

EMPOWERING RURAL LIVELIHOODS: A CASE STUDY OF POWERGRID'S CSR INITIATIVE IN KALAHANDI, ODISHA

POWERGRID, as a responsible corporate citizen, has initiated several CSR interventions targeting healthcare, education, environment, skill development, and rural development. Recognizing the challenges faced by rural communities, particularly in Kalahandi, Odisha, where erratic rainfall patterns and agricultural instability prevail, POWERGRID launched the "Improving Rural Livelihoods and Protecting Environment through Farmer-Centric Integrated Watershed Management" project. Collaborating with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), this initiative aims to enhance productivity, improve livelihoods sustainably, and address food security issues.

Challenges: Kalahandi, known as one of the most aspirational districts in Odisha listed by NITI Ayog, confronts the adverse impacts of unpredictable rainfall patterns on agriculture, the primary source of income for about 73% of its population. This unpredictability exacerbates the already precarious livelihood situation, necessitating innovative solutions for sustainable development.

Solution: POWERGRID's initiative focuses on science-led crop

diversification and integrated water management practices to mitigate the challenges faced by farmers. Through the establishment of "Model Sites of Learning" in collaboration with ICRISAT, the project aims to demonstrate and popularize climate-smart crop management practices. Moreover, capacity building programs empower farmers to adopt these practices effectively.

Implementation Strategy: The project adopts an integrated, holistic approach to livelihood enhancement, prioritizing community participation, gender inclusivity, and market-oriented development. By incorporating demand-driven technologies and fostering public-private partnerships, the initiative ensures the sustainability and scalability of interventions. Furthermore, the utilization of low-cost, science-driven rainwater harvesting structures promotes equity and enhances water availability for agricultural purposes.

Economic & Social Impact: The project's impact is evident in various aspects, including increased agricultural productivity, improved green cover, enhanced groundwater availability, and heightened awareness among farmers. By bridging the yield

gap through improved management practices, the initiative contributes significantly to poverty alleviation and environmental conservation. The comprehensive assessment underscores the economic viability of watershed development, with a notable benefit-cost ratio.

Future Expansion: Building on the success achieved in Kurnool and Kudgi, POWERGRID plans to expand the project to additional districts in Odisha. The positive outcomes and financial investments in ongoing projects indicate the commitment to further scale up interventions, thereby extending the benefits to more rural communities. We are also underway to replicate two more sites.

POWERGRID's CSR initiative in Kalahandi, Odisha, exemplifies a collaborative effort towards sustainable rural development. By addressing the multifaceted challenges of agricultural instability and livelihood insecurity, the project underscores the transformative potential of integrated watershed management. Through continued expansion and replication, it holds promise for uplifting marginalized communities and fostering resilience in the face of environmental uncertainties.

