



Bringing Life Back to Fallow Land – As Told by One of the Women Members

I still remember the time when the stretch of land near our village lay barren and dry. It was just fallow land—nothing grew there, and no one thought much of it. But things started changing in 2019, when we, a group of women from the village, got involved towards transforming a vast fallow land into a productive one. This initiative was supported by DRCSC. Although we were associated with DRCSC since 2012 and with support from BMZ Germany and NETZ Bangladesh and we were able to bring a positive change in our lives and livelihoods to some extent. This new initiative helped us to think not only for our families but also for our localities. It aimed to bring life back to neglected land like ours in the Birbhum district of West Bengal.



At this present scenario of the world when all of us are worried about the adverse effect of climate change. Deforestation is also acting as a catalyst in this aspect. The natural forests are not only being destroyed but the animals which used to reside there as per normal ecosystem, are being forced to come out from the area and after a certain time without having enough food, these are dying. It is evident that deforestation is contributing towards global warming.

The initiative wasn't just about planting trees—it was about understanding our relationship with the land and how we could heal it while also supporting our families. Alongside DRCSC, we identified a 5 bigha (1.65 acre) piece of fallow land that no one had touched for years. Together, we decided to take the first step.

That year, we began planting multi-purpose indigenous trees—trees that could give us fodder, fuel, and also improve the soil. It wasn't easy work, but we believed in what we were doing. Slowly, as the trees began to grow, we expanded the plantation to 18 bigha the next year, and then another 22 bigha after that. Altogether, we've now covered 45 bigha (about 14.85 acres) of land—land that was once useless but now breathes with life.





In total, we planted 11,445 trees across 26 different indigenous species. To our amazement, around 11,170 of them survived. The ones we planted in the first year have grown to an average height of 15 feet. The newer ones are catching up too—growing to 6 feet and 3.5 feet, depending on when they were planted.

But the trees are just one part of the story.

We also planted Roselle and pigeon pea as border crops. Every year, we harvest around 45 kg of Roselle and 60 kg of pigeon pea. We also collect about 3 quintals of fodder and 60 kg of fuelwood. This might not seem like much to others, but for us, it's a blessing. It feeds our livestock and saves us money on fuel.



To be more precise, DRCSC has promoted this fallow land plantation activities in around 50 Acres of land with almost 75000 saplings in 2 Blocks of Birbhum district. Not only that, around 2500 person days have also been created during this activity. Selection of varieties has been done with a participatory approach as these local people have the best knowledge about the local indigenous plants which are most suitable for the area.

What's even more beautiful is how the land has started to change. There's more biomass, the air feels fresher, and there's a sense of pride in our hearts. Where once there was nothing, now there's green everywhere. And it's something *we* did—with our hands and our hopes. One of our group members was sharing, "We do not have to commute far away to feed our animals or collect fuelwoods, instead we spend that time for other income generating activities or with children".



We often talk among ourselves, saying, "Yes, this region is dry. Yes, we struggle with water and heat. But now, with these trees, we can dream of a future—not just for us, but for our children too."

This might be a small contribution to nature in the grand scheme of things, but to us, it means everything.

