

Waterholes dug by villagers boost forest cover

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RANCHI: Villagers in Ranchi's Bero block voluntarily joined a unique campaign to increase the forest cover by digging small waterholes in nearby jungles so that Sal seeds can germinate in them. Together, the Lamkana villagers dug up more than 3,500 such small pits across 20 acres of the forest area in which rainwater collects.

According to village councillor Rajesh Oraon, the work was completed during the Covid-induced lockdowns in the previous and the current years. The villagers did not seek the help of the forest department or any other government agency, he said. As a morale booster, the holes they dug up last year started showing results this year as small Sal plants appeared in them, he said.

"The forest cover in our area has dwindled. So, we thought digging up small pits could help. The entire 20-acre jungle belongs to our village and protecting it is our duty," said Oraon. "The Sal seeds dropping from the trees often get washed away in the rainwater.

The villagers wanted to replant the Sal within the forest." The panchayat cleared the idea, prompting the villagers to offer 'shramdaan' (voluntary labour) from at least one member from each family. "Last year before the onset of monsoon, we succeeded in digging up more than 2,000 waterholes in around 65% of the forest area.

The rest was done this year by digging up another 1,500 waterholes," said Oraon. The villagers also keep an eye on the jungle. "Two youths are deputed every year. They are given 20 kg of paddy from each of the 125 households."

Source: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2021/jun/16/waterholes-dug-by-villagers-boost-forest-cover-2316903.html>