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RELEASE – Land Accelerator: 15 entrepreneurs pitch businesses that restore farms and forests before investors

The program aims at improving the environment, restoring farms and forests, and building strong rural economies in India

New Delhi, December 1, 2020– World Resources Institute India (WRI India) and Sangam Ventures introduced the first cohort of the [Land Accelerator South Asia](#) to an (online) room full of investors on Tuesday and Wednesday, December 1-2, 2020. These 15 entrepreneurs will pitch their innovations aimed at revitalizing farms and forests through agroforestry, ecological restoration, organic land amendments, Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP), and climate smart irrigation to the investors.

Entrepreneurs throughout South Asia are looking towards land to improve its productivity, soil health, and other ecosystem services. Their mission is to restore land and build strong rural economies. The opportunity is big: nearly [140 million hectares](#) of land in India alone could benefit from forest protection and restoration. That is around 42% of its entire area, much of it managed by rural small landholders.

Through the past six months of training and mentorship, the Land Accelerator has brought together a geographically diversified group of 15 companies whose businesses restore lands across South Asian landscapes. This program is funded by the IKEA Foundation and supported by Startup India and Invest India as the outreach partners and Labs Indigram as the community partner.

The Companies:

- **Aadhimalai Pazhangudiyinar Producer Co.** purchases and markets NTFPs produced by indigenous people in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve in Tamil Nadu, representing 1609 tribal shareholders from over 160 villages.
- **AI-GENIX International** replaces pesticides/chemicals with its Artificially Intelligent pest traps which increase yields by 30-40% and reduce input cost when compared to chemical pest management.



- **Bastar se Bazaar Tak** works with 250 small and marginal tribal farmers from 7 villages in Chattisgarh on sustainable harvesting and post-harvest value addition/processing of NTFPs.
- **Bee Basket** rescues honeybees in urban centers - having rescued beehives for over 5,000 urban residential and commercial clients in Pune.
- **EF Polymer** has created a 100% organic and fully biodegradable water retention polymer that is mixed into soil to reduce water and fertilizer requirements and increase yield by over 30% in arid lands.
- **Gratitude Farms** creates agroforestry systems on under-utilized or abandoned farmland covering 20 hectares, in 6 districts of Puducherry and Tamil Nadu through its organic “Food Forest” model with multi-cropping tree-based agroforestry interventions.
- **Hasten**, formerly Alaap, designs and funds regenerative economic development projects in emerging markets based on reforestation, soil regeneration, and food production.
- **IBANSS**, formerly Biomize, developed a patent-pending process to create polymers made from bamboo, rice and wheat waste that can be used in any plastic manufacturing machine to make products ranging from silverware, to food storage containers, replacing single use plastics.
- **Innotech Interventions** restores land and water ecosystems that have been contaminated with hazardous waste from mining and oil extraction, with the use of their signature Phyto-assisted Land conditioning and Microbial Augmentation Technology.
- **Jeev Anksh Eco Products** provides market linkages to over 10,000 farmers of organic and indigenous products in Northeast India, fetching them better returns and international market access.
- **Rhodotion** has created a mixed farming system in Northeast India, where usually monocrop tea reigns.
- **SenzAgro** is a precision agricultural firm that sells a soil sensing system that increases yield by 20%, decreases water usage by 40%, and decreases the usage of pesticides and fertilizers by 40%.
- **SquareRoots** works with over 21 small landholder clients/absentee farmers to transform their 210 hectares of land from abandoned farms to thriving agroforestry systems with eight tree varieties utilizing a unique co-financing and buy-back agreement.
- **Urdhvam Environmental Technologies Pvt Ltd** is an environmental services company that increases the water storage potential of borewells, ensuring wells can continue to provide water in the light of population growth and climate change.
- **Vasumitra Life Energies** offers a suite of 100% organic fertilizers and plant nutrients that reduce the amount of water used by 50% and chemicals used by 70%, yet resulting in higher yields.

The Investors' Panel including Impact investors from Omnivore, Villgro, Nabventures, Upaya Social Ventures, Indigram Labs, Sammunati, Ankur Capital, Alsisar Impact, VRIKSH Impact



Partners, Social Alpha, Caspian and Indian Angel Network will listen to these promising entrepreneurs and provided their real-time feedback.

Launching the Land Accelerator South Asia, **Dr. Ruchika Singh**, director, Sustainable Landscapes and Restoration program, WRI India, said, “Forest protection and landscape restoration can benefit more than 140 million hectares of area in India – that is, approximately 1000 times the size the National Capital Territory (Delhi). Besides, protecting and restoring our forest and other landscapes (like agricultural land) by growing trees could sequester 3 to 4.3 gigatons of above-ground carbon by 2040. The Land Accelerator is an attempt to leverage the talents and expertise of several entrepreneurs working in this space, by connecting them to the right investors.”

About WRI India

WRI India is a research organization with experts and staff who work closely with leaders to turn big ideas into action to sustain a healthy environment – the foundation of economic opportunity and human well-being. We envision an equitable and prosperous planet driven by the wise management of natural resources. We aspire to create a world where the actions of government, business and communities combine to eliminate poverty and sustain the natural environment for all people.