

Grassroots Level Institutions Strengthening and Transformation (GIST)

GIST aim is to strengthen **local communities** by empowering **grassroots institutions** such as **Gram Panchayats, Self-Help Groups**, and other **Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)** including **School Management Committees, libraries, and clubs**, thereby fostering **self-reliance** and promoting **inclusive development**. It also focuses on promoting **environmental sustainability** through active **community engagement** in the **protection** and **stewardship** of **common resources**, integrating **ecological considerations** into **village-level development**. Further, the objectives include enhancing progress on **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** by aligning local development efforts with **SDG targets** and supporting states in effective **localization of SDGs**. Additionally, the initiative supports the implementation of the **Forest Rights Act (FRA)** to secure **forest-based livelihoods** and rights, while also empowering **tribal communities** in **PESA areas** to improve **tribal representation** in decision-making, safeguard **traditional cultures**, and ensure **sustainable management** of **natural resources**.

Strategy and Approach of GIST

Enhance policy coherence and convergence by **refining existing policies across domains** like natural resource management, climate resilience, biodiversity, and inclusive rural development—**grounded in field testing, stakeholder inputs, and best practices**.

Strengthen grassroots governance and planning by **aligning institutions** (Gram Panchayats, SHGs, etc.) with GPDP and VPRP, and **promoting convergence across key schemes** such as NREGA, PESA, FRA, SDGs, and Aspirational Districts.

Build capacity and responsive governance by empowering officials and communities **through tailored training, circulars, guidelines, peer learning, and adaptive policy implementation** based on local contexts.

Enhance financing for sustainable development by pooling public funds (e.g., CAMPA, DMF) and **mobilizing private, CSR, ESG, and philanthropic contributions** to support community, climate, and biodiversity priorities.

Leverage technology and cross-learning by **using digital tools for data-driven planning and sustainable market practices**, while **facilitating write shops and innovation hubs** for peer exchange and stronger policy-practice integration.

Key Highlights and Activities

1. **Developed four training chapters on PRI-CBO Convergence** for Tamil Nadu's pilot project, which will build capacity among PRIs and SHGs, enabling stronger grassroots coordination and more effective local governance.
2. **Mapped responsibilities of block, district, and state-level stakeholders across 9 LSDG themes** in Tamil Nadu, ensuring clarity in roles and fostering coordinated action toward achieving Localized SDG outcomes.
3. **Conducted a gap analysis of NIRDPR and SIRD training modules** on all 9 LSDG themes in Tamil Nadu, identifying critical training needs and paving the way for improved, targeted capacity-building programs.
4. **Prepared a Status Report on VRPP-GPDP integration** in Karnataka, providing actionable insights to strengthen convergence between prosperity planning and Gram Panchayat Development efforts.
5. **Submitted a comprehensive Project Proposal/Action Plan** to the Government of Odisha, laying the groundwork for strategic, state-level engagement and pilot implementation of integrated development approaches.
6. **Submitted a Policy Advisory on Kendu Leaf Trade (NTFP)** to the Chief Secretary of Odisha, influencing policy to strengthen forest-based livelihoods and improve market access for tribal communities.

Challenges

Delay in Government Approvals: A challenge that we have been facing is getting clearance from the government side. This is being tackled through interventions from mentors, which is helping to speed up the process.

Learnings and Way Forward

The **Policy Advisory on Kendu Leaf Trade** holds relevance for multiple forest-rich states and provides a replicable framework for **policy-level interventions** in **Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP)** markets, contributing to improved **livelihood security** and **sustainable forest governance**.

Going forward, CRISP will focus on finalizing the **PRI-CBO Module and VPRP-GPDP Report/Guidelines**, while initiating the development of a **Panchayat SDG Scorecard for Tamil Nadu and Karnataka** to facilitate evidence-based local planning. In Odisha, efforts will center on creating an **SHG-PRI engagement plan, starting NTFP mapping, and conducting an analytical review of PESA Rules** to enhance Gram Sabha roles and governance convergence. In Jharkhand, **CRISP will finalize the MoU with the RD Department**, onboard partners for the GIST pilot, draft the State Action Plan, and complete the Fellows' immersion through a joint field visit.