

# Tamil Nadu: Barren lands transformed into urban forests

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COIMBATORE: A piece of barren land in the middle of Muthalipalayam village in Muthugounderpudur panchayat has been converted into a food forest over the course of four years, thanks to the massive tree plantation scheme launched by the district rural development agency (DRDA).

DRDA had set up an 11-bed nursery in the village in 2016 to grow 12,000 saplings. After two years, the agency established a Miyawaki forest that has 500 fruit tree saplings, 2,400 nochi plants and 350 saplings of other trees on 3.75 acres with the help of workers engaged in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

“Initially when we decided to plant the saplings, people discouraged us, saying the soil was infertile. They are now surprised that we managed to successfully plant and maintain the trees. We spent Rs 29 lakh to turn the

area into a green zone, of which Rs 27.96 lakh was used to pay the workers,” panchayat secretary P Karthikeyan told TOI.

The mini forest now has trees like guava, pomegranate, lemon, almond, custard apple, prickly custard apple, pencil bamboo, rosemary, sandalwood and magilam.

“Fruits from the orchard are given to the workers who are maintaining the forest. We are distributing the saplings grown at the nursery to other panchayats and public for free. We have distributed over 24,315 saplings,” Karthikeyan said.

DRDA had decided to implement the Miyawaki method after struggling for years to protect the saplings planted along the roads under the tree plantation scheme. Between 2017 and 19, the agency set up Miyawaki forests at six villages

Somaiyampalayam, Vadakkukadu, Pilichinampalayam, Malaiyadipalayam, Palathurai and Muthalipalayam – that have over 17,500 trees.

“Under the scheme, we have been planting saplings in Miyawaki style in vacant panchayat lands, park sites and along water bodies. The forests have 60% hard wood trees, 30% fruit trees and 10% flowering plants. While the fruit trees attract birds, flowering plants attract honey bees that act as pollinators,” DRDA project director J Rooban Sankar Raj said. “The Miyawaki style has a high success rate as we protect the saplings. When the saplings were planted along the roads, it was difficult to protect them from cattle and people.”

The Miyawaki forest at Palathurai village provides shelter to substantial flora and fauna, said Madukkarai block coordinator V Ramakrishnan. “We have been spotting a lot of honeycombs in the vicinity. More birds, especially peacocks, are frequenting the village, which has become a lot more cooler.”