh occupies the frame differently from the other states: its women's institutions have already crossed into formal office.

	INFORMAL	FORMAL
INDIVIDUAL	Q1 · Consciousness & Capabilities Women organised into 20–35 SHGs per village “speaking with growing confidence” in assessments where elders once spoke alone (Ghotpal); the Bihan mobilisation named by communities themselves as the turning point; a “Didi economy” already delivering sanitation, compost and forest-produce enterprise.	Q2 · Access to Resources 500+ SHGs (approximate), Village Organisations and CLFs throughout; SHG enterprise incomes across vermicompost, sal-leaf plates, NTFP processing, poultry-goatery-piggery and fisheries; yet where Didi honoraria go unpaid, the systems women run simply stall — reliable payment is itself a resource question.
SYSTEMIC	Q3 · Informal Norms & Practices Women hold seats and still describe the discomfort of speaking before the Siyan (elders); present in meetings but, as Cha Tolagaon puts it, “not yet equal in final decisions”; the fuelwood walk lengthens as the forest thins; borewell ownership decides who farms — and ownership sits with men and with wealthier households.	Q4 · Formal Rules & Policies The state's distinctive achievement — women serving as Sarpanch in several villages, women in office on PESA committees, Forest Rights Committees in place; the unfinished task is to fund these institutions reliably and vest them with decision-making authority equal to the stewardship women already perform.

The formal structures have moved further than the informal ones — the reverse of most Indian settings. The adaptations that would work here are precisely the ones women already lead: clean cooking that eases the fuelwood burden while relieving the forest, plantations on commons, restored ponds under community water rules, and value chains that make a standing forest worth more than a felled one. Chhattisgarh's task is no longer to build women's institutions. It is to fund them reliably and give them authority equal to the stewardship they already perform.

The CG plans add a discipline the other states imply but do not state: timeframes — Tier A: 0–6 months; Tier B: 6–18 months; Tier C: 1–3 years — so every resolution and convergence ask carries a due date.

1 · Water & the borewell question

TIER A — 0–6 MONTHS · PESA & GRAM SABHA RESOLUTIONS, SHRAMDAAN

Shramdaan desilting of ponds and dabris; PESA resolutions on borewell spacing and irrigation discipline; household soak pits

TIER B — 6–18 MONTHS · GP/BIHAN SEED FUNDS, MGNREGA

Dabri deepening and recharge structures; contour and drainage-line works for the uneven plateau; repair the non-functional JJM points; community water committees

TIER C — 1–3 YEARS · SCHEME CONVERGENCE

Ridge-to-valley watershed treatment (PMKSY); pond-network rejuvenation with fisheries; emergency drinking-water response where rivers are being filtered (Choknar); solar community irrigation for borewell-less households (equity answer, paired with budgeting)

2 · Forest & the NTFP economy

TIER A — 0–6 MONTHS · PESA & GRAM SABHA RESOLUTIONS, SHRAMDAAN

Community protection rules and watch for surviving forest and the devgudi network; no-hunting norms; monsoon plantation with local seed; document elders' species knowledge

TIER B — 6–18 MONTHS · GP/BIHAN SEED FUNDS, MGNREGA

Village nurseries; fenced plantation blocks; NTFP collection centres with solar drying and grading via SHGs; lac and mushroom trials

TIER C — 1–3 YEARS · SCHEME CONVERGENCE

CAMPA / Green India Mission restoration at scale; CFR claims completed and community forest-management plans financed (FRA); Van Dhan / TRIFED aggregation and market linkage; the vulture-return and wildlife-recovery agenda (Forest Dept)

3 · Soil, organic & the millet counterweight

TIER A — 0-6 MONTHS · PESA & GRAM SABHA RESOLUTIONS, SHRAMDAAN

Revive gobar and compost on willing plots; defend Hidpal-style chemical-free practice where it survives; community seed banks (kodo-kutki-ragi); no-burn norms

TIER B — 6-18 MONTHS · GP/BIHAN SEED FUNDS, MGNREGA

Vermicompost and bio-input units (Bihan/NRLM); soil testing; millet demonstration plots; side-by-side chemical-vs-organic demo fields

TIER C — 1-3 YEARS · SCHEME CONVERGENCE

PKVY/NMNF natural-farming clusters with transition support; millet value chains with procurement, milling and market linkage (Millet Mission, PMFME/ODOP); diversification incentives that answer the paddy-MSP pull



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

4 · Livestock & integrated farming

TIER A — 0–6 MONTHS

Stall-feeding and grazing norms; dung returned to fields; herd-care rotas; fodder on bunds

TIER B — 6–18 MONTHS

Backyard poultry, goatery and piggery via SHG aggregation; veterinary camps; fodder development (MGNREGA)

TIER C — 1–3 YEARS

Dairy and small-stock chains at scale (state livestock missions — verify current programmes); biogas where herd size supports it; fisheries stocking in restored waters

5 · SHG green livelihoods & youth retention

TIER A — 0–6 MONTHS

Direct the 20–35-SHG bases toward NRM roles; youth plantation, water-monitoring and wildlife-watch corps; cultural documentation (godna, Mohari, festival calendars)

TIER B — 6–18 MONTHS

Sal-leaf plate, NTFP-processing, nursery and solar-drying enterprises; collective marketing through the haats

TIER C — 1–3 YEARS

DDU-GKY green skilling; e-rickshaw and biomass-briquette enterprises; heritage and eco-livelihood activation; LCAT findings institutionalised in every GPDP–VPRP cycle through the PESA Gram Sabha

The closing argument is Chhattisgarh's own: these are villages whose names remember forests, whose faith already protects groves, whose law (PESA, FRA) already vests authority in the Gram Sabha, and whose elders have supplied both the diagnosis — *rich in cash, poor in life-support* — and the theory of change: protect the trees, and the committee comes back to life.

The LCAT's contribution is to hand the village its own testimony, organised into a plan with dates on it — so that one monsoon soon, somewhere between Bastar and Rajnandgaon, an elder steps out after the first rain and smells the sondhi-sondhi khushbu rising from the soil again.

07

Conclusion

What Fifty-One Villages Are Telling Us

"The villages in this report have named the loss, ranked the repair, and put dates against it. The remaining task belongs to everyone else."



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

The convergence: one pattern, three states

Fifty-one villages, eighteen districts, five language groups, three very different ecologies — from the Terai's canal-fed sugarcane to Bundelkhand's cracking black cotton soil to Bastar's sal forest. These communities have never met. They were assessed by different teams, in different months, in different tongues. And they returned, in substance, the same reading.

THE SHARED FINDING	HOW IT SHOWS UP
Six down, two up	The natural and cultural systems — water, soil, forest, wildlife, culture, the sensory landscape — are declining. The built and institutional systems — infrastructure and community organisation — are rising. The village body is growing a stronger skeleton while its circulation weakens.
One universal red line	Wildlife and biodiversity declined in every single village across all three states. No other element is unanimous. The endpoint is visible in Ranjit Gadhi, where cucurbit farmers now pollinate by hand.
Water first, nearly everywhere	Restoration and recharge was the first-ranked demand in the large majority of villages — and in 9 of 13 Madhya Pradesh villages it was ranked #1 outright.
The same mechanism, at different speeds	Extraction outrunning recharge as the rainfed calendar breaks. What differs between states is not the mechanism but its stage: the Terai is early, Awadh and Malwa are mid-course, Bundelkhand and the Kanker plateau are late.
The honest ledger	Communities claim their gains without hedging — the tap, the toilet, the road, the school, wages up from ₹50–60 to ₹500, caste barriers visibly falling. Then they name the price. As one summary put it: the conveniences have been gained by the household while the qualities have been lost by the landscape.

That convergence is the pilot's most important result. A single village describing a falling water table is an anecdote. Fifty-one villages, independently, describing the same cascade in the same order — forest loss, broken recharge, the borewell race, the snapped manure cycle, chemical dependence, rising costs, departure — is a signal about how rural India is actually experiencing climate change. It is also a signal that the diagnosis work has already been done, for free, by the people who live inside the problem.

A second convergence deserves equal weight. In all three states, communities named the policy drivers of ecological change with an accuracy that most sectoral surveys do not achieve.

Chhattisgarh

traced its borewell crisis to paddy MSP and PDS procurement.

Madhya Pradesh

explained that ancestral orchards were felled because wheat has a guaranteed price and a mango tree does not.

Uttar Pradesh

Gangauri diagnosed that chemical inputs arrived because out-migration created labour scarcity — a causal chain running from the bus ticket to the soil.

These are not complaints. They are policy analyses, delivered from the only vantage point from which the whole system is visible at once.

Where the money stops: four gaps no scheme currently crosses

Follow the finance through all fifty-one villages and the same four gaps appear, in every state, under different local names.

1 · The maintenance gap

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE ON THE GROUND

Naharpura's tank stands built but dry (MP). Rehunchi's 28 government taps stand while the supply behind them weakens (UP). Borgaon's Jal Jeevan Mission connection exists but does not function, so women and girls still fetch from the public stand (CG). Ponds are funded to be dug, not desilted; saplings funded to be planted, not watered through two summers.

WHAT WOULD CLOSE IT

Operations-and-maintenance budget lines attached to every capital asset; sapling-survival built into the MGNREGA muster; maintenance calendars adopted by the Gram Sabha.

2 · The transition gap

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE ON THE GROUND

No mainstream channel bridges a household across the lean first seasons from chemical to natural farming — or compensates a family for choosing a mango orchard (income in year six) over MSP wheat (income in month six). Communities want the ecological choice; finance pushes them to the extractive one.

WHAT WOULD CLOSE IT

Transition-bridging finance, guaranteed offtake for millets and fruit, and demonstration anchored on households that never left organic practice (Koldihwa and Nayi Basti in UP, Hidpal in CG). This is the single clearest entry point for blended and philanthropic capital.

3 · The demand-management gap

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE ON THE GROUND

Money flows readily to supply — ponds, pipes, pumps — and hardly at all to restraint. Pakhodna's flagship demand is to register and space private submersibles; no current scheme prices that kind of governance. Meanwhile subsidised solar pumping, unpaired with water budgeting, finances a deeper depth race for free.

WHAT WOULD CLOSE IT

Fund the rule, not only the structure: village water budgets, borewell registers, community water committees — and a standing condition that solar irrigation finance is released only alongside a water-budgeting agreement.

4 · The planning gap

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE ON THE GROUND

The GPDP–VPRP cycle, where village demands legally meet public money, contains no requirement to read the landscape as one system. A plan that never asks what is happening to our water, soil, forest and culture together is climate-blind by construction.

WHAT WOULD CLOSE IT

Embed a landscape reading in the annual planning cycle. This is what the pilot villages themselves demanded — and what costs least to change.

Two state-specific gaps worth carrying into national policy conversation

Chhattisgarh's two price signals

The state's largest agricultural payment finances the very monoculture its millet, watershed and soil programmes then pay to undo.

Uttar Pradesh's compensation and trust gap

Pathra's unsettled dues on 700–800 replanted bighas, and road corridors felled but never replanted, teach communities that ecological obligations owed to them go unpaid — an expensive lesson to unteach when their own labour is next requested.

The cheapest climate finance in India is a resolution

The tiering exercise that closes every LCAT produces one finding that should reorganise how this work is funded: a substantial share of each village's own climate agenda requires no external money at all.

TIER 1 ACROSS THE THREE STATES

Shramdaan desilting of ponds and wells	Gram Sabha resolutions on borewell spacing and irrigation discipline
No-burn norms and pledges	Community seed banks held by elder custodians
Two-trees-per-household commitments	Anti-hunting and grove-protection rules
Women-only pre-meetings before the Gram Sabha	School-run bird censuses
Cultural documentation of species, songs and seed knowledge	

None of it needs a sanction letter.

What it needs instead is a mandate — and in Chhattisgarh that mandate already exists in law. PESA and the Forest Rights Act vest these Gram Sabhas with authority over minor forest produce, planning and local resources that most Indian villages can only wish for. Yet no borewell rule, grazing rule or grove protection in the twenty-five-village pilot currently runs on those powers.

The cheapest financing available in Chhattisgarh is a resolution.

The implication for funders is direct. The binding constraint in these villages is not always capital. Often it is authority, sequencing and the absence of anyone whose job it is to connect a community's own diagnosis to the instrument that already exists.

The investment pipeline: five clusters ready to absorb capital

Read across all three states, the fifty-one village plans converge on five investable clusters — each with an existing community institution to deliver it and a named policy route to converge with.

1 · Soil & bio-inputs

THE PROPOSITION

Vermicompost, Jeevamrit and neem-based inputs substituting purchased chemicals; the highest-frequency demand in the pilot

DELIVERY BASE ALREADY IN PLACE

Vermicompost units are the most-cited SHG enterprise across all 51 villages; Krishi Sakhi cadres already operating (Ekalbara's 125 transitioning farmers)

2 · Forest & NTFP value recovery

THE PROPOSITION

Solar drying, grading and local processing of mahua, tendu, imli, chironji, honey and lac — recovering margin currently captured at the farm gate

DELIVERY BASE ALREADY IN PLACE

The plateau's collection economy already exists (Vanusari: 170 of 180 households); TRIFED/Van Dhan and FRA/CFR provide the legal and market scaffolding

3 · Water restoration as enterprise

THE PROPOSITION

Pond and dabri rejuvenation, watershed treatment and recharge — with fisheries income timed to arrive with restoration rather than before it

DELIVERY BASE ALREADY IN PLACE

MGNREGA as the labour engine; village water committees as the governance layer; ~1,000+ SHGs to hold the fisheries and O&M contracts

4 · Millet & diversified food chains

THE PROPOSITION

Seed bank → field → mill → kitchen → market, with school-feeding and Anganwadi offtake as anchor demand

DELIVERY BASE ALREADY IN PLACE

Elder seed custodians; SHG milling and processing; Shree Anna / Millet Mission / ODOP routes — but this cluster fails without the transition finance named in 7.2

5 · Distributed renewable energy, paired

THE PROPOSITION

Solar irrigation, solar drying, rooftops, biogas and biomass briquettes — the highest-return energy interventions in the pilot

DELIVERY BASE ALREADY IN PLACE

Present in every state's plans, with the communities' own condition attached: pair solar pumping with water budgeting, or it simply drills the race deeper

Advantage one

The demand is already articulated, ranked and tiered by the community — reducing the design and consultation cost that normally consumes early-stage rural investment.

Advantage two

The delivery institution already exists: roughly a thousand self-help groups with functioning credit discipline, federated into Village Organisations and Cluster Level Federations. What they lack is not capability but a formal charter over natural resources.

The villages are, in effect, asking for their strongest institution to be handed their hardest problem.

What each actor should do next

For policy decision-makers

Make a landscape reading a required input to the GPDP and VPRP, and route its findings into the annual plan by name. Attach O&M budget lines to capital assets as a condition of sanction. Resolve the price contradiction where two government signals point in opposite directions. And where PESA and FRA powers exist, actively task Gram Sabhas with aquifer, grove and grazing governance rather than leaving those powers idle.

For impact investors and blended-finance providers

The transition gap is the clearest place where patient capital does what public finance currently cannot: bridging households across the lean seasons of an organic or millet shift, and underwriting orchard and agroforestry crops whose income arrives in year six. Second, the value-addition step in NTFP chains — solar drying, grading, aggregation — is small capital against large margin recovery. Third, treat community water-governance agreements as a covenant, not a nicety, in any irrigation-energy investment.

For ecosystem players and intermediaries

The scarce function this pilot exposes is navigation. Schemes exist on paper for nearly every community demand, but converging them requires a Gram Panchayat to cross a maze. **Fund the navigator.** Second, carry the innovations sideways: Richi's mandatory-soak-pit building code, Gangauri's culverted khal reinstatement, Belhat's Community Conserved Area, Hidpal's preventive certification of a chemical-free village, and above all Uttar Pradesh's measurable Sankalp — the five-year public commitment with a bird, a song or a pond count as its metric.

For communities and their federations

The first column costs nothing. Begin there — and use the Sankalp to make the plan something the whole village can hear itself keeping.

LCAT is not only them to read their landscapes but also collectively reimagine, negotiate and plan them through the GPDP/VPRP process, the framework appears to move beyond diagnosis towards the co-creation of future landscapes.

How to know it is working

This pilot found an indicator system that already exists and costs nothing to run. No instrument is needed to know whether the sondhi-sondhi khushbu rose after the first rain, whether the Palash bloomed, whether a vulture circled this season, whether the well water tastes sweet again, whether the Kajri-Alha was sung at Panchami, or in which month the river went dry.

The petrichor	→	the organic transition and returning soil biology
The firefly and the vulture	→	pesticide reduction
Sweet water	→	recharge and borewell discipline
The fragrant orchard	→	plantation and grove protection
The bird count	→	habitat restoration

A short, village-chosen list of sensory indicators, reviewed annually in the Gram Sabha alongside the technical ones, gives a community a way to see and hear its plan working — or to demand to know why it is not.

For funders, this matters practically: it is a monitoring layer with near-zero collection cost, generated by the beneficiaries themselves, that is legible to everyone in the village regardless of literacy.

What this pilot does not tell us

Honesty about the evidence is part of the method, so it belongs in the conclusion.

The figures in these pages are **participatory recall, not measurement**. Depths, rainfall totals, migration shares, temperatures and the Pathra height account are testimony — powerful, consistent testimony — and they require verification against IMD, CGWB, Census and public-health records before being used as data.

Community-attributed links between environmental change and illness are **serious signals for public-health investigation, not epidemiological findings**.

Scheme mappings, MSP rates and fund routes are indicative and change over time and by district. Agro-climatic assignments are indicative pending official state zonation. And this pilot cannot support forward climate projections at village scale; none of the fifty-one communities asked for one.

Nor is fifty-one villages a statistically representative sample of three states, let alone of rural India.

What the pilot demonstrates is that the method travels, that the reading is reproducible across ecologies, and that the resulting plans are specific enough to fund. Whether the pattern holds at scale is the next question — and it is answerable, because the tool that produced this reading costs two days and no equipment.

The last word belongs to the village

Across three states, the pilot's through-line sits in a single column of a table: the first steps require no money at all, only the mandate. What the LCAT contributes is not a new theory of rural climate change. It is a structured way of gathering what communities already know, weighing it together, and handing it back organised into a plan a Gram Sabha can vote on, a department can fund, and a grandmother can measure.

Chhattisgarh's Daspur supplied the pilot's best statement of how that works, and it applies well beyond one village in Kanker:

“When there was forest, the committee existed; now that the forest is gone, the committee is no longer active. If we protect the trees and plants, our committee will come back to life.”

Institutions and ecology rise and fall together. That is the finding, and it is also the instruction.

The villages in this report have named the loss, ranked the repair, and put dates against it. The remaining task belongs to everyone else.



Sourced from TRI's internal photobank.

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“This is the first time we have looked at our village, and all that has changed in it, together — as one community.”

A self-help-group member, LCAT field conversations

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Reading the Village Whole — a national consolidated report on the Community-Led Landscape Assessment Tool (LCAT) pilots across Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, 2026.

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With gratitude to the fifty-one participating communities, the field facilitators, the Panchayati Raj institutions, the SHG networks, and our funders and learning partners.