

## Field Visit Report: Rajaji–Corbett Landscape (August 27–31, 2025)<sup>1</sup>

The field visit to the Rajaji–Corbett landscape, conducted jointly with the Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan (VGTYS), focused on strengthening community-led governance, rights awareness, and cultural initiatives among the Van Gujjar pastoralist community. Activities emphasized knowledge exchange, capacity building, and inclusive participation of women and youth.

### Key Discussions and Learnings

- **Conservation and Traditional Knowledge**

Community members raised concerns about government plantation schemes in grassland habitats, particularly the introduction of non-native species. The discussions highlighted the value of traditional knowledge in maintaining ecological balance, with special reference to the role of wild vegetables in seasonal migration patterns and women’s health.



Image 1: Kalpavriksh member speaking about wild vegetables

- **Community Forest Rights (CFR)**

Through workshops and participatory mapping, the community explored the formation of Community Forest Resource Management Committees (CFRMCs) and the drafting of management plans. The process underlined generational perspectives on landscapes and reinforced the importance of democratic tools such as People’s Biodiversity Registers (PBR).

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- Women’s Leadership and Self-Strengthening**  
 Women of the Van Gujjar community showcased progress of their Self-Help Group (SHG), with initiatives in health awareness, vegetable gardening, and traditional jewellery-making. Their aspirations for literacy, targeted health sessions, and livelihood opportunities reflect growing agency. For the first time, women publicly performed *Bainths* (traditional songs) in a formal setting, symbolizing confidence and inclusion.
- Youth Engagement and FRA Awareness**  
 Youth dialogues focused on leadership, advocacy, and legal awareness related to the Forest Rights Act (FRA). Participants expressed strong interest in building a **Yuva Sangathan**, conducting regular FRA meetings, and learning practical processes such as filling claim forms and compiling documentation. Education was recognized not only as a means for employment but also as a tool for empowerment and awareness.



Image 2: FRC members mapping CFR area with guidance from Kalpavriksh team members

### Outcomes

- Initiated planning for a **Biocultural Festival (Feb 2026)** in collaboration with VGTYS and potential partner organizations.



Image 3: VGTYS youth planning for Bio-cultural festival

- Strengthened capacity for **CFRMC formation** and participatory management planning.



Image 4: Women FRC members presenting their CFR map

- Enhanced women's confidence and leadership through SHG initiatives and inclusive forums.



Image 5: Sharing women's initiatives from other villages in a PA landscape

- Mobilized youth interest in **rights-based advocacy** and collective organizing.



Image 6: Youth FRC members discussing CFRMC constitution

### **Conclusion**

The visit reaffirmed the importance of creating inclusive spaces where Van Gujjar women, youth, and elders can participate equally in shaping conservation and governance. By building on traditional knowledge and strengthening community capacities under the FRA, the groundwork is being laid for resilient, community-driven management of forests and livelihoods.