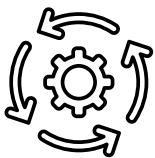**Monthly Updates- June 2025**

Grassroots Level Institutions Strengthening and Transformation (GIST)

Overview

GIST aims to strengthen local communities by empowering grassroots institutions like Gram Panchayats, Self-Help Groups, and other Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), fostering self-reliance and inclusive development. It promotes environmental sustainability through community-led protection of common resources and integrates ecological concerns into village development. The initiative also supports SDG localization by aligning local efforts with national targets and aids in implementing the Forest Rights Act (FRA) to secure forest-based livelihoods. Additionally, it empowers tribal communities in PESA areas to enhance representation, preserve traditional cultures, and manage natural resources sustainably.

Project Goal

To empower over 40 Gram Panchayats and 200+ Women Self-Help Groups by enabling collaboration between local governance bodies and community organizations for joint planning and collective action, with a focus on driving climate resilience and promoting sustainable development at the grassroots level.

Component Wise Approach

Component 1: Gram Panchayat CBO Convergence
This component focuses on fostering collaboration between Gram Panchayats and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to enhance local governance and community development. It empowers SHGs in decision-making, aligns initiatives for livelihood generation, and ensures inclusive grassroots outcomes through coordinated efforts.

Component 2: Localization of SDGs
Promote community-led SDG localisation by building capacities of Gram Panchayats in collaboration with SHGs and CBOs. Engage higher education institutions through Unnat Bharat Abhiyan and Focused Block Initiatives. Foster village-level partnerships to drive sustainable and inclusive development.

Component 3: Identifying, Protecting, and Regenerating Commons
This component seeks to ensure the sustainable use of village commons—critical for rural livelihoods—by improving legal frameworks, mobilizing SHGs and MGNREGA for land protection, and promoting equitable access, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience.

Component 4: Operationalising PESA Act
GIST supports the effective implementation of PESA in tribal regions like Odisha and Jharkhand. The goal is to empower tribal communities, ensure their representation in governance, and promote sustainable natural resource management while preserving traditional rights and cultures.

Component 5: Enhancing Implementation of Forest Right Acts
This aims to strengthen the implementation of FRA by improving claim filing processes, empowering communities to secure individual and collective forest rights, and supporting state efforts through trained resource persons and robust institutional support mechanisms.

Key Highlights and Activities

- The four comprehensive chapters focusing on the convergence between Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and CBOs developed previously are set to support training efforts targeting both PRI members and SHGs in Tamil Nadu under the pilot initiative.

- Tamil Nadu completed the mapping of duties across block, district, and state-level stakeholders for **nine key Local Sustainable Goals (LSDG) themes**. In addition, a **gap analysis of existing modules from NIRDPR and SIRD** was conducted for all nine themes to identify training needs and alignment issues.

- A status report outlining the p**rogress of integrating the Vulnerability Reduction Planning Progress (VRPP) with the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) in Karnataka** was completed. The Karnataka team also visited Kerala's Kasargod district to observe firsthand how VRPP and GPDP have been linked in practice.

- A detailed project proposal and action plan for Odisha was finalized and submitted. A **policy advisory concerning Kendu Leaf trade under Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP)** was also shared with Odisha's Chief Secretary. Meanwhile, a draft MoU with the Government of Jharkhand awaits approval from the Chief Minister's office and all Living Landscape partners, including WASSN have agreed to collaborate on GIST pilot in East Singhbhum.

Photo Gallery

Key Learnings and Way Forward

- ✅ The PRI-CBO convergence module can be adapted by other states to strengthen PRI and CBO capacities. The stakeholder responsibility mapping created for LSDG can guide other states in meeting their targets, with addition of Quality Education as a new theme. This addition fills a gap in the original nine themes, offering states a more comprehensive framework for their LSDG efforts. The Kendu Leaf Trade Policy, relevant to many states with forest resources, provides a valuable reference for policy recommendations on Kendu trade.

- ✅ Going forward, the team in Odisha will work on developing a Panchayat Scorecard and a structured stakeholder engagement plan to support SHG-PRI convergence and local-level planning. Efforts will also be directed towards initiating NTFP inventorization in Odisha, alongside drafting a report on Odisha's PESA Rules. In Jharkhand, the team will continue pursuing the MoU with the RD Department, onboard landscape partners, and finalize the GIST State Action Plan, with an emphasis on field visits to better understand local challenges.