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## Tiger Day: How India's first tribal President, Draupadi Murmu, inspired the 'Trees for Tiger' plantation drive

When I met our honorable President, Draupadi Murmu, at the Raj Bhavan during her tenure as the Governor of Jharkhand, an insightful conversation with her planted the seed for an idea that later grew into one of the biggest plantation drives in Odisha.

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Honorable President, Draupadi Murmu, at the Raj Bhavan during her tenure as the Governor of Jharkhand.

By Bikrant Tiwary

'I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the water to create many ripples.' These words by Mother Teresa have always reminded me that the right thought can cause a ripple of change. When I met our honorable President, Draupadi Murmu, at the Raj Bhavan during her tenure as the Governor of Jharkhand, an insightful conversation with her planted the seed for an idea that later grew into one of the biggest plantation drives in Odisha.

I was aware of Draupadi Ji's concern for the environment, and her eagerness to bring about a collective effort to enhance our socio-environment systems. During our conversation, she suggested that trees should be planted around Simlipal National Park in the Mayurbhanj district and other sanctuaries in Odisha. Being a tribal leader from Odisha, she has close ties with the Santhal community in Mayurbhanj and suggested we include tribal areas in our 'Trees

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for Tiger' plantation drive. Needless to say, I was determined to put this idea into action, especially in light of the recent forest fires in the area that had significantly damaged the ecosystem, biodiversity, and way of life.

Simlipal National Park in Odisha covers 2,750 square kilometers and is home to the only known habitat of the melanistic black tigers, a rare color variant of tiger. It is also the prime habitat of the Asiatic Elephants and other wildlife and birds. The National Tiger Conservation Authority in India has identified a potential link between the migration of wild animals from the Simlipal Tiger Reserve to the Satkosia Tiger Reserve and has proposed a corridor. Despite being a relatively long corridor, it is severely fragmented because of extensive mining operations, power plants, and numerous human settlements.

A plantation drive on the foothills of this national park would not only facilitate the restoration of lost wildlife habitat but also help us reinforce the importance of tigers as a sign of a healthy ecosystem. Forests are crucial to conserve the tiger population in our country. They provide shade, reduce air and water temperatures, and contribute to the overall health of an ecosystem. In addition to wild animals, these forests also serve as a crucial habitat for deer, antelope, langur, squirrel, and others. Thus, where tigers thrive, so do other plants and animals.

In order to cater to such a diverse ecosystem, we planted a mix of at least 15-20 tree species like Shisham, Mango, Lemon, Jackfruit, Teak, Karanj, and others. The species to be planted as well as the project location was decided keeping in mind the inputs of local and tribal communities, forest department, and environment experts. We also saw this project as an avenue of generating sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Starting from seed planting to the upkeep of saplings, we engaged local communities and prominent tribes like Bhumij, Santhal, Gond, Mankidia, and Kolha, in every step of the plantation process to generate employment as well as position this as an opportunity to educate them on the benefits of planting trees. The fruits, vegetables, and other NTFPs from the trees they plant can not only be used for consumption but also for sale to supplement their income. The trees will also help in improving moisture conservation, controlling soil erosion, enhancing the water table, and contribute towards the prevention of drought, flood, and forest fires.

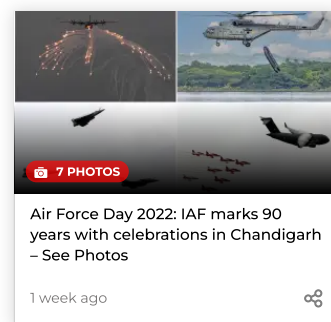
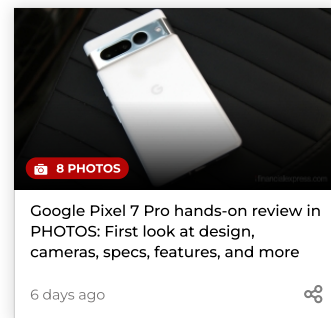
The trees that have helped expand the buffer zone have also played a significant role in reducing man-human conflict, a problem the local and tribal communities were struggling with because of habitat fragmentation. The plantation also gave us an opportunity to discourage illegal activities like poaching and educate people about the importance of conserving tigers and maintaining the balance of the ecosystem.

Watching this initiative come to life has only fueled my gratitude and hope. Draupadi Murmu's thought not only inspired one of our biggest and most important plantation projects but also reminded me that we have miles to go in our journey of environmental restoration. With Draupadi Ji becoming the President of India, I am positive that her compassion and love for the environment will inspire millions of people to come together and stand up for Mother Earth.



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(The author is CEO of Grow-Trees.com. Views expressed are personal and do not reflect the official position or policy of the FinancialExpress.com.)

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