

# Gaining from collective efforts

## Pradeep Kumar Panda

Women in Udaipur have switched over to organic ways of cultivating tomato, thereby increasing their yields and income. Gaining strength as a collective, these women are now able to handle the whole chain of activities starting from production to marketing.

**W**omen play a pivotal role in agriculture all over the world. Data reveals that there are 500 million small scale farm families around the world, and 70% of the agricultural work on these farms is done by women. It is recognized that farm productivity goes up by 30% if women have the same access as men to productive resources (FAO). While men focus more on economic gains, women's concerns are primarily about access to food and nutrition based on diversity.

Udyogini, aptly meaning 'woman in enterprise' has been working in the field of women entrepreneurship, since 1992. Udyogini initiatives have impacted lives of 25,000 farm families as producers in differentiated value chains (sal leaves, lac, silk, honey, bamboo, mahua, tulsi, tomato, mustard, pulses, embroidery, incense sticks, dairy, spices, goat rearing, imitation jewellery and poultry) showing potential for scale in difficult market conditions. Currently, Udyogini is working in four low income states viz. Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand.

### Tryst with tomato cultivation

In the villages of Salumber and Sarada blocks in Udaipur in Rajasthan, about 70% farmers were cultivating tomato through irrigation by wells. This led to an acute water shortage in the region and farmers struggled with rainfall aberrations as well as market fluctuations. Also, farmers were following inappropriate techniques like narrow spacing between plants, high usage of chemicals and storage in gunny bags leading to post harvest losses. Under these circumstances, Udyogini decided to intervene in these villages through training women farmers towards better production methods as well as effective supply chain management. Udyogini's tryst with tomato cultivation



*Learning on the field*

involving women farmers began in the year 2009, in the villages Salumber and Sarada blocks - collectively known as the tomato cluster of Udaipur. This initiative under Rural Business Hub project was funded by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.

Initially, women were organized into groups. To improve their tomato cultivation, they were trained on better planting, storage techniques and use of bio fertilisers and neem based plant protection measures. Farmers were educated on line planting with 2.5 ft-3 ft distance between two rows and at least 1.5 ft distance between each plant. They were also trained on using crates instead of gunny bags which were given free of cost to the farmers.

Women were provided with good quality seed as well as biofertilisers. Having got trained, farmers shifted to organic methods of cultivation. By using organic fertilizer and pest management, the external dependency on chemicals reduced and they were able to double the income. By storing the produce in crates, the wastage was reduced. Earlier the wastage was to the extent of 15%. This also enabled them to

**Jaisamand Agro Producer Company, set up in 2014 has 1,436 producers, associated with it. The company is managed by 15 board members, all women.**

Sustainable farming of tomatoes has helped Ms. Phool Bai gain new confidence, stay back in the village, while the family manages other enterprises. Phool Bai is a native of Limbawli village of Udaipur District, Rajasthan. She has 4 children and lives in a joint family. She has been practicing vegetable cultivation since 10 years, with low production levels and high wastages. She was spraying chemicals extensively to control pest attacks. Phool Bai says that the wastage used to be as high as 20%. Thus, her family preferred rearing buffaloes.

Around 5 years ago, Phool Bai joined the vegetable cultivation program, organized by Udyogini. She was part of the training programme in 2009, adopted organic farming practices. She invested

in compost unit and took up vermi composting, increasing the availability of organic manure for her crop. By this she could reduce the use of chemical fertilisers. She sprayed neem based pesticides thrice a week to control pests and diseases.

Over a period of 2 years, the tomato production increased by around 20% and income by 40%. The produce was marketed through Jaisamand Agro Producer Company. Her husband joins her in vegetable cultivation, sharing the work load. Her youngest daughter could join a private school. All these improvements were possible through enhanced incomes, shared family responsibilities and the support provided by the Jaisamand Agro Producer Company.

get better price. Farmers used to get Rs 8 per kg when they carried in crates, where as they were paid Rs 6 in the market, if they carried in gunny bags.

### Organising into a Producer Company

With a capital of Rs 1 lakh, Jaisamand Agro Producer Company (farmers' owned and managed), was set up in March 2014. Soon, it had 1436 producers, associated with it. The company is managed by 15 board members, all women. The company got an assistance of Rs 8.4 lakh from NABARD to manage for three years. Once the company was formed, different clusters were formed and the produce was picked up from specific location for sales in the larger market.

The women managed company is able to impart training, manage accurate weighing of the produce, organize seeds and equipment. The company also helps women farmers in marketing pulses and grains besides vegetables, in a limited way.

*Phool Bai growing vegetables organically*



In future, the company is planning to provide marketing support for all vegetables on a large scale - with regard to value addition, for eg., preparing chutneys and ketchup. Also, it realized that selling the produce in other markets is not easy as it is based on exchange of the produce by mandis with each other and also involves high transportation costs. The producer company plans to take the processing business forward by finding institutional buyers for their products. Initial attempts were however, not successful.

### Impact

This women exclusive intervention has resulted in multiple benefits to the communities. Women are now able to handle the whole chain of activities - production to marketing management. In the process, women got better recognition in their family and community; especially after gaining 'technical knowledge' and improved incomes. Also, some men opine that 'their sources of income have increased as they have been freed from agriculture, thus being able to handle other activities'. In a study conducted during 5<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> February 2015, women reflected on their enhanced ability to communicate, express their point of view strongly, with outsiders. However, there are still challenges to overcome – the crop's vulnerability to pest and diseases and adverse climate changes. Women recognize these challenges and are preparing themselves to face them boldly.

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