

NGO restoring forest to revive economy of Melghat village

TNN | Dec 26, 2019

Amravati: A forest in the hillocks around Payvihir, a tribal village in Melghat, which was destroyed in a fire in April this year is being restored through an initiative taken by a US-based NGO, Association for India's Development (AID).

In coordination with Hyderabad-based NGO Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA), AID is not only funding the project but also ensuring reverse migration through creating employment opportunities in the village itself.

Situated in the lap of Satpura hills in Melghat, Payvihir is a small tribal hamlet with a population of around 200, about 75km from Amravati. The forest here is notable for its custard apples. The village economy revolved round this produce which fetched the village gram sabha an income of Rs6-7 lakh every season until the fire in April reduced the forest to ashes and with it the local economy.

Nishikant Deshmukh, a young city scientist based in the US and the youngest member of the executive board of AID there, thought of restoring the barren 400-acre forest with bio-diverse forestry through joint forest management machinery that involved the villagers in the project.

"AID decided to fund the project through CSA, which manages the funds, provides technical assistance, training and also organic certification to farmers," said Deshmukh and added that they planted 18,000 saplings of 100 different species of plants like amla, cashew, mango, bamboo, hirda, bihada, jack fruit, etc with a view to create a bio-diverse forest that will save it from fire.

The plantation pits are dug by villagers who get paid for the work. Watering the plants and taking their care is also a paid work for the villagers who do not have to migrate now. Landless labourers are given priority by the village gram sabha. The concept of community forest is proving to be a success.

"All the 18,000 saplings are drip irrigated. We have constructed five dams at a cost of Rs2.50 lakh each to arrest water. None has any leakage. We also have four bore wells with solar drip system," said Deshmukh.

Ramlal, an AID coordinator appointed by the gram sabha, motivates village youths to take part in the project.

The gram sabha has built a state-of-the-art interpretation centre at a cost of Rs1.25 crore to run training programmes. The centre also has lodging and boarding facilities for 80. It has already started adding to the income of the gram sabha.

“Voluntary involvement of villagers has made the project a success,” said Deshmukh.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/ngo-restoring-forest-to-revive-economy-of-melghat-village/articleshow/72971572.cms>