



CIRHEP - ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024



About CIRHEP

CIRHEP (Centre for Improved Rural Health and Environmental Protection) is a legally registered, non-governmental, voluntary organization dedicated to promoting sustainable rural development and natural resource management in the dryland areas of Dindigul, Madurai, and Theni Districts of Tamil Nadu. Our work focuses on improving the health and nutrition of rural communities while protecting the environment through watershed development and sustainable agriculture.

Founded in 1994 by Mr. P.M. Mohan and Ms. K.A. Chandra, who bring vast experience in rural development, CIRHEP is governed by a General Body, an Executive Committee, and dedicated office bearers. Our team consists of committed professionals with expertise in watershed development, natural resource management, sustainable agriculture, adolescent health, and community empowerment.

Over the years, CIRHEP has successfully implemented numerous projects in collaboration with state agencies and international donors. Our initiatives include organic farming promotion, environmental education for children, women's empowerment, adolescent health awareness, and nutrition programs. CIRHEP's approach integrates community-driven participation to reduce poverty, enhance livelihoods, and ensure access to nutritious food for rural families.

One of CIRHEP's core beliefs is ensuring the long-term sustainability of its projects. Many watershed programs initiated by CIRHEP are now managed by local communities, with CIRHEP continuing to provide facilitation and support as needed. Our projects are designed through participatory planning, ensuring that community voices shape the interventions.

Vision

To build the capacities of rural communities to conserve the Vaigai-Kaveri River watersheds in Dindigul, Theni, and Madurai Districts, making the region sustainable for better livelihoods.

Mission

To create a sustainable human-ecology relationship and improve the quality of rural life by alleviating poverty, providing education, and conserving the environment through active community participation.

Approach

CIRHEP's **Community-Driven Participatory Development** approach places local communities at the center of all activities. We help them enhance their existing assets, develop their capacities, and actively engage in all stages of development. Our impact is visible in the transformation of rural women into community leaders, seed savers, and resilient farmers.

Geographical Area of Operation



CIRHEP operates across **three taluks in Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu:**

- **Nilakottai Taluk** – 32 villages in Kadavakurichi Reserve Forest
- **Oddanchatram Taluk** – 15 villages
- **Vedasandur Taluk** – 7 villages

Beneficiaries and Stakeholders

CIRHEP primarily works with small and marginal farmers, women, adolescents, and youth. Our programs support farmers' groups, self-help groups (SHGs), youth clubs, and farmer producer organizations. Key stakeholders include government departments, panchayat leaders, consumer networks, policymakers, and elected representatives.

Key Projects Implemented During 2023-2024

Project: Crop Diversification for Enhanced Food Systems Resilience

Supporting Agency: Future Earth, Sweden

CIRHEP is part of the Future Earth Asia Network, which includes 11 member organizations across Asia. Through this network, CIRHEP has implemented the Friend Group Project, focusing on climate-resilient agriculture, sustainable food production, and community-based initiatives.

Key Activities and Impact

Activity	Participants
Strengthening organic farmers' groups	50 farmers (35 women, 15 men)
Workshops on organic pesticides & fertilizers	50 farmers (34 women, 16 men)
Field visits on climate-resilient agriculture	50 farmers (35 women, 15 men)
Community seed bank maintenance	50 farmers (35 women, 15 men)
Training on millet and pulse seed saving	20 women, 10 men
Awareness on climate change for youth	50 youth (35 women, 15 men)
Nutritional vegetable seed distribution	50 youth (35 women, 15 men)
Signature campaign for sustainable agriculture in schools	71 girls, 29 boys

Adolescent Health & Nutrition Initiative

In response to rising concerns about adolescent malnutrition and health risks, CIRHEP introduced a **community-based health awareness program** targeting **adolescent girls and boys (ages 10-19)**. This initiative focused on:

Nutritional awareness: Encouraging healthy eating habits through kitchen gardens in schools and homes.

Menstrual health education: Providing training and sanitary resources to adolescent girls.

Combating anemia and undernutrition: Promoting iron-rich diets and traditional millet consumption.

Sexual and reproductive health workshops: Educating adolescents on hygiene, health rights, and preventive care.

Community engagement: Involving parents, teachers, and local health workers to sustain the initiative.

Photo Glimpses

		<i>Strengthening of Existing organic farmers group to Promote sustainable organic production systems and markets</i>
		<i>Workshop on preparation of organic pesticides and fertilizers</i>
		<i>Strengthening and maintenance of community seed bank</i>
		<i>Training program for Promotion of seed savers for millet and pulses and Strengthening of Millet based mixed cropping system</i>
		<i>Creating awareness among rural youths, Children about climate Change and Emergence of local leaders.</i>
		<i>Community Awareness Session on Adolescent Health and Well-being</i>

		<p><i>Supply of nutritional vegetable seeds, and Bio- Inputs to Children and youth.</i></p>
		<p><i>Supply of fruit tree seedling and planting</i></p>
		<p><i>Inter cropping and Kitchen Garden vegetables</i></p>

Outcomes:

- **30% increase in awareness** of balanced diets and micronutrient deficiencies.
- **Reduction in adolescent anemia** through dietary changes and supplements.
- **200 adolescent girls benefited** from menstrual health education and support.

Impact Stories

- **Millet Revival:** As a result of CIRHEP's millet promotion programs, **farm families now incorporate millet-based meals twice a day**, reducing reliance on rice and improving nutrition.
- **Organic Farming Adoption:** **25 farmers** started preparing organic pest repellents and fertilizers, enhancing soil health and crop yields.
- **Youth Leadership in Sustainability:** **50 rural youth** established kitchen gardens, improving their families' access to fresh vegetables.
- **Signature Campaign Success:** **300 community members** signed a petition advocating for sustainable agriculture in school curriculums. This was submitted to local policymakers, gaining support from MLA Kanimozhi Sekar

Internship Programme

from February 2023 to June 2023

Supported by: Future Earth Asia

Two interns from Sweden: Ms. Victoria and Ms. Embla



Supported by: Future Earth Asia

CIRHEP welcomed two Swedish interns, Ms. Victoria and Ms. Embla, for a hands-on experience in rural development, sustainable agriculture, and community engagement. Over the course of their internship, they immersed themselves in the realities of rural South India, learning from local communities, understanding the challenges they face, and witnessing the impact of CIRHEP's work firsthand.

Key Activities

1. Learning from Experience

- The interns had the opportunity to interact with CIRHEP's team and local farmers, gaining insights into sustainable agriculture, climate-resilient practices, and community-led initiatives.

2. Video Documentation & Storytelling

- To enhance their understanding, the interns explored real-life stories through video documentation and case studies, including:
 - *A Journey from Chemical to Organic Farming*: Ms. Arockiya Mary's transition to sustainable farming in Semmedu village.
 - *Agro-Ecological Family Farm*: How Mr. Karuppiyah from Musuvanuthu village built a resilient, sustainable livelihood.
 - *Two Decades of Change*: A look at how economic, social, cultural, and environmental landscapes have evolved, touching on education, health, watershed development, climate

change, migration, and women's empowerment.

- *Nature School & Regular School Activities*: Observing how environmental education is integrated into school programs.
- *Nutritional Kitchen Gardens*: Understanding their role in food security and better nutrition for families.

3. Social Media Engagement

- The interns actively contributed to CIRHEP's social media presence, sharing stories, updates, and experiences on Instagram and Facebook.

Looking Ahead

This internship was a journey of learning and exchange, both for CIRHEP and the interns. As we move forward, CIRHEP remains committed to:

- Strengthening adolescent health and nutrition initiatives.
- Supporting small farmers in adopting climate-resilient agriculture.
- Expanding organic farming and watershed programs to new regions.
- Advocating for sustainable food systems in schools and government policies.

We look forward to welcoming more young minds who are eager to learn, contribute, and make a difference in rural communities.



Watershed Projects – Follow up activities



. CIRHEP's Journey in Watershed Development

For over a decade, CIRHEP has been actively engaged in watershed development, completing 11 projects with support from NABARD and other agencies like TAWDEVA. Through years of experience, we have witnessed firsthand how watershed programs can transform rural landscapes—enhancing water availability, improving agricultural productivity, and fostering social and cultural change within communities.

Watershed management is more than just conservation; it is a dynamic, integrated approach that balances ecological, economic, and social needs. By bringing together land, water, and community participation, it ensures sustainable development for present and future generations.

Impact of Watershed Management

Our work in watershed development has led to significant positive changes, including:

- ✓ **Recharging groundwater levels**, ensuring a steady supply of water for irrigation
- ✓ **Restoring soil fertility** and improving soil conservation, leading to better crop yields.
- ✓ **Securing drinking water** for communities, reducing water scarcity and improving health.
- ✓ **Combating climate change** by promoting sustainable agricultural practices.
- ✓ **Protecting biodiversity**, preserving local flora and fauna, and maintaining ecological balance.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board, CIRHEP extends its heartfelt gratitude to all our donors and partners for their unwavering support in implementing our projects across target villages.

We sincerely thank Future Earth International Network and CIRHEP Friends' Ground in Sweden for their invaluable support in strengthening climate-resilient approaches through greater agro-biodiversity initiatives. A special appreciation goes to NABARD, whose support has been instrumental in CIRHEP's journey as a resource agency in watershed programs. With their assistance, we have expanded watershed development initiatives to other vulnerable areas through the Adaptation Fund Board, USA.

We also express our gratitude to the resource persons from NABARD and various government departments, including the Agriculture Department, Horticulture Department, Veterinary Department, and Gandhigram Rural Institute. Their expertise in designing, planning, implementation, and capacity-building has been invaluable in ensuring the success of our programs.

During the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sidhwa Trust played a crucial role in supporting underprivileged children with nutritious food, ensuring their well-being despite hardships.

Additionally, we extend our deepest thanks to LIFE Japan, whose support has empowered women's groups to understand the value of education. Their assistance in maintaining seed money has enabled women to provide financial aid for children's education in their communities.

CIRHEP remains committed to fostering sustainable development, and it is only through the collective efforts of our donors, partners, and communities that we can continue making a lasting impact.

Conclusion

The Indian NGO sector is undergoing significant changes, facing both regulatory challenges and funding constraints. In response, CIRHEP is actively working to build resilient institutions such as **Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and Village Watershed Committees**, empowering them to become self-sufficient entities capable of sustaining long-term impact.

CIRHEP has always prioritized forward-thinking approaches, adapting strategies to ensure meaningful and lasting change. This period of reflection has led to a sharper focus on result-oriented planning, resource optimization, and institutional strengthening. With this in mind, CIRHEP's **Board of Directors and staff** are in the process of developing a **SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) strategy** to guide the organization toward greater efficiency and impact.

None of this progress would have been possible without the **unwavering support** of our stakeholders. We extend our deepest gratitude to the **local Village Watershed Committees, farmers' groups, women's groups, and youth clubs**, whose dedication and collaboration have been instrumental in successfully implementing various projects this year. Their commitment has been a driving force behind CIRHEP's achievements, and we look forward to continuing this partnership in the years ahead.

Together, we remain committed to **sustainable development, climate resilience, and community empowerment**—building a future where rural communities thrive with dignity and self-reliance.

