

Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM)

Annual report 2024 – 25



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About SOPPECOM

Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM) is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation working in the area of Natural Resource Management (NRM) primarily in the rural areas. It is committed to the principles of sustainable and rational use of natural resources, equity and social justice in the distribution of benefits especially to the disadvantaged sections like dalits, landless, women, democratic and decentralised governance of these resources.

As an organisation committed to these principles, SOPPECOM extends its support to grassroots groups working on NRM issues through training, resource literacy, participatory planning, research and policy advocacy.

Within the broad spectrum of rural livelihood issues, water resource management, along with land, biomass and renewable energy, forms the core of SOPPECOM's concerns. Support for organising people into legal associations as user groups for participative management of eco-system resources, primarily water has been one of the key activities of SOPPECOM for more than a decade. In its initial phase, it piloted various action research programmes around sustainable use of land and water, low external input cropping practices, alternative technology for buildings and water storage structures that have helped develop broad norms for equitable access to resources and their sustainable use. From defining equity within the command areas of irrigation system, SOPPECOM in its subsequent experiments progressed into extending the idea of equity beyond the command to include the landless and women. Through its various experiments, research and writings SOPPECOM has also shown that integration of different sources of water - ground and surface as well as local and exogenous - is critical from the point of view of sustainable prosperity and equity. SOPPECOM through its work has shown that it is possible to go beyond the polarised discourse, for example large vs, small, on water in India.

On the home front, i.e., within the organisation there is a strong commitment to social justice. It is committed to affirmative action that supports the cause of women, dalits and minorities.

Donors; who supported our work

We extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to all our donors including foundations, research institutions, networks, corporations and individuals for their generous financial support. Their commitment fuels our programs, strengthens our capacity, and directly impacts the lives of those we serve.

We would like to acknowledge – American Jewish World Services (AJWS), *Bharat Agroecology Fund*, *Association for India's Development (AID)*, *India*, Azim Premji Foundation, Bengaluru, Global Greengrants Fund (GGF), USA, IHE Delft, Netherlands, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Laxenburg, Mozilla Foundation, USA, People for Progress in India, USA, TMG Think Tank for Sustainability, Berlin, Germany, The Nature Conservancy Centre, New Delhi, UK Research Innovation (UKRI), United Kingdom, University of Zaragoza, Spain, Wageningen University, Netherlands, Wildlife Conservation Trust Mumbai, Women's Fund Asia, Sri Lanka for supporting our projects.

As we look ahead to 2025-26, we are energized by the progress we have made together. We remain committed to faith, the donors have shown in our work and invite you to continue this journey with us.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECTS

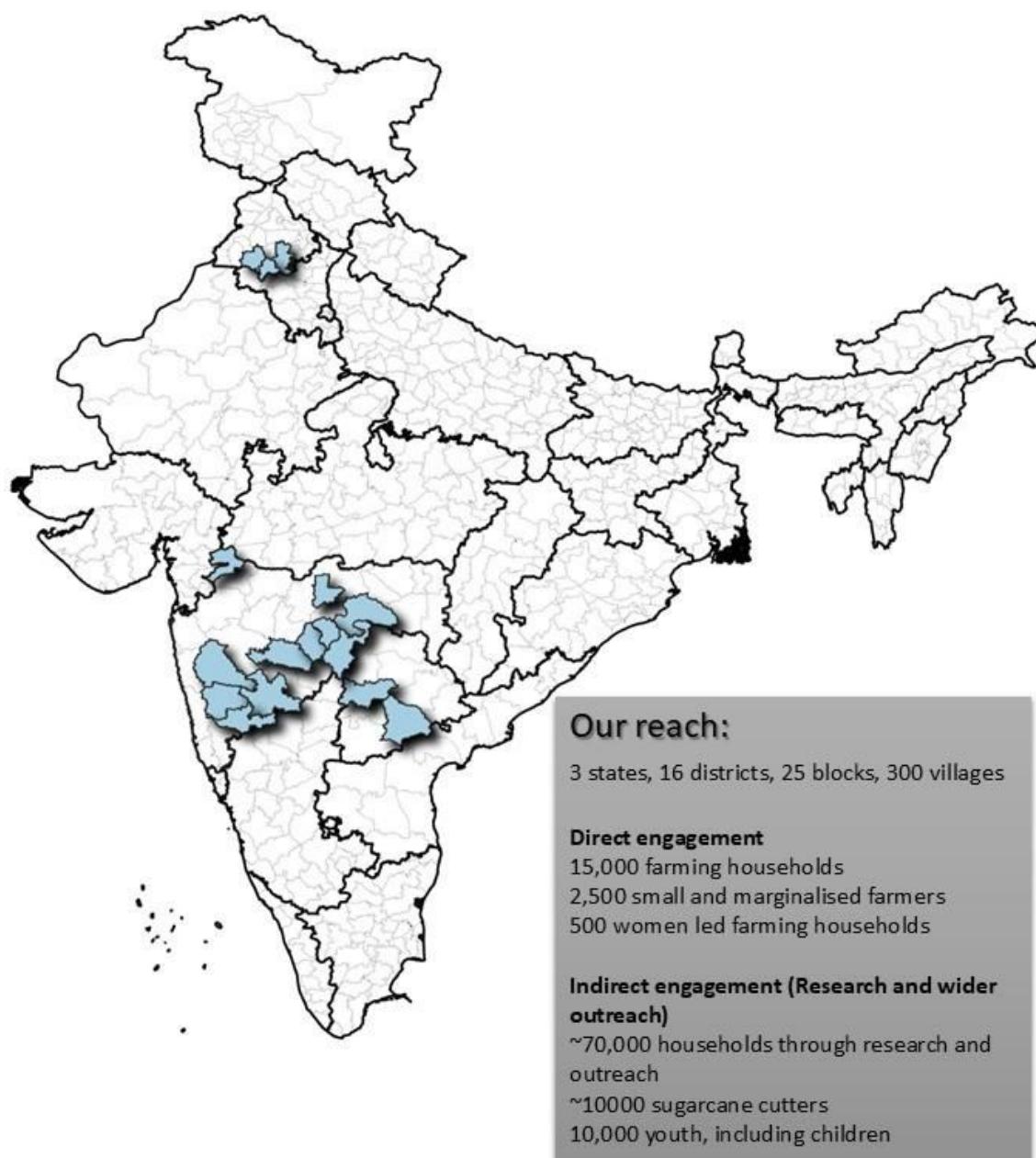


Figure 1: Outreach of SOPPECOM's project activities

1. Restructuring of the Tembhu Lift Irrigation Scheme (TLIS) on the basis of Integrated Water Resource Management, Equity and Participation to Ensure Water and Livelihood Security in Atpadi taluka, Sangli district, South Maharashtra

Project Period: April 2020- March 2025	Project Status: Completed
Budget: Rs. 1,47,90,830	Funder: Azim Premji Foundation (APF), Bengaluru
Collaborating Partners: Pani Sangharsh Chalwal, Sangli Irrigation Circle of Water Resources Department (Government of Maharashtra)	Principal Investigator: K. J. Joy

Aims and Objective

To achieve equitable water distribution such that every person in Atpadi taluka will receive 1000 cubic meters of water for their livelihood, which will be achieved through the Water User's Association who will manage the water for domestic & agriculture? in an equitable, integrated and participatory manner.

Project Activities

The major activities taken up during the reporting phase are as below:

Formation of Water User Association (WUAs) and streamlining their functioning

17 WUAs were formed on the Ghanand and Kharsundi distributaries and a registration certificate distribution program for these WUAs was conducted on 11 July 2024 for Cluster WUAs no. 8, 9 and 10 and the remaining 14 WUAs received their certificates on 10 October 2024 from the Superintending Engineer Mr. Chandrashekhar Patole of the Sangli Irrigation Department.

Handholding the processes for the formation of WUAs and legal agreements between the Irrigation Department and the WUAs

The SOPPECOM team, including the chairpersons and board of directors from 17 WUAs and Irrigation Department officials conducted joint inspection and field surveys to identify incomplete work and technical issues in the irrigation system. They found problems like water outlets at far distances from the fields and leakages that prevented water from reaching farmers' fields. Multiple meetings were then held with the irrigation department to address these issues and to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for transferring the systems to the WUAs. The issues are currently being addressed by the irrigation department

Knowledge generation and data dissemination

Based on a socio-economic survey and biophysical mapping (including RS-GIS land use analysis), comprehensive reports were prepared for all 60 villages in Atpadi taluka. These reports provide a comprehensive profile of the villages and each village has been given a copy in Marathi which they can use as a source book. Data from plot surveys on applied water use for key crops was used to estimate total water demand. An attempt was made to understand how integrated water use would work at the cluster WUAs level, but technical challenges during irrigation rotations

prevented a full conclusion. Nonetheless, water discharge was measured at some outlets to check if they met the designed discharge rates.

Capacity building: Training of the WUAs on participatory irrigation management, equitable water distribution and integrated water use.

Training programs were held for several cluster WUAs on the Kharsundi and Ghanand distributaries. The topics covered participatory irrigation management (based on the MMISF Act 2005), equitable water distribution, integrated water management, and using E-PAVAS app for WUA management decisions. To improve their understanding, board members of the 17 WUAs went on two exposure visits. The first was to the Tembhu Lift Irrigation Scheme to understand the distribution system from its source to Atpadi taluka, and the second was to the Waghad Irrigation Project WUAs Federation to learn how they operate the system. In the last year, a new initiative to increase women's participation was launched. A "stree melawa" (women's gathering) was held on 3 January 2025, with over 200 women participating in the event. The goal was to encourage them to use their right to water from the Tembhu scheme for small-plot cultivation. This was followed by a training program to teach them how to do this.

Setting up of agro-ecological plots and taking up small plot cultivation by women¹

1. 135 women signed up for the program and have actively taken up small plot cultivation after the successful *stree melawa* (women's conference) in January 2025.
2. 4 demonstration plots were set up on agroecological principles to demonstrate use of minimal external chemical inputs, improve soil health and water productivity. Out of the 4 plots 2 plots are women farmer led plots. The plots are yet to be monitored for the change and impact on soil health and water productivity as the cultivation took place only in December 2024.

Based on the key activities, Table 1 summarises the key **targets achieved** during the reporting period.

Table 1: Targets achieved by the TLIS project for period 2024-25

Sr. No.	Objectives/Interventions	Unit	Target	Achieved
Objective/Intervention #1: Formation of the WUAs and streamlining their functioning				
1	Formation of WUAs	WUAs	~30 ²	17
1.1	Kharsundi distributary	WUAs	13	13
1.2	Ghanand distributary	WUAs	4	4

¹ This was an activity that was planned newly in the year 2024-25. It also organically emerged from the idea of the homestead cultivation project in Jambhgoan which has been mentioned later in the report.

² In the original project proposal, the number of WUAs to be formed was pitched at 48. Once the delineation of the jurisdiction of the WUAs began the number came down to about 30 with a distribution of Kharsundi distributary 13 WUAs, Ghanand 4 WUAs, Nimbavade and Diganchi distributary 10 WUAs and direct outlets about 3 WUAs as the number might increase or decrease by about one or two WUAs.

Sr. No.	Objectives/Interventions	Unit	Target	Achieved
2	Signing of the MoUs of all the cluster WUAs on Kharsundi and Ghanand distributary	WUAs	17	5 ³
3	Joint inspection of all the cluster WUAs on Kharsundi and Ghanand distributary is complete	WUAs	17	17
Objective/Intervention #2: Data, knowledge generation and dissemination				
1	Village reports	Villages	60	60 ⁴
2	Refining of the applied crop water use norms	No. of crops	27	27
3	Understanding and operationalizing integrated water use within cluster WUA	outlets	3	1
Objective/Intervention #3: Capacity building				
1	Training of the board members of 17 cluster WUAs on participatory irrigation management and equitable water distribution and integrated water management	WUAs	17	17
2	Exposure visit of the chairperson and board members to successful WUA project site and Tembhu Lift Irrigation Scheme	board members	84	36
3	Conference (मेळावा) of women board members and women WUA members	women WUA members	0	~200
Objective/Intervention #4: Setting up of agro-ecological plots				
1	Setting up of demonstration plots for hands-on training of farmers for adopting agro-ecological approaches for improving soil health, water conservation	No. of plots	4	4
2	Small plot cultivation by women	No. of plots	0	135

Outreach and Impact

- 8200 households from the 17 WUAs covering 22 villages received assured irrigation through TLIS in rabi and the summer season this year.
- Out of these there were around 2500 families are small holders, having land less than 2.5 acres
- The WUAs were able to make demand for water through E-PAVAS digital app which made the job of the WUAs easy in terms of collating the demands and sending them on time to the irrigation department

³ 5 WUAs have signed the MoU with the irrigation department. The remaining MoUs will be signed soon after a proper review of the repairs

⁴ Project proposal has 48 villages out of the total 60 villages. The remaining 12 villages had been excluded from the original project by the department. In the household survey we covered these 12 villages also. We covered about 27500 households (including the 12 villages). The data has been analysed and village wise reports have been prepared. A copy of the report -- सामाजिक आर्थिक व पाणी संसाधनांचा गोपवारा (Socio-economic and water resources report) -- has been given to each of the village as a reference material about their village

- Women in Atpadi taluka have found a space for using their right to water which will improve not only the nutritional security of their households but also provide them additional financial support. The impact of this is that women participation in meetings conducted for WUAs has increased significantly.

Future Work

SOPPECOM is committed to its work in Atpadi for the implementation of the equitable model of water distribution and management. There are still about 20 WUAs that are yet to be formed in the northern part of Atpadi taluka. The current 17 WUAs also need a lot of handholding and troubleshooting support, including the support in critical step of handing over of the irrigation systems to the WUAs through formal MoUs. Post completion of the current Phase, SOPPECOM will be submitting a proposal for the renewal of the grant to Azim Premji Foundation so that it can continue to support its work in Atpadi taluka.



- A) Certificate distribution programme
- B) Joint Inspection of the irrigation system
- C) Flow measurements at outlet during active rotations
- D) Exposure visit to Waghad project
- E) Exposure visit to Tmebhu Lift Irrigation Scheme
- F) Small plot cultivation by women
- G) Annual conference of women (stree melawa)

Figure 2: Photos of key activities from the TLIS project

2.SEWOH Lab Project - Nature-based solutions workstream: “Strengthening local led water governance through digitalisation”

Project Period: December 2021- December 2024	Project Status: Completed
Budget: Euros 2,05,771 (Rs 17,902,077)	Funder: TMG Think Tank for Sustainability, Berlin, Germany
Collaborating Partners: TMG Think Tank for Sustainability, Berlin, Germany	Principal Investigator: Dr. Neha Bhadbhade

Aims and Objectives

The aim is to use **digital tools** to help local water related institutions like WUAs to manage water resources more effectively, enhancing the resilience of farming systems to climate change. Following were the specific objectives:

- Develop a **user-friendly digital system** for monitoring and managing water.
- Enable local institutions to use **digital data** for inclusive, sustainable water governance, including crop planning and equitable water access.
- Increase **transparency** in water data and decision-making processes.
- Empower local institutions to use digitally collected data to claim their water entitlements and in negotiations with the government.
- Provide non-governmental organizations with pilot experiences and digital data to inform **water policies and programs** in India.

Key Activities

As reported in the last annual report, a digital tool called E-PAVAS was developed with the help of a Delhi based software company, Microware Computing and Consulting India Pvt Ltd. The main features of the app are as follows:

- Monitoring Water Demand: Facilitates effective water budgeting and crop planning.
- Grievance Reporting: Addresses issues related to water access and system leakages.
- Data Visualization: Supports evidence-based decision-making and facilitates water entitlement claims with the district-level irrigation department.

After the initial piloting and testing of the app in two WUAs on the Buddhihal Medium Irrigation Project in Sangola taluka, Solapur district the app, the following were the key activities taken up from April 2024 – December 2025

Implementation of E-PAVAS

- 1) E-PAVAS was implemented in the remaining 14 WUAs on the Buddhihal Medium Irrigation Project and 17 WUAs in Atpadi taluka on the Kharsundi and Ghanand distributaries. There are a total of 34 registered WUAs with more than 12000 farmers using E-PAVAS.

- 2) Training and handholding programs were conducted to register farmers on E-PAVAS and guide them to use E-PAVAS for making demands and filing grievances
- 3) In Atpadi taluka E-PAVAS was used by 17 WUAs to demand water for the rabi rotation in January 2025.

State level peer review consultation for use of App, with a follow up field visit to Atpadi

A one-day peer review was conducted on 9 July 2024 at the Sangli Circle Irrigation Office at Warnali, Sangli to get feedback from various practitioners in the field of participatory irrigation management, including the board members of the WUAs from Atpadi, Sangola and other irrigation projects in Maharashtra, officials from the water resources department and other research organizations. The consultation meeting was followed by a field visit to Atpadi on 10 July 2024, the pilot site for the restructuring of the water distribution from the TLIS. During the meeting detailed presentations on the E-PAVAS mobile interface and web portal were made followed by discussions regarding usability of the app in terms of upscaling and areas of improvement. Some key insights from the meeting and suggestions from the meeting were as below

1. E-PAVAS achieves i) transparency ii) participation and iii) accountability (responsibility), which are essential for good water management
2. E-PAVAS has a user-friendly interface and is definitely a useful tool for the WUAs.

Some areas of improvement include:

1. Provide a facility for payment of the water tariff through the app
2. Have Unique Id for members rather than mobile phones
3. Give an access to the irrigation department as well which was currently missing in the app
4. GIS based maps that will have an option to open in Google earth could be incorporated for better planning. This is because under e-governance cell is in the process of digitalising all the canals and the other piped networks in the command areas. This geo-referencing will help in planning and management of the water resources under the WUA command
5. It would also be interesting to incorporate the total groundwater availability in the integrated water use management

During this meeting it was decided to have a small closed group technical meeting in Pune to discuss how the current functionality of E-PAVAS can be enhanced

Technical meeting for improving E-PAVAS

A technical meeting was held in Pune to discuss the E-PAVAS mobile app and web portal on 8 November 2024. The meeting, which included a demonstration of the app and a brainstorming session, focused on enhancing the functionality and addressing user feedback. Some useful suggestions for the improvement of the app that came forth during the meeting are as below:

1. Feature for farmers to pay water tariffs directly through the app
2. Simplification of the login process
3. Addition of project, division, and distributary names within the app
4. Notifications (e.g., via SMS) to farmers who don't have smartphones.
5. Cancellation of demands by WUAs on case-to-case basis.
6. Addition of tab with basic WUA information and access to relevant documents like the MMISF Act.
7. Addition of an "import" button to allow WUAs to upload member lists via an Excel file, which would save time.
8. Permission of access to irrigation department officials, such as the sectional and executive engineers, who serve on the WUA managing committees.
9. The system for managing tariffs should be upgraded to offer three options: **area-crop basis**, **volumetric basis**, and a **lumpsum** payment.
10. Create a standardized template for annual reports.

All these suggestions were taken into consideration and accordingly a new contract was signed with Microware to allow them to improve the features with E-PAVAS. Currently, the app continues to be used and is functional including the suggested features.

State level end of the project policy workshop

On 3 December, 2024, a workshop was held to understand necessary policy and regulatory support to upscale E-PAVAS across Maharashtra. The key takeaways from the discussions during this workshop were that for the E-PAVAS app to be successful and upscaled across the state, several things must be done or improvements need to be made. It was suggested that farmers should have access to information on water availability and planned allocations from reservoirs. Government must offer its support, particularly the role of the Water Resources Department, is crucial for scaling up the app, as it can provide a central data repository, technical upgrades, and incentives. Given the significant government investment in irrigation, funding for basic support like computers for the WUAs should not be an issue. Finally, it was recommended to pilot the app in more sites across Maharashtra's agroclimatic zones and to rely on NGOs and CSOs for community engagement and support in its statewide implementation.

Outputs

1. Information brief on E-PAVAS
2. Policy Brief on E-PAVAS

Outcomes

More than 12000 farmers are using E-PAVAS for making demands and filing grievance report. SOPPECOM has been able to also reach out to other irrigation divisions across Maharashtra for implementation of E-PAVAS. The full potential of E-PAVAS is yet to be realised after the WUAs start using it without SOPPECOM support. Currently that is the biggest challenge that the WUAs still require the backend and handholding support.

Future Work

E-PAVAS is currently being upgraded and sincere efforts will be made to implement it in many other WUAs across Maharashtra.



A) Handholding of E-PAVAS

B) Peer Review Workshop at Sangli Irrigation Circle Office

C) Exposure visit to Tembhur List Irrigation Scheme following peer review workshop

D) End of project Policy workshop

Figure 3: Photos of field activities during implementation of E-paavas app

3.Strengthening community awareness and capacity for conservation and monitoring of freshwater ecosystems along River Bhima, Maharashtra, India

Project Period: January 2025 – June 2025	Project Status: On going
Budget: Rs 600,000	Funder: The Nature Conservancy Centre (TNCC), New Delhi
Collaborating Partners: TNCC and IISER, Kolkata	Principal Investigator: Dr. Neha Bhadbhade

Aim and Objectives

To strengthen local communities for conservation of freshwater ecosystem, sensitize the local village communities on water pollution in the Upper River Bhima watershed from Bhorgiri to Rajgurunagar, Pune district. The key objectives of this project were:

- **Identifying the river stretch for community involvement:** Identify 2 km stretch along River Bhima keeping pollutants and flow of river into context for community involvement especially for implementation of phytoremediation strategies for improvement of river water quality
- **Strengthen citizen freshwater monitoring:** Develop a citizen's monitoring framework (related to water quality and biodiversity), create a cadre and build capacities of the local communities and for implementation and monitoring of river health.
- **Sensitize the local village communities on water pollution, freshwater biodiversity:** Through sensitization meetings/workshops, have a dialogue with the local village communities along the river stretch on their concerns on water pollution and freshwater biodiversity loss and contribute to their awareness/knowledge on ways they can play a role in conservation and protection of the group for protection of freshwater species/biodiversity

Key Activities

Site visit

In January, Kiran Lohakare, Radhika Kanade and Neha Bhadbhade from SOPPECOM did a detailed survey of the watershed, looking at different aspects of river pollution, starting from the source of Bhima river. The team visited the sites suggested by IISER Kolkata for the implementation of phytoremediation solutions near Chas. Some of the major sources of pollution that were identified were solid waste and agriculture runoffs. Domestic pollution load is not much owing to the fact that most of the population here is rural.

Discussion with village communities regarding river pollution

A two-day visit was conducted to meet with key people from Bhorgiri and Bomale villages to understand the situation related to the pollution in river Bhima. This included village leaders and people who actively participate in village-level issues. The team also met professors from Arts and College in Dehane village to see how the students can be included in the larger sensitization program. On day two, the team interacted with youth from Bhorgiri, Bhivagon and Bomale villages who were going to receive training on Public Biodiversity Registers (PBRs) to talk to them about the

issues related to pollution, understand their perspectives about the issue and also understand their interests in being a part of the initiative.

Conduct Sensitization and Awareness programs

Two days of sensitization programs were conducted across different schools and colleges on 24 and 25 March 2025. On 24 March sensitisation program was conducted for the arts and commerce students at the college in Dehane village. More than 100 students were present. Dr. Amol Waghmare from Adheem encouraged and motivated the students regarding the issues related to river health and conservation. This was followed by presentations by Dr. Radhika Kanade and Dr. Neha Bhadbhade on the ecology and current challenges on Bhima River. Kiran Lohakare then encouraged the students to join as 'Bhima saathis' (friends of river Bhima), the local cadre who would help in freshwater conservation action.

On the second day, counter mapping exercise was conducted in Bhomale village to understand the perspective of people regarding river health and pollution. Around 25 people including 3 to 4 elderly women participated in the counter mapping exercise. The major insights from the exercise were that most of the people from the village practice farming and fishing is a secondary occupation. The people drew the existing village map, showing key features like village area, fields, places of fishing, types of fishes found and sources of pollution etc. Following the sensitization program in Dehane college, similar programs were conducted at Ashram school in Tokawade village and a school in Kanhewadi village.

Key Outputs and Outcomes

Outputs

Illustrative story book Titled "River Bhima: Knowledge Exchange", translated in Marathi

Outcomes

More than 1500 school students and around 50 school teachers have been made aware regarding the issues on pollution of River Bhima and conservation of its health

Future Work:

1. Develop and citizen science guide
2. Select around 10 *Bhima saathis* and train them for the monitoring of river health
3. Conduct training programs for the *Bhima saathis*
4. Conduct a socio-economic survey in the basin to understand the current issues related to water pollution
5. Co-develop a citizen science guide



Figure 4: Key photos during raising awareness and capacity building of community members

4.Soft systems analysis: Streamlining participatory approaches and agent-based models to explore ideas of fairness at the food-water-biodiversity (FWB) nexus (fairSTREAM)

Project Period: April 2022 – September 2024 (Extended to December 2024)	Project Status: Completed
Budget: 57000 € (51000€ + 6000€ Amendment) Rs. 498,768 received	Funder: International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Laxenburg
Collaborating Partners: International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Laxenburg & Indian Institute for Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune	Principal Investigator: Sussane Hanger-Kopp (IIASA)

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the project was to develop and demonstrate a scalable co-production methodology for including fairness (equity and justice) alongside efficiency in developing sustainable policy options across the food-water-biodiversity nexus.

While the project included several components—such as a review of co-production methods, the design and development of a co-production toolkit, and the development of an agent-based model—SOPPECOM's primary contribution focused on testing knowledge co-production approaches in the Upper Bhima basin through stakeholder engagement and the development of qualitative future narratives.

Key Activities:

Compiling stakeholder inputs for co-developing storylines and future scenarios

Based on inputs from diverse stakeholders, including farmers, tribal communities, women, experts, and academicians, gathered through focus group discussions, stakeholder workshops, and expert interviews, future scenario narratives and associated storylines were developed. These narratives envisioned future as –a Business-as-Usual (BAU) scenario, and a Desirable Future scenario, where sustainable and equitable practices are implemented within the water–food–biodiversity nexus. The storylines also served as qualitative inputs to an agent-based model, which was developed in parallel to generate and compare quantitative future scenarios under both business-as-usual and desirable futures.

Stakeholder engagement at the fairSTREAM Workshop III

The concluding workshop of the fairSTREAM project was successfully held on 12 November 2024 at Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune, bringing together diverse stakeholders to review and validate the project's outcomes. The workshop presented the qualitative narratives co-developed during the project alongside the quantitative (preliminary) outputs generated through the agent-based model.

Stakeholder consultation formed the core of the discussions, with participants actively engaging in assessing future scenarios and providing valuable feedback on the findings. A key outcome of the workshop was the collaborative development of an action plan to address sustainability and equity (fairness) concerns within the water–food–biodiversity nexus in the Upper Bhima Basin.

Key Outputs and Outcomes:

1. Identification and development of three main storylines about water, agriculture and biodiversity, each addressing key challenges in the sector.
 - a) Securing Water for All
 - b) Promoting Sustainable Agriculture
 - c) Conserving biodiversity-dependent livelihoods
2. Development of Future Narratives for the Upper Bhima Basin
Detailed narrative descriptions of the current situation in the Upper Bhima Basin (UBB) and two plausible future trajectories, a Business-as-Usual (BAU) future and a Desirable future, were developed. The narratives provide greater granularity to both the existing context of the UBB and its potential pathways of change. They also serve as a qualitative foundation to complement the quantitative scenario analysis, thereby strengthening the basis for sustainable and equitable decision-making in the basin.
3. The project facilitated a two-step participatory action planning process to identify strategies and pathways for achieving a desirable future in the UBB across the three storylines—Water for all, Sustainable agriculture, and Conservation of biodiversity-dependent livelihoods.

Outreach and Impact:

1. A final project report documenting the co-production methods and their implementation to address WFB nexus challenges in the Upper Bhima Basin has been compiled.
2. Radhika Kanade presented the fairSTREAM case study on addressing water–food–biodiversity nexus challenges at the Sustainability Research and Innovation Congress 2024 in Helsinki, Finland.
3. An illustrated booklet explaining the WFB nexus in the Upper Bhima Basin, along with business-as-usual and desirable future scenarios, is under preparation for wider dissemination.



Figure 5: Stakeholder engagement during a workshop at IISER

5. Homestead plots by Project Affected Women to build climate resilience, improve nutrition and income security, Jambhgaon, Satara

Project Period: February 2024 – January 2026	Project Status: Ongoing
Budget: USD 9965 (Rs. 824,604 received)	Funder: Global Greengrants Fund (GGF)
Collaborating Partners: Shramik Mukti Dal Saman Pani Vatap Pani Sangharsh Chalwal	Principal Investigator: K. J. Joy

Aims and Objectives:

The overall project goal is to convert the unconstructed plot area of the women from the rehabilitated villages to homestead plots where they can grow nutritious vegetables and fruits and thereby enhance overall health and well-being of them and their families. The specific objectives for this goal are to handhold the process of cultivation of homestead plots by providing inputs, training and capacity building, monitoring of the plots and advocacy with the government to include homestead farming as a part of the rehabilitation package for the project affected people.

Key Activities

Planning meetings to discuss the details of the program and bring the participating women to the same level.

Two meetings were held, in Jamgaon to discuss the project. During these meetings, the project's details and the one guntha homestead cultivation model was discussed with 25 to 30 women who attended the meeting. Eighteen women showed interest, and their plots were inspected to ensure they had the required land size and a water source. Out of the 18 women, ultimately 17 women joined the programme. A six-woman committee was also formed to oversee the project.

Preparing a plot of land near the house for vegetable and fruit cultivation, provision of irrigation facility and inputs for cultivation

After the initial discussion with the women, the land preparation, including preparation of the beds for cultivation took place. At a subsequent meeting the group unanimously voiced their concern for fencing their plots with shade nets to protect from hens. The total cost for each enclosure is Rs 1400, half of which was covered by SOPPECOM and remainder by each women as decided in the meeting. Drip irrigation was provided on each plot to encourage efficient use of water. Keeping in mind the future water shortage, an arrangement was made on these plots so that the crops can be irrigated even with less water. Inputs in form of seeds and fertilisers were given for Kharif and Rabi cultivation. The inputs for Kharif cultivation were given in July sourced from the local agriculture market centre in Satara town and each women received 40 kg of vermicompost. Other than this natural fungicide were also given. Last year the rainfall was very heavy due to which leafy vegetables did not grow at all. Hence it was decided to provide additional vegetable seeds in Rabi season as well in October.

Training program for women with the help of agricultural experts

Training on one guntha model of homestead cultivation for Kharif season – 5 July 2024

In this training, women were given information about crop structure, spacing between crops, trap crops, water planning, weed control, fertilization methods, irrigation, diseases affecting crops and their remedial measures while cultivating vegetables in a one-guntha plot. After the training, a demonstration was given on how to actually go to a plot and cultivate vegetables, fruits, vegetables, trap crops.

Training on preparing Dashparni extract

A hands-on training was held on 22 July 2024 for the women to prepare the Dashparni extract which is a herbicide. The agriculture expert trained the women on type of trees and needed to prepare Dashparni extract, its importance, and how and when to spray it on the crops. This was then followed by a practical session where women themselves collected the required ingredients and prepared the Dashparni extract for their plots.

Refresher training program

Seeing the progress of the plots in Kharif season, a refresher training program was conducted in October to troubleshoot problems and plan for Rabi cultivation.

Farm diary method for monitoring and evaluation

Additionally, the women were trained to maintain a farm diary to maintain the records of their plots which include, inputs given, i.e. water, fertilisers, herbicides, total hours spent on their plots for sowing and weeding, total daily yield (either consumed/ sold), diseases, and remedies used, etc. This also helped the women to understand what changes they need to make to improve their homestead plots.

Baseline socio-economic survey of all beneficiary women's households.

A baseline survey of all 17 women's households participating in the project was conducted in the month of October. The information has been collected and the work of analysing that information is underway.

Outputs

- 17 participating families from Jambhgaon develop and manage their household plots and CLRP (Community Led Resource Person) to grow various vegetables and fruits.
- Women practice natural farming and store biological material.
- The women keep a daily record of their farming activities.

Impact of the project on 17 families

- For the past year, the women and their families have been consuming a more diverse, nutritious, and balanced diet, improving their health.
- Some women sell the surplus produce, which provides additional income to meet their families' needs. Their capacity to plant and manage their household plots has increased.

- The women have gained the right to make decisions regarding their plot cultivation and the income they receive, and they are autonomous in this regard.



Figure 6: Produce from the community led household plots in Jamgaon

6. Baseline assessment of the Pavana catchment for the implementation of watershed development and sustainable water resources management

Project Period: December 2024 – March 2025	Project Status: Completed
Budget: Rs. 365,000	Funder: Wildlife Conservation Trust Mumbai
Principal Investigator: K.J. Joy	

Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this project was to develop a long-term strategy for biodiversity conservation and the sustainable management of water resources within the Pavana dam catchment. As part of this initiative, SOPPECOM focused on conducting a preliminary situation analysis of the watershed. The key objectives of this assessment were:

- To understand the biophysical characteristics of the catchment, including micro-watershed delineation, drainage patterns, land use/land cover, and other relevant parameters.
- To estimate the current and potential water availability and use in the region.
- To identify opportunities for developing a comprehensive and context-specific watershed development plan.

Key Activities

Hydrological and Ecological Assessment

- Mapped rainfall, runoff, and aquifer characteristics of the catchment.
- Identified low-yield, seasonal recharge aquifers and estimated water consumption (1.5 MCM) against surplus harvestable runoff (13.1 MCM).
- Documented storage potential (0.3 MCM) and highlighted gaps in surface water retention.

Land Use and Livelihood Analysis

- Analysed available land use classification from global data. The catchment was dominated by forests (43.6%) and grasslands (26.4%) with limited agriculture (10.7%).
- Evaluated livelihood patterns, with emphasis on forest-based, livestock-oriented, and NTFP-dependent systems.

Socio-economic and Institutional Study

- Engaged with farmers, tribal communities (Thakars, Katkaris), and smallholders.
- Explored tourism's impact on employment, land use, and water demand (additional 1.2 MCM annually).

Participatory Consultations

- Conducted focus group discussions and key informant interviews.
- Gathered community perspectives on water scarcity, changing occupations, and the need for equitable access.

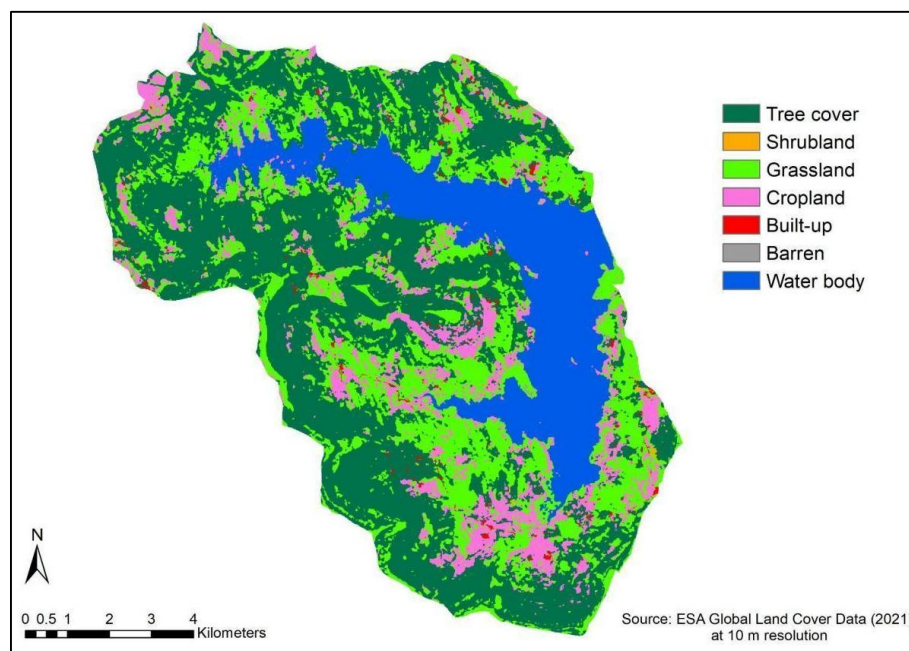


Figure 7: Land cover classification of Pavana catchment for 2021

Outputs and Outcomes

- **Holistic Catchment Profile:** A detailed understanding of the Pavana catchment's ecological fragility, water balance, and socio-economic drivers.
- **Identification of Challenges:** Seasonal water scarcity, limited aquifer storage, and rising tourism pressure on resources.
- **Strategic Recommendations:**
 - Soil and water conservation aligned with steep slopes and basaltic geology.
 - Vegetative regeneration and dryland horticulture suited to land capability.
 - Livestock-based livelihood systems leveraging grassland and forest cover.
 - Watershed development approach rooted in equity, sustainability, and resilience.
- **Paradigm Shift in Approach:** Moving beyond conventional runoff harvesting toward regenerative, risk-reducing systems tailored to local ecology and community needs.

Conclusion

The project highlighted the urgent need for integrated watershed management in the Pavana catchment. By aligning interventions with ecological sustainability, land capability, and equitable access, the project recommends pathways to:

- Enhance water availability,
- Strengthen climate and livelihood resilience, and
- Promote green food systems in the upper Pavana catchment.

The baseline now provides a solid foundation for long-term collaborative action, ensuring that future watershed development in the Pavana catchment is both sustainable and socially just.

7. Understanding the nature, forms and implications of structural violence against rural women in the context of agrarian distress

Project Period: December 2021 – June 2025	Project Status: Completed
Budget: 5,50,000 USD (Rs. 36,184,622)	Funder: Ford Foundation
Collaborating partners: Rukmini Rao, Ashalatha, Usha Seethalakshmi (Research team in Telangana), Anupama Uppal and Simran Vohra (Research team in Punjab)	Team members: Seema Kulkarni, Sneha Bhat, Vanita Tumsare, Rucha V S

Aim and objective

The present study is an attempt to bring together the discourses of agrarian distress and gender-based violence through the conceptual lens of structural violence. It examines the everyday violence experienced by rural women during an agrarian crisis marked by landlessness, debt, migration, and ecological breakdown. It adopts a broad definition of violence, encompassing economic exclusion, institutional neglect, labour exploitation, and denial of recognition. By centering the experiences of rural

women, the study aims to visualise the often invisible and normalised forms of deprivation, exclusion, and violence that women experience in agriculture and related livelihoods.

The study was conducted across seven districts, 18 blocks, and 74 villages in three states of Maharashtra, Telangana, and Punjab.

Key Activities

Research activities

Data collection was done in Maharashtra and Telangana between 2021-2023. This included FGDs, quantitative surveys, in-depth interviews, and key information interviews. Through these methods we tried to understand rural women's experiences of violence in the context of agrarian distress. Data collection was done in Punjab in 2024. A quantitative survey was conducted with 711 women across three districts, and case stories were collected to capture women's lived experiences in the region. Analysis of data collected in Maharashtra and Telangana continued.

Dissemination and stakeholder engagement

This year the project focussed on disseminating the findings and engagement with key stakeholders at district, state, national, and international levels. This phase of the project highlighted the critical importance of strengthening dialogue with networks, organisations, and academic institutions engaged in work on women farmers and gender-based violence. Early on, it became evident that meaningful partnerships were essential, not just for logistical support, but to enrich the interpretation of findings and co-develop pathways for action. Consequently, all major dissemination events were organised collaboratively with state and national level partners, ensuring that diverse perspectives informed the conversations and laid the groundwork for future collective initiatives.

A total of six district-level dissemination workshops were held in Maharashtra and Telangana, followed by two national consultations, one of which specifically focused on the issues of farm suicide affected women. In March 2025, a multimedia exhibition on the lives and struggles of women farmers was organised in Pune, drawing wide public and media attention.

The research team shared key findings at several state, national and international platforms, amplifying the discourse on structural violence against women in agriculture. The research team co-organised a virtual session at the 69th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), focusing on structural violence in agriculture. The session brought together feminist movement leaders globally, fostering rich dialogue and linking local findings to global advocacy.

Outcomes

Expanded understanding of agrarian distress and structural violence

The study deepened our understanding of the agrarian crisis as a site of structural violence, revealing the rise in input costs due to mono-cropping and factors like erratic weather and market dependency undermine agricultural livelihoods, particularly for women. These factors reduce women's paid work opportunities, increase unpaid care burdens and intensify food insecurity, that in turn negatively affect their physical and mental health.

By disaggregating data across caste, class, land ownership, marital status, and age, the study illuminated how these intersecting identities shape women's experiences of violence, both in private and public spaces. It also revealed how boundaries between home, workplace, and community are often blurred in rural settings, making violence in agricultural work difficult to identify, report, and redress.

Greater visibility for violence against women farmers

The project significantly raised visibility on violence against women in agriculture among policymakers and the public. Through community poster exhibitions, state consultations, and national policy dialogues, rural women engaged directly in validating and strengthening the findings. Creative formats and participatory dissemination helped shift the narrative, from seeing violence only as domestic or sexual, to recognising it as systemic, structural, and rooted in agrarian inequalities, bringing much-needed attention to its gendered dimensions.

Strengthened collaborations with grassroots organisations

A key outcome was the strengthening of partnerships with grassroots women's collectives, CBOs, and networks working on gender and rural livelihoods. These collaborations shaped the study design, ensured ethical practice, and co-produced knowledge. They also helped create manuals and visual materials, turning the research process into a capacity-building effort for local organisations to address structural violence.

Outputs

- District summary reports for the five districts from Maharashtra and Telangana in Marathi and Telugu
- State summary reports based on the study findings
<https://www.soppecom.org/publications-techstudyrepots.htm>
- A series of 30 illustrated posters on violence against women in five languages (English, Hindi, Marathi, Telugu and Punjabi)
<https://www.soppecom.org/pdf/Women-work-Posters-1-opti.pdf>
- A booklet combining all the posters from the poster series in five languages
- A photo stories book combining six photo essays based on the case stories of women farmers, published in five languages
- A series of ten graphic stories based on the case stories of women farmers, published in five languages

- An entire issue of the Marathi academic journal *Vatsaru* (January 2025) was dedicated to presenting various issues of women farmers, and work of MAKAAAM. Three of the articles in the issue were based on this study
- A consolidated study report is currently in progress

8..Ecologically Sound Self Reliant Farming (ESSRF) programme

Project Period:	Project Status: Ongoing (Phase 3)
Budget: USD 30000 USD (Rs. 2,493,803) Rs. 4,009,658 Rs. 500,000	Funder: American Jewish World Services (AJWS) Bharat Agroecology Fund People for Progress in India
Collaborating partners: MAKAAAM	Team members: Seema Kulkarni, Swati Satpute, Bhumika Kadu, Sneha Bhat

Objective and scope of the programme

The agroecology program, initiated by SOPPECOM, continues to address the interconnected issues of the disempowerment of women farmers and environmental degradation caused by mainstream, chemical-intensive farming practices. This initiative, which started as a relief measure during the pandemic in 2021, supporting women farmers from drought-prone and suicide-affected regions of Marathwada and Vidarbha, has now grown into a comprehensive program encouraging sustainable, self-reliant farming models, promoting biodiversity, food, and nutrition security, while preserving and amplifying the role of women's local knowledge in agriculture.

In 2024-25, **210 women across 30 villages from 5 districts** participated in the programme.

Key activities

Direct support to women farmers

In 2024, direct support was adapted to promote greater self-reliance. We continued providing seeds and partial support for manure. Women themselves bore more than half of the cost of manure purchase. Crop raiding by wild animals has been a major issue in most of these villages. After exploring options, solar fencing was introduced on a pilot basis, which showed encouraging results. Additionally, Trichoderma powder was provided to women farmers to prevent fungal diseases during sowing, enabling them to protect crops from excessive rains.

To expand the reach of the programme, kitchen garden seed kits were distributed to 940 women across Akola, Beed, Hingoli, Parbhani, and Yavatmal districts. Each kit contained a diverse selection of vegetable seeds to encourage women to grow food for their families, promoting nutrition and food security. An online training was also conducted which was attended by many women.

Training and capacity building

In April 2024, a three-day Fresher's Training at Chetana Vikas, Wardha, introduced new participants to agroecological practices such as soil and water management, mixed cropping, pulses, seeds, and pest Management. At the same time, a two-day Revision Training for Champion Women Farmers revisited core principles and

focused on strategies to expand these practices in their villages, including reflection on their two-year journey and shared learnings.

In March 2025, a four-day residential training at Chetana Vikas, Wardha, brought together 45 women farmers from different districts to strengthen their understanding of agroecological practices. Special sessions with women from Beed on sowing patterns was also conducted

Sharing and joint learning activities

In 2024 we organised intra-district exchange visits for women farmers. These visits allowed them to learn from one another and observe each other's farms in person. It provided a valuable opportunity to assess how the women had applied the learning from the training in their own farming practices. The exchange visits proved a very successful experiment and we plan to continue them next year as well.

In December 2024, a three-day state-level workshop was held in Pune with 70 women farmers and partner organisations to review the progress and planning future activities. Expert sessions on marketing, finance models and soil health were also conducted. Based on the experiences shared, a plan for 2025 Kharif season was outlined.

Cultivating Futures: A multimedia exhibition based on the experiences of women farmers was held in Pune from 21 to 23 March 2025. This event offered a space for rural women's voices, stories, and innovations for urban audiences. The programme included exhibitions with thematic discussions and cultural performances, including a vibrant cultural evening featuring poetry reading, readings from the publication 'Pushkala – the plentiful' (a collection of stories of women practising agroecology) and screening of the film 'One seed at a time'. Two interactive games – one about identifying uncultivated vegetables, and the other about different operations involved in agroecology-based farming – were developed for the exhibition. Both these games were well appreciated by the attendees.

Outcomes

A collective of women farmers practicing ESSRF

One of the program's most important achievements is the strong collectivization among women farmers. Now, they have formalized their efforts by establishing the '*Paryavaransnehi Swavlambi Shetkari Mahila Sanghatan*' (Ecologically Sound Self-Reliant Women Farmers' Collective). Collectivization has not only bolstered women's confidence but also improved their access to government schemes and earned them respect in their villages.

A cohort of champion women farmers

For the past two years we have been specifically focusing on building leadership of women farmers at the village level. A group of these champion women farmers has started taking a more proactive role in not only implementing and monitoring the programme in their village but also creating awareness with their communities.

Expansion of the ESSRF model

Understanding the benefits of the model, some women have increased their plot from half acre to one acre, while others have started reducing chemical inputs in their farming practices. They have voluntarily started contributing towards the cost of the manure, and preserving their own seeds. With the efforts of champion women, more and more women from the village are showing interest in joining the initiative.

Challenging patriarchy

Emboldened by their association with the network, and the success on their farm, women have started to become more assertive in their families, and take an active role in the decision-making related to agriculture. Many male members of these families, who were not supportive in the initial stage, have started appreciating women's efforts.

Challenging caste

Dalit women from Beed share that they are seeing a significant change in their villages. Attitudes of the upper caste community have significantly changed since the inception of ESSRF. Upper caste women now visit their farms and request for their seeds and vegetables. A Dalit woman sugarcane worker shared her experience in the workshop in December. Earlier when they used to go for cane cutting, they didn't have enough money to buy foodgrains for the duration of migration. So they borrowed bajra from upper caste families, in exchange for labour work. The bajra was often of poor quality. But since the start of ESSRF, they have been cultivating local varieties of bajra. Last year an upper caste man, from whom she used to borrow bajra earlier, came to ask if she would sell some of her bajra.

Increased food security and crop diversity

Women now cultivate a diverse range of crops, ensuring a richer and healthier diet for their families. Many have noted that they would have never purchased such a variety of vegetables from the market. Uncultivated vegetables growing naturally in their fields further add to their food security and dietary diversity. Data for representative women from 2024-25 show that each woman on an average receives around 25 different types of produce from her farm.

Improved soil health

Women who have participated in the program for the last 3-4 years have noticed significant changes in their soil. They have observed that the soil texture is more fertile and soft, making it easier for weeding. It also retains more moisture.

Outputs

Two major outputs were produced during 2024-25

Case stories

We documented the inspiring stories of 12 women farmers who are practising agroecology. These stories share their struggles, successes, and new ways of farming sustainably. They have been published in a booklet called *Pushkala (Plentiful)*, which helps spread their voices and encourages more women to take up self-reliant farming.

Documentary film

As part of our outreach and documentation efforts, we produced a documentary film titled *One Seed at a Time*. The film captures the experiences of women farmers practising ESSRF, highlighting their challenges, resilience, and successes in transforming their farms and communities. It showcases how they navigate gender/patriarchy and caste barriers while adopting sustainable farming practices. This documentary serves as an advocacy tool to inspire more women to join the movement and to engage policymakers, stakeholders, and the broader community in discussions about sustainable agriculture. The film can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbC4JYIHq44>



- 1: Exposure visit of women farmers
- 2: Training of women farmers
- 3: Women farmers selling their produce during a workshop in Pune
- 4: A woman farmer from Akola with her produce
- 5: Screening of the film 'One seed at a time' in March 2025
- 6: District level training activity
- 7: Discussion with women farmers about seed preservation
- 8: Interactive game about wild uncultivated vegetables

Figure 10: Photographs of key activities from the ESSRF project

9. Agro-ecology for sustainable and just groundwater governance (Short title: Careful irrigation)

Project Period: 2023-2007	Project Status: Ongoing
Budget: 64,500 Euros (Rs. 282,079 received till date)	Funder: IHE Delft
Collaborating partners: ACWADAM, MAKAAAM	Team members: Seema Kulkarni, Sneha Bhat, Swati Satpute, Bhumika Kadu

Aim and Objectives

This is a multi-country project bringing together partners working on agroecology and/or groundwater. The project starts from the premise that transformations to water sustainability in agriculture require a shift to less intensive crops and farming systems. More regenerative forms of farming such as agroecology are promising here, as these are potentially much less water-demanding. The project aims to re-think and re-do irrigation to make it compatible with more regenerative forms of farming, which is called care-ful irrigation. The objective is to identify and document such farming experiments which will form the basis for systematic and long-term grounded engagement and practice-based processes of co-learning and experimenting.

Key Activities

Various activities conducted under this project complement the activities of agroecology based farming programme

In-depth monitoring of ESSRF practices of women farmers

A detailed study of 30 women farmers is being conducted as part of the research. Data is maintained by the women farmers themselves in a monthly diary format. This includes data on their farming practices, changes in soil health, pest management, expenditure and produce gained from the ESSRF farming. Analysis of this data would give critical insights into implementation of the ESSRF model, challenges faced by women, and their gains. The data collection will complete in April 2025, and analysis would be done after that.

PhD mentoring

As part of this project, SOPPECOM is providing guidance to a PhD student from IHE Delft, who will conduct her research in one of the districts where ESSRF is being implemented.

10. Amplifying voices of women cane cutters

Project Period: December 2021- May 2025	Project Status: Completed
Budget: USD 205,771 (Rs. 18,463,299)	Funder: Women's Fund Asia
Collaborating partners: Mahila Ustod Kamgar Sanghatana	Team members: Seema Kulkarni, Pallavi Harshe, Aarti Bankar

Aim and Objectives

The project aims to amplify the voice and leadership of women cane cutters in Beed and Hingoli districts in Maharashtra. Its primary goal was capacity building of women leaders across eight talukas to mobilize their peers, advocate rights, and lay the foundation for strong, sustainable collectives of sugarcane cutters in the state. SOPPECOM has advanced this process by training local leaders, generating research and documentation to strengthen advocacy, and facilitating the formation of a Union to represent women cane cutters in negotiations with government authorities. This year's focus was on consolidation, evaluation, and sustainability—assessing leaders' readiness to carry forward organizational building, developing structures, advancing policy advocacy, producing communication outputs, and preparing for long-term functioning beyond external funding.

Key Activities

Collective identity and advocacy

- The Forum for women farmers, cane cutters, and other women workers was launched in September 2024 and registered in March 2025. Next steps: strengthen structures, build capacities of the managing body, ensure regular meetings, and seek recognition from departments and the Sugar Factories Federation.
- Membership drives expanded with strong responses in Beed and gradual rebuilding of trust in Hingoli through campaigns like postcard petitions for separate women's registration and entitlements. Currently around **500 women members** have registered with the forum.
- A village-level study on ration access was conducted to support advocacy for cane cutter families.
- Meetings were held with *mukadams* to understand their concerns and press for women cane cutters' demands that could be addressed at their level.

Worker registration and policy engagement

- Separate IDs for women sugarcane cutters progressed in Beed; in Hingoli, sustained engagement led the Collector to initiate a registration survey with the Women Cane Cutter Organization.
- Representatives from Beed and SOPPECOM participated in the UN Women–CSO SDG Review (Feb 2024) organised in Delhi, influencing gender policy narratives.
- International advocacy, including the brutality of sugar and MAKAAAM's study, spotlighted hysterectomies and harsh conditions, leading to cane cutting being recognized as forced labour in ILAB reports.

- Consultations were held with government officials and unions to advance women cane cutters' demands, address gaps in entitlement delivery, and integrate their issues into union agendas.

Health and governance

- A health study covering **334 women cane cutters** (225 in Beed and 109 in Hingoli) was conducted to assess their health status, availability of basic amenities, access to entitlements, and the overall impact on their well-being.
- 43 women leaders became members of Jan Arogya Samitis (28 in Beed, 15 in Hingoli), enabling them to monitor cleanliness, organize health camps, and push for cervical cancer screening. Screenings expanded in Beed; in Hingoli they remain pending.
- The Aarogya Sakhi model was strengthened. Here the women cane cutters are trained to provide health care support to fellow women at migration sites, with the Beed Health Department supplying medicines. In a district meeting organized by the CEO, officials responded positively to adopting it as an innovative program in Beed district.

Economic justice

- Advance settlement training enabled women to monitor slips and prevent misappropriation. In one case, a woman leader's vigilance averted losses of Rs. 1.6 lakh for the entire group and Rs. 21,000 per couple of sugarcane workers
- Women began demanding advances in their own names/bank accounts, asserting financial independence.
- Women leaders ensured settlements reflected the new wage rate of Rs. 366 per tonne.

Broader leadership and local action

- Despite resistance from husbands and *mukadams*, women leaders sustained activism, supported by district, block coordinators and SOPPECOM.
- Leaders proactively addressed issues on their own: securing job cards, facilitating medical benefits, supporting victims of violence, advocating for children, engaging with factory officials, and ensuring access to welfare schemes.

Learnings

The project deepened understanding of cane cutters' sanitation, migration, health, and work risks, while highlighting limitations of state systems and the importance of interventions like *Aarogya Sakhis*. Engagement with *mukadams* revealed layered hierarchies and opened up space for dialogue.

Lessons regarding strengthening organization included the importance of trust, contextualized trainings, participatory approaches, and financial support for grassroots coordinators. Government responsiveness improved where sustained advocacy and visibility were maintained, leading to breakthroughs such as separate registration for women. In the future, sustaining pressure, strengthening legal

literacy, and demonstrating alternative livelihood and credit models will be essential for resilience and reduced migration.

Challenges

- Political instability in Maharashtra disrupted institutional processes, including the Cane Cutters Welfare Board.
- Resistance from *mukadams* and family members created backlash for women leaders.
- Bureaucratic apathy slowed progress in Hingoli as compared to Beed.
- Migrant nature of work makes sustaining interventions at destinations difficult.

Outputs

- MJPJAY Pocket Booklet – A booklet which give the information about Mahatma Phule Jan Aarogya Scheme
- News Article about Migration in Baimanus newspaper
- Arogya Sakhi Video – A video based on the arogya sakhi model
- Article about Aarogy sakhi model in Loksatta news paper
- Day and Night: The struggle never ends: A video on lack of sanitation facilities during cane cutting season and its impact on women cane cutters. Available at, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77t8grifkDs>
- Health flyer - A flyer on the health initiatives to provide health services at the source districts done by SOPPECOM in collaboration with women cane cutter organisation. Available at, <https://www.soppecom.org/pdf/Helath-Initiative-English.pdf>
- Aarogya Sakhi flyer – A flyer on the innovative experiment done by SOPPECOM in collaboration with women cane cutter organisation to deal with health issues at migration place. <https://www.soppecom.org/pdf/Aarogya-Sakhi-Flyer-English.pdf>
- वणवणती जीव पाण्यासाठी – a video on lack of facilities especially water during cane cutting season and its impact on women cane cutters. Available at, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoZEVHVyLQM>

Way Forward (2025 and Beyond)

1. Strengthen and expand the scope of Union: Expand membership, secure recognition, ensure women's separate registration, expand the union in other districts and place the Union at decision-making tables.
2. Build economic and health alternatives: Pilot credit societies (Pat Pedhis), independent mediclaim models, and agroecology-based livelihoods to reduce migration.
3. Scale Health Models: Institutionalize and expand *Aarogya Sakhis* through government partnerships.



- 1: Women doing a test in the health camp organised in the village
- 2: AGM of the union (*Shetkari, Ustod va Itar Asanghatit Mahila Kamgar Manch*)
- 3: Aarogya Sakhis providing treatment to workers from her group
- 4: Aarogya Sakhis training provided to twenty Aarogya Sakhis

Figure 11: Various activities taken for the Aarogya Sakhis

11.Cultivating Change: Advancing leadership, strengthening organisations, and promoting agroecology for migrant sugarcane workers

Project Period: January 2025 - December 2027	Project Status: Ongoing
Budget: Rs. 53,70,000	Funder: Association for India's Development (AID), India
Collaborating partners: MAKAAAM	Principal Investigator: Seema Kulkarni

Aim and Objective

To **strengthen women farmers' organisations** in Western Maharashtra and Nandurbar, enhancing their recognition, voice, and access to entitlements. The project also aims to **arrest migration** among sugarcane workers by promoting and scaling up **self-reliant, agroecological farming models**, challenging the mainstream chemical-intensive agrarian paradigm.

Key Activity

Village selection

For strengthening women farmers' organisations in Nandurbar district, 15 villages were selected. The local organisation, *Janartha Adivasi Vikas Sanstha*, conducted surveys in these villages to understand the challenges faced by single women, which formed the basis for interventions in the block. For promoting agroecology among migrant sugarcane workers, the process of village selection in Beed and Hingoli districts is currently underway.

12.Towards Brown Gold Reimagining off-grid sanitation in rapidly urbanising areas in Asia and Africa

Project Period: October 2020 to September 2024	Project Status: Complete
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Budget: £ 33530 with additional grant of £ 2999.15 (Rs. 3,825,760 received)	Funder: Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and UK Research Innovation (UKRI)
Collaborating partners: Institute of Development Studies (IDS)	Team members: Seema Kulkarni, Pallavi Harshe and Prakash Ransing

Aim and objective

This is a multidisciplinary research project aimed at designing inclusive, sustainable, and community-led sanitation solutions for off-grid towns in Ethiopia, Ghana, India, and Nepal. SOPPECOM's study in Nanded urban area focuses on sanitation from the lens of marginality, documenting the social, economic, and spatial inequalities that influence access to sanitation services. The study highlights the challenges faced by marginalized communities while identifying community-driven strategies for equitable and sustainable sanitation solutions.

Key Activities

Dissemination of the study on marginality and access to sanitation in Nanded-Waghala Municipal Corporation

On 12 August 2024, SOPPECOM organized a workshop in Nanded titled "*Dissemination of the Study on Marginality and Access to Sanitation in Nanded-Waghala Municipal Corporation.*" The workshop brought together a panel of experts in city sanitation planning and faecal sludge management, along with officers from the Nanded-Waghala Municipal Corporation. Sanitation workers and local citizens also joined, fostering a comprehensive discussion on the study's findings.

Final Project Meeting in Sussex and Brighton, UK

From 14 to 22 September 2024, the Institute of Development Studies hosted a final project meeting in Sussex and Brighton, UK. This meeting aimed to review and discuss draft country papers and research based on cross-cutting themes. Representatives from SOPPECOM, including Seema Kulkarni, Pallavi Harshe, and Prakash Ransing participated and shared insights from the Nanded study.

Outcome

The study reveals that dysfunctional sewerage, unsafe faecal sludge management, and ongoing manual scavenging disproportionately burden slum residents, women, migrants, and sanitation workers. Yet, through self-provisioning, collective action, and negotiations, communities assert their agency—highlighting sanitation as a pressing social justice concern that demands inclusive and equity-oriented policies alongside infrastructure.

Output

Policy Brief: Centring marginality in sanitation service delivery in India

A policy brief highlighting the intersection of caste, class, gender, and migration in access to sanitation. The study documents community-led assertions for equitable and sustainable sanitation services. The policy brief is available at, <https://www.soppecom.org/pdf/Nanded-Final-Zine-Webversion-with-quotes.pdf>

Zine

This zine brings together stories and insights from Nanded, showing how sanitation is deeply tied to questions of caste, class, gender, and migration. It captures voices from the margins and their collective struggles for dignity, equity, and cleaner futures. Link <https://www.soppecom.org/pdf/Nanded-Final-Zine-Webversion-with-quotes.pdf>

Blog

Visual Methods and working with Migrant People in an Urban Setting- This blog draws on the reflexivity of the researcher while conducting participatory inquiry with migrant populations to engage in deeper critical reflection on the ethical implications of these methods in keeping with Participatory Action Research's (PAR) roots. Link - <https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/visual-methods-and-working-with-migrant-people-in-an-urban-setting/>

Short Films

1. वणवणती जीव पाण्यासाठी / Burning Soul for Water: A documentary on migrant women sugarcane-cutters, highlighting their struggles for water and sanitation during the cane-cutting season. Link- <https://youtu.be/8DgyS2vTI4g>

2. दिवस रात्र कुचंबना / Day and Night, the Struggle Never Ends: The documentary highlights the severe shortage of bathing and toilet facilities and their impact on women cane workers. Link- <https://youtu.be/77t8qrifkDs>

3.कोंडमारा / Nanded's Unseen Sanitation Workers: A documentary portraying the lives and challenges of sanitation workers in Nanded, highlighting gaps in safety and dignity despite ODF+ and ODF++ claims. Link- https://youtu.be/I5idUsPt3_o

Animation Film

Faecal Matters: The film shows how inadequate sanitation infrastructure and poor faecal sludge management increase the burden on sanitation workers. It calls for urgent attention to dignity, safety, and better systems.

Outreach and Impact

Through this study, we drew the attention of policymakers, local administration, and scholars, bringing focus back to faecal sludge management, sanitation, and marginalization issues.

Future outputs:

Based on the study, the following research articles are in the publication process,

- “Sanitation Crisis and Marginality in Nanded City.” In progress; to be published in a special issue of Economic and Political Weekly.
- “Understanding urban inequalities and policy-making in India’s faecal sludge management” (Journal to be decided)
- “Understanding Marginality and Agency in Sanitation: A case of four secondary cities in Africa and Asia” (Journal to be decided)



1: Open drains run alongside drinking water pipelines.
2: Empty plastic drums outside migrant huts highlight their daily struggle to fetch and store water.

3: Project closing meeting in the UK in September 2024.
4: Dissemination of the study on marginality and access to sanitation in Nanded-Waghala Municipal Corporation.

Figure 12: Photos of activities from the Brown Gold Reimagining off-grid sanitation project

13. Mozilla Foundation Fellowship Programme

Project Period: September 2024 to March 2026	Project Status: Ongoing
Budget: 5500 USD (Rs. 469,088 received)	Funder: Mozilla Foundation
Team members: Seema Kulkarni, Sneha Bhat, Pallavi Harshe, Swati Satpute, Prakash Ransing	

Objective of the project

SOPPECOM has been selected as one of the host organisations for the Mozilla Foundation Tech + Society Fellowship. Host organisations are paired with a Fellow who will work with the organisation for a specific proposed output. As part of the Fellowship programme, SOPPECOM is working with Ms. Priya Goswami, a feminist tech and media maker. With support from Priya, we are developing a website to share stories of women farmers in an interactive way.

Activities

The project activities began in November 2024, and by March 2025 we have finalised the nature and scope of the proposed website. Website development work begins in April 2025.

14. RESILIENT RULES – Evolution of institutional diversity in a changing world: Finding solutions in resilient agricultural systems

Project Period: August 2024 - March 2026	Project Status: Ongoing
Budget: Euros. 4536	Funder: European Research Council through University of Zaragoza
Collaborating Partners: University of Zaragoza	Principal Investigator: Prof. Irene Pérez Ibarra (University of Zaragoza) & K. J. Joy (SOPPECOM) Team members: Kiran Lohakare, Radhika Kanade & Neha Bhadbhade

“RESILIENT RULES – Evolution of institutional diversity in a changing world: Finding solutions in resilient agricultural systems” is a research project with a global reach. It will engage with institutional rulemaking in the context of the management /governance of irrigation water and pastoral systems. Prof. Irene Perez Ibarra of University of Zaragoza, the Principal Investigator of this project, approached Joy to join as a researcher for the Maharashtra case study. They had already identified Panumbre WUA in Sangli for the study through literature review.

The main work/activities and their progress:

1. Get various permissions to do the research, etc. – *Completed*
2. Social ecological assessment – *Completed*
3. Participation in the week-long workshop at the university – *Completed*
4. Interview five persons from the Panumbre WUA (at least two of them to be women) – *Two are done and three more to be done*
5. Participate in a co-authored paper – *to be done*

Programs, Affiliations & Networking:

AFFILIATIONS WITH UNIVERSITIES

River Commons/ Riverhood Programme

Project Period: September 2021 to August 2026	Project Status: Ongoing
Budget: Support to the PhD candidate and consultancy assignments	Funder: River Commons: Wageningen University’s Interdisciplinary Research and Education Fund (INREF) Riverhood: European Research Council (ERF)

Aim and objective

This twin sister projects focus on river governance and new water justice movements across the globe. Both projects have a common framework that illuminates the different facets and complexities of river systems. About 19 PhDs, 4 post-doctoral researchers and Master students are pursuing research under this multi-dimensional project from the Wageningen University. SOPPECOM is a partner organisation in the River Commons project and Sarita Bhagat is pursuing her PhD under the River Commons. More information about these projects are available at www.movingrivers.org

Key Activities

Field Work in Warna basin

As part of ongoing research, Sarita conducted river walks to explore the relationship of different communities with the river, observing the changes in the river during different seasons and initiating dialogue with the different communities. Apart from the river walks, the field work included detailed interviews with the project affected persons and members from the Shamik Mukti Dal. Counter pictorial mapping was done with the fishing communities who were identified during the river walks.

Moving Rivers Webinar

Five online webinars were organised during the reporting period. The 2-hour webinar is an opportunity for the PhD researchers to collaborate with a senior researcher and speak about common research or methodologies. Table 2 summarises the webinars organised in 2024. Apart from these activities, each PhD student is either doing their field work or disseminating their work through workshops, seminars, popular articles or journal articles.

Publications:

- de Souza, D. T., Hommes, L., Wals, A., Hoogesteger, J., Boelens, R., Duarte-Abadía, B., ... **Joy, K. J.** (2024). River co-learning arenas: principles and practices for transdisciplinary knowledge co-creation and multi-scalar (inter)action. *Local Environment*, 30(1), pp 58–80. Available at, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2024.2428215>
- Bhagat, S (2024), "Counter mapping the Mula River: A methodological tool to investigate Pune's riverfront development" in Riverfront development: Implications, Challenges and Way Ahead, *Urban Kaleidoscope (4th edition)*. Available at, <https://prcindia.in/publications/urban-kaleidoscope-riverfront-development-implication-challenges-and-way-ahead-volume-4/>

Forthcoming events and publications

Ubuntu ke nuka River Commons & Riverhood International Seminar

The international seminar on governance beyond the needs of the people for the river, will take place from 23-25 April in Lusaka, Zambia. Sarita will be presenting her work with the fishing communities, on bridging the river co-learning arenas with her colleagues from Colombia and Zambia. She will also be organising the River

Commons workshops titled 'weaving the commons' , which is a continuation of the workshop organised in Colombia last year, on understanding how commons are perceived by different communities in the scientific and civil society world in Africa.

Research Articles

Based on the ongoing research Sarita is engaged in the publication of following articles:

- 'Engaging with four onto-epistemological river struggles through counter-mapping" by Edward H. Huijbens, Daniele Tubino de Souza, Jennifer C. Veilleux, Sarita Bhagat, Bibiana A.D. Abadia and Juliana Forigua Sandoval, in *Environment and Planning Special Issue: Rivers, Commons, and Translocal Struggles for Water Justice*
- 'Socionature assemblages of river movements in rural and urban Maharashtra' by Sarita Bhagat and Jeroen Vos in special issue on River grabbing in the *Journal of Political Geography*
- 'Hydrosocial imaginaries of the riverine communities in the Warna river basin in India', by Sarita Bhagat in *Territory, Politics and Governance (Tentative)*

Table 2: Summary of river webinars in 2024

Date	Title	Speakers	Insights
April 2024	Reflections on the transformation of two Colombian Rivers	Laura Giraldo-Martinez (River memories and enlivening infrastructures along Bogota River) Arturo Escobar (Re-storying river in Cauca basin)	Laura spoke about the connection of people's memories with rivers and are site of co-existence, citing examples from her field experiences in the Bogota river. Escobar presented the campaign in the Cauca river that challenges the dominant narratives around rivers and fosters transformative alternatives.
June 2024	Peasant worlds, territorial disputes, and alternative ways of life	Juan Sebastian Reyes-Bejarano (<i>Peasant dispute in Sumapaz region of Colombia</i>) Tatiana Roa (Peasant paths of two Colombian experiences)	Both speakers highlighted their different Colombian experiences, in which development projects threaten peasants' way of life and what strategies and proposals the campaigning groups have come up with to counteract and defend their ways of life.
October 2024	Creating counter-narratives with local riverine communities in Thailand, Laos, and India: Disentangling Multiple Realities	Sarita Bhagat (Counter-mapping narratives in Warna river basin) Diana Suhardiman (State-citizen relationship in the context of hydropower development in Thailand)	Sarita spoke about the pictorial mapping tool that allows participants to collectively imagine, reflect and share their experiences, knowledge and connections with the river. Diana narrated the collective experiences of local communities that reflect broader political histories and realities
November 2024	Thinking with rivers: alternative hydrosocial relations for just transitions	Catalina Rey (Redesigning rivers: power and representation in Yanuncay river, Ecuador) Denisse Roca-Servat (structural causes related to destruction of rivers)	Catalina reflected on the counter mapping exercises done along the Yanuncay river that helped communities engage in regional and political debates in order to protect the river and life around it. Denisse spoke about the anthropocentric and patriarchal approaches to engage with water. She proposed three justice frameworks to build alternative hydrosocial relations and just transitions - decoloniality, territorial feminism & multispecies justice.
December 2024	Mainstreams and 'alter' streams: water stories from fishing communities in Zambia and First Nations communities in Australia	Agness Musutu (Coping with changing floodplain fishery in the Barotse floodplains in Zambia) Aleaxandra Dixon (Groundwater stories on Murrawari nation, Australia)	Agness spoke about the critical relationship between the Zambian Barotse Floodplain ecosystem and the Lozi people in relation to the impacts of climate change on fisheries, livelihood and cultural practice and thereby a need to incorporate indigenous knowledge with scientific approaches. Whereas Alexandra reflects on the decolonising policy integrating first nation's knowledge diverse cultural and relational practices embedded in narratives that show interconnection between surface water, groundwater and their belief systems.

NETWORKING

Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India

The Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India (Forum to be brief) is a network of individuals and organisations who are interested in engaging with water conflicts in India. The Forum has been in existence since 2003 and took up extensive documentation of different types of water related conflicts, organised dialogues and also capacity building programmes for young researchers, activists, law students and media persons. SOPPECOM has been anchoring this network right from its inception. Since 2016-17, Forum does not have any ground presence as it could not generate financial resources for its work. The Steering Committee meets once in a while to discuss important developments in the water sector and also organises webinars on current water related topics. Forum organised a webinar on 1 February 2025 on the issue of China building a large dam on the Brahmaputra in Tibet titled, “At the Water’s Edge: How Weak Institutionalism Will Weaken Sustainable Futures of the Brahmaputra”. Dr. Nimmi Kurian made the lead presentation. Dr. Medha Bisht and Dr. Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman offered comments as discussants. The webinar was quite well attended.

Water Conflicts Forum was one of the co-organisers of “Dialogue on Water as Commons” held in IISER, Pune on 5-6 March 2025. This dialogue was part of an ongoing series of dialogues initiated by the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), National Law School of India University, Bangalore (NLSIU), and the Social Accountability Forum for Action and Research (SAFAR) to explore social accountability of the commons. The other organisers/co-organisers of this water dialogue were Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), National Centre for Advocacy Studies (NCAS), and SAFAR. It brought in activists and academics from all over India. One of the outcomes of this dialogue is a small network consisting of Shramik Mukti Dal (Bharat Patankar), Mapping Malanadu (Nirmala Gouda), Manthan Adhyayan Kendra (Shripad Dharmadhikari) and Water Conflicts Forum/SOPPECOM (K. J. Joy) on the issue of the large number of pumped storage hydropower projects coming up in the entire Western Ghats. Ever since then there has been a continuous engagement on this issue.

Website: <https://waterconflictforum.org/>

Vikalp Sangam

SOPPECOM has been an active member of Vikalp Sangam (VS) – a network of organisations engaged with alternatives in different sectors – right from its inception in 2014. SOPPECOM is also a member of the Facilitation Team (VSFT) that sees to the implementation of decisions taken in the General Assembly – which meets twice a year (one on-line and one in-person). VSFT is also an attempt to decentralise the functioning of VS. VS brought out a people’s manifesto prior to the parliamentary elections in 2024. It is available at: <https://vikalpsangam.org/article/vikalp-sangam-general-assembly-to-release-peoples-manifesto-2024/>. The framework of

the Vikalp Sangam process – “The search for radical alternatives: key aspects and principles” – was revised and the 7th version is now available at: <https://vikalpsangam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Alternatives-Framework-7th-Avatar-digital-v1.4.pdf>. Coinciding with the 10th year of its formation, VS organised a National Vikalp Sangam at Kutch. A report on the Sangam is available at: <https://vikalpsangam.org/article/press-release-national-vikalp-sangam-concludes-with-resolution-to-work-towards-ecological-social-and-economic-justice-for-india-and-for-kachchh/>. During the National Sangam, it was decided to hold a Deccan Vikalp Sangam and along with Deccan Development Society, SOPPECOM is one of its organisers. The plan is to organise the Deccan Vikalp Sangam at Deccan Development Society, Zahirabad from 7-9 August, 2025.

Website: <https://vikalpsangam.org/>

India Rivers Forum

SOPPECOM was drafted into the Core Group of India Rivers Forum (IRF) in 2020 after the India Rivers Week (IRW) that year on sand mining. SOPPECOM had played a key role in organising the IRW and also anchored the west zone report on sand mining. It used to organise bi-annual IRW and later with the COVID, since IRWs were organised online, it became an annual event. Apart from IRW, IRF gives two awards: 1) Bhagirath Prayaas Samman (BPS) for substantive work on rivers, and 2) Shri Anupam Mishra Memorial Medal (AMM) for media persons who cover rivers consistently. Presently IRF is trying to reorganise itself because Manoj Misra, who was the main mover and spirit behind IRF, passed away in 2023.

Website: <https://indiariversforum.org/>

MAKAAM (Mahila Aadhaar Kisan Manch)

SOPPECOM, as the Secretariat to MAKAAM Maharashtra, supports the following activities of MAKAAM

Women farmers' Manifesto

For the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly elections in 2024, MAKAAM drafted a manifesto reflecting the voices of women farmers. This 10-point manifesto outlines their key demands and aspirations. Across districts, women farmers shared the manifesto with political leaders and also read it collectively in their villages, making their concerns visible and asserting their right to be heard in the political process.

National Women Farmer's day: 15 Oct 2024

In Maharashtra, women farmers celebrated *Rashtriya Mahila Kisan Divas* across multiple districts at the village level. On this day, women collectively read out the 10-point manifesto, emphasising their struggles, demands, and vision for change. A key highlight of the celebrations was the submission at the Gram Panchayat level, where women demanded that their names be officially registered as farmers.

Union of women farmers and cane cutters registered

The MAKAAAM-associated Farmers, Cane Cutters, and Other Unorganized Women Workers Forum was formally registered under the Trade Union Act, 1926, in March 2025. This is now a formally registered union that will engage with the appropriate authorities to negotiate for the rights of women farmers, cane cutters, and other women workers associated with agriculture.

MAKAAAM – VNR Consultation on Women Farmers

On 1 March 2025, MAKAAAM, in collaboration with UN Women, organized an online CSO consultation to inform India's Voluntary National Review (VNR) on Sustainable Development Goals. The consultation reviewed six sub-themes and five SDGs, focusing on women farmers' perspectives on progress, challenges, and recommendations. MAKAAAM Maharashtra members participated and contributed to raising key issues of women farmers and their demands.

MAKAAAM Sharing Session Sept 2024: Women Farmers' Journey to Agroecology

MAKAAAM and organisations from six states have conducted three rounds of interviews with women practicing agroecology based farming in eight research sites. The women farmers were from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh (Bundelkhand), Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. The study employed an extensive questionnaire to create detailed profiles of 40 women farmers and documented their experiences with agroecological farming. In this sharing session of MAKAAAM, the anchors of this study – Ms. Sejal Dand, Ms. S. Ashalatha and Ms. Seema Kulkarni discussed the findings from this survey, weaving in testimonials of the participant women farmers. They discussed the methodology, profile of women farmers, agroecological practices, challenges and enabling factors that encouraged women farmers to take up natural farming. The session concluded with some recommendations for the government.