

# RESILIENT WOMEN, RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

SSP COVID-19 FIELD UPDATE - 3



## INTRODUCTION

In this Update, we focus on how during these unprecedented and difficult times, women from rural areas have effectively assumed leadership roles and taken charge of the situation voting to be part of the solution, not the problem.

Women's leadership post COVID19, is most visible - as they convert a crisis into opportunity to build resilience. Sakhi Task Force have moved from relief to recovery in various ways. At the frontline of the COVID19 crisis, they act as a volunteer force providing repeated information on COVID19 and connecting to health emergency services and monitoring water security for life saving steps -hand washing and ensuring equitable distribution of PDS rations and more.

## REGENERATING LOCAL ECONOMIES -LIVELIHOODS

Surekha is a woman entrepreneur from Wagholi village of Kalamb, Osmanabad. After the training, she started a flour mill with her neighbour and also started Noodles making. She also learnt about poultry farming and started a small poultry business with 25 poultry, birds. In 2018 she also invested Rs.50,000 in buying a cow and that yielded her a respectable income of Rs 375 per day. When she lost her husband in the same year, she was burdened with the complete responsibility for the household.

Now, during the current lockdown her son returned from Pune to help her with the business. She now earns a monthly income of Rs 30,000 having made an investment of Rs.1.9 or 2 lakhs.

With four different businesses in hand, Surekha has come a long way and it has made her even more ambitious."I was motivated when Women Entrepreneurship and Leadership Initiatives leader Vijayatai appreciated my efforts. I am thankful for her invaluable guidance and support towards handling the changes brought about in my life." - Surekha



## IMPACT



During July 2020, the SSP facilitated Sakhi Task Force reached out to over two lakhs families across 15 districts in Maharashtra, Bihar, Odisha and Kerala in COVID response and recovery initiatives. Community Resilience Fund (CRF) was utilized by women entrepreneurs to revive their small businesses and livelihoods.

"Sakhi Task Force women are the torch bearers for us. They show us how to take care of migrant workers who returned from cities, widows and the elderly in our village" - Revati Kangule, Badarpur village, Nanded, Maharashtra

## HIGHLIGHTS

### SSP & UNICEF Partnership : COVID19 Preparedness with Panchayats and communities

Swayam Shikshan Prayog, partnering with UNICEF Maharashtra, joined the nation-wide efforts to fight COVID19 in Maharashtra. The Sakhi Task Force was successful in ensuring equitable distribution of relief, leveraging village level resources to help vulnerable families. They also collaborated with Gram Panchayats to ensure social inclusion in terms of ration cards and job cards, and creation of job opportunities for migrants and vulnerable families. Due to the impact of Sakhi Task Force in COVID19 response, UNICEF has decided to support SSP in scaling up COVID19 recovery initiatives across Osmanabad, Latur and Solapur districts of Maharashtra. It aims to work with the government to facilitate district wide preparedness initiatives that are both, COVID19 intensive & WASH (Water, Sanitation & Health) sensitive.

# CONVERTING WASTE LAND FOR AGRICULTURE

Powerful negotiation skills acquired over years have enabled Sakhi networks to be a voice for the voiceless during the current crisis. They have become the local trusted virtual helpline for the poor and most vulnerable.

Monsoons often spell trouble for the people of Wayanad, who primarily depend on agriculture. Recurrent floods and landslides for the last two years have affected their life to a great extent. COVID19 has only made it worse. But the groups of women organised as 'Sakhi Farmers' in Kottathara and Edavaka panchayats of Wayanad district are not afraid. They have a platform for negotiating with the Gram Panchayat to revive farming through partnership.

The recently declared Subiksha Keralam (Food Secure Kerala) program by Government of Kerala pointed out that waste land would be converted to farming land and that work will be allotted under MNREGS. Grabbing the opportunity, Sakhi Farmer leaders negotiated with Gram Panchayat and identified waste land for rice cultivation. Women groups have identified 15 acres of waste land in Kottathara and created land cleaning and preparation jobs for 200 women from vulnerable families. Every employed woman receives Rs 8288 as wages from 28 days of MNREGS work (Rs 296 per days). This has brought their families much needed relief. Now women farmers are ready to cultivate aromatic and traditional varieties of rice on the prepared land.

**"This work has benefitted us in multiple ways. Poor families now have work under MNREGS, the waste land is being converted for farming, and our own Sakhi Farmers now have new land to cultivate rice" - Preena, Sakhi Farmer leader from Kottathara, Wayanad.**



## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN COVID CRISIS

### Green Pathways to Growth

Women lead Eco-Farming - women farmers from remote villages in Nanded have demonstrated that shifting from cash crops to food crops has multiple yields - nutritious food, viable farming and incomes all year round. 300 women farmers have converted about 300 acres (1 acre each) of their land into 'Sakhi Anna Suraksha Sheti' or 'One Acre Model' farming. Marginal women farmers were trained on water efficient farming and use of bio fertilizers. Traditional ways of farming, seed preservation and soil protection has led to greener farming, greater yield, and more self-reliance for families. By promoting sustainable farming practices, women farmers are also protecting land and water sources to improve ground water levels.

The COVID19 Crisis robbed the poor and landless of their daily wage work, but also pushed them towards greater self-reliance. They started to grow food and medicinal plants in their home gardens. "Our food should come from our farm. We don't need to go to the market and buy vegetables that could be contaminated " - Devubhai More, Leader from Nanded.



Rekha Devi is a landless woman from Rahuva, one of the most backward villages in Khagaria, Bihar. She belongs to the Mahadalit community and lives in a hut. During the lockdown her husband lost his work and their life became miserable. But with determination Rekha faced the reality with a plan she had in her mind. She had saved Rs 10,000 over the years and approached her Group to sanction Rs 20,000 loan under Community Resilience Fund (CRF). When she got the fund, Rekha Devi started a small kirana shop in front of her hut. Slowly her business picked up well and it enabled her to repay the loan as well as running her family smoothly. "If I had not saved some money for the emergency purposes, I was not able to start this small business. CRF also helped me in this crisis and I am paying back on time", says Rekha Devi.

## Grassroots Women's Leadership

“Being organized, having a strong grassroots network and our robust partnerships with the local government, allowed us to deal with the COVID19 crisis and help our communities and the migrant workers.” - Godavari Dange, Secretary of the Sakhi Federation, Maharashtra; leader from Swayam Shikshan Prayog and of the Huairou Commission; shared the experiences and learnings of how her federation's women leaders addressed the COVID19 crisis during session on "CBA14 setting the stage: from crisis to climate action". The session was jointly organised with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).



She emphasized the role played by organized, grassroots, women's networks in partnership with the local government, to address the issue of migrant workers and vulnerable community members. The Sakhi federation has facilitated access to free rations for 10,000 families under the PDS and supported around 3,500 migrant workers, through jobs under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Program.

## How Grassroots Women are Delivering Pandemic Responses

In an article published on IIED website, Sheela Patel and Suranjana Gupta said that women at the grassroots level are generating practical responses to the coronavirus pandemic and their effectiveness highlights the importance of including grassroots women in climate change planning. In India, women's federations worked with village councils to distribute relief. They surveyed villages to identify those most in need of assistance and have already enabled more than two thousand households to claim government entitlements. Predicting food shortages as early as March 2020, grassroots women encouraged their peers to plant vegetables. Three months later, vegetables from kitchen gardens are ensuring that families have nutritious food. Seeing grassroots women as drivers of change, turns the spotlight on their innovations and contributions and demonstrates the value of involving them in public planning and decision-making. <https://www.iied.org/new-narratives-for-new-normal>

## WEBINAR

## Dignity of Labour Action-Dialogue: Grassroots Women-Led Regenerative Local Economy, August 30, 2020

We are happy to invite you to the above Action Dialogue. It features global and local changemakers and throws a spotlight on the power of grassroots women as solutioners and leaders in tackling the pandemic and regenerating local economies.

You will hear Sheela Patel Commissioner, Global Commission on Adaptation and on global experiences in regenerating economies.

SSP 's network leaders will speak from the front lines on COVID impact and how they are building resilience with their local governments, in these uncertain times.

Register and join us by filling the short form to confirm your availability.

We will send you further details on your email address provided by you in the form. <http://www.tinyurl.com/DOL300820>

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