

Strengthening Local Planning: Understanding DPR Submission Across States

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This report outlines some key learning and the progress made in using **CoRE stack tools** to facilitate community-based planning and demand processes for natural resource management and livelihood assets. These are early results from pilot test runs with three partner organizations, **FES, SUPPORT, and Gram Vaani**, who have been using the tools in **three different states** to build village development plans using the **Commons Connect** application.

The philosophy of the CoRE stack and its tools including Commons Connect is aimed at enabling **bottom-up decision making** - an approach to ensure that communities aren't just passive recipients of schemes, but active participants in shaping how resources are allocated. This shift is anchored in three key goals:

1. Building **social accountability** through transparent digital records,
2. Supporting **data-driven decisions** for selecting the right sites and interventions, and
3. Enabling **community discussions** backed by analytics to create a shared understanding of local needs.

To enable this, the **Commons Connect** application serves as a **digital tool for local planning**, integrating participatory methods, spatial and temporal data, and decision-support systems. It empowers communities at the village and Pachayat levels to carry out **evidence-based planning** and express their needs with greater clarity and confidence.

One of the key enablers of this process is the **landscape steward model**. These stewards are typically local youth or community resource persons who are trained to facilitate the planning process, use digital tools, conduct site assessments, validate data, and coordinate with panchayat functionaries. Their role as **trusted intermediaries** has proven critical in building local capacity, fostering accountability, and ensuring that technology serves the people.

In programmes where landscape stewards, mentored by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), help prepare village development plans in the form of **Detailed Project Reports (DPRs)**, the implementation across states is not standard due to variations in **institutional frameworks, organizational approaches**, and the **degree of decentralization** in state governance structures. In some states, CSOs lead the charge by facilitating community engagement and digital planning. In others, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Self-Help Group (SHG) federations, or line departments take the lead, each adapting the process to fit local realities.

Moreover, **state-specific differences in planning processes under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA, Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs), and Panchayat Standing Committees** further shape the way local demands are identified, discussed, and submitted. For

example, some states have robust systems for convergence between NREGA and GPDP, while others follow separate cycles or rely on different committees for technical vetting and approvals. These administrative pathways influence how quickly and effectively community-generated demands move through the system.

In our work with Gram Vaani, FES, and SUPPORT, this report discusses bottom-up digital planning processes that have facilitated the articulation of over 180+ community demands for assets listed across 20 Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for 20 villages. Of these, 100 demands have already been approved.

As we continue to scale this approach, these learnings from diverse state contexts help refine both the tools and the processes, moving us closer to a governance system that is **participatory, data-driven, and truly responsive to local priorities**.

Case study 1: Insights from Gram Vaani, Uttar Pradesh

Section A: Empowering Communities with Digital Tools for Decentralized NRM Planning

In an effort to promote participatory and transparent NRM planning, Gram Vaani deployed its grassroots community media and volunteer-driven mobilization model in several districts of rural Uttar Pradesh, including **Basti and Balrampur** where Gram Sabhas are either irregular or limited in scope due to administrative or social bottlenecks. This often leaves marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes, landless laborers, and women excluded from key decision-making processes, including those related to accessing social entitlements and development schemes.

To address this gap, Gram Vaani, through the **Commons Connect** tool, facilitated a more inclusive and streamlined DPR submission process that enables local communities to articulate and submit NRM demands. This approach integrated a combination of community mobilization, digital tools, and volunteer facilitation to ensure that planning reflects local priorities and is led by the people most affected.

The Gram Vaani Volunteer Model:

At the core of this process is a **network of trained Gram Vaani volunteers and local stewards**, often youth or community members from the villages themselves, who are equipped with smartphones and capacitated to use the Commons Connect app. These volunteers play a crucial intermediary role:

- **Mobilizing communities** for collective action.
- **Facilitating the use of digital tools** for resource mapping and plan development.

- **Ensuring inclusion** of marginalized voices by proactively reaching out to vulnerable households.
- **Assisting in navigating bureaucratic hurdles**, such as procuring land ownership documents or caste certificates, which are often prerequisites for official approval of plans.

These Volunteers are active contributors to **Mobile Vaani**, a voice-based participatory media platform that enables even less-literate users to report problems, share feedback, and raise demands. Many **NRM-related needs are first recorded on Mobile Vaani** after running an awareness campaign to inform communities about the kind of assets that can be implemented under MGNREGA.

Why This Approach Is Needed in Basti, Uttar Pradesh

In the context of Basti district, although Gram Sabhas are legally required to be held **four times a year**, their implementation on the ground is patchy. Even when held, these meetings often **lack true deliberation** and exclude marginalized voices. Therefore, Gram Vaani complements the formal Gram Sabha structure with **smaller, focused community discussions**, facilitated by volunteers, to ensure more **broad-based participation, data-backed decision-making**, and inclusive plan formulation. These forums become critical to **institutionalizing bottom-up governance**.

The Step-by-Step DPR Submission Journey followed by the Gram Vaani Volunteers

1. Community Mobilization and Resource Mapping

The process starts with organizing **community meetings** to discuss various issues being faced by different groups, NRM works that have happened in the village, and additional assets or maintenance efforts that will help both at the community level and individual household level. To ensure inclusion, these meetings proactively involve **marginalized and vulnerable groups** in the meetings and try to ensure **gender diversity**.

Next, through transect walks with the community, Gram Vaani volunteers begin with **resource mapping** using the Commons Connect app. Volunteers and stewards engage with community members to collect information on land and water sources.

2. Demand generation

Simultaneously, campaigns on Mobile Vaani encourage community members to record their demands. These campaigns highlight the benefits of NRM assets, different types of assets that can be supported through MGNREGA and other schemes, and examples of impact stories. Community members record their demands through *Mobile Vaani*, which are then jointly discussed in subsequent **community meetings**, akin to a Gram Sabha.

3. Building a collective and feasible plan

In these meetings, community volunteers use data and insights from the app to jointly design a **realistic and inclusive action plan**. Volunteers help interpret satellite data, historical resource usage, and the expected impact from the demands, and facilitate discussions amongst all community members.

One of the recurring challenges during this phase is related to obtaining the necessary **land ownership documentation** and other papers like revenue slips, caste certificates, income certificates, and personal declarations in the required format. For many proposed interventions on individual lands such as farm pond construction and plantation efforts, a proof of land ownership is imperative. However, in several cases, families either do not have the necessary documents or the records are outdated or disputed. As a result, a significant portion of the volunteers' time and effort is spent **helping families retrieve or validate these documents**, liaising with revenue officials, and guiding them through administrative processes. Sometimes monetary hurdles come in the way too and might prevent marginalized groups from being able to get the benefits. Despite being time-consuming, this step is crucial to ensure that community plans are eligible for government support and can be implemented effectively.

4. Panchayat Approval

Supporting documents and the formal DPR obtained through Commons Connect are then submitted to the **Gram Panchayat**. The Panchayat's endorsement is essential to validate the proposed works through **Gram Sabha resolutions**. Volunteers ensure that all documents are submitted and follow up with Panchayat officials to track the status.

5. Submission to the Block Program Officer

Upon Panchayat approval, a demand application is submitted to the **Block Program Officer**, accompanied by essential supporting documents including land records, ownership proof, revenue slips, income certificate or ration card, and identity verification.



6. Technical Feasibility Assessment

The Block assigns a technical investigation team to conduct an **on-site feasibility check**. The digital DPR significantly strengthens the review process by offering spatial accuracy and community-vetted data.

7. Approval and Sanctioning

If found feasible, as is mostly the case since the demands have already undergone checks and balances at several levels in the community, the demand is approved and formally sanctioned by the Block. The intervention then moves into the implementation phase.

7. Implementation and Beneficiary Support

Volunteers then continue to assist community volunteers with any follow-up requests, capture further evidence via photographs, and record impact stories through **Mobile Vaani** to encourage more community members to participate in the process in future rounds.

Section B: DPR Submissions so far - Snapshot from the Field from Basti, Uttar Pradesh

Thanks to efforts by the dedicated landscape stewards, the following villages across **Basti and Balrampur districts** have successfully submitted DPRs for NRM interventions. Below is a summary of approved demands in the DPRs along with their respective village-level details and direct links to the DPR records:

1. **Narainpur (Harraiya Block, Basti):** *Irrigation Well* | Beneficiary: Adarsh Chandra | **DPR Reference :** [DPR Plan narainpur](#)
2. **Basantpur (Harraiya Block, Basti):** *Farm Pond* | Beneficiary: Somnath | **DPR Reference:** [DPR Plan Basantpur](#)
3. **Nayakapar (Harraiya Block, Basti):** *Farm Pond* | Beneficiary: Awnish | **DPR Reference:** [DPR Plan nayakapar](#)
4. **Naghra (Basti Sadar Block, Basti):** *Canal, Community Pond* | Beneficiary: Bhoyar Chooba Tola (Community) | **DPR Reference:** [DPR Plan naghra](#)
5. **Katholia (Basti Sadar Block, Basti):** *Farm Bund (Individual: Hardev), Farm Pond (Community)* | **DPR Reference:** [DPR Plan katholia](#)
6. **Maharajganj Tarai (Tulsipur Block, Balrampur):** *Well, Canal* | **DPR Reference:** [DPR Plan Maharajganj Tarai](#)
7. **Labudwa (Tulsipur Block, Balrampur):** *Well, Two Farm Ponds* | **DPR Reference:** [DPR Plan Labudwa](#)
8. **Labudhi (Tulsipur Block, Balrampur):** *Canal, Community Pond* | **DPR Reference:** [DPR Plan Labudhi](#)

Impact and Advantages

Through the Commons Connect and Mobile Vaani platforms, we believe this has helped bring:

Support in Strengthening Social Accountability: The entire planning process is digitized and visible to the community, creating a digital trail of who submitted what, when, and how. This ensures fair targeting, and builds trust in public systems.

Inclusion and Empowerment: By using voice-based platforms and app-guided facilitation, coupled with proactive efforts to involve the entire community in meetings and discussions, even less-literate users and marginalized families are able to participate meaningfully. Volunteers put efforts to bridge the digital divide, making NRM planning accessible to all.

Decentralized Governance: The process reinforces bottom-up leadership. When the community leads data collection, decision-making, and oversight, it builds stronger local institutions.

Volunteer Empowerment: Mobile Vaani essentially gives volunteers a “**loudspeaker**,” helping them surface issues and mobilize action. Commons Connect gives them a “**planning toolkit**,” equipping them to conduct resource mapping, prepare DPRs, and support implementation. This builds local capacity and leadership.

Case study 2: Insights from SUPPORT, Jharkhand

Section A: How Support is using Commons Connect to Generate DPRs in Jharkhand

In Jharkhand, regular Gram Sabhas are a key part of how rural communities discuss and decide on NRM needs. One of our implementing partners, **SUPPORT**, is working closely with local communities to integrate **Commons Connect** in this process.



Here's how SUPPORT integrates Commons Connect in its workflow:

In Jharkhand, especially in tribal areas where the **PESA Act** is in effect, **Gram Sabhas are held regularly** and play a key role in approving village development plans. SUPPORT leverages this by using **Commons Connect** to gather community inputs and prepare data-backed NRM demands ahead of Gram Sabha meetings. This streamlines the **DPR submission** process while also strengthening transparency and local ownership.

1. Capturing Village-Level Resource Information

During Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) sessions and Gram Sabha meetings, SUPPORT's field facilitators use Commons Connect to **digitally map village level resources** like:

- Settlement details
- Well and Water bodies
- Crop information

This process also helps uncover key issues that communities are facing and opportunities they would like to realize, while also helping improve awareness about the possibilities.

2. Collecting Beneficiary-Level Details

For each proposed demand, Commons Connect allows field teams to enter the name and demographic details of the community members, the type of proposed work (e.g., farm pond, well, bund, etc.), its details, and photos and GPS coordinates. The tool uses the collected data to auto-generate maps, visualize where each proposed work falls in the village landscape, and makes it easier for stewards and community members to **understand how the work fits within the broader resource system** and avoid duplication or overlap.

3. Preparing DPR Outputs for Gram Sabha Approval

After community validation during subsequent meetings, Commons Connect helps generate a printable **DPR** with all technical and beneficiary details. These outputs are presented during the second Gram Sabha for formal community approval and signatures.

4. Gram Sabha Approval

The draft DPRs are presented in the **Gram Sabha** for collective approval helps reinforce transparency in the selection of works for funds allocation, community consensus on prioritization, and builds trust in the process. The documents are also often scanned and uploaded for records

5. Panchayat and Panchayat Karyakarini Review

With Gram Sabha approval in place, the final DPR is reviewed by the **Panchayat Executive Committee** (Karyakarini), which aligns the proposed works with the **seasonality calendar** to ensure timely implementation. This is a crucial step for syncing community plans with administrative processes.

6. Submission to Block Office for Sanction

The approved DPRs are submitted to the **Block administration**, which may:

- Assign technical personnel for site visits
- Vet the proposals against budget norms
- Issue formal sanctions and start implementation

SUPPORT's field team continues to follow up and provide any clarifications or documentation required by officials.

Section B: DPR Submissions so far - Snapshot from the Field from Dumka Jharkhand

Thanks to dedicated local stewards and proactive Gram Sabhas, the following villages across **Dumka district** have successfully submitted DPRs for NRM interventions. Below is a summary of approved DPRs along with their respective village-level details and direct links to the DPR records:

1. **Thari (Masaliya Block):**
 - *Recharge*: Percolation Tanks (Suresh Sarma, Subodh Gorai), WATs (Shankar Chand, Munga Ray)
 - *Didi Badi*: 13 women-led kitchen gardens (e.g., Bijli Devi, Sarswati Devi)
 - *Livelihood*: Fisheries (Kalavati Devi, Madhuri Devi), Poultry & Aam Bagwani (Manik Chand)
 - [DPR Reference: [Plan thari](#)]
2. **Lakhibad:**
 - *Irrigation*: Farm Ponds (Sourabh Jha, Gopeshwar Jha)
 - *Livelihood*: Cattle Shelter (Lalita Devi, Tarulata Devi)
 - [DPR Reference: [DPR Lakhibad](#)]
3. **Maisamangar:**
 - *Irrigation*: Well, Farm Pond (Debisar Tudu, Jayprakash Hansda, etc.)
 - *Plantation*: Mango Orchards (Mahadev Hansda, Babusing Murmu)
 - [DPR Reference: [DPR_Plan maisamangar](#)]
4. **Pichhuli:**
 - *Irrigation*: Farm Pond (Giridhari Mandal, Akshay Mandal)
 - *Livelihood*: Cattle Shelter (Roji Kumari Mahto)
 - [DPR Reference: [DPR_Plan_Pichhuli](#)]
5. **Murgathol:**
 - *Recharge*: Percolation Tanks (Srijol Marngdi, Bejun Hansda)
 - *Irrigation*: Well (Upendra Hansda)
 - *Plantation*: Mango Orchards (Ramkishor Hembrom)
 - [DPR Reference: [Plan murgathol](#)]
6. **Sidpahari:**
 - *Livelihood*: 27 Didi Badis (e.g., Mahrana Bibi, Sumita Hembram)
 - *Fisheries*: Subodhan Murmu
 - *Plantation*: Aam Bagwani
 - [DPR Reference: [DPR_Plan sidpahari](#)]
7. **Uparbadha:**
 - *Plantation*: Mango Plantations (Wirkodhar, Diwakar, Laltu Choudhary)
 - [DPR Reference: [DPR_Plan uparbadha](#)]
8. **Kukurtopa:**
 - *Livelihood*: Didi Badi (Budin Hansda, Nilmuni Soren, Maku Murmu, etc.)
 - [DPR Reference: [DPR_Plan kukurtopa](#)]

Impact and Advantages

The process of using Commons Connect is helping SUPPORT to:

- Standardize the DPR format across pilot locations
- Reduce dependency on external engineers for initial planning
- Strengthen community ownership through transparent data sharing
- Save time in compiling and submitting proposals

As more field functionaries become confident in using the tool, the quality and number of DPRs submitted are increasing.

Case study 3: Insights from FES, Odisha

In Odisha, **FES promotes community-led natural resource management**, especially of commons like forests, pastures, and water bodies. Through **ground-up collectivization**, FES mobilizes communities via trained Panchayat Resource Persons (**PRPs**) and Community Resource Persons (**CRPs**) who conduct village-level consultations to map resources, identify needs, and form or strengthen local institutions.

In this process:

- **Commons-based interventions** are funded through **15th Finance Commission Untied Grants**, enabling Gram Panchayats to prioritize shared resources.
- **Individual demands** (e.g., farm ponds, wells) are supported via **MGNREGA**, benefiting vulnerable households.

This ensures inclusive, sustainable development rooted in local priorities, while also strengthening local institutions.

Section A: How FES is using Commons Connect to generate DPRs in Odisha

In the Nakchi Panchayat of Kishorenagar Block, Angul, Odisha, the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) has been using Commons Connect for community-based planning. This effort, covering five villages, focuses on equitable resource distribution and building ecological resilience. The process begins with mapping existing water resources, considering both settlement patterns and caste-based access, helping communities visualise access disparities. This created a space for dialogue on fairness in resource allocation and set the stage for inclusive planning.

Building on these insights, the team, along with the community, developed scientifically informed plans for water harvesting, recharge structures, and livelihood opportunities, aligning with MGNREGA provisions. Using micro-watershed-level data, rainfall, evapotranspiration, well depths, slope, and land information from CLART, the effort was to support communities to understand the environmental context and accordingly assess which structures are suitable and feasible given their village's geology and water behaviour.



Once the proposed interventions were finalised, they were digitally mapped on Commons Connect to generate a Preliminary DPR. This plan was then verified on the ground with community members to ensure accuracy and relevance. The final DPR was presented to the Sarpanch, Ward Members, and other PRI representatives of Nakchi Panchayat. This led to constructive discussions on how the Sarpanch could play a key role in leveraging the proposed demands through MGNREGA. Beyond this, the Panchayat leadership proactively suggested utilising the DPR as a reference document during the formulation of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), recognising that several community-level needs identified through the process could be addressed at the Panchayat level itself. They then initiated field verification and ground-truthing of the proposed works that had been finalized through informed, community-driven planning grounded in both scientific data and participatory validation.

Section B: DPR Submissions so far - Snapshot from the field from Angul, Odisha

1.Mankadchu (Block: Kishorenagar, District: Angul)



- **DPR Name:** DPR_Plan_Mankadchua
- **Approved Works:** The approved community-demanded interventions are as follows:

Recharge Structures

- A. **Pradhan Sahi** – *Percolation Tank*
- B. **Kuda Sahi (ST)** – *Loose Boulder Structure, Staggered Contour Trenches (SCT), Water Absorption Trenches (WAT)*
- C. **Kuda Sahi** – *Check Dam*

Community Irrigation Works (Wells & Farm Ponds)

- A. **Dimiri Sahi (ST)** – *Community Well*
- B. **Kudasahi (ST)** – *Community Well*
- C. **Pradhan Sahi** – *Community Well*
- D. **Dhubasahi (ST)** – *Community Well*
- E. **Dhuba Sahi (OBC)** – *Community Well*
- F. **Dhuba Sahi (SC)** – *Community Well*
- **DPR Reference:** [Plan_Mankadchua](#)

2. Takaba (Block: Kishorenagar, District: Angul)

- **DPR Name:** DPR_Plan_Takaba
- **Approved Works:** Community Pond
 - **Settlement:** Gaunsahi (OBC) , Duud
 - **DPR Reference:** [Plan_Takaba](#)

3. Kholadangiani (Block: Kishorenagar, District: Angul)

- **DPR Name:**DPR_Plan_Kholadangiani
- **Approved Works:**
DPR Reference: [Plan_Kholadangiani](#)

4. Madhupur (Block: Kishorenagar, District: Angul)

- **DPR Name:**DPR_Plan_Madhupur
 - **Approved Works:**
 - **Irrigation Work** - Community Pond
 - **Settlement:** Talasahi (OBC, SC, GE)
DPR Reference: [Plan_Madhupur](#)
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Looking ahead

The experiences across different states highlights that indeed decentralized, evidence-based rural planning where communities are not just participants, but drivers of decision-making, is feasible. As this model expands, sustaining the role of trained landscape stewards will be critical. Their ability to bridge data, technology, and local knowledge ensures that planning processes remain rooted in people's realities.

Going forward, strengthening institutional convergence, particularly between NREGA, GPDP, and Panchayat Standing Committees, will be essential to fast-track approvals and translate community demands into implementable DPRs. Further refining Commons Connect to align with diverse state contexts and building local capacity to navigate planning and submission cycles, will ensure this approach remains scalable and responsive.

With continued collaboration between communities, CSOs, and local governments, we are moving closer to a system where planning is participatory, transparent, and driven by the collective priorities of rural citizens.

What Questions Are Emerging?

While the early outcomes are promising, this journey of bottom-up digital planning is still unfolding. Usage of the tools remains largely facilitated rather than organically community-led. Institutionalizing these practices will take time, along with sustained investment in capacity-building.

Several critical questions are surfacing:

- **How do we ensure long-term financial sustainability for landscape stewards?** Gram Vaani's volunteers and FES' stewards and PRPs/CRPs have had longer engagement and support structures, while SUPPORT has initiated this model now. However, long-term and deep engagement of the stewards requires solving for the establishment of a steady income stream for them.
- **How do stewards deepen both their technical and digital skills?** Beyond the application, they need to grasp concepts around watersheds, water security, and convergence planning to effectively support communities.
- **Which kinds of community demands are ultimately accepted or rejected—and why?** Understanding the political and procedural filters will be key to making the system more responsive.
- **And perhaps most importantly: when do we ask whether this process is truly shifting power?** While currently the usage of Commons Connect is facilitated, integrating community-based platforms like Mobile Vaani can hold the potential for communities to demand that such processes are conducted regularly and demands flow to relevant government schemes and Panchayat funds. We are sincerely waiting to see that happen down the line. A few rays of light do indicate some groups as articulating the impact of Commons Connect as “**now having a paper in their hands about demands they have made**” on which they can “**follow-up with the concerned people**” - these are the kind of signs that indicate whether technology is shifting power dynamics or not.