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Despite pandemic obstacle, Ranmala village in Pune plants 600 trees via unique drive

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While state govt's target to plant 17 cr trees this year flounders due to outbreak, village gathers Rs 3.5L and counting from public as 'sponsors' for trees, accepts responsibility for tending to them; district collector also takes part

It was just at the beginning of 2020 that the state government had promulgated its ambitious (and muchneeded) 'Green Maharashtra' drive, with the aim of planting at least 17 crore trees across districts between June and September, so as to achieve the ultimate goal of plantation of 50 crore trees over three years. As much as Rs 450 crore had also been allocated for this time's target.

Little was it known then that just weeks down the line, the unexpected outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and a subsequent economic crisis would seemingly stall this entire plan. In fact now, not a single tree has been planted by the state government this year till date, putting the blame on the complete lack of funds available for this purpose with the forest department.

And yet, Ranmala village, just 54 km from Pune city near Rajgurunagar, has proved that will is more important when it comes to creating green cover.

Already the pioneer of the Ranmala Model of plantation, the village — instead of waiting for any aid from the government — has managed to gather lakhs of rupees exclusively for tree plantations via crowdfunding.

Ahost of villagers, members of the public, revenue officers, office-bearers of nearby banks, private companies and credit societies have given their contribution to achieve this target, with a total of Rs 3.5 lakh gathered at the moment. Interestingly, after receiving the appeal, district collector Naval Kishore Ram also contributed to the noble cause from his own pocket by sponsoring a tree guard.

Interestingly, this heartening amount of participation from society at large was not garnered in any complicated way, said villagers — they merely appealed to people to become the 'owners' of a tree in their village. The very name of their campaign exemplifies this: 'Zhaad Tumche, Naavahi Tumche…

Sangopan Matra Aamche' (The tree is yours, in your name… but we are here to conserve it).Launched at end-June, within a week till July, the campaign had spread to all over the district. As per the initiative, each donor gains ownership of a tree, and is liable to get its fruits, shadow and oxygen.

Interestingly, while the village had a target of planting 200 saplings under the state's drive, so far, over 600 trees have already been planted, focused on barren areas and roads connecting to Ranmala.

PT Shinde, a 76-year-old retired teacher who is the brain behind this idea and the Ranmala Model, shared, "Villagers appealed to people to sponsor a tree and cage — the rest of the responsibility is theirs. The idea worked out with a tremendous response. Many people gave monetary donations and others helped with tree guards and labour charges. Common people are willing to do something for conservation of nature — but busy lifestyles and lack of space prevent them often. All we did is giving them space at our village for good work. Coronavirus failed to prevent us from achieving our target."

He added, "Villagers will take responsibility to conserve this tree for the next three years. The forest department and joint forest management committee will also take care. We are not charging more than Rs 1,100 from individuals."

Explaining that each tree guard will be painted with the sponsor's name, villager Jayram Shinde said, "Our appeal carries a simple statistic — a human being requires 28 kg of oxygen per day. A single tree gives out some 7 kg of oxygen. Therefore, one human being should plant at least four trees! Fortunately, we received a great response. From peon to tehsildar and district collector to bank manager, all contributed. The initial target was just 200 trees, but we are already at triple the number. "

The village has long been on the environment map of the state due to its 'Ranmala Model.' Over the last decade, over 25,000 trees have been planted in the vicinity of this hamlet as part of the 'Smritivan' (memorial forest) project. This idea encourages villagers to plant saplings in the name of newborns, newly married couples or in memory of departed loved ones. Moreover, the state urban development department had also started implementing this model across civic bodies to promote afforestation.

Speaking about the latest initiative in light of the ongoing pandemic, Rajgurunagar range forest officer Ashutosh Shendge said, "The COVID-19 outbreak stalled all the funding we get for tree plantations annually. We had even wrapped up the plan for 2020. But once again, Ranmala has set an example. The innovative idea has helped the village achieve a near-impossible task. We also contributed to this worthy cause by giving saplings of native trees."

District collector Ram, who is also a sponsor of a tree now, echoed, "The administration always supports such noble efforts. This is an example of how to achieve a goal despite all odds."

Source: https://punemirror.indiatimes.com/pune/cover-story/despite-pandemic-obstacle-village-plants-600-trees-via-unique-drive/articleshow/76822039.cms