

# Growing trees, strengthening livelihoods, protecting environment

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Grow-Trees.com, a social enterprise is providing a cost-effective service to individuals and companies globally to enable planting of trees. Through its web enabled services, the organization is giving every person an opportunity to do his/her bit in protecting the environment.

Rural communities are involved in various activities during the plantation process



Photo: Grow-Trees.com

## Box 1: Story of Mrs. Devi

The project has brought a significant change in life of 35 years old Mrs Devi, belonging to the Irula tribal community of Villupuram, who has three sons to look after in her family. Earlier, working as a day labourer with about 13 hours of rigorous work, she could neither spare any time to look after her family nor contribute to her children's health, education or wellbeing.

After being engaged and employed as a nursery worker for the plantation project, Mrs. Devi feels dignified to work in an organizational atmosphere, and is now also able to contribute to her children's education, health and is living a fulfilled life with her family. Her work is also looked-up by many others in her community.

plantation initiatives across India in 2010. The goal is to reconnect these community members to the basics of life.

In the last 10 years, the organisation has expanded to 20 states across India, namely, Odisha, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, Telangana, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Puducherry, and Punjab. The recent afforestation project in Cherangani Hills, Kenya has taken it on to the global level.

## The process

Grow-Trees, with the help of its Project coordinators, planting partners and environmental researchers, selects community lands in need of reforestation and/or afforestation and initiates plantation activities. The trees are planted only on public lands to ensure maximum benefit being provided to the inhabitants of the region.

Awareness drives are organized to involve the rural communities in the plantation process. Meetings are held at the village level educating the Panchayat and the community members about the benefits of the trees,

important measures to keep in mind for their upkeep and the plantation process. During these meetings, it is made sure that the value from the trees is conveyed to the community members. Community members are sensitized about the value of trees which keeps them away from overexploiting the land or using it for grazing purposes.

The tree species planted are chosen after long research and consultation with experts and the community members, based on the latter's needs. Often, plants species that hold ethnic, ayurvedic as well as economic value to the local rural communities are planted to preserve the local biodiversity. Based on the features of the soil, rain patterns in the region and economic, medicinal and social needs of the rural communities and the wildlife, the suitable tree species are sourced and bred in local nurseries. For eg., mangroves are planted in the periphery of Sundarbans National Park, West Bengal as a measure towards disaster management from the impending cyclones that frequently hit the Bay of Bengal. In recent studies, it has also been highlighted that due to the shield of trees in and around the Sundarbans National Park, massive damages from natural calamities have been prevented in Kolkata.

In order to achieve higher survival rate, saplings are first raised in the nurseries and then transported to the plantation sites upon maturity. The rural communities are involved in various activities during the plantation process, i.e., raising saplings in the nursery, transporting of saplings to the plantation site, site clearance and pit-digging, plantation of saplings and watering the field etc. This has generated employment to the tribal-rural communities, especially for women on a daily-wage basis.

Since the trees belong to the community, they are the sole recipients of all the socio-economic benefits from

## Box 2: Greet with Trees®

Grow-Trees.com offers a unique Greet with Trees® feature, wherein individuals can plant a tree online and greet their loved ones with an eTreeCertificate®. Via its Plant Monthly, Greet Anytime!® Subscription, Grow-Trees.com is attempting to imbibe the habit of tree plantation in every household of India. These eTreeCertificates® can be used to gift family and friends on birthdays, festivals, anniversaries and other special occasions. Each tree that you plant with them, provides for the sustenance of the rural communities. This is their attempt of re-greening the country and providing equal opportunities to every citizen of India.

Over 4.5 million trees have been planted across 20 states of India, generating approximately 370,000 workdays of employment for the rural communities.