

Carbon project:

Trees for Livelihoods, Madhya Pradesh, India



VCS 4627

A Cool Effect onsite report

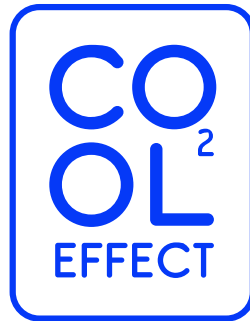
October 2025



As part of Carbon Done Correctly, Cool Effect conducts a site visit after completing scientific due diligence and ensuring the GHG integrity of each project we represent. Sometimes visits take place before we purchase credits and sometimes after.

The site visit is intended to see operations of the project firsthand, gather information on any outstanding questions, meet the project management team, see them in action and assess project interactions with the local community.

Our team also focuses on gathering details on how revenue from the sale of carbon credits is being used. We look for evidence of how income from previous years has been applied and we discuss funding for future expansion.



Project specifications

Name of project:

Trees for Livelihoods,
Madhya Pradesh,
India

Project type:

Nature-based Removal

Standard:

Verra 4627

Methodology:

AR-ACM0003



Expected issuance:

165,000 per year

Crediting periods:

20 years

Agriculture is a cornerstone of Madhya Pradesh's economy, yet farmers remain among the most economically vulnerable populations in India. Traditional farming practices have contributed to widespread soil erosion, and many smallholder farmers face declining productivity and increasing climate-related risks.

VNV's project counteracts this by planting millions of trees at no cost to the landowners, bolstering the health of their land while introducing alternate revenue streams from fruit and sustainable timber harvest.

The project has planted and overseen the growth of more than

314,948

trees, engaging over

528

smallholder farmers across two districts in Madhya Pradesh. Combined, these farmers enrolled

1,290

hectares of agricultural land in the project.

In early October 2025, Cool Effect team members Tom Wickline (Sustainability Coordinator) and Elsy Alvarado (Director of Project Relations) traveled to the project area for the first time.

Objectives of this site visit



- Visit the project sites in Madhya Pradesh, India to see the planting in-person
- Meet the community-led leadership team and see how they manage the project
- Provide early-stage guidance to the project as it prepares for first issuance
- Hear firsthand accounts from farmers of how the project has changed their lives



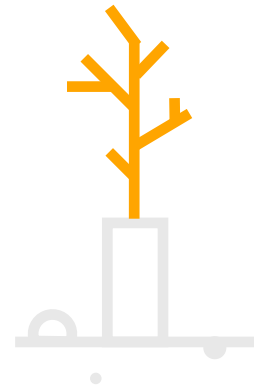
What is VNV?

Value Network Ventures (VNV) is an India-based project developer with over 130 carbon projects across 15 countries. Cool Effect is engaged with several of VNV's projects throughout South Asia.

3 pillars

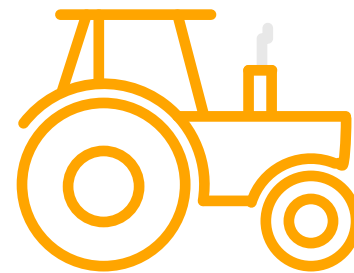
1 Planting & Operations

A core reason we visit project sites is to see operations with our own eyes. From the nurseries where seedlings are grown to the bunds where they're planted, we saw the project delivering on its commitments to rigor and long-term impact.



2 Farmer Empowerment

This project brings rural farmers free saplings, legal harvest rights, and the long-term asset of high-value trees. These tangible benefits represent real improvements to their lives.



3 Community & Social Impact

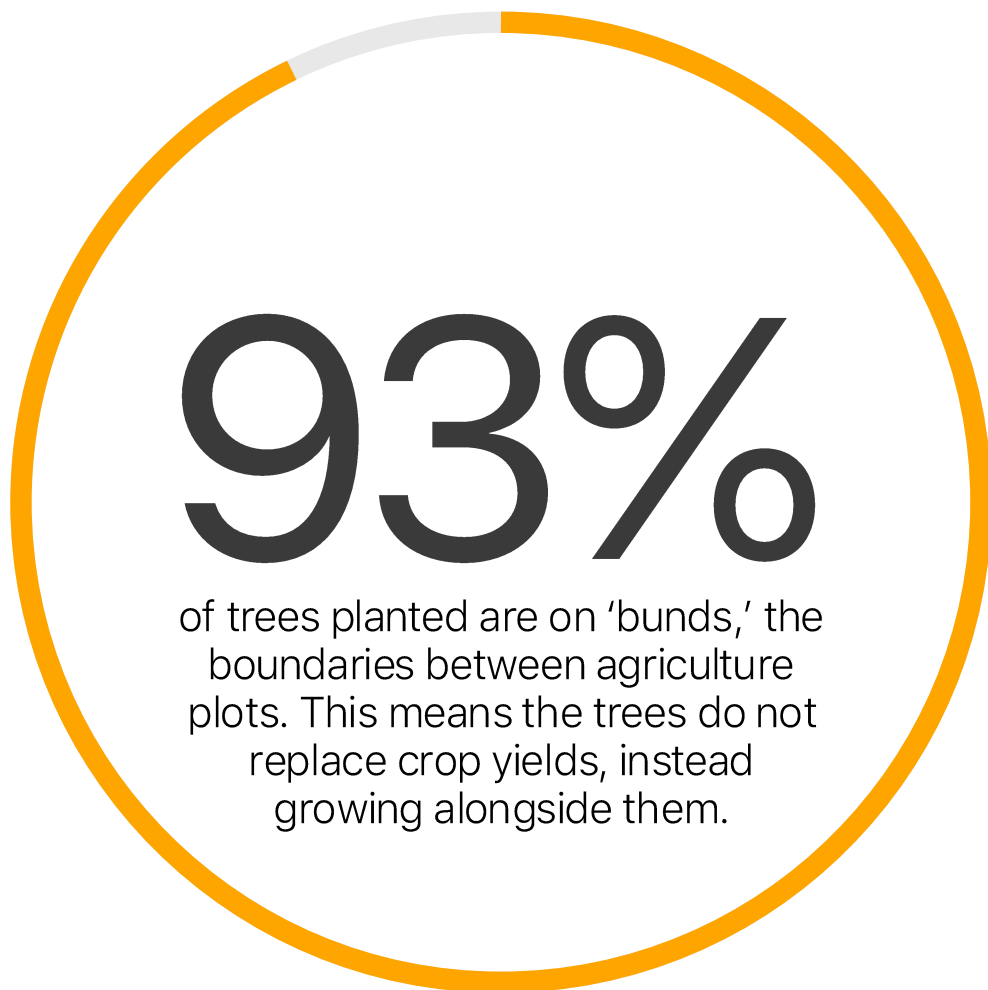
Beyond the direct benefits to participating farmers, this project brings benefits to the entire community. This means employment opportunities for women, protection of local water reserves, and regular community meetings to hear their input firsthand.



Planting & Operations

Madhya Pradesh state is a very fertile and successful agricultural area of India, but traditional agricultural practices have contributed to elevated CO₂ emissions, deforestation, soil erosion, and increasing pressure on local biodiversity.

This agroforestry project seeks to address these challenges by converting farmland into a long-term carbon sink through large-scale tree planting, while also promoting sustainable farming practices and supporting rural livelihoods.



Planting & Operations

The project is designed to make sure that participating farmers can benefit without changing their daily routines or devoting extra labor. The goal is to ensure that the growth of trees does not come at the expense of lower agricultural yields or additional labor.

All trees are planted on land that was not used for agriculture. 93% of trees are planted on 'bunds,' the boundaries between plots, while the remaining 7% are planted on unproductive parcels that individual farmers opted to include.



Cool Effect and VNV next to a border planting.

Planting & Operations

The sapling transportation, planting, and logistics are all handled by the project itself. Farmers request a specific blend of tree species, and teams of workers do the rest. What this means in practice is that farmers benefit from this project without devoting any of their own money.

\$0
cost
to farmers

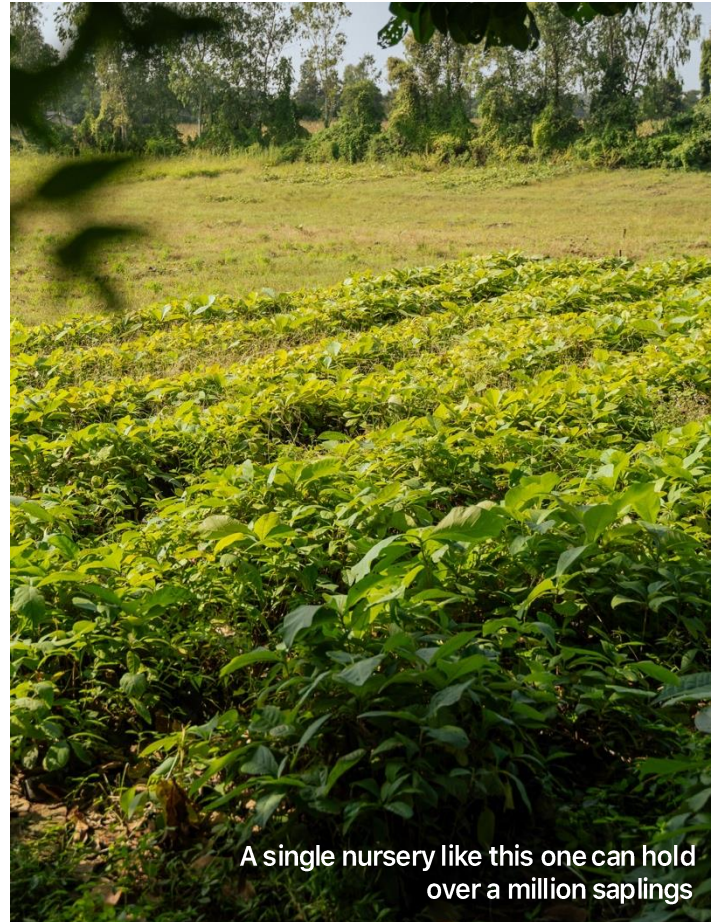


Trees planted along water bodies help protect the water from contaminants.

VNV leases local nurseries to retain full oversight of the quantity, quality, and type of seedlings produced. This level of control is essential for effective planning, as it provides certainty on available volumes, reduces total costs, and reduces tree mortality rates. VNV tracks each farmer's seedling allocation to ensure that saplings get where they need to go.

VNV covers the full cost of the seedlings, including handling, transportation, and planting. These expenses would otherwise be prohibitive for farmers in the region.

The sign at the entrance identifies the nursery as part of the VNV carbon project. During the site visit, Tom Wickline and Elsy Alvarado from Cool Effect toured two nurseries, both similar in size and managed under the same operational model.



A single nursery like this one can hold over a million saplings



Planting & Operations

Nurseries

These nurseries are remarkably productive. One site we visited, only 1.5 hectares in size, can hold between 2 and 3 million saplings during the peak of planting season. The nurseries are employed predominantly by women.

At this site, we got the chance to meet three women who work at the nursery and ask them how they saw their work.

One of the women, in yellow, has a Master's degree in History and is married to the nursery owner. The woman in blue has a bachelor's degree, and the woman in black studied until 10th grade.

They said that they find the job interesting, even though it can be hard work. The job also serves as an opportunity to build community, and the women we met seemed to be close friends.



Three women we met at a nursery. One (Right) is the wife of the nursery owner.



Any leftover seedlings from the current year's planting will be maintained and used for planting in the following year.



Project participant – nursery owner

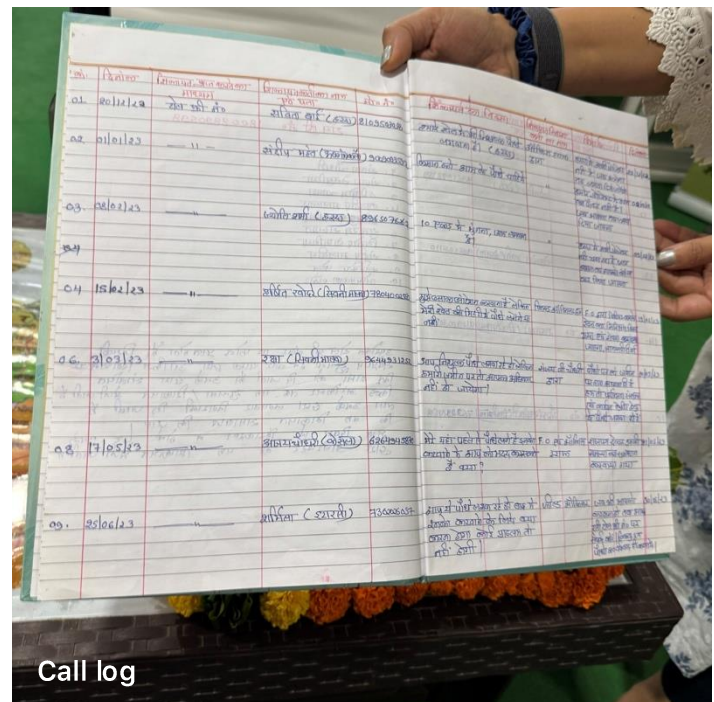
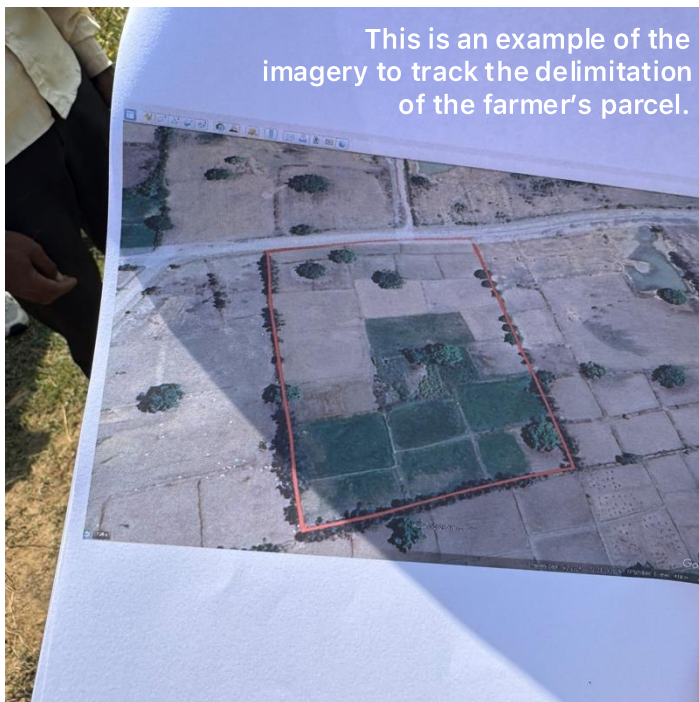
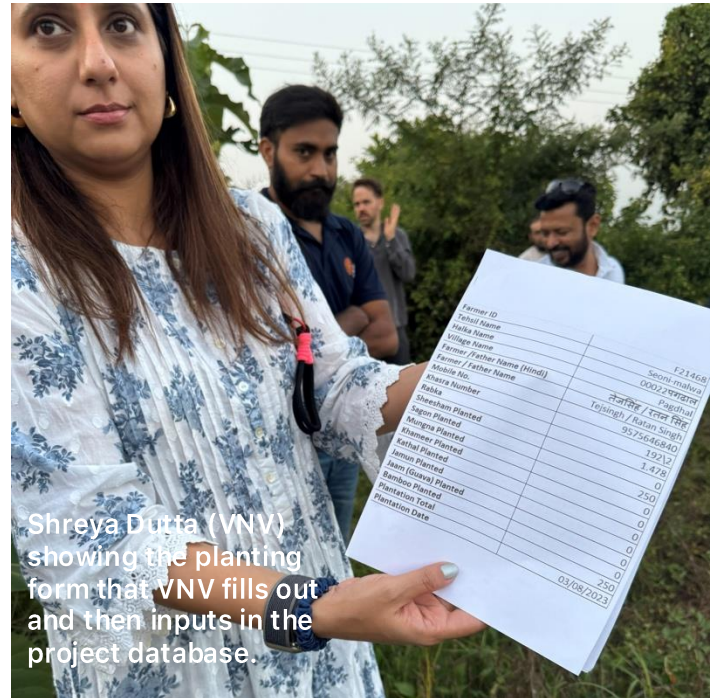
Planting & Operations

Data

Maintaining meticulous, detailed records of project plots, communications, and contracts is essential for ensuring financial transparency and accountability for the project developer, VNV.

The project maintains comprehensive records, including farmers' land eligibility, land titles, carbon rights agreements, planting dates, species planted, claims, call logs, and a wide range of other relevant data.

The project also utilizes satellite imagery to verify that farmland boundaries are accurately delineated.

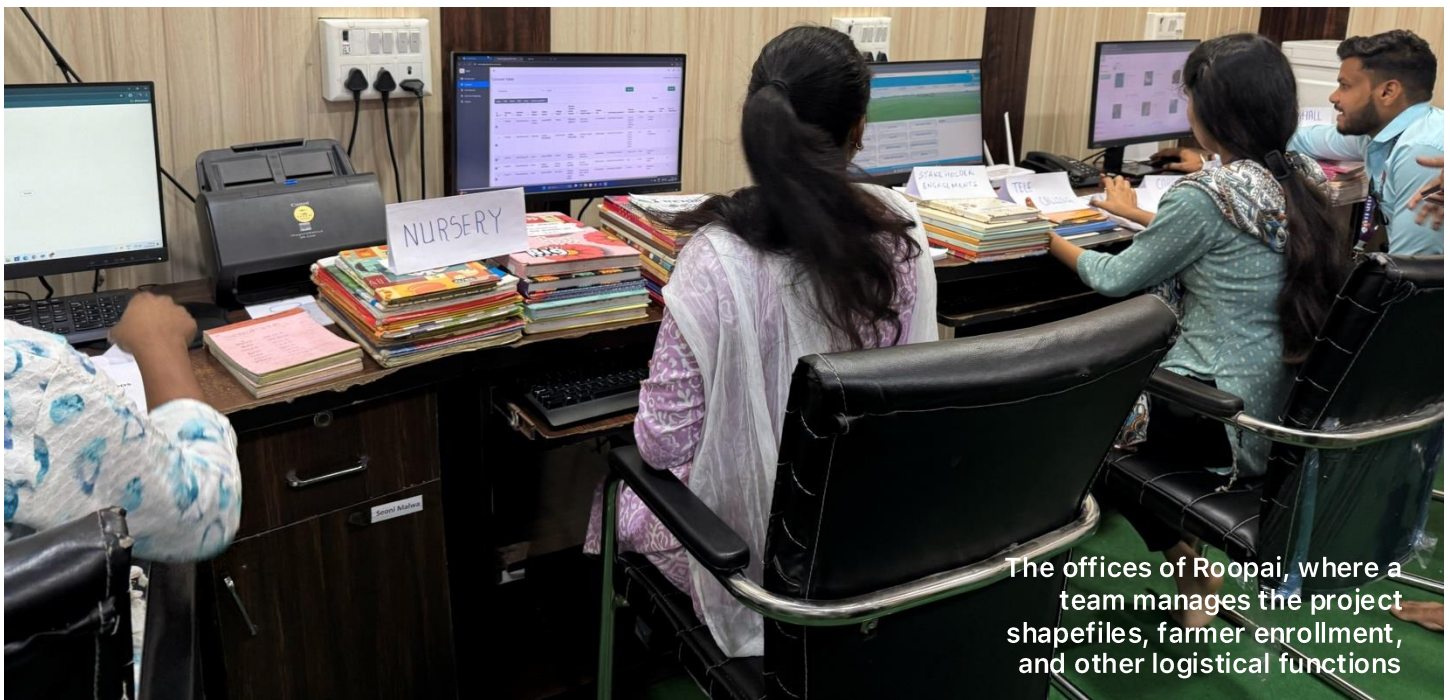


Planting & Operations

Data

All field-collected data is systematically entered into the project database. For this task, the project primarily employs women, creating valuable and highly sought-after job opportunities in the local community.

The group receives thorough training on accurate data entry, and all data is regularly audited to ensure quality. Additionally, helpful reminders are posted in the office as visual cues to reinforce proper procedures.



The offices of Roopai, where a team manages the project shapefiles, farmer enrollment, and other logistical functions

Planting & Operations

Although the crediting period for the project ends at 20 years, the project is committed to maintaining the trees through at least year 40. There are several systems in place, both institutional and incentive-based, that provide strong assurance that activities will continue past year 20.

Continued on-the-ground monitoring

VNV maintains field teams that continue to monitor and record plantation health beyond the crediting period, supported by a cloud-based MRV system.

This monitoring framework will persist for the entire 40-year lifetime of the project.

Strong farmer incentives

Farmers benefit most when long-rotation species such as teak (up to ~70% of project planting) are allowed to mature. Premature harvesting is neither common in India nor would it make economic sense.

The project allows farmers to legally harvest on year 21, 2% of trees at maturity and handles the maze of permitting that is required to cut any tree in India.

Regulatory safeguards India's Forest Department regulates timber harvesting and transport; it cannot legally move on main roads without documentation, checkpoint approvals, or stamped verification.

Teak specifically has even stricter controls. Based on both VNV's explanations and what we observed during the visit, illegal harvesting or over-harvesting at any real scale is extremely difficult.

Ongoing capacity building

VNV continues farmer engagement beyond year 20 through periodic training, site visits, and programs aimed at sustainable farming, nursery management, and agroforestry skills.

Farmers maintaining good plantation health are eligible for accidental injury/death insurance when working on their farmland, which further incentivizes long-term project participation.

Farmer Empowerment

Agriculture is a cornerstone of Madhya Pradesh's economy, yet farmers remain among the most economically vulnerable populations. Despite their central role in food production, many smallholder farmers face declining productivity and increasing climate-related risks.

The project removes key barriers to participation by providing farmers with free seeds, replacement seedlings, technical training, planting support and legal license to harvest and sell timber. These upfront costs and technical requirements would otherwise be prohibitive for most farmers.

By reducing these obstacles, the project enables participation and delivers lasting benefits — improving soil health, reducing erosion, and creating opportunities for diversified income streams.



Farmer Empowerment

Farmers indicate their preferred mix of teak and fruit trees, and VNV handles everything that follows, including procurement, transport, planting, replanting and ongoing maintenance.

Given the high upfront cost of saplings and the stringent regulatory requirements associated with cutting or transporting trees in India—

especially teak—farmers generally cannot undertake such activities independently.

By managing the entire process and legally enabling up to 2% harvest at maturity, the project provides an income-generating asset that many farmers described as a “retirement account” for their children.



Tom Wickline (Cool Effect, Sustainability Coordinator) inspecting a sapling from one of VNV's leased nursery. Both ladies are part of the nursery's hourly employees.

Farmer Empowerment

During the first three years, when seedling survival and establishment are most critical, farmers receive the provision, planting, and full maintenance of saplings at no cost.

After this period, the project introduces a range of livelihood-enhancing interventions, including training in vermicomposting, nursery management, carpentry, and other skills identified by community members.



The project also provides accidental injury or death insurance (up to 100,000 INR) for all work conducted on a farmer's land, contingent on maintaining tree health.

This level of financial protection is rarely accessible to smallholder farmers.

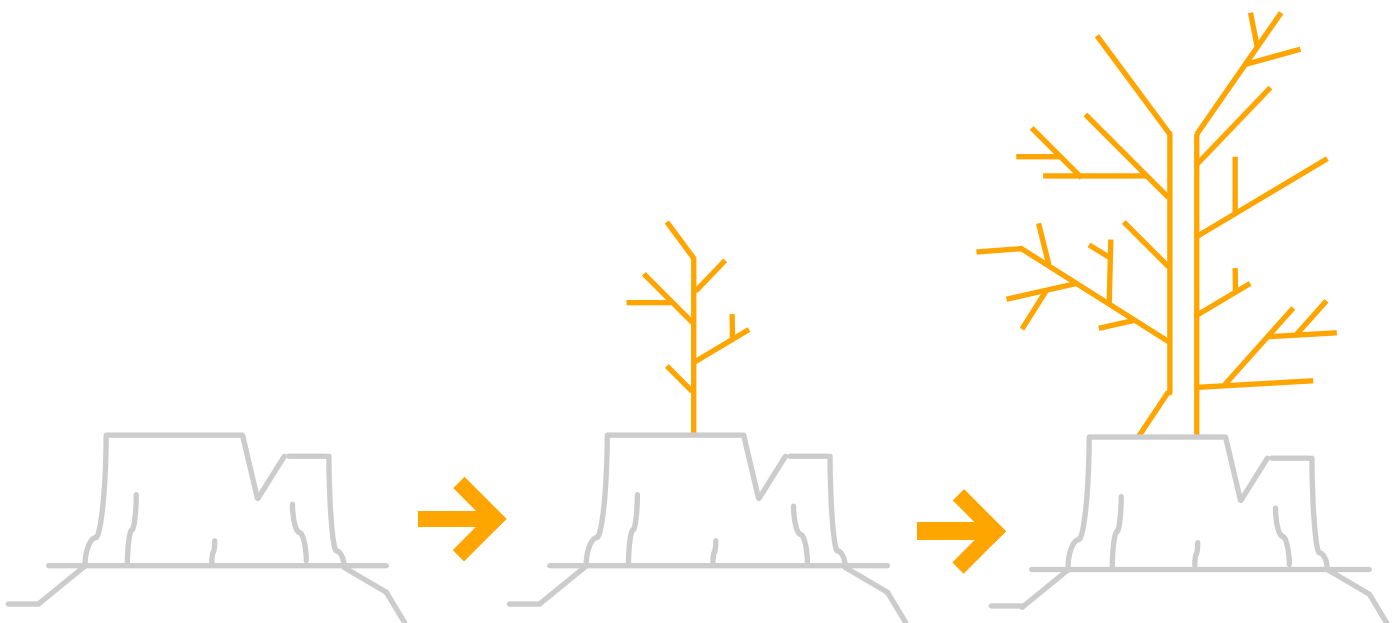
Farmer Empowerment

A central benefit for participating farmers is the right to harvest timber from the trees they've planted. Once those trees reach maturity, each farmer may cut up to 2% of their planted trees per year—a meaningful long-term income stream from a resource they own.

All the project's timber species regrow from the stump through a process called coppicing: the existing root system pushes up new shoots that mature into a new tree, often faster than the original. A harvested tree isn't killed; its growth cycle begins again.

At a harvest rate of 2% per year, it takes a farmer 50 years to cycle through a full planting. The primary species, teak, has an initial growing period of 20–30 years, with coppice regrowth running shorter than that. By the time the last tree in the cycle is cut, the first one harvested has already regrown to maturity.

The result is a steady state: farmers earn timber income year after year, while standing biomass on each plot continues to accumulate over the project's lifetime.



Farmer Empowerment

A key eligibility requirement for farmers participating in the project is having an existing and reliable source of water and irrigation. These must already be in place for a farm to qualify.

By promoting sustainable practices, from intercropping to avoiding pesticides, the project helps protect and restore the groundwater supply.

A large share of the Madhya Pradesh agricultural economy is reliant on monsoon rains, but during our visit we witnessed ponds, creeks and water pumps to manage the available water.

By providing farmers with sustainable management plans free of charge, the project helps farmers both improve their water availability and adapt to less water-intensive practices.



VNV technician inspecting the health of the trees planted along the pond's edge, where they help protect water quality and reduce erosion.



Farmer Empowerment



Many farmers expressed deep concern that their current way of life is no longer sustainable or viable for the next generation.

They described farming as increasingly harsh—requiring more labor each year while generating steadily declining income. Several shared that, under current conditions, they do not see a future in agriculture for their children.

Instead, younger generations are expected to migrate to cities in search of more stable employment, accelerating the loss of farming knowledge and rural communities.

This project offers farmers a pathway to reverse that decline. By integrating trees into existing farms, it helps diversify their income and hedge against future risk of declining agricultural yields.

The arrangement works for all parties: the farmers get a tangible product they can sell, and the project developer gets the intangible carbon rights that allow them to finance the operations.



As one farmer remarked, looking at his newly planted trees:

"What I can see is mine. What I cannot see is yours."

Community Impact

Beyond the immediate benefits to farmers directly involved in the project, these activities bring far-reaching quality of life improvements to the entire community.

Regular community meetings keep locals informed and give them the opportunity to voice any criticisms and questions. By promoting sustainable land management, the project meaningfully protects groundwater reserves that the entire region relies on. The introduction of agroforestry practices help diversify the sources of income in this region, which is essential as climate change continues to threaten conventional agricultural yields.

The project also provides women with a sense of security and empowerment by engaging them directly and providing new employment opportunities that otherwise wouldn't be available.

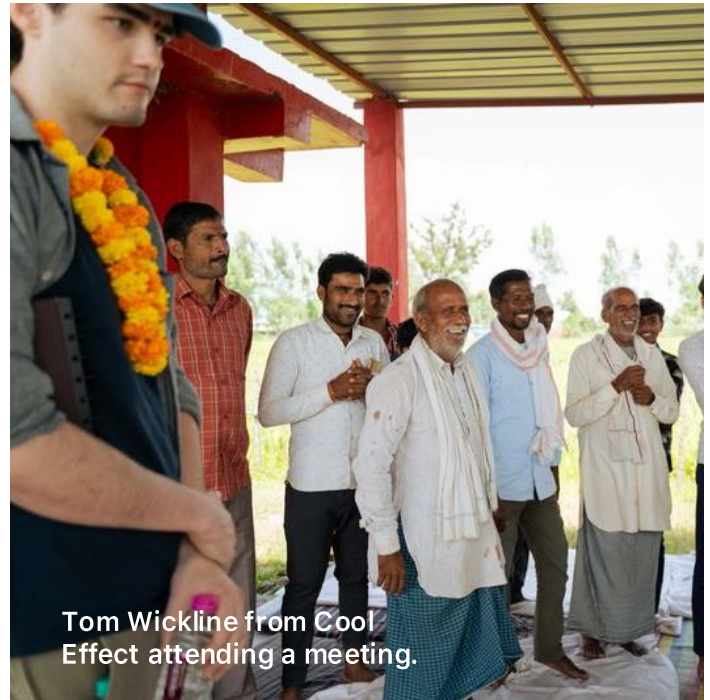


Community Impact

Community meetings are held regularly with VNV to keep project participants informed about the carbon market, project progress, training opportunities, and future enrollment timelines.

All participants are encouraged to ask questions, seek clarification, and share feedback on what is working well and what could be improved.

At the meeting we attended, most questions focused on expanding the project. The female recruiter expressed her desire to continue her work, while new potential participants were interested in starting the enrollment process. Other questions were more varied, such as whether farmers not currently in the project could call the project office for guidance on their land.



Community Impact

One thing that surprised us at this community meeting was the presence of very young participants, including a few female students and a group of middle school boys.



Middle school boys attending the meeting—sons of farmers participating in the project along with a female middle schooler interested in the project.



Community Impact

The project has provided women with a sense of security and empowerment.

Traditionally, these women would work solely in the fields, but as project recruiters and data entry technicians, they feel empowered, seeing that their efforts are making a tangible impact on both the environment and their communities.



Community Impact

We love this picture because it shows that the impact of a carbon project goes beyond the environment to positively affect the lives of its participants.



Here, we see the female project developer, Shreya Dutta, along with three female project recruiters, leading the way during this part of our visit—a rare situation in this region.

Community Impact

Future Generations

During our visit, we spent time at a local elementary school attended primarily by the sons and daughters of participating farmers. The farmers view the trees as a form of savings account—a long-term asset to help cover future expenses such as healthcare, college education, and retirement. They hope this additional income will encourage their children to remain on the farm and continue the family tradition.



Thank you to VNV, Roopai, and IMPCA for your dedication and hard work under challenging conditions to help make the world a better place. We are deeply grateful for your patience, warm hospitality, and the invaluable time you shared with us.



Appendix

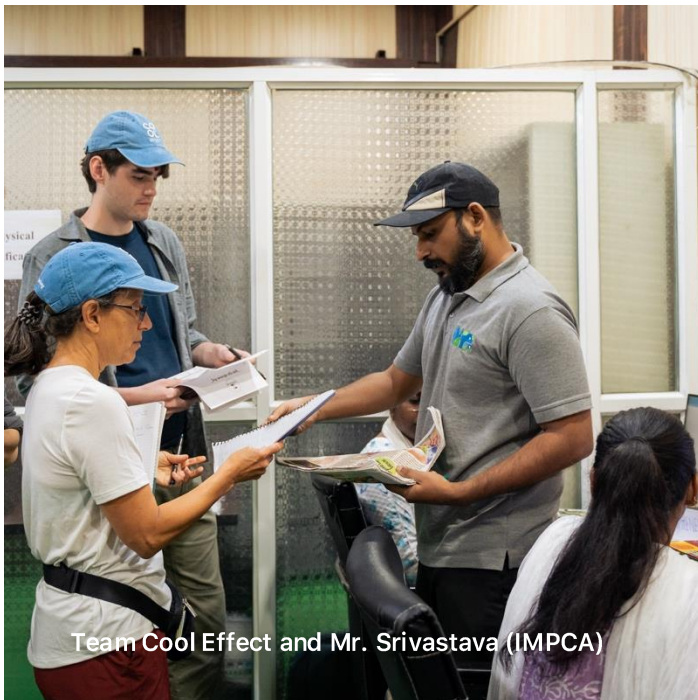
Project Partners

VNV was represented by Shreya Dutta, Team Head, Program Relations. The India-based project developer has over 20 years of experience in the carbon industry and oversees a diverse global portfolio of carbon projects. VNV provides decarbonization advisory services to public and private organizations, has co-founded multiple carbon market initiatives, and its CEO serves on the boards of several climate-focused organizations, including IETA.

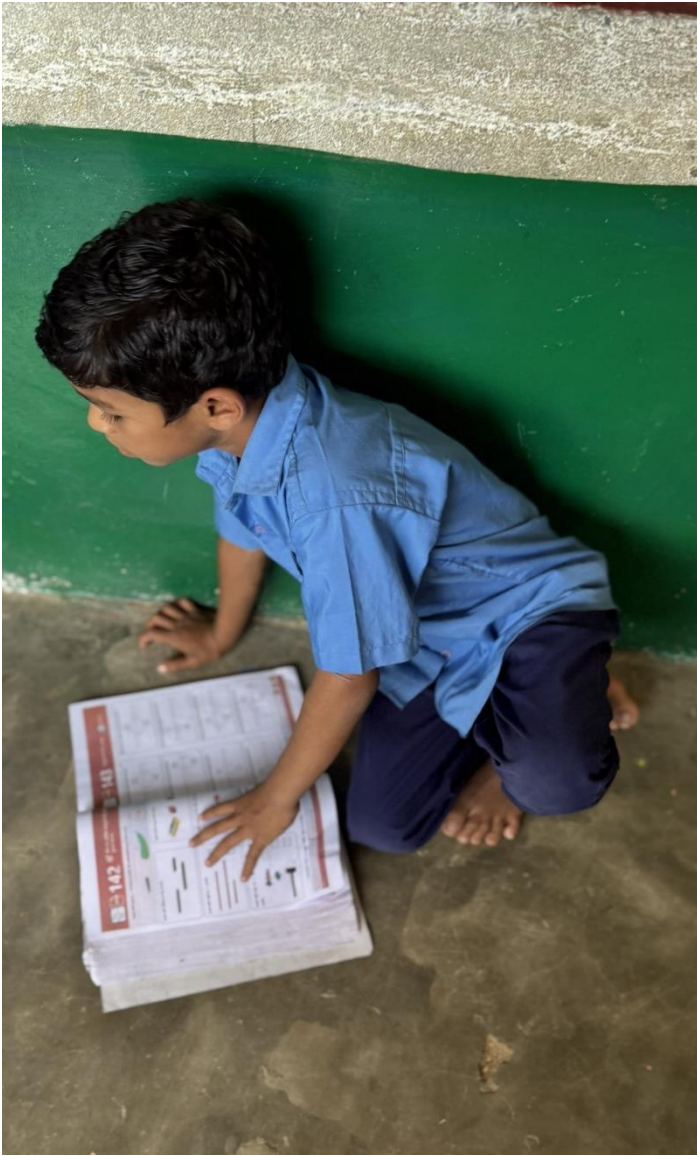
The Cool Effect team was joined by the project developer Value Network Ventures (VNV); Roopai, the local organization promoting agroforestry to improve land productivity and ecological restoration; and the technical team from IMPCA Services Private Ltd.

Roopai Agroforest was represented by its founder, Mr. Mukti. Roopai is based in Harda, Madhya Pradesh and is dedicated to carbon sequestration and environmental conservation, focusing on planting trees to combat climate change and enhance green cover across the region

IMPCA Services was represented by Pavitra Srivastava, Sr. Project Manager. IMPCA is a social impact advisory that design and implement projects that not only drive carbon sequestration but also foster the holistic growth of rural and tribal communities. IMPCA ensures every initiative is rooted in scientific data, community participation, and sustainability principles.











Shreya Dutta (VNV) meets with the operators of a project nursery



Mr. Mukti (Roopai) and Ms. Shreya Dutta (VNV) explain the project to the Cool Effect team

