

ANNUAL REPORT 2025 – 26

Farmers Organizatio for Research Welfare Agriculture and Rural Development (FORWARD)

"Together for Sustainable Development and Human Dignity"



"Together for Sustainable Development and Human Dignity"

ANNUAL REPORT 2025–26

“Strengthening Communities, Sustaining Livelihoods, Nurturing Futures”

Cover Visuals

- Tribal women millet farmers in field
- Children in pre-school activities
- Biodiversity conservation activities
- Community meetings
- FORWARD logo



"Together for Sustainable Development and Human Dignity"

2

Executive Summary

A Year of Growth, Resilience and Transformation

The year 2025–26 marked another significant milestone in FORWARD's journey of empowering tribal and rural communities across Odisha. Through climate-resilient agriculture, child development initiatives, nutrition interventions, and institutional strengthening, we continued our mission of creating sustainable and inclusive development opportunities.

In Mayurbhanj district, the fourth year of the Millet Mission witnessed remarkable progress in community mobilization, farmer capacity building, biodiversity conservation, and promotion of climate-resilient farming systems. Hundreds of small and marginal farmers, especially women cultivators, strengthened their livelihoods through improved millet production practices.

Simultaneously, in Rayagada district, our nutrition and education initiatives supported vulnerable children and families through pre-school education, nutrition services, educational support, solar lighting, and emergency relief assistance.

The year also saw important organizational achievements. Through collaborations with foundations, government departments, and civil society organizations, FORWARD enhanced its institutional capacities, governance systems, and leadership development processes.

As we move forward, we remain committed to building resilient communities, strengthening local institutions, and promoting sustainable development rooted in community participation and dignity.



About FORWARD

Three Decades of Grassroots Development

Since 1995, FORWARD has been a steadfast champion for marginalized communities, driving impactful, grassroots change for over three decades. The organization's holistic approach to community development focuses on breaking the cycle of poverty by addressing its root causes.

Key pillars of FORWARD's mission include:

- **Sustainable Livelihoods & Women Empowerment:** Equipping families, particularly women, with the tools and financial independence needed to thrive.
- **Child Development & Nutrition Security:** Ensuring the next generation has access to essential health, education, and robust nutritional support.
- **Natural Resource Management:** Protecting local ecosystems to secure vital resources for the future.
- **Climate-Resilient Agriculture:** Training farmers in adaptive, eco-friendly techniques to safeguard yields against a changing climate.

By blending traditional community wisdom with modern sustainable practices, FORWARD continues to foster resilient, self-reliant ecosystems where both people and nature can flourish for generations to come.

Our Vision

A just, equitable, and sustainable society where every individual has access to opportunities for dignified living.

Our Mission

To empower vulnerable communities through participatory development processes that promote livelihoods, education, health, nutrition, and environmental sustainability.

Key Intervention Areas

- Sustainable Agriculture
- Millet Promotion
- Child Development
- Nutrition Security
- Women Empowerment
- Climate Change Adaptation
- Natural Resource Management
- Community Institution Building

Suggested Photos

- Organization office
- Community meetings
- Farmer groups

Programme Focus Area 1

Climate Resilient Agriculture Through Millet Mission

Deep within the Tiring and Sukruli blocks of Odisha's Mayurbhanj district, the **Shree Anna Abhiyan** (Millet Mission) has officially entered its fourth consecutive year. This vital initiative continues to serve as a cornerstone for strengthening food security, enhancing nutritional diversity, and building long-term climate resilience among indigenous tribal farming communities.

Historically, unpredictable weather patterns have threatened traditional crops, but millets have emerged as a powerful, sustainable solution to climate variability. These ancient grains are naturally hardy; they thrive in poor soil conditions, resist pests, and require significantly less water than water-intensive staples like rice or wheat. This makes them an ideal crop for a changing climate.

Beyond environmental benefits, the mission drives change on two critical fronts:

- **Nutritional Diversity:** Known as "nutri-cereals," millets are packed with essential micronutrients, protein, and dietary fiber, directly combating malnutrition in vulnerable households.
- **Economic Stability:** By establishing robust local value chains, the initiative provides tribal farmers with reliable income opportunities, turning sustainable agriculture into a viable livelihood.

Through the Shree Anna Abhiyan, Mayurbhanj's tribal farmers are not just adapting to ecological shifts—they are pioneering a healthier, self-reliant future.

Key Achievements

- Women-led campaign teams strengthened
- Farmer capacities enhanced through SMI training
- Increased community awareness on millet consumption
- Promotion of local millet biodiversity
- Improved documentation and crop performance monitoring

Programme Reach

- Hundreds of tribal farming households
- Multiple Gram Panchayats
- Women farmer collectives
- Community Resource Persons (CRPs)



Building Farmer Capacities

Recognizing that knowledge is the primary driver of lasting transformation, FORWARD organized a series of intensive, district-level training programmes designed to empower local communities. These initiatives focus on bridging the gap between traditional practices and modern sustainable solutions, equipping participants with actionable skills to lead their own development.

The training modules are specifically tailored to meet the unique challenges of each district, focusing on core areas such as:

Climate-Smart Agriculture: Training farmers in water conservation, soil health management, and organic farming techniques.

Institutional Building: Strengthening local self-help groups (SHGs) and farmer collectives to improve community governance.

Livelihood Diversification: Teaching non-farm income-generating skills, particularly to women and youth.

By investing heavily in human capital, FORWARD is ensuring that community leaders possess the expertise, confidence, and tools necessary to drive grassroots innovation and sustain long-term economic and social progress.

Women Campaign Team Training

Two-day residential and non-residential programmes enabled women leaders to:

- Strengthen leadership skills
- Improve community mobilization
- Promote nutrition-sensitive agriculture
- Facilitate awareness campaigns

SMI Training for CRPs & Progressive Farmers

Training focused on:

- System of Millet Intensification (SMI)
- Agronomic best practices
- Data recording systems
- Field-level implementation strategies
- Peer-to-peer farmer extension

Outcome

The trained community leaders emerged as local champions supporting wider adoption of improved millet cultivation practices.

Suggested Photos



Conserving Biodiversity & Strengthening Seed Sovereignty

"Together for Sustainable Development and Human Dignity"

8

Protecting Indigenous Millet Heritage

Traditional millet varieties hold immense value for climate adaptation and nutritional security. For generations, indigenous communities have cultivated unique strains of these hardy grains, carefully selecting seeds that can withstand localized droughts, extreme heat, and unpredictable pest outbreaks.

However, the rise of commercial monoculture threatens to erase this priceless agricultural heritage. To counter this, protecting indigenous millet varieties has become a critical baseline for securing community self-reliance. By shifting control of seeds back into the hands of local farmers, communities can safeguard essential biodiversity while fortifying their fields against ecological disruptions.

This initiative focuses on two core, intersecting goals:

- **Biodiversity Conservation:** Reviving near-extinct, resilient landraces (localized, native crop varieties) that naturally thrive without expensive chemical fertilizers or heavy irrigation.
- **Strengthening Seed Sovereignty:** Establishing community-managed seed banks. These hubs ensure smallholders have free, immediate access to diverse, open-pollinated seeds, eliminating dependencies on corporate seed markets.

Ultimately, conserving these ancient grains is about more than preserving history—it is a vital strategy for feeding a changing world from the ground up.

During the reporting year:

Participatory Varietal Trials (PVT)

FORWARD conducted field explorations and varietal assessments to identify:

- Farmer-preferred local varieties
- Climate-resilient cultivars
- High-performing traditional seeds

Biodiversity Block

A dedicated biodiversity conservation block was established to:

- Preserve indigenous germplasm
- Promote farmer learning
- Demonstrate agro-ecological diversity
- Encourage local seed conservation

Looking Ahead

The findings will support mass selection and community-based seed distribution in the coming year



Demonstrating Results in the Field

Field Days & Crop Cutting Experiments

"Together for Sustainable Development and Human Dignity"

10

FORWARD
Limaliguda, Gunupur, Rayagada, Odisha

Field demonstrations play a critical role in promoting farmer confidence and fostering peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. To bridge the gap between theoretical training and real-world application, FORWARD structured interactive **Field Days** and scientifically rigorous **Crop Cutting Experiments**. These events transform local farms into living classrooms, allowing agricultural communities to witness the tangible benefits of sustainable practices firsthand.

During Field Days, neighboring smallholders gather at demonstration plots to observe the direct results of climate-resilient methods, such as optimal spacing and organic pest management. This open forum allows them to discuss challenges, compare notes, and build collective trust in new technologies.

The core validation comes from Crop Cutting Experiments. By harvesting and weighing crops from specific, randomly selected sample plots alongside local authorities, the initiative provides undeniable, empirical proof of success.

- **Accurate Yield Data:** Delivers unbiased, measurable statistics on crop productivity.
- **Performance Metrics:** Explicitly isolates how indigenous, climate-smart varieties outperform traditional or unmanaged plots under identical weather stressors.

By substituting abstract promises with verifiable, localized data, these field exercises dismantle skepticism. They provide smallholders with the security and data-driven proof they need to permanently adopt progressive, resilient farming techniques.

Activities Conducted

- Mid-season crop observations
- Farmer field days
- Harvest demonstrations
- Crop Cutting Experiments (CCE)

Strengthening Evidence-Based Agriculture

Systematic sampling and documentation procedures were introduced to generate reliable yield data and strengthen future programme planning.

Impact

Farmers gained practical insights into improved crop management while field demonstrations created opportunities for peer learning and adoption.



Programme Focus Area 2

Nutrition, Education & Rahateliief Programme

Gudari Block, Rayagada District

Nestled within the rugged terrain of the Gudari block in Odisha's Rayagada district, six isolated villages continue to face deep-seated socioeconomic challenges. To support these vulnerable families, FORWARD has sustained an integrated development model, seamlessly weaving together targeted nutrition, foundational education, and essential social protection initiatives to uplift marginalized households.

In regions marked by systemic poverty, a child's development cannot be addressed through a single lens. Malnutrition stunts cognitive growth, while financial insecurity pulls children away from classrooms. FORWARD's multi-layered approach simultaneously targets these overlapping vulnerabilities to build a resilient foundation for the community's future.

The comprehensive framework focuses on three core pillars:

- **Holistic Nutrition Security:** The programme targets pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children under the age of five. By setting up community-led nutrition kitchens and promoting backyard kitchen gardens, families gain year-round access to fresh, iron-rich vegetables and micro-nutrient-dense food, systematically tackling local anemia and wasting.
- **Accessible Early Education:** Recognizing that early childhood care shapes life outcomes, FORWARD strengthens local learning centers. The initiative provides age-appropriate, bilingual learning materials that bridge the tribal dialect gap, fostering safe spaces that encourage consistent enrollment, joyful learning, and regular attendance.
- **Social Protection & Relief:** The team actively connects eligible families with government safety nets, including old-age pensions, maternal health cash transfers, and subsidized food grains. During lean agricultural seasons or extreme weather, emergency relief supplies are deployed to prevent families from falling into high-interest debt traps.

By combining immediate humanitarian relief with long-term capacity building, FORWARD is helping these six villages transition away from systemic vulnerability, ensuring that the next generation grows up healthier, educated, and secure.

Early Childhood Care & Nutrition

The programme operated six days per week, ensuring children receive:

- Nutritious meals
- Early childhood education

"Together for Sustainable Development and Human Dignity"

13

- Safe learning environments
- Growth and development support

Educational Support

To reduce barriers to learning:

- School uniforms distributed
- Winter clothing provided
- Educational kits supplied

Outcome

Children from marginalized households received continuous support for healthy development and education.



Bringing Light, Nutrition and Hope

Green Energy Support

Access to reliable electricity remains a critical challenge for many remote communities, directly limiting productive hours, evening study time for children, and basic household safety. To address this energy gap, FORWARD launched a green energy initiative, distributing high-quality solar lights to 300 households experiencing limited grid access.

This clean energy intervention provides an immediate, eco-friendly alternative to hazardous kerosene lamps, significantly reducing indoor air pollution and accidental fire risks. Beyond health and safety benefits, the solar lights extend active evening hours, allowing children to study comfortably after sunset and enabling adults to engage in income-generating activities. By replacing fossil fuels with renewable solar energy, the project fosters sustainable grassroots development while cutting monthly fuel expenses for vulnerable families.

"Together for Sustainable Development and Human Dignity"

14

Benefits included:

- Improved study environment
- Enhanced household safety
- Reduced dependence on kerosene

Economic shocks, sudden crop failures, and severe weather events often leave marginalized families exposed to extreme financial precarity. To buffer vulnerable households against these acute hardships, FORWARD launched the **Rahat Relief Initiative**, a targeted social protection effort designed to stabilize families during their times of greatest need.

Under this initiative, comprehensive, essential support kits were distributed to families facing severe economic distress. Far beyond short-term charity, these kits act as a vital safety net, protecting households from falling into high-interest debt cycles or resorting to distress asset sales just to meet baseline needs.

Each relief kit is meticulously packed to secure a family's immediate well-being, containing:

- **Dry Rations:** Nutrient-dense, staple food items to ensure household food security.
- **Hygiene Supplies:** Essential sanitization items to maintain health and prevent disease.
- **Utility Essentials:** Seasonal necessities to shield families from environmental vulnerabilities.

By pairing immediate relief with structural empathy, the Rahat initiative preserves human dignity and helps resilient communities withstand economic crises.

Food Festivals & Nutrition Campaigns

Community events promoted:

- Rice
- Healthy dietary practices
- Local food diversity
- Community participation

Collaborative Approach

True sustainability at the grassroots level cannot be achieved in a vacuum; it requires a deeply synchronized ecosystem of local actors. To ensure that its development interventions are built to last, FORWARD champions a highly collaborative approach that places local governance and frontline workers at the very center of its strategy.

During recent initiatives, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) workers and Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) representatives actively participated, moving from passive observers to key implementers. ICDS workers brought deep, localized

"Together for Sustainable Development and Human Dignity"

15

expertise in maternal and child healthcare, ensuring nutrition interventions targeted the most vulnerable households. Concurrently, PRI representatives—the bedrock of rural local self-governance—aligned the project goals with village development plans and facilitated smooth resource allocation.

This deliberate integration of local institutional actors drives critical outcomes:

- **Dismantling Top-Down Dependencies:** Rather than imposing outside solutions, the strategy leverages existing, trusted community figures.
- **Creating Stronger Community Ownership:** When local leaders help design and manage initiatives, the community transitions from passive beneficiaries to active stakeholders.
- **Institutional Sustainability:** Training local representatives ensures that knowledge, monitoring, and project maintenance remain embedded in the village long after formal implementation phases conclude.

By uniting frontline healthcare workers with local elected leaders, FORWARD ensures that grassroots development is not just impactful, but permanently woven into the social fabric of the community.

Suggested Photos

- Solar light distribution
- Food festivals
- Community gatherings

Partnerships & Collaborative Action

FORWARD firmly believes that lasting, sustainable development cannot be achieved in isolation; it requires a collective commitment to shared goals. True, systemic impact is born when diverse stakeholders unite their unique strengths to tackle deeply entrenched grassroots challenges.

By actively building cross-sector alliances, FORWARD bridges the gap between institutional resources and marginalized communities. The organization fosters strategic collaborations with philanthropic foundations, technical experts, grassroots organizations, and local government bodies. These partnerships combine diverse capabilities—ranging from financial backing and policy advocacy to technical expertise in climate-resilient agriculture and public health.

Ultimately, this collaborative ecosystem ensures that interventions are not only deeply rooted in local realities but are also scalable, resource-efficient, and structurally sustainable for decades to come.

Our Key Partners

- **EdelGive Foundation** Supporting community development and institutional growth.
 - **Dhwani Foundation** Strengthening governance systems, policies, and organizational development.
 - **Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL)** Promoting child rights and educational access.
 - **Samajik Seva Sadan** Knowledge exchange and grassroots collaboration.
 - **Living Farms** Technical support in sustainable agriculture and nutrition initiatives.
 - **Jiv Daya Foundation** Supporting maternal and child healthcare, pediatric care, and rural nutrition initiatives.
- **Government Collaborations**
 - Odisha Millet Mission
 - ICDS
 - Panchayati Raj Institutions
 - District Administration



strengthening the Institution

During the **2025–26** fiscal year, FORWARD prioritized significant internal strengthening initiatives, recognizing that long-term grassroots impact requires an unyielding commitment to organizational excellence. By investing in its own structural health, the organization ensures it remains agile, transparent, and fully equipped to meet the evolving challenges of marginalized communities.

A cornerstone of this institutional strategy was the focus on **Second-Line Leadership Development**. Emerging staff members and promising community leaders received targeted mentoring, strategic management training, and capacity-building support.

"Together for Sustainable Development and Human Dignity"

17

This deliberate initiative aims to distribute governance responsibilities and build a robust internal talent pipeline.

Investing in these emerging leaders secures two vital organizational goals:

- **Operational Continuity:** Minimizes leadership gaps, ensuring projects run smoothly during transitions.
- **Grassroots Innovation:** Infuses fresh perspectives into project design, keeping interventions deeply aligned with community needs.

By fortifying its leadership from within, FORWARD secures institutional sustainability and lasting community impact.

Second-Line Leadership Development

During the year, FORWARD placed a strategic focus on cultivating its next generation of changemakers. Recognizing that organizational resilience depends on distributed governance, emerging staff members and promising community leaders received targeted mentoring, technical training, and intensive capacity-building support.

This deliberate initiative empowers local leaders to take direct ownership of project planning, community mobilization, and field operations. By investing heavily in its internal talent pipeline, FORWARD effectively prevents operational bottlenecks and safeguards long-term leadership continuity. Ultimately, building this strong second line of leadership ensures that grassroots development remains deeply rooted, dynamic, and fully capable of driving sustainable, community-led transformation for years to come.

Staff Development

To sustain high operational standards and maximize grassroots impact, FORWARD conducted a series of regular, comprehensive staff development training sessions throughout the year. These intensive modules were strategically designed to sharpen the core technical and interpersonal competencies of field teams, ensuring that project implementation is both data-driven and community-centric.

The capacity-building sessions focused directly on four critical pillars:

- **Data Management & Reporting Systems:** Training teams to use digital tools for accurate field-data collection, ensuring robust, verifiable metrics and streamlined progress tracking.
- **Documentation:** Equipping staff to systematically capture case studies, best practices, and qualitative field insights to better inform future project designs.
- **Community Facilitation:** Developing advanced dialogue and mobilization skills to foster deep local trust, break down socio-cultural barriers, and build long-term community ownership.

By continuously upgrading these internal skillsets, FORWARD guarantees a highly proficient, agile workforce capable of delivering transparent results and empowering communities efficiently.

Organizational Development Journey

In a deliberate push toward institutional excellence, FORWARD significantly advanced its internal capacities through a strategic partnership with the **Dhwani Foundation**. This structured organizational development journey focused on modernizing critical operational frameworks, moving the compliance and governance structures from a traditional setup to a highly professionalized, scalable system.

The collaborative efforts targeted four foundational pillars:

- **Governance Systems:** Strengthening board oversight and internal check-and-balance mechanisms to maximize institutional accountability.
- **Policy Development:** Drafting and implementing comprehensive, gender-just workplace policies and child protection safeguards aligned with global best practices.
- **Operational Procedures:** Refining procurement, human resources, and financial workflows to minimize operational bottlenecks and eliminate administrative redundancies.
- **Strategic Planning Frameworks:** Constructing long-term roadmaps driven by data, allowing the organization to adapt quickly to changing climate and development landscapes.

By deeply embedding these structural updates into its day-to-day operations, FORWARD has successfully minimized administrative risks and optimized resource utilization. This comprehensive institutional overhaul does not just improve efficiency—it fundamentally positions the organization for sustainable future growth, ensuring it remains a trusted, high-impact vehicle for grassroots transformation for decades to come.



Way Forward 2026 - 27

Building on three decades of momentum, FORWARD enters its next phase of growth with an unwavering commitment to fostering resilient, self-reliant communities. As climate variability and socioeconomic shifts create new challenges for marginalized groups, the organization will focus on scaling proven, data-backed models that promote grassroots independence and systemic stability.

Key Strategic Priorities

- **Scale Up Seed Sovereignty:** Expand community-based seed systems by accelerating mass selection techniques and broadening localized seed bank distribution networks to protect indigenous biodiversity.
- **Advance Data-Driven Evidence:** Strengthen field verification by deploying digitized, robust tracking tools for Crop Cutting Experiments, transforming field data into powerful policy advocacy.
- **Expand Climate-Smart Agriculture:** Drive the widespread adoption of eco-friendly, low-water farming methodologies among tribal smallholders to secure reliable yields against weather irregularities.
- **Deepen Governance Integration:** Synchronize nutrition and health interventions directly with ICDS workers and Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) frameworks to anchor long-term maternal and child wellness within local governance.
- **Invest in Institutional Excellence:** Maintain internal momentum by continuing second-line leadership mentoring, refining operational policies, and sharpening staff technical capabilities.

- **Forge Strategic Alliances:** Cultivate high-impact partnerships with technical experts, foundations, and grassroots networks to maximize resource efficiency and amplify community impact.

Closing Message: A Vision for Shared Transformation

Real and lasting change is never imposed from the outside; it begins from within, at the exact moment communities are empowered to lead, design, and sustain their own development. For over three decades, FORWARD has served not as a top-down manager, but as a catalyst—bridging the gap between marginalized groups and the resources, tools, and structural knowledge they need to claim their own self-reliance. True progress is measured when a community takes ownership of its seed banks, its farms, its classrooms, and its future.

As we look ahead to new horizons, we recognize that this profound journey of grassroots transformation is a shared endeavor. We remain deeply grateful to our resilient communities, dedicated philanthropic partners, visionary donors, supportive government departments, tireless field staff, and well-wishers. Thank you for walking alongside us, challenging us, and investing in this vision. Together, we are building an equitable, climate-resilient legacy where no one is left behind.





FORWARD

Farmers Organisation for Research Welfare Agriculture and Rural Development

"Together for Sustainable Development and Human Dignity"