



Project For Improvement of Himachal Pradesh Forest Ecosystems Management and Livelihoods (JICA Funded)



Newsletter

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A Journey of 1 Year 3 Months in the Project...

The journey of 1 year and 3 months with the Himachal Pradesh JICA Forestry Project has been truly memorable. I assumed the role of Chief Project Director on 6th April 2024. During this period, I received immense support from the officers and staff of both the project and the department. With a mix of sweet and challenging experiences, I would like to express my hope that the second phase of the JICA Forestry Project in Himachal Pradesh will be launched. Such an initiative would further improve employment opportunities for the youth and enhance the livelihoods of people in rural areas. The people of Himachal are hardworking and passionate about making a difference.

From 5th to 9th May 2025, a two-member team from JICA India conducted a mid-term review in Himachal. The mission members evaluated the work carried out since 2018 and appreciated the progress made. The project has also honored Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Village Forest Development Societies (VFDS) that have shown outstanding performance in livelihood improvement by awarding them with cash prizes. Moreover, by providing modern tools and techniques, the project is not only preserving the traditional crafts of rural women in Himachal Pradesh but also enhancing their income. Giving a modern touch to the traditional craft of making leaf plates, the project has provided modern machines to SHGs at the Forest Division level. With these machines, women are now able to produce more beautiful and durable leaf plates. These plates, made from Taur leaves, are fully biodegradable and environmentally friendly. The demand for these modern leaf plates is growing rapidly across the state.

The project has also made commendable progress in the handloom sector. Various SHGs associated with the project are giving a new identity to handloom and weaving products. In Kullu district alone, 106 SHGs are engaged in the handloom sector. The products created by these groups are being marketed under the brand name “Him Tradition”. Earlier, dry pine needles in the forests were considered waste, but now they are being turned into a source of income. SHGs linked to the project are making various household products from these needles and have also started selling them. Under the state government’s key initiative the Mukhya Mantri Van Vistar Yojana plantation work has been carried out on 100 hectares of barren land across different regions of the state. In the 12th Governing Body meeting, the project decided to form over 140 new Village Forest Development Societies (VFDS). Although there are currently 400 VFDSs and 60 Biodiversity Sub-committees actively working in the state, the project has resolved to form additional VFDSs to provide more livelihood opportunities to rural communities. Under these new VFDSs, more than 280 new SHGs will also be formed.

“During my short tenure, I had visited all 22 forest divisions of the state, where I witnessed commendable work taking place. As the Head of Forest Force, I have always received love and cooperation from the department and all project staff—something I will always be grateful for. I sincerely hope that the second phase of this project will come soon”

Jai Hind.

**Sameer Rastogi (IFS)
PCCF HoFF cum Chief Project Director**

CM Sukhvinder Sukhu Distributed 9 Sewing Machines to SHGs

- Natural and chemical-free products spread fragrance in Dehra
- CM Sukhu praises the hardworking Self-Help Group women



RP Negi

Media Specialist

Chief Minister Thakur Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu distributed 9 sewing machines to women associated with Self-Help Groups under the JICA Forestry Project. He praised the dedication and hard work of these women during the state-level KfW program held in Dehra. During the event, the Chief Minister inaugurated the JICA Forestry Project stall, highlighting the significant contribution of Self-Help Group members in improving livelihoods. He noted that the members were doing exemplary work in the field of income generation.

Kamlesh Thakur, MLA of Dehra and wife of the Chief Minister, also appreciated the efforts of the



project and its members. The program venue was filled with the pleasant aroma of natural and chemical-free products showcased by the Self-Help Groups. On this occasion, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Project Director, Sameer Rastogi, encouraged and applauded the SHG members for their efforts. The exhibition featured products prepared by various Self-Help Groups from the forest divisions of Dehra, Dharamshala, Nurpur, and Palampur. Items included bamboo products, pickles, seera-badi, papads, handmade bags, and more – all of which were available for sale and display at the stall.

Govt at Your Doorstep: CM Sukhu Visited JICA Stall



During the "Government at Your Doorstep" program held on 17th June 2025 at Baga Sarahan under the Ani Forest Division, Chief Minister Thakur Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu visited the stall set up by the JICA Forestry Project. The stall showcased and sold various products made by Self-Help Groups. The Chief Minister inaugurated the stall and appreciated the products, stating that rural women have made significant progress in the field of livelihood enhancement. On this occasion, MLA Kullu Mr Sunder Singh Thakur, Chairman HP Milk Federation Mr. Budhi Singh Thaku, Project Director Mr. Shreshtha Nand Sharma, CCF Mr. K. Thirumal,

Divisional Forest Officer of Ani Mr. Chaman Rao, along with officials and staff from the Forest Department and the project, were present. Earlier, on 2nd June 2025, during the Van Mitra Samvad program held at Badu in Hamirpur, Chief Minister Thakur Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu had also visited the stall set up by the project. He was accompanied by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Project Director Mr. Sameer Rastogi.

Capacity Building of Project Stakeholders during FY 2024-25



Reena Sharma

Program Manager
(Livelihoods and Training)

The JICA Forestry Project is strongly committed to enhancing the institutional capacity of all its stakeholders to ensure the effective and sustainable implementation of project interventions. The project operates across 22 divisions, engaging a diverse range of stakeholders including Project staff, Forest Department personnel and members of VFDS, BMCsc and SHGs. To ensure effective coordination and execution of project activities at all levels, it is essential to regularly organize capacity-building



initiatives such as workshops, skill development trainings, refresher courses, and exposure visits. These programs not only enhance functional skills but also foster collaboration, leadership and ownership among the stakeholders.

Workshops Organized by PMU Shimla during FY 2024-25



During the financial year 2024-25, PMU Shimla organized a series of capacity-building workshops aimed at strengthening the skills and knowledge of various project stakeholders, including field functionaries, VFDS members, and SHG representatives. The key workshops conducted include:

- **Marketing Techniques for SHG Executives** – Focused on enhancing the marketing and sales skills of SHG members for effective promotion of their products.
- **Portal Handling Inspection** – Organized for field staff to build their proficiency in using the digital inspection and monitoring system.
- **Short Film Making and Capacity Building** – Designed to develop communication and documentation skills among field personnel.

- **Workshop on TDS/TCS Provisions of Income Tax** – Conducted specifically for JICA project accountants to ensure compliance with financial regulations.

- **Review Workshops with Forest Department Staff** – Held to assess progress and align departmental efforts with overall project objectives.

The primary objective of these workshops was to ensure that all stakeholders are well-equipped, both technically and operationally, to contribute effectively toward the successful implementation of the project.

Skill Based Trainings at Division level

At the Division level, module-based trainings and workshops were also organized, particularly for VFDS/BMC and SHG executives. Based on SHG preferences to enhance their livelihoods through income-generating activities, the JICA Project provided skill-based trainings through reputed institutions such as KVKs, Line Departments and experienced NGOs. During FY 2024–25, SHGs received trainings in trades like cutting and tailoring,

knitting, handloom weaving, food processing, mushroom cultivation, vermicompost making etc. By March 2025, a total of 870 SHGs had received training, benefiting around 8,570 women. All trainings were provided free of cost to the Project SHGs. In addition, the Project also facilitated add-on and advanced skill trainings to strengthen the long-term sustainability of SHG income activities.



In addition to training, exposure visits were organized within and outside the project area, including inter-state visits, to facilitate knowledge sharing and cross-learning. Community representatives from Lahaul Division & Spiti (WL) Division visited Leh–Ladakh to explore sea buckthorn processing and marketing opportunities. Similarly, field staff and community members undertook exposure visits to the JICA Uttarakhand Project in two batches to study livelihood promotion, collective functioning, and marketing strategies. Divisions such as Ani, Suket, Mandi, Chopal, Bilaspur, Palampur, and Nurpur also conducted cross-visits within the project

region, fostering mutual learning and exploration of innovative livelihood models. The combined efforts of PMU Shimla and its Divisions in organizing targeted trainings, workshops, and exposure visits have significantly enhanced the capacities of field functionaries, VFDS, and SHG members. These initiatives not only equipped stakeholders with practical skills and technical knowledge but also fostered mutual learning, innovation, and collaboration. As a result, the project has made notable progress toward its goal of sustainable livelihood enhancement and effective community participation in project activities.

Traditional art of Handloom Weaving Going Back Ages

- Success story of Saraswati Self Help Group



Aditya S. Thakur

FTU Co Ordinator,
Wildlife Kullu

Situated in beautiful Kullu valley the, picturesque village of Bhakli is surrounded by terraced fields, green forests and utter beauty. There exists a remarkable self-help group known as Saraswati Self-Help Group. This group took shape under the wings of a JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) project and embarked on a transformative journey that would change their lives and the landscape of their village forever.

With the traditional art of handloom weaving going back ages, Saraswati SHG focused on creating exquisite stalls, borders, and shawls that were not just products but embodiments of their cultural heritage and artistic prowess. Challenges such as limited resources, market access, and completion from other market players caused some hurdles on the way but



members of the group were fueled by their passion for preserving their craft and improving their livelihoods. Under the guidance and support of the JICA project, Saraswati SHG underwent comprehensive training programs in modern weaving techniques, quality control measures and effective marketing strategies. JICA also helped the group financially in all aspects, Armed with newfound knowledge and skills, they set out to showcase their handloom creations to a wider audience beyond Bhekhli Village.



Their consistency towards work and dedication for making this group a success story led them to overcome all the hurdles and problems they faced. A key turning point came when the group learned to market their products effectively. They started participating in local fairs and exhibitions, showcasing

their handloom. These events helped them reach a wider audience, including tourists who visits Kullu valley for its natural beauty. As their reputation and demand grew, so did their income. From a modest income of Rs.30,000 rupees Saraswati SHG's total income soared to an impressive 1,55,000 rupees. This financial success not only uplifted the economic status of the group members but also was critical in social prosperity of the village. Saraswati SHG became an inspiration for other self-help groups and artisans in the region. Fostering a spirit of collaboration and empowerment among the local community. The success story of Saraswati Self-Help Group in Bhekhli Village under the JICA project serves as a powerful example of how consistency, collective effort and facilitation can turn dreams into reality, bringing economic growth, social upliftment to a once struggling community.

Glimpse Of Mid Term Review (MTR) 5th to 9th May 2025



Model Nursery Piyuntra: A Green Revolution School



Arun Verma

SMS (Chopal)

Under the JICA Forestry Project, excellent nurseries are being operated across 66 forest ranges in 22 forest divisions of Himachal Pradesh. These nurseries are acting as green classrooms, spreading the message of environmental conservation. Among them, the Model Nursery Piyuntra, located in the Nerwa Forest Range under Chopal Forest Division of district Shimla, has emerged as a milestone. This model nursery is now seen as a "School of Green Revolution." It is the first state nursery equipped with cutting-edge technology. The Piyuntra Model Forest Nursery has been developed on two hectares of land at Kaidi, Chopal. Although it was originally established in 1972, the JICA Forestry Project began modernizing



and upgrading it with advanced technologies in 2018. Today, the nursery operates with a capacity of over 600,000 saplings.

List of available species

- Deodar
- Ban oak
- Chulli (wild apricot)
- Bakayan (chinaberry)
- Reetha (soapnut)
- Baimi
- Kachnar
- Kaith (wood apple)
- Pomegranate
- Bayul
- Amla (Indian gooseberry)



Under the JICA Forestry Project, advanced technologies are being widely used for the maintenance of the Piyuntra nursery. A weather station and crop app are used to monitor the moisture and dryness levels of saplings planted in polybags. A fully automatic irrigation system has been installed, allowing water to be distributed throughout the nursery at the press of a button. This saves time and increases work efficiency. The nursery has six modern polyhouses and an 80,000-litre capacity water tank to support irrigation needs.

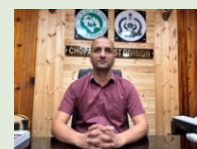


HoFF Sameer Rastogi Inspects the Nursery

15th July 2025.

Principal from the department and Chief Conservator of Forests (HoFF) and Nand Sharma, Project Chief Project Director of the JICA Forestry Project and Mr. Jangveer Singh Dulta, Divisional Forest Officer of Chopal Piyuntra Nursery on were also present.

"Piyuntra Nursery is a model nursery in the state, equipped with state-of-the-art technology. Although it was established in 1972, it has been operating under the JICA Forestry Project since 2018. With a capacity of over 600,000 saplings of various species."



Jangveer Singh Dulta
(DCF Chopal)

Samir Rastogi Retired After 37 Years of Service



IFS officer of the 1988 batch, Mr. Samir Rastogi, who served as Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Project Director (CPD) of the JICA Forestry Project, retired on 31st July 2025 after 37 years of distinguished service.

He qualified for the Indian Forest Service and underwent training at the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy, Dehradun from 4th July 1988 to 31st March 1990. Samir Rastogi began his career as an Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF) in the Parvati Forest Division on 1st August 1990. From 1992 to 2008, he served as Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) in various Forest Divisions across the state. He was promoted to the post of Conservator of Forests (CF) on 6th October 2008, then to Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF) on 11th July 2012, and further to Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (APCCF) on 12th October 2007.

From 2nd May 2017 to 18th February 2019, he served as Chief Project Director of an earlier phase of the Forestry Project. He was then deputed to central services, serving from 20th February 2019 to 19th February 2024 at a key post related to Forestry and Environmental Conservation. On 30th April 2021, he was promoted to the post of Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF). On 5th April 2024, the state government appointed him as CPD of the JICA Forestry Project, a role he assumed on 6th April. During his 1 year and 3 months in the JICA Project, he played a pivotal role and actively engaged with Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in rural areas. In April 2024, he visited the tribal region of Demul in Spiti and distributed diesel-powered threshing machines to address the farmer's problems. On his retirement, officers and staff of the Forest Department and JICA Forestry Project organized a farewell to honor his service.





**Chief Minister
Thakur Sukhvinder
Singh Sukhu
inaugurated Selfi
point at Bagasarahan
(Forest Division Ani)**



**Forest officers in
Forest Range
Pooh (Kinnaur)
while reading
Newsletter**



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