

TRIBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP, IN FORESTED HINTERLAND OF JHARKHAND. A SOLUTION FOR LWE REGION

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ABSTRACT

The intent of this paper is to review the attempts made, the extent/mechanism of different models used for livelihood enhancement (NTFPs based) for the forest dependent tribal communities. This also identifies/highlights key strategies to be adopted, which makes the model “sustainable”. The model, adopted by JSFDC is highlighted for how it capitalized the natural strength of tribal, society; i.e. culture of community working, (which is part of “social capital”); “sincerity of purpose”, “availability of raw material in local area”; “marketing opportunity available in local area” etc. This model of entrepreneurship has the elements like “Natural solution” and “Circular economy”, which are being promoted under the “Modern Development Paradigm” also.

KEYWORDS

Tribal entrepreneurship, NTFP, Local market, Local raw material, Natural Solution, Circular economy.

ACRONYM

Distt.-District; JSFDC(Jharkhand state Forest Development Corporation- a state owned unit to harvest/process/market the NTFPS/Timber; KPSS (Kendu Patta Sangraha Samiti- Diospyros leaves Collectors Organization) briefly called “Samiti”) ; LWE (Left Wing Extremism) ; MOTA (Ministry of Tribal Affairs);MSP(Minimum Support Price) NTFP (NonTimber Forest Products)

Fighting the lack of accessibility and constant neglect, yet the remote tribal hamlets of Jharkhand are converting these handicaps into opportunities. Many models of “entrepreneurship” are emerging which are tribal-centric, but only few are sustainable and also aim for inclusive development.

Box- 1

Tribal, NTFP.....Livelihood potential

Tribal livelihood systems vary considerably between different regions as also among the various ethnic groups, depending on ecological, historical and cultural factors. The NTFP's have proven to serve tribals as a vital livelihood safety net in times of hardship. Collection of NTFPs by them primarily for meeting their subsistence needs varies from state to state ranging from 5.4 to 55% in the country. As per Government of India report, at least 35 million man-days of employment were generated in the NTFPs trading which includes collection and processing of economically valuable NTFPs species. Studies have also revealed that NTFPs provide substantial inputs to the livelihoods of forest dependent population, many of whom have limited nonagricultural income opportunities. It is estimated that 275 million poor rural people in India i.e., 27% of the total population, depend on NTFPs for at least part of their subsistence and cash livelihoods. This dependency is particularly intense for half of India's 89 million tribal people, the most disadvantaged section of society. About 70% of the NTFP collection in India takes place in the tribal belt of the country, whereas, 55% of employment in forestry sector is attributed to NTFP sector. While NTFP collection is a major source of income and employment for forest dwellers, it holds multi-fold impact on economy through downstream processing and trading activities.

Box- 2

NTFP.....and socio-economics of tribals

It is estimated that 275 million poor rural people in India, depend on NTFPs for at least part of their subsistence and cash livelihoods. Furthermore, the NTFP extraction has multiplier effects in the economy by generating employment and income in downstream processing and trading activities. However, depletion of NTFPs resources on account of indiscriminate exploitation, deforestation and forest degradation-besides lack of "appropriate model"- which does not appreciate basic strength of "tribal society" is a major issue of concern as it has major bearing on their NTFP based livelihood.

(4) Pandey et al 2016)

There are diverse ethnic groups are called "scheduled Tribes", in the constitution of India and have always shared a unique relationship with nature and have an age long tradition and practices for sustenance, which conform to the principle of Modern concept of "Sustainable Development". The belief system and religious practices of worshiping nature and their understanding of natural processes, their strong faith in "collective rights/responsibilities to community resources", are unique. Unfortunately, these unique facets of "Tribal life styles" have either not been appreciated/understood properly or conveniently ignored by the "Mainstream Society", so far. However, of late modern science and society has started appreciating these distinctive facets of tribal life, which are essential for "Sustainable development". With a population of over 1 crore, tribals as a group form the largest native community in Jharkhand province of India. Largely confined to forests and fringe villages of interior Jharkhand, these weakest of weak population have been dependent on the jungle and its produce for their

sustenance, since time immemorial. The nuanced “cultural” background of each ethnic group put them in a strong and unique socio-economic position; when they are expected to be equal partners in “Development Path”. The standard of life among tribal groups may be called lower or poor. For example low literacy, high dropout rates from schools, malnutrition and poverty plaguing India's tribal population etc. can be used to term them “poor”, when compared to mainstream norms. These low values of “parameters” are often flagged by the few “development Planners” and are quoted against the efforts towards tribal development, when they play to galleries. These “unheard or less appreciated groups” are often blamed for making low and slow progress; also accused for isolating themselves from “Modern Developmental approach/models”. But “the modern world” often fails to appreciate their precious “Social Capital” and “traditional knowledge and skills” (conserved and improvised, over the centuries) which still work for them for their survival/sustenance; even when no “Govt. agencies” or “schemes” are there in “dark pockets” of the “developed world”. This is the real test for “age-old wisdom/skills”- which has made them survive even in extreme cases of famine/floods etc. Whereas the “modern development planners” are still struggling with their “half-baked models”- which are still in very nascent stages. The national govt. of India ,through a mission is changing lives of 1.74 crore women through climate-resilient agriculture, which also includes NTFP based enterprises – having some elements experimented in this paper- (13) Sinha 2022.

Box- 3

Social capital/ Natural Capital adds resilience

Native Kharwars/Uraontribals of Jharkhand could survive in the extreme famine of late 1960's in Palamau district, it is because they had exceptionally high “Social Capital” and “Natural Capital” within them and around them. All the mainstream population of Palamau district; either had to migrate or be totally dependent on “Relief/doles” of Govt; suffering extreme misery and loss of self-respect. Whereas the forest dependent tribes could take the nature's worst vagary with lot of self-respect, as they believed in “natural solutions” and had robust “circular economy”.

1. THE “ENTREPRENEURSHIP” REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

Having seen the weakness/failure of “Dole/Grant based models” of modern “Development Planners” to improve the livelihood system of tribal; there is a new craze to develop “Entrepreneurship models”. The growing emphasis in rural entrepreneurship is spreading across the tribal/rural landscape of India too. By connecting agricultural and forest produce with markets, using technology, added by innovative institutional mechanisms- often using the “self-help groups” as institutions. Thus empowering tribal men/women has led to creation of numerous self-sustainable enterprises. This way, a large number of tribal entrepreneurs are changing the face of tribal India.

It is high time to celebrate that the idea of “Gram Swaraj” as- originally proposed by Gandhi ji is getting new opportunities. But these new generation of tribal entrepreneurs are struggling with a variety of issues/problems/gaps at the ground. At the same time it poses a serious challenge to “planners” to empathically feel the “gap” and to devise possible corrective methods and approaches, so that these “nascent” tribal entrepreneurs do not get lost.

Yet, It is high time that we revisit and respect tribal wisdom and bring “innovative models” of rural entrepreneurship for tribal, which facilitates them to come into mainstream at their own terms/strengths. Their invaluable “traditional knowledge” and “sense of cooperation” can always be basic pillars to “newer models” that will help them evolve with their innovative “Enterprise”. These will be “distinct features” to “improve tribal livelihood” and yet maintaining environmental security, is the need of the hour as has always been the belief of the author.

Symbolic celebrating the tribal ways of life is not a new thing. But graduating beyond the “lip service” and helping strengthen “new models” of entrepreneurship for tribal India is certainly a huge challenge. Being in a nascent stage, it needs to be encouraged/facilitated whole heartedly as very few examples of tribal entrepreneurs and enterprises are there, which are using indigenous ways to build such social enterprises in rural Jharkhand. A few models or their variants are covered in this article. These examples, by no way are exhaustive, but represent the trends and innovations at large which are happening on the ground to change the scenario.

Box- 4

Including, the excluded Gandhi revisited

This reminds us of the basic tenets of Gandhism, who always emphasized on “Gram Swaraj”, a model he visualized for micro rural/ urban enterprises. This wanted that locals would use small machinery/ equipment to convert local natural forest produce to feed into “local market”.

Gandhi’s prudence and vision to promote products like khadi clothing; leather foot wears; locally produced edible items- like jiggery etc. were aimed at keeping the opportunity of livelihood at village level. In a sense the “villagers’ enterprises” to produce- the products that are needed locally existed for long ages in Indian rural landscape, but it got systematically decimated by the imported/dumped products (of industry origin) of East India Company. At long last; Gandhiji could understand the nefarious design of “economic colonization” of britishers to ruin the Indian rural/tribal hinterland and his solution in ideas of “Gram Swaraj”. Alas; we could not fully appreciate his point so far and now after 150 years of Gandhiji birth anniversary, we have to talk of “Inclusive Development of the excluded ones” for developed India.

Box- 5

Women of Jharkhand: whose 'pattals' are trading beyond the shores of India

Group of tribal men and women, have formed "KPSS" in scores of tribal hamlets of district like Chatra, Hazaribagh, Latehar, Palamau and Garhwaetc and have entered into a semi formal/formal agreement to urban shops/agents and through them, they send supply of Mahulan/Sal leaf plates (called pattals in vernacular), every month to next level of urban market. The best quality of these leaf plates, are in high demand even not only urban markets of Jharkhand but some of it gets exported to other states/foreign countries. This is because, they are biodegradable and are best alternative to plastic and Styrofoam, hence are getting new attraction to "climate sensitive" Indian users too. Majority of Jharkhand's export to leaf/produce finds destination in states like Orissa, Maharashtra, A.P., Karnataka and Tamilnadu etc (all centers of religious importance).

The tribal women, who earlier bartered away the various minor forest products such as Mahulan (Bahuniavahili) leaves, sal (Shorearobusta) seed, mahua (Madhucaindica) flowers and tamarind etc locally, are today value adding them as a "entrepreneur group" and inspiring many other fellow men/women to follow suit.

2. BUILDING A TAMARIND ECONOMY IN TRIBAL DOMINATED GARHWA DISTRICT- AN EXAMPLE

Parro is the nondescript village in the remote corner of Jharkhand. In 2017, the Jharkhand State Forest Development Corporation (JSFDC) came up with the idea to develop a few different "social enterprises", which are based on principles of "Gram Swaraj" (village self-rule) enunciated in para above. The Oraon and Kharwar tribal men/women of this locality are very hard-working ethnic groups often living near the fringe of forested landscape; They are always open to new ideas which can change the lives of brethren living around. Their institutions are called K.P.S.S. (Kendu Patta Sangrahaak Samiti- Kendu leaves Collectors Organization) briefly called "Samiti", has been now able to start aggregating numerous NTFPs. The Imli (tamarind), being found in plenty is getting further processed to dried- seedless form, in different sizes of packaging. Tamarind which grows in abundance in the region and almost untouched by insecticide or fertilizer, hence can be called organic (basically because it is grown and collected in the wild) and simply collected by villagers, with minimum possibility of any addition of insecticide/ fertilizer and then processed to dried cake or pulp. This small value addition to the raw tamarind; not only adds to shelf life but increases its marketability; has helped them to fetch higher price and reduces their cost on transportation/store etc.

3. MACRO-SCENARIO OF NTFP VALUE CHAIN, VIS A VIS TRIBALS STRENGTH

Though the business in NTFPs has grown in volume over time, the small players have been getting marginalised or replaced by large ones because of their better access to national and international markets, capital, technology and information, economy of scale consideration etc. In the wake of unequal and unsustainable development, the big question that still looms large is whether the "big business" approach to develop NTFPs is right? (8)Tewari 1994; (9)Tewari and Campbell 1995.

However, concern for the due income and livelihood potential accruing to the poor has increased tremendously when NTFPs are processed and value is added. It is believed that income and employment generation potential through value added activities is many times compared to that of in sheer collection of NTFPs. This “additionality” of value addition if happens in distant places/rural areas (where raw NTFPs are collected)-it can augment livelihood opportunities of the locality multifold, which otherwise goes to urban centers. This dis-placement of income and livelihood can be a “game changer” by transforming underdeveloped rural/tribal areas. (8)Tewari, 1994.

Box- 6

Why can't the value addition take place locally..... ?

The activity of value addition though very important for augmenting local livelihood is often largely performed by large market intermediaries and large manufacturers at far off locations. Thus there is little value addition at the primary collector's level.

If value addition such as drying, chopping or cleaning takes place at collectors place/level it can substantially increase the value and quality of the produce, which is now days valued by the modern and concerned buyers. This also augments the livelihood opportunity at local level.

The capital-rich large businesses have a big inherent advantage to control natural resources compared to the capital poor tribal people. Yet, the benefits derived from NTFPs trade is not appropriately/equitably shared between collectors and businessmen. Often the collectors of NTFPs end up, receiving a small proportion of the consumer's price (7) Tewari 1998. Even the government intervention through Cooperatives has not been successful in ensuring higher return to “basic/primary collectors” or in leveraging attractive “Minimum Support Price” prices for NTFP collectors. In some examples, few Large Agriculture Multipurpose Societies (LAMPS) in India could offer upto some 7 to 15 percent of consumer's price to collectors (5) Sekar et al. 1996. Leaving these exceptions, otherwise the meager compensation to collectors by the “co-operatives”, shows the incompetence of “prevalent models”. Various “artificial” attempts to boost price levels for NTFP collectors, often has ended up attracting outsiders in the business at the cost of marginalizing and excluding the local people/collectors from enjoying the benefits of the local/global opportunity,12 (FAO 1995)

Box- 7

The concern for resource sustainability.....

The other types of changes that occur as a result of big business entering in NTFPs sector are related to the resource exploitation. The resource related challenges entail the over-exploitation of resource and thus has made concerns for the sustainability a reality. Some of the trends are not fully visible at this time but certainly would be realized a few years from now and by then most of the damage would be already done, leaving hardly any chance for nature to recuperate.

The concern for “Resource Sustainability” is vital in designing “models”; in general smaller enterprise- controlled by tribes tends to be cautious on this issue.

Box- 8

The world view about “Middlemen” in NTFP trade

Firstly, majority of NTFPs are bulky and they are transported in raw form to distant markets/processing points; that makes transportation costs very high, unfortunately it finally reduces net price to the tribal collectors. Secondly, most collectors are less informed about access to better production techniques, resulting in transforming the margins to middlemen (Tewari 2008). Often the NTFPs markets and marketing channels are also not well developed, as a result, the marketing margins are very large for the “Middlemen” who exploit the situation. All this finally translates into low price to NTFP collectors. But, at the same time, it also promotes exportation of jobs and income to distant places. To boost income and employment in local economy, we need to reverse the process by promoting value addition activities in the local village economy. (10)Tewari, 2008

A “model” which internalizes the strength of “middlemen” and yet provides maximum returns to the primary collector has been developed, its evolution is discussed at a later stage.

In changing times when our concern is to enhance livelihood opportunities at the local level on “Self sustained basis”; these “models”- cannot justify their achievement when it boils down to benefiting the “poor collectors” on a “Sustained basis”.

Another count, on which these so-called “successful models” will now fail, while considering the argument of dealing with the challenge of Climate Change, it is “the scale”. This is a very important issue in this context. The “Micro scale model”, promoted by JSFDC benefiting the poor collectors has been keeping the transportation cost to the minimum and thus making huge savings on the “Carbon emission” and also “minimizing the migration of locals”, thus again saving the carbon emitted. This has a huge advantage over “Conventional Big scale models”, which does not or cannot capitalise on local logistics and thus cannot compete with local “middlemen supported models”, used by JSFDC.

It may look awkward to support the case of “middle men” in the value chain of NTFP; but their distributed network of operation at the tertiary level justifies the argument of having better appreciation for them, at least on two to three counts mentioned here-

- (i) Efficiency
- (ii) Risk sharing
- (iii) Capability to minimise the causes of Climate change

Box- 9

The model, which cares for “Climate” also.....

There is no doubt about the potential of NTFP business; as there are wide range of operators, including those working as middlemen –who are aggregating/storing/doing value addition operations etc. (either doing these individual activity or all these activities in combination) at very small margin of profit. They are often supported by finance, by the next layer of middlemen. Since, they deal with variety of NTFPs and agricultural products (both making it quite complex exercise, as products are different/diverse and with often overlapping temporal sequences) and they also deal with other petty traded commodities as well. Thus they have to use varied/ locally available logistics arrangement (often available/developed at local level), which is utilized to its best efficiency by middlemen. This is not only for the good for their own but good for the economics of nation/society. This argument in favour is also very important from the view of climate change- as the “bigger” State run/NGO run model- cannot compete on “efficiency” or “Carbon neutrality with equity” count: This is made possible by the fact that the basic “aggregation”/“value addition” is done at the local level by “middlemen” in a very “cost effective” manner, capitalising on local logistics planning and ensuring “equity” and “inclusion” at the regional level (which mainly comprise of marginalised community).

This country bred “micro and grass root model” which involves “middlemen”, also appreciates and rewards the “traditional knowledge system” of local communities for their age old and time tested practices; i.e. storage and other primary value addition techniques, which are unique to particular NTFPs. The tribal community of different ethnicity have been continuing it as tradition and it gets some economic incentive support too in this “model”.

Hence in year 2017; instead of simply cursing the “middlemen”; when similar Government owned/ Government supported organisations; institutions, federations etc. were following the same “old school models”; JSFDC tried to have “a relook” at these approaches, to start a new chapter. Hence when these existing models were analysed for the underlying logic; majority of these “models” with few exceptions were found to have failed on “efficacy” and “efficiency” count when compared with “middleman” driven models. It was a big challenge for JSFDC to choose the right model to move ahead. Given the plethora of NTFPs and their specific management nuances, attached to each commodity- made them a very complex business to deal with. Even the person with the best graduate degree from a premium business school or Economics school or Engineering college or Forestry college- cannot do- full justice to every aspect of even a single “commodity” of NTFP. It is because the “value chain” of any commodity has to be understood in its holistic manner for all its facets to make it a “commercial and sustainable venture”. Failure to see this “holistic” picture in the past, has resulted in numerous but flawed models of Rural Development and Tribal Development for NTFPs.

The quest for a ‘right model’ by JSFDC, as it unfolds later, tried to take advantage of the knowledge base, technical skill, logistics base, storage base and risk taking ability of existing “middlemen” at the same time capitalising the strength of JSFDC as convention Govt. owned agency. The institution of local “KPSS”/“Samiti” was also utilized to the hilt; ably supported by JSFDC officials (who always guided/ facilitated the efforts of villagers united in forms of “KPSS”/“Samiti” to take best advantages of “legal regime available”). In this newly adopted model; the JSFDC did not invest any money upfront for any operation; except indirect support- in the shape of giving advice/ facilitating linkage to bigger markets by training the KPSS members/ supporting visits to market for sale etc. All these hand holding support, with a clear strategy to

help “primary collectors” to be their “master” paid dividend in the very first year. A lot of “Piggybacking” to “middle men” for certain activities like aggregation/ local storage and primary value addition in a highly regulated manner was also designed in the “model”. This has not only ensured “efficiency” but also the timely and effective procurement of NTFP. Further this could lead to better remuneration to even the most vulnerable “collectors”.

The collectors in this new “model” could be motivated and incentivized enough to collect better and better value quality of leaves. These better-quality leaf plates now have many takers not only in the “local” market, but it has even generated the demand from the far-off markets of towns like Latehar, Daltonganj, Ranchi etc. The local leaf plate makers/sellers are also now able to buy the raw plates from these groups. A set of 2 plates, sells for a rupee. The KPSS prefer selling the plates in a bulk pack of 180 pieces. Each bulk pack can sell for Rs 60-80, depending on the level of market they sell to. The plates when aggregated are also sent to far off areas like Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Kerala, Maharashtra etc. where they are in high demand and fetch premium price. Here came the role of “big” traders, who with all the wherewithal helped the KPSS to reach such market. The “Kendu Patta Sangraha Samiti”, being very small player- have been encouraged on regular basis and few members have been facilitated by the official of JSFDC to visit to Chennai or other large markets (with funding support of JSFDC) to assess the dynamics and elements of these “market”. This “initial” empowerment given to “Group members” of “KPSS” to visit the big markets and interact directly with the big buyers, transporters of others states has given them opportunity to think big and appreciate the market/economic dimensions of higher level and their capacity to take up suitable business link with the “final market” also.

The Table-1 below indicates the procurement details of raw leaves, as maintained in the records of various “Kendu Patta Sangraha Samiti” (KPSS).

Box- 10

The current policy regime is favourable in Jharkhand.....

The trade of “Mahulan” in Jharkhand is slightly advantageous to natives and traders. Compared to states like Odishaetc, because there is no government imposed royalty on sal/ mahulan leaves.

In Jharkhand Forest department officials are trying hard to ensure fairness in the business. A senior official of Jharkhand State Forest Development Corporation says, “The prices are fixed by the state government, The MSP as decided by MoTA has come also as a boon and the traders cannot cheat the collectors; by offering them something below MSP. “The extra facilitation by the JSFDC in the 2017, 2018 season by encouraging/ supporting the KPSS committees to upscale the “trading of Mahulan leaves” by locals has successfully minimised the role of middlemen. Thus taking the critical support of middlemen in “Value Chain” has created a new chapter in sustainable NTFP trade.

The Table-1 below indicates and highlights the effort of JSFDC; in the season of 2017, the efforts to empower/ support the KPSS for doing sustainable business of Mahulan Leaves and few other NTFPs.

Table – 1 - Some indicative figures related to Mahulan Leave based production/ trade in a two forest Ranges of Jharkhand

SL. No.	Name of Forest Division	Name of Range	Name of KPSS	Name of Villages collection	Procurement of Mahulan Leaves (Tons)	Amount paid to primary collectors (Rs)	Remarks
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1.	Daltonganj	Manika	Mandal	152	15 MT	225000.00	The money were given to collectors through their bank account – which is again a unique step
2.	Daltonganj	Manika	Meral	122	13 MT	19500.00	
3.	Daltonganj	Manika	Tataha-A	165	15 MT	225000.00	
4.	Daltonganj	Manika	Tataha-B	145	14 MT	210000.00	
5.	Daltonganj	Manika	Horilong	70	8 MT	120000.00	
Total :				654	65 MT	975000.00	
1.	Daltonganj	Latehar	Lai	232	11.550 MT	173250.00	The money were given to collectors through their bank a – which is again a unique step
2.	Daltonganj	Latehar	Chorha	208	15.100 MT	226500.00	
3.	Daltonganj	Latehar	Banduwa	271	20.070 MT	301050.00	
4.	Daltonganj	Latehar	Gotang	270	30.600 MT	459000.00	
5.	Daltonganj	Latehar	Sarju	197	32.700 MT	490500.00	
6.	Daltonganj	Latehar	Patratu	200	5.500 MT	82500.00	
7.	Daltonganj	Latehar	Ubari	178	10.500 MT	157500.00	
8.	Daltonganj	Latehar	Khairahi	272	13.650 MT	204750.00	
Total :				1828	139.670 MT	2095050.00	
Grand Total :				2482	204.670 MT	3070050.00	

This experiment also took place in Garhwa division of JSFDC, where the collection work started in 2017. Under the “new model” here also the mahulan leaves from forest started getting collected by the villagers of Nagnaha under “NagnahaKendu Patti PrathamikSangrahakSamittee”. The work of mahulan collection was done by a group of 10 people all ranging between. 20 to 25 year old. PatrusMinj of Nagnaha has been very enthusiastic, well planned and systematic while leading his team. This team has created the new business model of work, eliminating the middleman and remaining pragmatic was key to higher earnings for the members of this group.

Box- 11

NTFP based enterprises.....improves the life of women/tribal

A government report highlights that India's largest unorganized sectors have a dependent population of about 275 million and with a business turnover of more than Rs.6000 crores per annum the NTFP sector is critical. Although NTFP accounts for about 68% of the export in the forestry sector, NTFP contributes to about 20% to 40% of the annual income of forest dwellers who are mostly disadvantageous and landless communities with a dominant population of tribals. Providing them a critical subsistence on "sustained basis" during the lean seasons, particularly for primitive tribal groups such as hunter gatherers, and the landless is imperative. Most of the NTFPs are collected and used/sold by women and tribals so it has a strong linkage to women's/ tribal financial empowerment in the forest-fringe areas (1) Anon. 2011

The "unique model", involving local tribal women and men under the facilitation of JSFDC, is enabling them to see a new era in this backward area, which appears to be far more "sustainable" than the earlier practiced ones.

4. DISCUSSION

Small-Scale Enterprises (SSEs) are as promoted by JSFDC also more efficient while catering local markets, particularly when certain market infrastructures such as roads and other fast communication channels are absent or are far off. Further the small-scale enterprises are able to serve the local tribals, as they use cheaper means of accessing the finance/market/information/handholding and can quickly support and respond to demand of markets or other stakeholders. This is made possible by using "Natural solutions" and leveraging the elements of "Circular economy".

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