



QUARTERLY UPDATE

Swayam Shikshan Prayog



Introduction

SSP's programmes and initiatives continued in this quarter with a vision of making grassroots women as change makers and resources persons in secure and sustainable development. Grassroots women leaders across Maharashtra, Bihar and Kerala demonstrated that local partnership, learning new knowledge and practices, and addressing risks in changing climatic conditions through innovations are the way to strengthen community resilience. Marginalised and social excluded communities are taking the lead in addressing nutrition and food security, water security, health, livelihoods and entrepreneurship.

As our leading light and founding director late Prema Gopalan envisioned, 'ordinary women can trigger extraordinary changes' are coming true in many villages. We described the highlight of the activities happened in the field for the last three months (April to June 2022).

Highlights

Compendium of Best Practices: SSP has won the 3rd rank by presenting SSP's Women-led Climate Resilient Farming (WCRF) Model to the IUIINDRR-NIDM Compendium of Best Practices on Agenda 3 "Role of Women in DRR".

Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction 2022: Godavari Dange and Naseem Shaikh represented SSP at the GPDRR in Bali, Indonesia, where Godavari emphasized the need for collaboration between government, financial institutions and grassroots women's groups to design financial mechanisms that work for grassroots women and allow them to scale up local implementation.

Women-led Farmer Producer Companies take the lead in the agricultural value chain: Manjari and Vijayalakshmi Sakhi Farmer Producer Companies organized a 'Rice & Pulses Festival' on 16th June in Osmanabad, Maharashtra with the objective of establishing the presence of women led farmer producer companies in the value chain sector. SSP facilitated this program in partnership with District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). In April 2022, Vijayalaxmi FPO ws recognized by Parbhani University for its collective leadership in supporting women farmers.

Highlights

Marathwada Transformation Model project: The implementation of the three years project “Marathwada Transformation Model” supported by Hindustan Unilever Foundation began in April 2022. Key Project achievements so far include: 250 Sakhis identified, baseline survey of 40,000 farmers completed, started training of women farmers on one acre model and 7,000 farmers are trained out of the total 50,000 projected during the project period. The farmers access government schemes for farmers on fertilizers. Expected project outreach is 1,00,000 small and marginal farmers and local Gram panchayats across 100 villages in Osmanabad district for intensive water conservation. Three pillars of the project are farmers, market and government. Project focus is on water conservation in 100 villages – linkage with gram panchayats for access to agriculture and other schemes.



Stories from the Field

Inspiring others through her example

Vijaymala Shendage from Wagholi village, Osmanabad is a Taluka leader and local SSP Center in-charge guiding five women leaders under her presently. After receiving training on organic farming, leadership, entrepreneurship development, financial and digital literacy from SSP, she joined SSP in 2017 as a trainer for five villages. Through practical and contextual examples, she trained women in entrepreneurship, livelihoods diversification and business management. Focusing on financial independence, Vijaymala Tai urged women to participate in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises and helped them identify various business opportunities available in their village. Due to her efforts, over 700 women in Kallam Taluka are involved in sustainable small-scale businesses like papad making, vegetable vending, dairy, clothing, tailoring, stationery and groceries. Each one of them has increased their monthly income to at least Rs.3,000

Moving from chemical to organic agriculture

In 2018, Pooja Patil, from Boramani village, Solapur faced severe economic distress, as her family relied on the cultivation of Soyabean, a high input cash crop. With her family in debt, Pooja approached SSP for an enterprise support fund, attended various training sessions on organic farming, livelihood diversification and enterprise development. Inspired by SSP's work, Pooja Patil convinced her family to replace their chemically cultivated soyabean farm with organically cultivated food crops. Adopting the 'one-acre model' she and her husband cultivated a variety of indigenous food crops including vegetables, grains and pulses through vermicomposting and bio-pesticides. Pooja also practices water efficient farming using drip irrigation. She did soil testing on her farm to understand its quality to plant appropriate crops. She also diversified into goat rearing and started a milk dairy on her farm to earn additional income.

Stories from the Field

"Grassroots level work is an inspiration for many"

"Now, women are empowered. They have the knowledge and confidence to participate in Gram Sabha and speak to government officials for further development in their village", says Jijabai Wad, from Madki village in Nanded district.

Jijabai Wad, an Arogya Sakhi of SSP since 2019, has been educating women in her village about health, nutrition and the various government schemes available for women. Guided by SSP Jijabai, conducted home visits and locality meetings to change the mindset of both women and their families. Though hesitant in the beginning, after seeing a few women get benefits of schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, more women sought her guidance. She helped 25 pregnant women get the Matru Vandana Yojana in her village since 2019. Reaching out to the most vulnerable community members, Jijabai has gained the respect of her community and participates in local governance issues, freely interacting with the Block Development Officer, Gram Sevak and Gram Panchayat.



Gaining self-confidence and the respect of her family

"Today I am financially independent. My husband and family have changed the way they look at me. Women in my community are inspired and continue to grow as leaders under my guidance", says Priya Rakunde from Khadki village in Osmanabad district.

Initially, Priya did not have the confidence to go to the market and sell her own produce, her mother-in-law would go instead. After about a year she had enough savings to support her husband in buying another plot of land. It increased her confidence and belief in her own abilities. She invested her earnings in livelihood diversification activities.

Today Priya has diversified into dairy business and poultry rearing, in addition to organic farming of vegetables. With SSP's support, she developed a 'model farm' which is visited by people from across Kallam Block. She uses hydroponics for water conservation, and creates her own manure through vermicomposting and uses bio-pesticides. She now gets an average income of around Rs.15000 per month through her various initiatives. Her work has gained her respect and confidence in her family, who have now replaced the chemical dependent cotton and soya bean to fully organic vegetable cultivation on their 3 acres of land.



Stories from the Field

Driving last-mile healthcare in rural Maharashtra

"Through the Arogya Sakhi program, we have been able to empower women to make decisions about their own health and the health of their family", says Sangita Kadam, an Arogya Sakhi from Shelgaon village in Maharashtra.

Over the past two years, Sangita's efforts to increase awareness on health and well-being has helped women of different age groups to understand this aspect. They have gained confidence to address health related concerns with government officials and primary health centers and negotiate access to schemes related to health, water and sanitation implemented in their village.

Out of the thirty villages in Loha block in which Arogya Sakhis are active, twenty-eight villages have created Arogya Sakhi Groups, specifically for the purpose of addressing healthcare expenses. Due to the low rate of interest and ease of borrowing, women use this financial resource to meet small family expenses related to healthcare. These groups meet on a monthly basis and women contribute money to the group fund, along with carrying out lending and repayment activities. Around 8-10 women attend these monthly meetings in her village and lend money to about 3-4 women every month.



Transforming from a farmer to an entrepreneur

Vaishali Munde from Malkaranja village in Osmanabad was depending on the small income source from selling milk to run her family. Her life changed in 2021 after SSP introduced Vaishali to *Lakshmi Dairy, which caters milk to 85 villages in the area by sourcing milk from women farmers. With the support of SSP, she was given training in storage and supply of milk to the Dairy. To increase the milk production, she purchased 4 more buffaloes through a loan from ICICI Bank. Vaishali started organic cultivation on her farm land and realized the benefits of growing crops and vegetables without chemicals using vermi-compost. Her success in farming spread among the villagers and five more women approached SSP to learn about vermin-compost beds. Slowly her milk business also got good benefits, her family helped her in the field and earns around 7000 per month.



Stories from the Field

Sowing seeds of resilience

Shaila Tai from Masla Khurd village in Osmanabad is a relentless leader who guides and works with fellow women farmers in finding solutions in innovative farming, livelihoods and natural resource management thus taking grassroots women leadership to a new level of resilience.

When the COVID-19 hit and lockdown started, the farmers faced issues of selling the products in the market. SSP's training on seed germination, organic farming practices and agri allied business prompted Shaila Tai to look beyond kitchen garden. When the markets were closed, she collected and preserved locally grown organic seeds and sold them to needy farmers in sowing season. It was a huge success. They earned Rs 1.5 lakh from selling the seed kits.

Two years later, the agriculture groups of Masla Khurd created a Seed Bank and added value to the product by branding, quality checking, packing and reaching to the fellow farmers in Osmanabad district and outside. The pesticide free seed kits include 33 varieties of vegetables and pulses grown locally through organic methods by women farmers.

Seeing a government advertisement for supply of organic seeds in a newspaper, Shaila Tai's group approached the Collector of Osmanabad district and bagged an order of Rs 15 lakh. "We felt very proud when we got the order from government for 1,500 seeds kits covering farmers from 8 blocks," says Parvati Tai, member of the Agriculture group. This year, so far, they have received orders of seeds kits worth Rs 16.5 lakhs.



Seizing opportunities and making the best of them

Valsamma Stephen's journey is all about seizing opportunities and making the best of them to transform her life. Her transformation from a homemaker to a farmer, entrepreneur, and leader was very quick. When SSP entered Wayanad after the 2018 flood, Valsamma joined Sakhi Farmer Groups and received training on climate resilient farming.

In 2021, Valsamma joined in a project facilitated by SSP with support from the State Medicinal Plant Board (SMPB), Government of Kerala for cultivating medicinal plants. She had cultivated five different varieties of medicinal plants on 15 cents of land. Slowly, she converted the medicinal plants into a nursery, which is now grown and ready for sale.

After the training from SSP, she became a trainer in sustainable agriculture. She is called for trainings conducted by Krishi Bhavan, Kudumbashree, and Keravrisiksha Farmer Producer Company. She has trained 760 women in agriculture so far, and many of them have turned into organic farming. She receives a handsome remuneration for these training programs. In 2021, her earnings crossed the mark of Rs. 1,50,000/- from various agriculture activities.



In the Media

The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), USA has selected SSP as the 'Grassroots Organisation of the Month'. This was a big inspiration for the work done by grassroots women leaders facilitated by SSP. They mentioned SSP as "Moving from the space of women centered community-led reconstruction strategy and a four year partnership with the Government of Maharashtra after the massive Latur earthquake, SSP was born! "



As a part of the Oxfam-Novib Fair for All project, SSP was featured for our work on economic empowerment of women.

"Grassroots women can play important leadership roles in village development. Now I am more aware of the issues affecting me and my communities and know how to address them. I want to start new businesses through which grassroots women like me can earn and have money in their hands for decision making," says Sitabai Ramhari Bhore. She is a grassroots leader from Eda village in Osmanabad district of Maharashtra, India.

Link: <https://bit.ly/3JhTsZO>



SSP's work in entrepreneurship development and livelihoods has been featured in the Economic Justice and Rights (EJR) Action Coalition of the Generation Equality Forum (GEF).

SSP has been at the forefront of inclusive, sustainable community development by empowering women at the grassroots in climate-threatened, under-served areas across seven states of India. SSP repositions women to take on new roles as decision makers in agriculture, enterprise and embrace community leadership, thereby enhancing their economic and social resilience.

Link: <https://bit.ly/3S8reDS>

EJR Action Coalition Newsletter (Generation Equality Fo



Recognition

Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2022

At the 7th Session of the GPDRR at Bali, Indonesia, Naseem Shaikh from SSP spoke about “Scaling up local implementation of Sendai Framework for DRR” on 24th May 2022. She spoke about the challenges in implementing Sendai framework. Decision making and access to planning and resources for women groups being most crucial and the need to address them at policy level.

Godavari Dange, an SSP grassroots leader was also a resource person at the GPDRR, Bali. Speaking on the theme of “Financing Local Investment through Risk Informed and Bankable Strategies”, she deliberated on women's role

role being crucial in decision making processes and accessing resources for local development. She stressed the need for community managed financial mechanism (Community Resilience Fund) to promote grassroots-led innovation and inclusion of vulnerable groups in government programs. She emphasized the need for collaboration between government, financial institutions & grassroots women's groups to design financial mechanisms that work for grassroots women's groups to scale local implementation of #sendaiframework.



Yashaswini Sanman Puraskar

Yashwantrao Chavan Centre, Mumbai, as part of its objectives, has instituted a series of awards and honors given to a distinguished person or organization for their outstanding work in several fields. This year the Centre has started the “Yashaswini Sanman Puraskar”, to felicitate women's contributions in the fields of agriculture, literature, social work, sports, and journalism along with industries.

Godavari tai Dange from Tuljapur, a powerful leader and mentor of Swayam Shikshan Prayog, was honored with 'Yashswini Agriculture Honor Award' for her huge contribution in agriculture sector acknowledging the innovative practices developed by her. The award includes a cash prize of Rs 21,000 as well as honours and certificates. Several dignitaries were part of this huge event.

In her speech Godavari stated that, "around "80% of the agricultural work is done by women, however, most of them do not have any right to the land they toil. We promise to fight for it in the days to come."

Recognition

Pre-kharif Information Festival

Women farmers from SSP were invited by Latur Administration for the Pre-kharif information festival on the occasion of Azadi Ki Amrit Mahotsav celebration at Latur on 31st May 2022. The event focused on pre-kharif farming and land preparation. It was an opportunity for women farmers to understand various schemes related to agriculture, water harvesting, crop management, entrepreneurship development and farmer producer companies.

'Environment and Climate Crisis' Workshop by SAPACC

A two day State-level workshop titled 'Environment and Climate Crisis' was organised by the South Asian People's Action on Climate Crisis (SAPACC), for their team at Beed, Maharashtra on 16th & 17th April 2022.

Godavari Dange, spoke about the challenges faced by women farmers in drought-prone Marathwada region, and the role of SSP in mobilising women to address climate change adaptation and environmental issues. She elaborated on how the rural women responded to this challenge by organising themselves and implementing SSP's 'Women-led Climate Resilient Farming (WCRF)' model, a comprehensive model that addresses food and income security, health, nutrition, environment conservation and livelihood diversification.

"Stakeholders at all levels need to include women and recognise their central role in the implementation of SDGs, and ensure that they have access to land and other productive assets" - Godavari Dange, Grassroots Leader, SSP.



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