

CONCEPT NOTE



Grameen Charcha
Indigenous Wisdom in Practice

Location: Bisam Cuttack, Rayagada, Odisha, India

Organized by: Atmashakti Trust | Proposed Dates: February 22-24, 2026

1. Context: Evidence from the Ground and the National Moment

India's development story is inseparable from its villages. Nearly 65% of India's population still lives in rural areas, where livelihoods based on agriculture, forests, crafts, and informal work shape everyday life. These landscapes, especially in tribal and Indigenous regions, are not on the margins of the nation. They are central to food security, ecological stability, and cultural continuity.

Tribal-dominated districts hold a large share of India's forests, biodiversity-rich areas, and mineral resources. Yet they also face some of the country's deepest challenges, such as poverty, malnutrition, climate vulnerability, and governance gaps.

A Climate and Livelihood Turning Point

Climate stress is no longer a distant threat. It is already changing village life. Erratic rainfall, declining soil fertility, forest degradation, and growing water scarcity are reshaping cropping patterns, reducing food diversity, and driving distress migration across Odisha and similar regions.

What is often described as a "**climate crisis**" is experienced on the ground as a food crisis, a health crisis, and a crisis of dignity.

At the same time, Indigenous and traditional food systems, long dismissed as outdated, are gaining renewed attention. Traditional grains, forest foods, wild greens, millets, tubers, and non-timber forest produce are increasingly recognised for their nutritional value, climate resilience, and links to health and wellness. These foods are now entering urban markets, wellness narratives, and premium value chains.

However, this recognition remains fragmented and often extractive. Indigenous food systems are often overlooked as viable economic systems. They lack sustained policy backing, ecosystem investment, research, documentation, and ethical financing, often excluding communities from ownership and decision-making.

Lessons We Risk Forgetting

The COVID-19 pandemic offered a clear lesson. When supply chains broke down and formal systems failed, communities turned to local seeds, traditional foods, forest knowledge, and collective care practices. Indigenous food and health systems re-emerged not as nostalgia, but as survival.

Yet as the crisis faded, so did institutional attention.

Many traditional recipes, seed practices, preservation methods, and healing foods remain undocumented and undervalued. Much of this knowledge, carried by women and elders and passed on orally, is at risk of being lost. This erosion is not just a cultural loss; it directly weakens nutrition, climate resilience, and local livelihoods.

A Governance Recognition Gap

Despite policy commitments to participation and inclusion, platforms where community knowledge genuinely shapes governance, markets, and programme design remain limited. Indigenous knowledge is often treated as anecdotal rather than as evidence. Communities are consulted, but rarely positioned as co-creators of solutions.

This gap matters.

Across tribal regions, communities are navigating climate uncertainty, livelihood stress, cultural erosion, and distance from institutions. At the same time, these regions hold some of India's strongest solution systems, sacred groves, uncultivated foods, seed diversity, water stewardship practices, collective decision-making, and care economies. These are not remnants of the past, rather they are assets for the future.

2. Why Grameen Charcha, Why Now

Grameen Charcha responds to this moment by placing Indigenous wisdom at the centre of evidence, and rural communities at the centre of solutions.

It creates a participatory pathway that takes voices from villages to districts and into a shared public platform, bringing lived experience, ecological knowledge, and practical solutions into public and

policy discussions. This process leads to a people-led Action Charter, not as a symbolic statement, but as a collective call to governments, institutions, markets, and funders to invest in what already works.

Grameen Charcha rests on a simple truth:

- There is no **Viksit Bharat** without resilient villages.
- There are no **resilient villages** without Indigenous food systems, ecological knowledge, and community-led governance.
- **What is at stake** is not preservation alone, but the possibility of a development pathway that is nutritious, climate-resilient, culturally rooted, and economically just, one that strengthens Indigenous systems with dignity, resources, and voice, rather than replacing them.

3. Objectives

1. **Amplify Indigenous Wisdom:** Bring local knowledge into practice-oriented dialogue and policy discussions.
2. **Enable Grassroots Innovation:** Showcase scalable rural innovations across land, livelihoods, mental health, sports, and climate action.
3. **Enable Community-Led Governance:** Strengthen participatory governance through Samaj-Sarkaar experiences and civic engagement.
4. **Engage Diverse Stakeholders:** Facilitate dialogue among community leaders, civil society, government officials, youth, and researchers.
5. **Inspire Leadership:** Launch “**Tribal Leadership Council**” and “**Tribal Representative Cohort**” to recognize and empower local leadership.

4. Program Overview

This initiative is being shaped and led by 50+ community collectives across seven states, facilitated by Atmashakti Trust as a people-led platform for dialogue between communities and institutions.

This year’s Grameen Charcha unfolds as a month-long community process:

Feb 01–20, 2026: Village Dialogues and Visioning

Communities across villages will reflect on their aspirations for 2026 and explore their contributions towards ecological resilience, local economies, and emotional well-being in the spirit of a *Viksit Bharat 2047*.

Feb 20–21, 2026: Immersive rural learning for 100 participants from six states:

- Village visits, vibe sensing, and voice reports capturing community aspirations.
- Hands-on workshops, storytelling circles, and experiential sessions.

Feb 22–24, 2026: Main Grameen Charcha event for 1000 participants from Odisha:

Exhibition – Workshops - Consultation

- **Panels:** Indigenous knowledge, climate and agriculture, mental health and sports, policy influence.
- **Pavilions and Exhibitions:** Innovation Bazaar, Indigenous Wisdom Counters, Climate Stories, Samaj-Sarkaar, Uncultivated Food Pavilion, Sports Pavilion.
- **Cultural Engagement:** Tribal music and dance, reel-making competitions, and film screenings.
- **Call to Action:** Launch of Tribal Leadership Council and Representative Cohort, recognition of grassroots heroes.

5. Key Themes

1. **Emotion:** Cultural celebrations, storytelling, sports, and reflection spaces.
2. **Ecology:** Climate adaptation, traditional land practices, sustainable agriculture.
3. **Economy:** Local enterprises, rural innovations, skill-building, and governance.

6. Value Proposition for Partners and Collaborators

Audience	What They Gain	Engagement Opportunities
Funders & Donors	Access to innovative rural interventions, high-impact community engagement	Branding, field exposure, advisory role, co-design of programs
Civil Society & NGOs	Evidence-based insights, partnerships for replication	Panel participation, workshops, documentation, advocacy support

Government & Local Governance	Grounded data for policy, community-informed solutions	Participatory Samaj-Sarkaar sessions, leadership engagement, program insights
Media & Documentation Partners	Rich stories, visuals, and narratives	Storytelling, film screenings, coverage of innovations and cultural events
Researchers & Academia	Empirical data and insights	Collaboration in studies, co-authored publications, knowledge sharing
Youth & Students	Exposure to rural realities, skill-building	Participation in workshops, cultural programs, leadership initiatives

7. Call for Collaboration

Grameen Charcha is envisioned as a **co-created, multi-stakeholder platform**. We invite partners to engage as:

- **Knowledge Partners** – help frame discussions and evidence-building.
- **Practice and Field Collaborators** – bring expertise in agriculture, health, ecology, or sports.
- **Policy and Systems Allies** – advise on governance and program alignment.
- **Documentation and Media Partners** – capture learnings and amplify stories.
- **Funding Partners** – support operational costs, logistics, participant engagement, and scale-up.

8. Expected Impact

- Strengthened **Indigenous leadership** through the Tribal Leadership Council.
- Enhanced **community-driven policy insights** for state and national replication.
- Showcased **scalable rural innovations** in economy, ecology, and social wellbeing.
- Creation of **multi-stakeholder networks** for long-term partnerships and learning.

9. Next Steps

- Identification of potential funding and knowledge partners.
- Finalization of program themes, panels, and participant cohorts.

- Onboarding collaborators for workshops, exhibitions, and cultural programming.
- Documentation and media strategy for national and international dissemination.

Grameen Charcha is a space to listen, reflect, and act together. It begins with the belief that villages are not just sites of need, but sources of knowledge, strength, and solutions. At a moment of climate uncertainty and social change, it calls on institutions, policymakers, and partners to walk alongside rural and Indigenous communities, recognising their wisdom and leadership in shaping futures that are rooted in dignity, ecology, and lived realities.