

NEWSLETTER

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Dear Readers,

It has been an eventful couple of months since we last wrote to you, and I am delighted to share some milestones that have stayed with me.

The first is deeply connected to MSSRF's mission. In July, Maharashtra passed the **Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill**, becoming the first state in India to enact a law that formally recognises women as farmers in their own right. MSSRF partnered in this effort, co-leading the consultations along with the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, which supported the legal drafting.

For us, this is history in the making. It is also a dream of Prof. Swaminathan that has now taken shape in Maharashtra, and one that we hope will be emulated by other states.

Such a significant change requires political will and a deep commitment to women's empowerment. I am grateful that we found both in Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavisji.

The second highlight was our two-day Annual Conference on **Building Gender-Just Land, Food and Water Systems**, held on August 7 and 8. Against the backdrop of the International Year of the Woman Farmer, we brought together more than 400 people from research, civil society, government, UN agencies, and farming communities.

Farmers, fisherfolk, researchers, and scientists sat at the same table, and the conversations that followed were rich and engaging. We will share the full proceedings and key learnings with you soon.

We also launched **Clean Land, Equitable Air & Resilience (CLEAR)**, a four-year research programme that looks at the links between waste, environmental health, and human health. Supported by the UK-based Wellcome Trust, the project aims to address the growing challenges of waste management, pollution, climate change, and public health.

As always, none of this would be possible without you, our partners, collaborators, and the communities who continue to believe in and contribute to this work.

Thank you for being part of the journey.

Dr Soumya Swaminathan, FRS
Chairperson, MSSRF

MSSRF CONFERENCE 2026

Building Gender-Just Food, Land and Water Systems



“It is India's turn now to show how women's empowerment can transform agriculture.”

Prof. S. Mahendra Dev, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, GoI, in his inaugural address.

The session also featured addresses by Ms Aditi Varda Sunil Tatkare, Hon'ble Minister for Women and Child Development, Government of Maharashtra; Dr Mangi Lal Jat, Director General, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (online); Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Chairperson, MSSRF; and Dr C. Chandramouli, IAS (Retd.), Trustee, MSSRF. Dr C Chandramouli, IAS (Retd.), Member, Board of Trustee, MSSRF. [Watch the Inaugural Session here.](#)



“Women are often the first to identify early warning signs due to the roles they take up in agricultural families.”

- Aditi Mukherjee, International Livestock Research Institute

Hear from all Session 1 Speakers: Women as Custodians of Agrobiodiversity, Forgotten Foods and Climate-Resilient Farming Systems



“I urge everyone to consider how they think about women leadership in their own organisations.”

- Marianne Manuel, Director, Dakshin Foundation

Hear from all Session 2 Speakers: Advancing Women's Leadership in the Governance of Coastal Resources, Fisheries, Wetlands and Rangelands



“There are many ways to provide cooling. However, if we rely on inefficient air conditioners, we risk worsening our energy challenges.”

- Dr Anna Aggarwal, Fellow (Adaptation and Resilience), Sustainable Futures Collective

Hear from all Session 3 Speakers: Gendered Experiences of Climate Change, Heat Stress, Health and Care Systems



“Women are the backbone of India's food systems.”

- Prof Pravat Kumar Roul, Vice Chancellor, Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology, Bhubaneswar

Hear from all Session 4 Speakers: Women Agripreneurs, Digital Innovation and Inclusive Food Value Chain



“Gender equality is never given on a silver platter. It has to be fought for.”

- Ma. Esther Penunia, Secretary General, Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development, Philippines

Hear from all Session 5 Speakers: Policies, Entitlements and Collective Action as Pathways Towards Gender-Just Food, Land and Water Systems



“Any money in the hands of women is good money.”

Ms Kanta Singh, Deputy Country Representative, UN Women
India Country Office in her guest of honour address.

The session also featured a valedictory address by Thiru P Venkataramanan, Hon’ble Minister for Food and Civil Supplies, Consumer Protection and Price Control, Government of Tamil Nadu, as well as, special remarks by Dr Purvi Mehta, Member, Board of Trustees, MSSRF (Online), and Dr N R Bhanumurthy, Director, Madras School of Economics, Chennai. [Watch the Valedictory Session here.](#)

Mahila Krishi Shakti Puraskar 2026

JSW Foundation – MSSRF
National Awards for
Women in Agriculture

Land based Farmers
Fisheries
Pastoralists
Rural Enterprises
Forest & Seed conservationists

Cash awards up to ₹ 7 lakh

Eminent National Jury

Apply / Nominate by 15 September 2026

Nominate Now

Award Categories

1. Seeds, Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge
2. Climate Resilience and Ecological Stewardship
3. Nutrition Security and Rural Livelihoods
4. Bhoomi Jaa Rashtriya Samman (Special Citations)

Learn more: mssrf.org/mahila-krishi-shakti-puraskar

MS Swaminathan Research Foundation
Dedicated to Sustainable Development

Recognising Women Strengthening India's Agricultural Systems

We are pleased to announce the *Mahila Krishi Shakti Puraskar*, a national recognition platform jointly instituted by MSSRF and JSW Foundation to honour women strengthening agriculture, allied livelihoods, food systems, biodiversity, climate resilience, coastal systems, nutrition security and rural communities across India.

This inaugural award invites nominations from women and women-led institutions. Recipients will receive a prestigious national award, along with a citation, trophy, and a cash award of three to seven lakhs. For more information on the nomination process, [read our FAQs.](#)

[LEARN MORE](#)



MSSRF Launches CLEAR Project to Address Waste-Driven Climate and Health Risks

Clean Land, Equitable Air & Resilience (CLEAR) is a transdisciplinary research-to-action programme that sets out to generate evidence and strengthen solid waste management and health system responses. This is one of India’s first systematic efforts to measure the health impacts of waste-driven pollution and use the evidence to shape policy and improve waste management for the most vulnerable.

Supported by UK-based Wellcome Trust and led by the MSSRF, this four-year project will be implemented in Chennai and Warangal in collaboration with IIT Madras, Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education (SRIHER), and Shrishti Waste Management Services. CLEAR was launched on 28 July, in the presence of Kaushik IAS, Deputy Regional Commissioner, Central, Greater Chennai Corporation.

LEARN MORE

INSIGHTS & PERSPECTIVES



In Maharashtra, giving women farmers the recognition they deserve

In this joint OpEd, the Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis and MSSRF Chairperson Dr Soumya Swaminathan offer an overview of the Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Act, 2026. This landmark law offers women farmers real access to credit, loans and government schemes that were once out of reach — a major step for gender equality in agriculture.

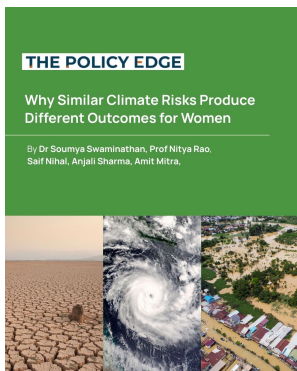
[Read in The Indian Express](#)



Air pollution is one of the biggest health threats of our time, yet it often remains invisible

In this episode of MSSRF's Science Simply podcast, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan explains how polluted air affects our lungs, heart, brain, and overall health, why India faces a growing air quality challenge, and what governments, communities, and individuals can do to create a cleaner and healthier future.

[Watch on YouTube](#)



Why Similar Climate Risks Produce Different Outcomes for Women

The relationship between climate and gender is frequently discussed as if all climate risks affect women in broadly similar ways. Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Prof. Nitya Rao, Amit Mitra, and Research Fellows from International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) write that, evidence from across India suggests otherwise. Droughts, floods and cyclones create distinct forms of disruption, and their consequences for women's wellbeing can differ significantly even where overall climate exposure appears similar.

[Read in The Policy Edge](#)



Measuring development through wellbeing, sustainability and more

While GDP remains indispensable for measuring economic activity, it doesn't capture the quality, equity or sustainability of development. In contrast, measuring Biohappiness tells us whether that growth is creating healthier people, healthier ecosystems and more resilient communities.

India has an opportunity not only to embrace the global Beyond GDP agenda but also to enrich it through a uniquely Indian framework inspired by Professor M. S. Swaminathan's vision of Biohappiness.

[Read in Mongabay](#)

EVENTS

Urban Mangroves in the Spotlight on Mangrove Day 2026



MSSRF marked World Mangrove Day at a two-day event in Mumbai organised under the Mangrove Coalition, led by Soonabai Pirojsha Godrej Foundation. MSSRF shared insights from its wider work on wetland and coastal ecosystems, as well as its two study sites in [Chennai \(Kovalam and Ennore\)](#) as part of the coalition. MSSRF also participated in a policy roundtable and screened a [short film](#) capturing the experiences of fisher communities in Kovalam.



The Mangrove Coalition is dedicated to studying and protecting the health of urban mangroves in Mumbai and Chennai. The event brought together members including, WWF-India, World Resources Institute, and Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

680 kgs of Debris Cleared on the First Day of MSSRF's Beach Cleanup Drive with HCL Foundation



MSSRF and the HCL Foundation kickstarted the beach cleanup drive on 11 August at Lighthouse Beach in Chennai - bringing together over 905 students and volunteers. They collected plastic, cloth, and ghost gear such as fishing nets and ropes, which was later segregated, and weighed.



Ever since, this beach restoration drive has been travelling to sites across the Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh coast to mark 50 years of HCL. In the lead up to Coastal Cleanup Week in September, our restoration efforts will reach 50 beaches and raise greater awareness about marine pollution among students and coastal communities.

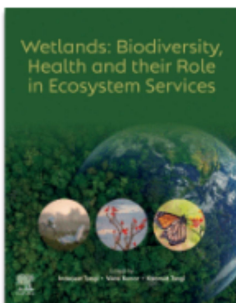
RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS



MSSRF Annual Report (2025-2026)

Launched at the Annual Conference by Prof. S. Mahendra Dev, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, GoI, this report offers insight into MSSRF's evolving vision, the projects we have undertaken over the past year, and the impact of our work with agricultural, coastal and tribal communities.

[Read the report to explore the research, partnerships, and stories that shaped our year](#)



Scientists demonstrate sustainable pest management by planting flowering crops in paddy fields

In India, paddy is commonly grown as a monocrop. This study demonstrates how co-cropping flowering plants along wetland paddy field borders boost natural pest predators, offering a sustainable alternative to chemical-intensive farming. Since the overreliance on fertilisers and pesticides has driven biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and water pollution, the authors recommend adopting border co-cropping tailored to local agronomic and landscape conditions.

[Read the book chapter here](#)



Review proposes designing next-generation bioinoculants that perform more reliably on fields

Studies and field trials have shown that bioinoculant products often produce unpredictable results in improving yields, nutrient use, or disease control, even when the same product is used on the same crop. This unpredictability has led many farmers, advisors, and policymakers to question their value. In this review, the authors propose moving from strain-centric optimisation to system-level engineering of agricultural microbiomes to improve the predictability of these outcomes.

[Read the review here](#)

New species of *Araceae* discovered in Pallakad, Kerala

This paper describes a new species of *Lagenandra*, *L. dominicii* from Silent Valley National Park. It is related to *L. kunkichirmuseumensis* and *L. meeboldii* by the foliar morphology and ecological preferences. This paper presents the diagnostic morphological characters, distribution, and images of the new species.

[Read the paper here](#)



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M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation 3rd Cross Street, Taramani Institutional Area,
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