



World Environment Day

5th June 2026

Rooted in Rainfed India

Perspectives and Reflections
from WASSAN



5th June, World Environment Day reminds us that the future of our planet depends on how we care for our soil, water, biodiversity, and food systems. Across India's rainfed regions, Watershed Support Services and Activities Network (WASSAN) works with communities to strengthen sustainable livelihoods through ecological agriculture, traditional seed conservation, integrated farming systems, and local food diversity. By learning from communities and promoting practices grounded in sustainability and resilience, WASSAN continues to contribute towards restoring ecosystems, and nurturing a more balanced relationship between people and nature.

This brochure brings together reflections from WASSAN team members, particularly young professionals from diverse backgrounds, academic disciplines, and areas of expertise. Released on the eve of World Environment Day, it captures their journeys, experiences, learnings, and perspectives shaped by their work across diverse landscapes and alongside resilient rural communities.



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Diksha Alok



Abhishek Pradhan



Monuhar Pegu



C. Narasimha Reddy



Ankita Mohanty



**Kalyanapu
Uday Kumar**



Malyaj Shrivastava



**Nannapaneni
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Pritesh Sundar Roy



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**Jayanta Kumar
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Aniket Likhari



Anil Uppalapati



**Sunil Ranjan
Thanapati**

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I am fortunate to have learned about sustainability, agriculture, and ecology from the tribal communities of Jharkhand, guardians of biodiversity who live in harmony with nature. Working with the Santhal, Ho, and Munda communities in West Singhbhum taught me that sustainability is woven into everyday life. I remember meeting Sita Devi from Tetuldih village, whose knowledge of indigenous seeds, cultivation, and storage deeply impressed me. Farmers like her continue to shape my understanding of biodiversity and resilience. Whether farming, collecting forest produce, sharing resources, or celebrating festivals, these communities remain closely connected to nature. On World Environment Day, I feel humbled by lifestyles that embody ecological balance, collective living, and care for all life on Earth.



Diksha Alok

Senior Programme Officer
Ranchi, Jharkhand



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My journey with WASSAN in Odisha has been about rediscovering the value and resilience of traditional seeds. In villages facing climate uncertainty, reviving traditional millets, pulses, and native crops has restored nutrition, biodiversity, and most importantly, hope. Through community seed systems and integrated farming, I have seen soils regain life and farmers regain confidence. On this World Environment Day, I am reminded that every conserved seed and revived food tradition is a step towards ecological balance and a more sustainable future for coming generations.



Abhishek Pradhan

Agriculture Expert
Bhubaneswar, Odisha





As a member of the Mising community from Assam, my journey with WASSAN across Northeast India has deepened my belief that Indigenous knowledge is inseparable from environmental stewardship. Working with farming communities, youth, and local institutions, I have seen how traditional seeds, biodiversity-based farming, and agroecological practices restore landscapes, and strengthen community bonds. On this World Environment Day, I feel hopeful knowing that many of these age-old practices are still alive, carried forward by communities who continue to live in harmony with nature.



Monuhar Pegu

Regional Coordinator
Northeast Region



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For me, Poshana Vanitha and food systems at WASSAN in Andhra Pradesh have been a deeply personal learning journey. Through field visits and conversations with farmers and women groups, I realised that food is closely linked to nutrition, health, livelihoods, and the environment. I have seen communities return to local vegetables, millets, and traditional foods amidst changing climate and rising water scarcity. These experiences taught me that protecting the environment also means protecting local food systems and traditional wisdom that sustain farming and community life.



C. Narasimha Reddy

Project Coordinator
Sri Sathya Sai, Andhra Pradesh



“WASSAN led me to the people who inspire me the most. When I joined, I had the opportunity to work with some of the country’s leading feminist leaders, who showed me what gender integration and mainstreaming look like in practice. But it was meeting extraordinary women across Odisha like Anjana Naik, Sukuri Odari, Sakuntala Mohanta, and Sanjita Sethi, that helped me truly understand why these leaders have dedicated their lives to amplifying women’s voices. Despite many challenges, these women continue to dream, learn, and lead. They break stereotypes, leave their villages to build their capacities, work long hours, and strive for a better future. Their groups bear aspirational names like Jyoti, Surjyamukhi, and Maa Laxmi, reflecting their hopes and determination. During a visit to Keonjhar, Laxmi Majhi, a single woman entrepreneur, told me, “I am illiterate, but I possess a lot of knowledge.” Her words have stayed with me. These women, their stories, efforts, and success are at the core of what WASSAN truly stands for.

Ankita Mohanty

Programme Officer
Bhubaneswar, Odisha





Over the past decade, working with tribal and smallholder communities across India has shown me how deeply livestock is connected to dignity and resilience. From desi backyard poultry to small ruminant rearing and community-led fodder systems, I have seen how sustainable livestock practices strengthen incomes, nutrition, and women's leadership. On this World Environment Day, I believe that protecting native breeds, local knowledge, and agroecological practices is essential for building resilient rural communities.



Kalyanapu Uday Kumar

Programme Officer
Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh





Working on draught animal power adaptation at WASSAN has transformed my understanding of farming and rural livelihoods. Across rainfed and tribal regions, I saw how bullocks remain central to household economies and culture. From Achampet and Kadiri to the hills of Himachal and the tribal landscapes of Nuapada and Panna, communities continue to adapt through locally suited implements and practices despite climate uncertainties, labour shortages, and rising cultivation costs. These experiences showed me that sustainable farming solutions do not always come from advanced machinery. Often, they emerge from strengthening traditional wisdom with simple innovations that reduce drudgery, improve efficiency, and keep farming accessible for smallholders.



Malyaj Shrivastava

Programme Officer
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh



Over time, I realised that trust cannot be built through trainings alone. Farmers observe actions more than words. They want to know whether we stand with them during crop failures, pest attacks and uncertain seasons, not only during success stories. Some of my strongest learning came from moments of failure. I have seen farmers lose crops to erratic rainfall and still return the next season willing to experiment again. That resilience deeply humbled me. Working with farmers in Rayalaseema changed my understanding of sustainability. Farmers are not searching for perfect models; they are searching for ways to survive with dignity. Now I understand that reduced risk, healthy food, soil health, lower dependency on chemicals and community confidence are equally important.



Nannapaneni Maneesh

Programme Officer
Annamayya, Andhra Pradesh



Across Odisha's rainfed landscapes, WASSAN's initiatives have helped farmers, women's SHGs, and producer collectives strengthen their livelihoods. Yet, what stays with me are the people behind the change. I have seen farmers replace eucalyptus plantations with ragi, reclaiming both soil and dignity, and women gain confidence and a stronger voice in decision-making. Stories like those of Basanti Murmu, who built a livelihood through millet enterprises, and Sukuri Odari, who improved her ragi yields and income, continue to inspire me. Their journeys show that lasting change comes from strengthening community knowledge and passing it to future generations.



Trinath Taraputia

Associate State Coordinator
Bhubaneswar, Odisha



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Natural Farming, for me, is not just about replacing chemicals, it is about rebuilding trust in local knowledge, collective learning and farmers’ own capabilities. I have met seed saviours conserving traditional varieties, women confidently managing Bio-Resource Centres, and practicing farmers inspiring others across the country. What moved me most was seeing young people begin to view agriculture with renewed purpose and dignity. My journey with Natural Farming taught me that real transformation cannot come from policies alone. It becomes meaningful only when communities feel confident to face challenges through their own knowledge, resilience and collective strength.



Sandeep CS

Senior Program Officer
Hyderabad, Telangana





As someone from a molecular biology background, my world was once confined to laboratories, microscopes and research papers. Working with WASSAN and the Shree Anna Abhiyan changed that perspective completely. The laboratory gradually gave way to long journeys through forests, mountain roads and remote millet-growing villages across Odisha. I was deeply fascinated by the diversity of traditional millets preserved by farmers through memory, care and lived experience. Sitting with elderly farmers and listening to stories of seeds, droughts, crop failures and survival often felt less like scientific research and more like inheriting generations of wisdom that no laboratory could ever teach.



Pritesh Sundar Roy

Program Officer
Bhubaneswar, Odisha



The years I have worked in the tribal regions of Andhra Pradesh have taught me that farming is deeply connected with nature, food, water, and livelihoods. Through WASSAN's work on natural farming, integrated production systems, local enterprises, and community institutions, we are witnessing a gradual yet visible reduction in farmers' dependence on chemical inputs and a growing confidence in natural farming practices. I have seen farmers protect their seeds, water, and biodiversity, helping them withstand difficult climate conditions. The resilience of tribal communities and small farmers, shaped by ecological wisdom and collective responsibility, inspires me the most. Their collective spirit strengthens my belief that sustainable, community-led farming can create a better future.

J V Jaya Prakash

Program Manager
Vishakapatnam, Andhra Pradesh





For the last few years, I have been working closely with pastoral communities. It has deeply changed the way I understand community, culture, landscapes, livelihoods, and resilience. It all started as a technical engagement, but gradually the journey enriched my learning from people whose lives are inseparable from their animals, forests, and grazing commons. Through my work at WASSAN, I witnessed how pastoral systems sustain relationships across cultures, biodiversity, food systems, and local economies despite remaining largely invisible in mainstream policy spaces. Walking alongside grazing routes, listening to community memories, and supporting collective action around grazing resources and animal health became a new education altogether, teaching me to look deeper into the world.



Kavya Chinda

Program Officer
Hyderabad, Telangana





The opportunity to engage with farmers, tribal and indigenous communities, researchers, scientists, and policymakers around seed systems has deeply shaped my understanding of agricultural biodiversity. Through my journey at WASSAN, I witnessed how communities carefully conserve seeds for culture, resilience, and continuity across generations. From village-level seed initiatives to larger multi-stakeholder platforms, these experiences helped me realise that sustainable agriculture begins with protecting local diversity and community wisdom. On World Environment Day, I feel hopeful seeing farmers continue to preserve traditional seeds and strengthen resilient food systems rooted in biodiversity and collective knowledge.



**Jayanta Kumar
Padhiary**

Program Officer
Hyderabad, Telangana

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As part of the JIVA Programme, I realised that agroecological transformation begins when people decide to transform their relationship with land. In Maharashtra, I met Suman Tai Borole, who told me, “The land was tired, and so were we. We were farming only to repay moneylenders. Today, because of the JIVA Programme, our soil breathes again. We have vegetables, grains, and pulses. We are no longer dependent on markets.” In that one sentence lies the history of rainfed farming, along with hope for a more sustainable future. In Madhya Pradesh, Wasudeo Kasdekar said, “Poultry is the daily support for our home. Farming gives us income once a year, but poultry helps us every day.” It reminded me that while policy discussions often focus on annual incomes, farmers live through the realities of daily sustenance. Another farmer, Namu Dhurve, said, “Farming should not be limited to crops alone. It must include trees, cows, bullocks, poultry, and others. Each contributes to agriculture in its own way.” Through the JIVA Programme, WASSAN and its partners are advancing agroecological farming grounded in local knowledge and resilience.



Aniket Likhari

Regional Coordinator
Nagpur, Maharashtra



Through my engagement with communities and farmers, I have witnessed the gradual rebuilding of farming and food systems shaped by local needs and ecological wisdom. Across Telangana, women's self-help groups are reviving traditional foods and nutrition practices, while farmers are returning to polycropping and organic farming. Young people are also beginning to reconnect with agriculture through new opportunities. Conversations with farmers have deeply influenced my understanding of sustainability. One farmer said, "Rainfed farming teaches patience because we do not control nature; we learn to live with it." These voices remind me that resilience grows from local knowledge, adaptation, and collective action. Despite ongoing challenges, the wisdom and determination of communities continue to inspire hope for a more sustainable future.



Anil Uppalapati

Program officer
Hyderabad, Telangana





My experience in the tribal and rainfed regions of Odisha has taught me that meaningful change is built on trust, sustained engagement, and respect for community knowledge. I have learned that forests, water, soils, biodiversity, and farming systems are deeply interconnected and must be addressed holistically. I remain concerned about climate variability, market pressures, declining youth interest in agriculture, and the erosion of traditional knowledge, which make rainfed regions increasingly vulnerable. At the same time, WASSAN's work in agroecology, eco-friendly farming, landscape-based planning, and community participation has demonstrated that resilient and sustainable pathways are possible.



Sunil Ranjan Thanapati

Program Manager
Koraput, Odisha





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