

VSS transforms bald hill into lush green forest

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sundargarh, June 4: A Vana Suraksha Samiti (forest protection committee) formed by the residents of Sagarpali village under Ujalpur forest range of Sundargarh forest division has been able to turn a bald hill into lush green forest with community efforts.

The transformation of the hill into a lush green forest by Sagarpali Vana Suraksha Samiti (VSS) members has once again proved that community is the best manager of forest resources.

Sagarpali, which is yet to receive revenue village status turned a bald hill named Kurladunguri into a lush green forest within a 25-year period. The first-ever step towards the conservation of Kurladunguri was launched in the year 1956 which aimed to check illegal and mindless tree felling in the village and on the hill. The small step that was taken by the villagers goaded them to form a VSS or forest protection



committee (FPC) in the village.

In 1975, the then members of Sagarpali youth club of the village took action against deforestation and prepared regulations for forest protection. In 1993-94 Sagarpali VSS was formed and registered under Sundargarh forest division.

At that time, Kurladunguri with an area of 121.41 hectare and a length of 8.4 km was a completely bald hill. In the meantime, to give more power to forest protection and management, the Sagarpali VSS prepared and implemented various rules and regulations for conser-

vation of forest with support and assistance by the forest officials and mobilisation by the NGO Sewak.

The VSS members started a popular trend "Thengapali" the stick rotation-based forest patrol practices and "Muthidhana"-contribution of a handful of paddy towards forest protection activities and also to create a corpus fund for the purpose.

The VSS members including women created awareness in and around the VSS areas related to forest fire and wildlife conservation. They motivated themselves for "Shramdaan"-The contribu-

tion of labour for the development of the forest and plantation.

The VSS planted 56 Banyan and 74 Pipal tree by all 130 households of Sagarpali VSS near forest area, palm seedlings around the Kurladunguri forest to create a natural forest boundary. To avoid open grazing and fire control the VSS dug cattle proof trenches of 4 km through 'Shramdaan' around the Kurladunguri forest. It has drastically controlled the cattle movements inside the forest.

Forest fire has always been a troubling issue that destroys forest and the wild animals. So the VSS has formed a forest fire control team in the committee to intervene and douse the wildfire. The 24-hour painstaking watch and ward activities were able to save both the forest and the plantations.

Presently the VSS is implementing the Odisha Forestry Sector Development Project, phase-II which has drastically reduced the human pressure on forest resources and

increased both farm and off-farm based sustainable livelihood options as well as strengthened the WSHGs.

The VSS successfully implemented the plantation programme in the 52 hectare of open forest land and planted 46,070 seedlings under ANR and AR plantations with 98% survival rate.

To reduce the pressure on forest resources, the VSS members are now connected and using the LPG cylinders. Women self help groups (WSHG) are involved in alternative livelihood options such as dairy farming, mushroom farming, vermi-compost preparation, turmeric cultivation, millet farming, and other small businesses. These activities have not only reduced pressure on the forest but also empowered the women of the VSS.

When contacted, a VSS member said that they have transformed the bald hill in Kurladunguri into a lush green forest in just 25 years and created a safe home for wild animals.