



# STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNANCE

INSIGHTS FROM A  
COLLABORATIVE CONVENING



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Recognizing the critical role of local governance in addressing environmental and socio-economic challenges in Indian agriculture, the National Coalition of Natural Farming and the ClimateRISE Alliance jointly facilitated a convening focused on strengthening local governance structures, to explore strategies for fostering community participation, ensuring efficient resource allocation, and ultimately, implementing effective climate adaptation strategies.

Following the insightful discussions, we have identified the following key learnings:

## 1. Terminology and Conceptual Clarity:

- **Variety of Initiatives:** NRLM uses terms like Natural Farming and Organic Farming, each contributing uniquely to resilient agriculture.
- **Need for Clarity:** Multi-stakeholder approaches are essential to bridge conceptual gaps and align initiatives with climate resilience goals.

## 2. Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:

- **Convergence and Partnership:** Effective collaboration among line departments, CSOs, Gram Panchayats (GPs), and block officials is crucial for promoting resilient agriculture.
- **Integrated Farming Systems:** Initiatives like the Lakhpati model guide the implementation of economically viable and scalable climate-resilient practices.

## 3. Sustainability and Universalization:

- **Livelihood Diversification:** Reducing dependence on agriculture supports resilient agriculture and provides stable income sources for rural communities.
- **Universalizing Practices:** Engaging with NRLM to standardize and promote economically viable climate-resilient practices on a national level, reaching around 10 crore rural women.

## 4. Institutional Engagement and Capacity Building:

- **Role of Institutional Tiers:** Ensuring Government Structures such as NRLM work with Gram Panchayats to prevent parallel systems from undermining local governance.
- **Capacity Building:** Training local leaders and institutions to implement climate-resilient practices effectively.





## 5. Integrated Natural Resource Management:

- 6Js Approach: Combining resilient agriculture with comprehensive natural resource management ensures sustainable ecosystem management.

## 6. Local Level Convergence Models:

- Creating Models: Developing panchayat-level models for effective convergence of efforts promotes resilient agricultural practices within broader developmental agendas.

**Next Steps: A core team will be formed to synthesize capacity-building materials and identify new needs, ensuring integration within the GPDP process.**



# INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT SETTING

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## **Strengthening Local Governance Pillar**

The agriculture sector in India today faces a host of environmental challenges (e.g., loss of soil fertility, waterlogging, ground and surface water pollution, intensified pests, and diseases) and socioeconomic problems (e.g., increased farm input prices, regional disparity). In addition to all these, climate change has added a new dimension to the existing problems by posing a significant threat to Indian agriculture in general and food security in particular.

Of the many pathways that grassroot organizations working in the sector have adopted, strengthening local governance plays a crucial role in building resilience of agriculture against climate change. Local governance structures are essential for implementing climate adaptation strategies tailored to specific regional needs, fostering community participation, and ensuring efficient resource allocation for resilient agricultural practices. By empowering local authorities and engaging communities, we can enhance the agility and responsiveness of agriculture to climate-related challenges, ultimately safeguarding food security and livelihoods at the grassroots level.

Building upon the work NCNF and ClimateRISE Alliance has initiated to strengthen the local governance to promote resilient agricultural practices in India. Going ahead we aim to organize a series of convenings where we will prioritize key opportunities available through various government structures and community based organizations that can be collectively leveraged to promote resilient agriculture practices from the village to national level and to develop actionable plans for policy action. The convening will also act as a cross-learning platform to help gain insights from the challenges and breakthroughs of stakeholders. We aim to delve deeper into leveraging governance structures like NRLM, Community Based Organisations, and Gram Panchayats (GPs) to use a bottom-up approach to strengthen local governance to promote resilient agriculture practices.

## Opening Statements:

The convening inaugurated with a focus on bolstering GPs' understanding of natural farming (NF) and resilient agriculture practices. Underscoring the pivotal role of leveraging various village development schemes, discussions showed the need for effective commons, farmland management and conservation.

Key deliberations centered on promoting NF and Natural Resource Management (NRM)-based livelihoods through the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) process. Participants explored aligning these efforts with the Panchayats' mandate of achieving inclusive and sustainable development, while integrating agricultural practices outlined in the 11th Schedule. The opening remarks also emphasized the strategic integration of the Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP) and Local Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) with NF initiatives.

Furthermore, the significance of collaboration between Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) was highlighted. This collaboration would focus on farmer organization, merging GPDP with MGNREGA and other NRM activities. The importance of dedicated resources and facilitators was underscored to ensure the GPDP process remains people-centered and impactful.





# IDENTIFYING KEY CHALLENGES

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During the convening, several key challenges were highlighted that impede the strengthening of local governance systems, and the need for targeted interventions and specific solutions.

## Integrating Natural Elements with Farming Practices



**Water Resource Accessibility:** Ensuring that water resources are accessible and managed sustainably is fundamental for the success of natural farming. The challenge lies in making these resources commonly available and overcoming issues related to privatization or depletion.



**Survival of Pastures:** The health and availability of pastures are crucial for NF, as they provide essential ecosystems for various flora and fauna that support agricultural cycles. Dependency on Livestock and Forests: Natural farming depends heavily on thriving livestock and forests, which are interconnected within ecological cycles that support agriculture. Ensuring these elements are healthy and sustainable is a significant challenge.



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## Enabling Conditions for Farmers and Livestock Managers



**Practical Knowledge and Support:** There is a significant challenge in providing farmers and livestock managers with the enabling conditions necessary for applying natural farming techniques effectively. This includes access to practical knowledge, resources, and supportive policies that encompass a holistic support system beyond mere training.

## Digital and Technological Challenges



**Accessibility of Technology:** While there is significant adoption of technology, especially among the youth, there remains a substantial risk of increasing the digital divide due to unequal access to technological resources.



**Relevance and Usability of Technology:** Ensuring that technological tools are relevant and usable for all community members, including those without stable internet access or literacy skills, poses a significant challenge.

## Institutional and Technical Capacity Building



**Building Robust Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas:** Strengthening these local governance institutions is crucial to enable them to effectively shoulder responsibilities for community development and resource management.



**Training in Natural Farming and Resource Management:** Building capacity in NF technical practices and tools, such as water budgeting, for community resource persons and frontline functionaries requires structured and ongoing training programs.



**Capacity Building of Department Staff and CSOs:** Enhancing the capabilities of department staff and CSOs to technically and institutionally support GPs and community workers is crucial but challenging, given the breadth of knowledge and skills required.

## Empowerment and Policy Influence



**Enabling Gram Panchayats to Influence Policies:** Empowering GPs to proactively issue directives or communicate with state governments to promote NF practices is challenging but essential for grassroots impact.

## Resource Mobilization



**Mobilizing Funds from Departments:** Securing and mobilizing funds from various departments to support local initiatives and sustainable practices, is a critical challenge that requires effective advocacy and engagement strategies.



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# FROM DISCUSSION TO ACTION: STRATEGIES & EMERGING THEMES

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Along with identifying the relevant challenges, the discussions also led to strategies across diverse themes, listed below:

## Addressing the Digital Divide in Local Governance and Agriculture

- 1 Technology Adoption and Accessibility:** Emphasis on the widespread adoption of technology, particularly by youth, while recognizing the risk of exacerbating the digital divide. Technology should enhance human capacities rather than replace them, promoting inclusive tech solutions.
- 2 Human-Centric Technology Use:** Advocating for technology that puts the human experience at the center. Ensuring digital tools are accessible offline and use image or animation-based interfaces to overcome language barriers.
- 3 Data Empowerment for Decision-Making:** Harnessing diverse socio-economic and ecological data to empower communities. Using data to inform and refine decision-making processes at the local level, ensuring decisions are grounded in reality and data-driven.

## Integrating Ecological Considerations into Natural Farming

- 1 Holistic View of Natural Resources:** Viewing NF within the broader ecological systems is essential. Addressing issues like water accessibility, pasture survival, and the well-being of livestock and forests is critical for sustainable practices.
- 2 Enabling Conditions for Farmers and Livestock Managers:** Addressing underlying enabling conditions that support sustainable practices, including access to resources, knowledge, and supportive policies, beyond mere technical instruction.
- 3 Need to Understand Resilience:** Resilience involves transitioning from a degraded to a restored landscape, recognizing the interconnections between land, water, agriculture, livestock, and non-farm systems. Enhancing resilience is about understanding and fostering these interconnections.
- 4 Resilient Resource Management Techniques:** Employing strategies such as ecological threshold tools, water budgeting, and balanced resource consumption to sustain natural resources, address immediate community needs, and prevent resource depletion.



## Capacity Building Across Different Levels

- 1 Institutional and Technological Capacity Building:** Strengthening local institutions like GPs and Gram Sabhas to handle significant responsibilities effectively, including governance skills and resource management capabilities.
- 2 Technical Capacity Building for Frontline Functionaries:** Enhancing technical skills for community resource persons and frontline workers in NF techniques and water budgeting tools.
- 3 Need to Understand Resilience:** Resilience involves transitioning from a degraded to a restored landscape, recognizing the interconnections between land, water, agriculture, livestock, and non-farm systems. Enhancing resilience is about understanding and fostering these interconnections.
- 4 Capacity Building for Department Staff and CSOs:** Enhancing the capabilities of departmental staff and CSOs to support GPs and community workers with necessary technical and administrative assistance.
- 5 Adaptive Governance Through Systems Thinking:** Utilizing a community-based system dynamics approach that captures the intricate interactions among social, ecological, and economic factors. This allows for an adaptive governance model that can respond dynamically to local changes and challenges.

## Empowerment and Mobilization at the Local Level

- 1 Empowering Gram Panchayats:** Enabling GPs to take proactive roles in promoting sustainable practices like NF and influencing state government policies.
- 2 Mobilization of Resources:** Highlighting the importance of mobilizing funds and resources from various departments to support the implementation of sustainable practices at the local level.
- 3 Collective and Inclusive Action:** Promoting collective decision-making and understanding resource stocks, emphasizing inclusive community action, and extending to gender-balanced community organizations and leadership roles.
- 4 Building CSO Capacities:** Strengthening the capacities of CSOs to support Panchayats technologically and institutionally, ensuring local governance bodies can manage and implement sustainable development initiatives effectively.

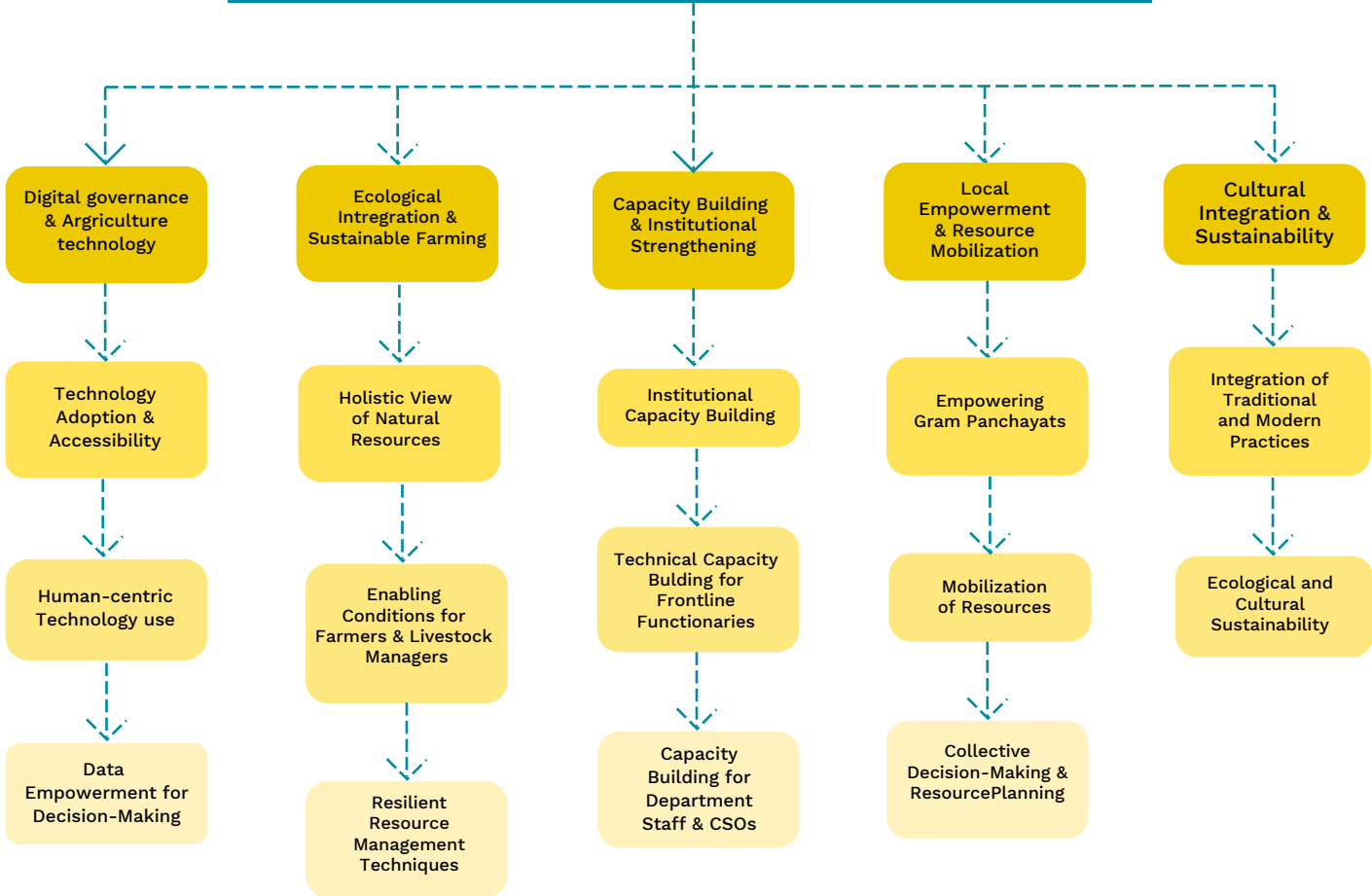
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**Integration of Traditional and Modern Practices:** Blending traditional knowledge with modern governance frameworks and technology usage, respecting local cultural insights while adapting to contemporary challenges and technologies.

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**Ecological and Cultural Sustainability:** Maintaining ecological balance and cultural integrity through environmentally sustainable and culturally enriching practices, including climate resilience strategies, renewable energy use, and preserving and innovating cultural practices.

# ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE THROUGH SYSTEMS THINKING



# Learning from Rajasthan: A Case Study in GPDP-NF Integration

## BACKGROUND:

In Rajasthan, a concerted effort was made to incorporate natural farming into the GPDP across 36 gram panchayats, supported by 16 organizations. This initiative aimed to harmonize agricultural practices with local governance and sustainable development goals.

## OBJECTIVES:

- Embed sustainable, chemical-free farming techniques into the local agricultural framework.
- Empower gram panchayats to effectively plan and implement sustainable agricultural practices.
- Engage local communities in the planning process, ensuring that development is responsive to their needs.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS:

- 01. Consultative Workshops:** Initial workshops were held in Udaipur, Jaipur, and Jodhpur, engaging CSOs, sarpanches, and government officials to align on goals, understand local contexts, and plan the integration strategy.
- 02. Capacity Building and Resource Mapping:** These workshops also focused on building the capacity of local leaders and mapping available resources to support the planned activities effectively.
- 03. Data Empowerment for Decision-Making:** The GPDP was tailored to each panchayat's specific needs, considering the existing agricultural practices and the community's input.



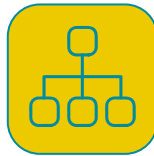


## KEY ACTIVITIES:



### Holistic Plan Development

Integrated plans included not only agriculture but also addressed other social issues, ensuring a comprehensive development approach.



### Enhanced Local Governance:

GPs developed stronger capacities for planning and implementation, fostering more resilient and responsive local governance structures.



### Community Engagement:

The involvement of local communities through the GPDP process increased awareness and adoption of sustainable practices, ensuring broader community support and participation.

## CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED:

- Financial and human resources were stretched thin, limiting the ability to scale up initiatives across all targeted panchayats.
- There were significant delays in obtaining necessary approvals and coordinating between different governmental levels, which slowed the implementation process.
- A prevalent focus on physical infrastructure over sustainable development initiatives required continuous effort to reorient priorities towards natural farming integration.

## OUTCOMES AND IMPACT:

### 01: Sustainable Agricultural Practices

The introduction and adoption of NF practices led to an improvement in soil health and productivity, benefiting local farmers directly.

### 02: Enhanced Local Governance

GPs developed stronger capacities for planning and implementation, fostering more resilient and responsive local governance structures.

### 03: Community Engagement

The involvement of local communities through the GPDP process increased awareness and adoption of sustainable practices, ensuring broader community support and participation.

# Partner Approaches To Strengthening Local Governance

## FES (FOUNDATION FOR ECOLOGICAL SECURITY)

### 1. Understanding Resilience in Local Governance:

- Utilizing community-based system dynamics helps visualize and manage complex interactions between social, ecological, and economic factors.
- Formalizing by laws, developing perspective plans, and fostering partnerships enhance governance frameworks and resilience.

### 2. Data-Driven Decision Making:

- Comprehensive data collection on socio-economic, floral, faunal, and ecological information is crucial for informed decision-making.
- Technology democratizes knowledge, ensuring all stakeholders have the necessary information for resource management and governance.

### 3. Sustainable Resource Management:

Techniques like crop water budgeting manage natural resources sustainably. Strategies include:



#### Restoration

Ensuring consumption is less than recharge to increase storage and raise groundwater levels.



#### Balance and Buffer

Matching consumption with recharge to prevent depletion and use reserves strategically.



#### Steady Depletion

Managing groundwater drawdown to prolong availability and increase productivity.



#### Race to the Bottom

Avoiding uncoordinated resource management that leads to detrimental outcomes.

## 4. Collective Action and Resource Planning:

- Knowledge of current resource stocks compared with demand triggers appropriate actions, especially in deficit scenarios.
- Fostering collective thinking and engagement at the community level is vital for addressing broader issues sustainably outcomes.

## 5. Integrated Governance and Community Engagement:

- Engaging stakeholders from local to regional levels integrates efforts to strengthen governance and ensure sustainable agricultural practices.
- Emphasizing community roles in governance processes aligns measures with local needs and capabilities.



CREDITS: FES



## 1. Swaraj and Community Sovereignty

- Using traditional practices empowers communities, preserving indigenous knowledge while integrating it into modern governance.
- Vaagdhara promotes sovereignty in seeds, food, water, land, livestock, health, and education, aiming for self-sufficient, resilient communities.

## 2. Gender-Balanced Community Organizations

- Building gender-balanced organizations ensures equitable participation in decision-making and leadership.
- Emphasizing women's leadership within community organizations reflects a commitment to gender equality and empowerment.

## 3. Integration of Environmental Sustainability

- Strategies for climate mitigation and adaptation aim to make agricultural practices and communities more climate-resilient.
- Focusing on renewable energy contributes to environmental sustainability and community development.

## 4. Rights and Participation

- Promoting 'Rights and Participation Swaraj' encourages marginalized groups to voice their demands, fostering active participation and accountability.
- Aligning local efforts with global sustainability movements ensures local initiatives contribute to broader goals.

## 5. Sustainable Development Goals

- Aligning with SDGs ensures food and nutrition security, sustainable livelihoods, and child rights.
- Initiatives are designed to meet local needs and potentials, ensuring grounded development efforts.

## 6. Cultural Strengthening and Innovation

- Strengthening traditional culture and integrating it into contemporary governance and development practices.
- Encouraging innovation within traditional practices promotes cultural sustainability.



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## Key Insights on Challenges and Strategic Interventions in Local Governance

### 1. Challenges in Local Governance

- Gender, caste, and class-based inequalities limit citizens' rights, creating a "Patron State and Subject Citizenry" scenario, leading to corruption and poor grassroots governance.

### 2. Strategic Interventions for Governance Enhancement

- Enhancing civic literacy empowers citizens to participate more effectively in local governance.
- Collaboration between CBOs and PRIs improves local governance functionality and effectiveness.

### 3. Promotion of Resilient Agriculture through Local Governance

- Promoting regenerative agriculture involves setting up agricultural committees, village surveys, and facilitating training and bio-input linkages.
- Linking agricultural practices with LSDGs ensures agriculture contributes to community resilience and sustainability.

### 4. Capacity Building and Infrastructure Development

- Regular Gram Panchayat meetings, grievance boxes, and information boards build local governance capacities.
- Creating infrastructure to support resilient agriculture and linking efforts with schemes like MNREGA is vital.



## **5. Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Systems to monitor the 'State of Governance' ensure regular assessment and adjustments.
- Block and district-level forums gather feedback, share learnings, and improve governance practices.

## **6. Community Participation and Empowerment**

- Enhancing participation of women and marginalized groups ensures inclusive development.
- Facilities disseminate information and assist citizens with government schemes and entitlements.

# **Integrating Resilient Agriculture with NRLM**

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## **1. Terminology and Conceptual Clarity**

- NRLM uses terms like Natural Farming and Organic Farming, each contributing uniquely to resilient agriculture.
- Multi-stakeholder approaches are needed to bridge conceptual gaps and align these initiatives with climate resilience goals.

## **2. Terminology and Conceptual Clarity**

- Effective collaboration at the gram panchayat level among line departments, CSOs, GPs and block officials is crucial for promoting resilient agriculture.
- Initiatives like the Lakhpati model and integrated farming clusters guide the implementation of economically viable and scalable climate-resilient practices.

### 3. Sustainability and Universalization

- Diversifying livelihoods to reduce dependence on agriculture supports resilient agriculture and provides stable income sources for rural communities.
- Engaging with NRLM to promote standardized, economically viable climate-resilient practices on a national level, reaching around 10 crore rural women.

### 4. Institutional Engagement and Capacity Building

- Ensuring that NRLM's cluster-level federations and other institutional tiers work in tandem with Gram Panchayats to prevent parallel systems undermining local governance.
- Building local leaders; and institutions' capacities to implement climate-resilient practices through training, resource sharing, and continuous support.

### 5. Integrated Natural Resource Management

**6Js Approach:** Coupling resilient agriculture with comprehensive NRM practices—*Jal* (water), *Jungle* (forests), *Jameen* (land), *Janwar* (animals), *Jan* (people), and *Jeevika* (livelihood)—is crucial to support agriculture and livelihoods.

### 6. Local Level Convergence Models

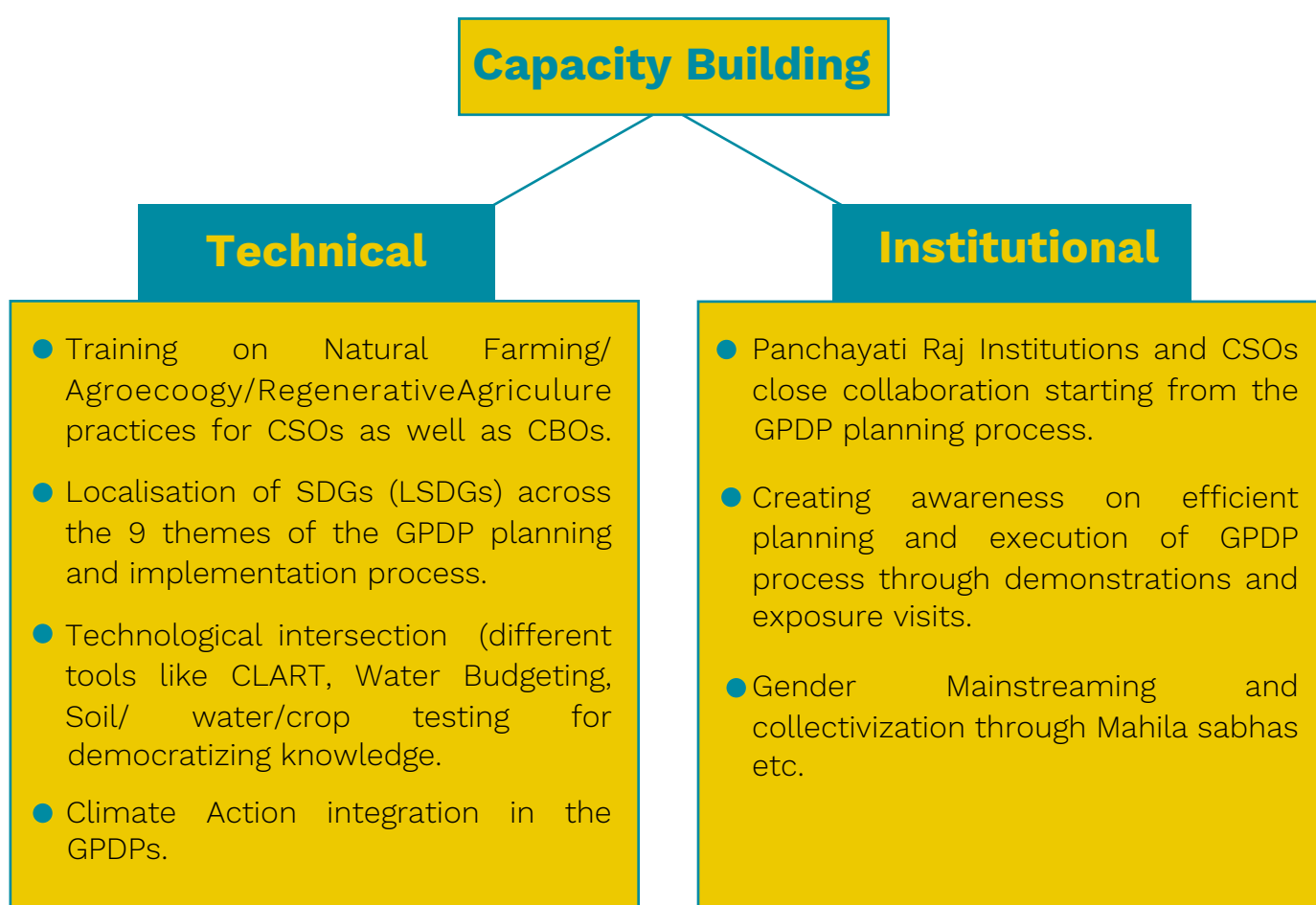
- Developing models at the panchayat level for effective convergence of efforts across sectors and stakeholders promotes resilient agricultural practices within broader developmental agendas.

# CONCLUSION & PRIORITY ACTIONS

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## OUR FORWARD LOOKING GOALS

In continuation with our efforts to strengthen governance systems, one of the key focus areas requiring urgent action is the capacity building of Gram Panchayats and other significant stakeholders in the ecosystem. This capacity building needs to occur at two levels, technical and institutional, to ensure effective implementation and integration of governance initiatives.



The specific next step would be to form a core team based on the interest showcased in the convening to collate and synthesize existing capacity-building materials and identify areas where new materials are needed. This team will ensure these components are integrated within the GPDP process, fostering a more comprehensive and cohesive approach to local governance and development.

This collaborative effort across CSOs in the Alliance is expected to enhance resilient agricultural practices in India, aiming to address the environmental and socio-economic challenges faced by the agriculture sector.



The National Coalition for Natural Farming (NCNF) is a collaborative platform for accelerating the spread of various agroecology-based farming practices, improving on existing practices, and collaborating for policy discourse. The Coalition helps in building necessary partnerships, including with State agencies and farmers' groups, to facilitate a smooth and effective transition towards agro-ecology. It provides necessary knowledge and capacity enhancement inputs to its members on a demand-driven basis.

The ClimateRISE Alliance is a collaborative platform, built with 75+ civil society organizations, ecosystem builders, and funders, that aims to build knowledge, consensus, and common outcomes for the most vulnerable communities on climate action. As one of the objectives, the Alliance has been working towards building an India view, a common vocabulary, and enabling a multi-stakeholder engagement approach on resilient agriculture in India.

## About the collaboration

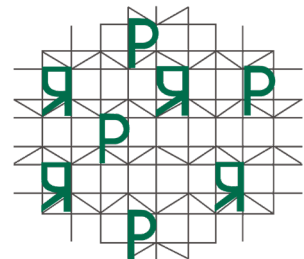
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# PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS



Centre for Accelerated Development



### Get in Touch:

If you are keen to collaborate with us or want to learn more about our work,  
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