SSP
Margin to Mainstream

Re-emerging World
Strategic Advisory Services




**EVENT REPORT**

# Solving for the Transition Challenge

A National Dialogue on enabling Women-led Transition Pathways towards Natural Farming among Climate-vulnerable Smallholder Farmers

DELHI | THURSDAY, 24 SEP, 2026

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# About the Event

For over 12 years, Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) (www.swayamshikshanprayog.org) has been developing and refining the Women-led Climate Resilient Farming (WCRF) model, also known as the One-Acre model, to help climate-vulnerable smallholder farmers transition to natural farming. The model takes a counterintuitive starting point. Instead of asking farmers to convert their entire landholding, a woman farmer takes charge of a small plot and grows local food crops using bio-inputs she makes herself, mulching and water conservation. She experiments, builds confidence and gradually expands.

Today, over 275,000 women across 10 districts in four states have adopted the model: Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Bihar. Participating families save roughly ₹40,000 a year on input costs, alongside gains in soil health, water security and women's role in household farm decisions. The model has delivered similar results across very different terrains, landholdings and support systems.

The Government of India's launch of the National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF) in 2024 signalled a strong national commitment to chemical-free, climate-resilient agriculture. As the Mission moves into implementation, its success will depend on the quality of the transition it enables, not just its coverage. For most smallholders, the barrier is not awareness but the absence of a credible, low-risk way to begin, a "last-mile transition gap". As SSP's knowledge partner, Re-emerging World (www.re-emergingworld.com) synthesised the learnings from the WCRF model into a public report, *Bridging the Last Mile Transition for Natural Farming Adoption*.

On Thursday, 24 September 2026, SSP organised *Solving for the Transition Challenge: A National Dialogue on enabling Women-led Transition Pathways towards Natural Farming among Climate-vulnerable Smallholder Farmers* at Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, New Delhi. The dialogue aimed to build policy alignment on integrating the One-Acre model as a structured transition pathway within NMNF, and to secure commitments to pilot it. It brought together policymakers, former senior government officials, researchers, practitioners, donors and women farmer leaders from four states. Participants witnessed an inaugural session with farmer impact stories, a documentary on the WCRF model, keynote addresses, the launch of the public report, and two expert panel discussions on scaling adoption and on women as catalysts of change.



"Across India, it is women who are farming. Enabling women-led, natural farming means enabling our smallholder farmers. They are one and the same agenda"

DR. SHRAMAN JHA
CEO, HINDUSTAN UNILEVER FOUNDATION



"I cannot think of a better topic for the workshop than a women-led transition. It is women who ensure their families eat well and stay healthy"

SHRI CHARANJIT SINGH
FORMER ADDITIONAL SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

# The Event in Numbers

**61**

Total Participants at the Workshop

**24**

Organisations Represented

**02**

Thematic Panel Discussions

**13**

Grassroots Actors Participated

**04**

Government Officials Participated

**01**

Public Report Launched



"96% of farmers who do not follow sustainable agriculture are not unaware of its merits. There is a fear, a hesitation, to adopt natural farming"

ANUP NAIR, CEO, LEDS

# Welcome Address by Anup Nair, CEO, LEDS

Anup Nair, Master of Ceremonies, formally welcomed the chief guests, SSP's board members and CEO, expert panellists, partner organisations from Kerala, Karnataka and Bihar, women farmer leaders and members of the media on behalf of SSP. He also walked participants through the day's agenda.

He set the context for the dialogue by pointing to a growing national shift towards natural farming, reflected in the launch of the National Mission on Natural Farming. Yet only about 4% of Indian farmers follow sustainable methods. The rest are not unaware of its benefits. They hesitate out of fear of income loss, pest attacks and crop failure, a "last-mile transition gap" that training and awareness alone have not closed.

Mr. Nair shared that SSP's One-Acre model addresses this gap. Women across 10 districts in four states have adopted it, saving families around ₹40,000 a year on input costs. He called for building policy alignment on integrating the model within NMNF.

# Inauguration Session

*Solving for the Transition Challenge* was formally inaugurated with the traditional lighting of the lamp by Shri Charanjit Singh, Former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India; Dr. Shraman Jha, CEO, Hindustan Unilever Foundation; Naseem Shaikh, CEO, Swayam Shikshan Prayog; and Priya Patil and Abhishek Kadam, Directors, Swayam Shikshan Prayog.

To celebrate the diversity of the WCRF journey, Sakhis from Kerala, Bihar and Karnataka performed songs in their local languages. The Bihar team's song urged farmers to replace urea and potash with compost made from cow dung. Grounding the dialogue in lived experience, women farmers from Bihar, Wayanad (Kerala) and Bidar (Karnataka) shared impact stories of how the model changed their farms and lives. The session closed with the premiere of a video documentary on the WCRF model, showcasing its innovations and impact.





"Our objective is to build genuine policy alignment on integrating the One-Acre model within the Mission, not through a single presentation, but through real dialogue and shared evidence"

ANUP NAIR
CEO, LEDS

# WCRF Adopter Farmers from Bihar, Kerala, Karnataka share their Experiences



"We help women get half an acre or an acre from their families to farm. Within two years, their husbands say, 'You can manage the farm.' That is when a woman believes she too can do something"

ANITA KUMARI
COMMUNITY LEADER, BIHAR
SSP WCRF ADOPTER



"We grew only cash crops like banana, ginger and areca nut using chemicals. Today we grow over 40 crops with bio-inputs, earn extra income, and other women in the village are adopting the same method"

MARIYAM JOSEPH
FARMER, WAYANAD, KERALA
SSP WCRF ADOPTER



"Our drought-hit land gave very little. Now we make our own bio-inputs from local resources, grow vegetables for the family, and sell the surplus. That income goes into our children's education"

SULOCHANA PARITH
FARMER, BIDAR, KARNATAKA
SSP WCRF ADOPTER

# Premiering “Marathwada District Transformation Model: Impacting One Lakh Marginal Women Farmers | HUF x SSP”

a short documentary on innovations and impact of SSP’s Women-led Climate Resilient Farming (WCRF) Model




## About the Session

The session premiered a short documentary on SSP's women-led work in Dharashiv, Maharashtra, supported by the Hindustan Unilever Foundation. Its objective was to show participants what the model looks like on the ground. The film traced three initiatives: the One-Acre model for crop diversity and food security; panchayat-led water conservation, with over 550 structures built or repaired across 200 villages; and women-led FPOs that secured fair prices. In three years, the model reached 1 lakh women farmers, and 12,000 women secured land ownership. The screening grounded the day's dialogue in field evidence, and Dr. Shraman Jha, CEO Hindustan Unilever Foundation drew on it in his keynote.











"SSP has already proven their model in Maharashtra. So, the question is not whether the model works, but where and how should we scale it"

DR. SHRAMAN JHA
CEO, HINDUSTAN UNILEVER FOUNDATION

# Keynote Address by Dr. Shraman Jha, CEO, Hindustan Unilever Foundation

Dr. Shraman Jha, Chief Executive Officer, Hindustan Unilever Foundation (HUF), gave the keynote address and shared perspectives across three thematic areas.

## Key Perspectives

**Women-led, natural and smallholder farming are one agenda:** The dialogue's three themes, women-led transition, natural farming and smallholder farmers, ultimately converge. Across most of India, women are now the farmers, as men increasingly migrate to cities for work. Enabling women therefore means enabling the country's smallholder farming.

**Natural farming builds both productivity and soil resilience:** Chemical fertilisers were introduced to raise productivity. The SSP approach showed that productivity and the soil's own strength can improve together. Soil conditions three years into the programme were markedly different from where they started. The shift takes time, though: natural farming is not a quick-fix pill but a sustained practice.

**From proof of concept to scale:** With one lakh women farmers and substantial data behind it, the model is no longer at the stage of theory. The question is no longer whether it can work, but how far and how fast it should be scaled, and what support is needed. HUF hopes to see it extended across more regions and states.



"Agriculture is the sector where maximum impact can be delivered to rural women"

SHRI CHARANJIT SINGH
FORMER ADDITIONAL SECRETARY, MORD, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

# Keynote Address by Shri Charanjit Singh, Former Additional Secretary, MoRD, Government of India

Shri Charanjit Singh, Former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India, gave the keynote address and shared perspectives across five thematic areas.

## Key Perspectives

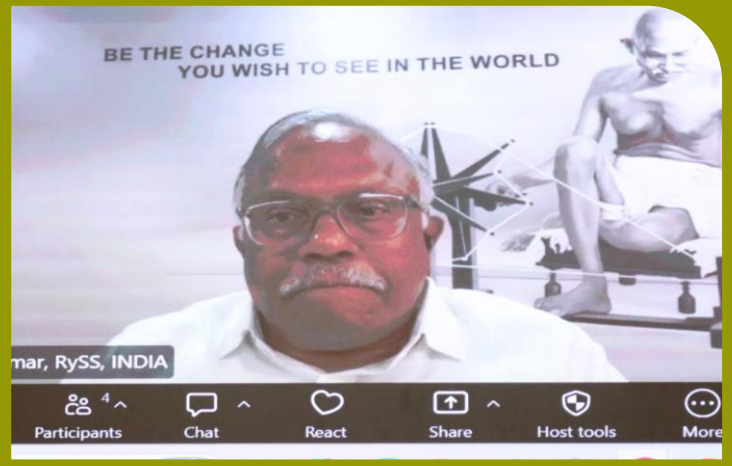
**Women are the strongest stakeholders in the transition:** Women ensure their families eat well and stay healthy, which makes them the strongest stakeholders in the transition. Additionally a woman with an agri-nutri garden experiences three benefits: she no longer buys vegetables, she sells the surplus, and her family stays healthy, saving on doctors' visits.

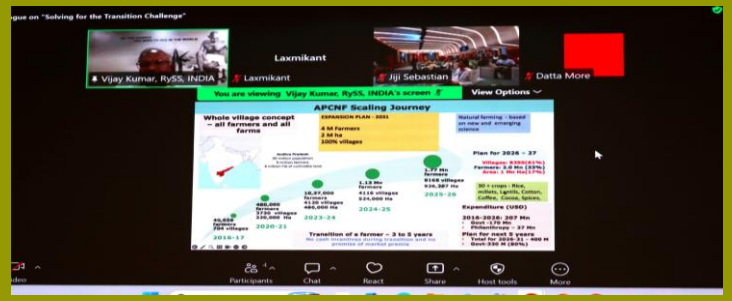
**The structural gaps women farmers face:** India's female labour force participation is only about 40%, against 68.6% in Vietnam. Around 110 million women work in agriculture, yet only 14% of operational landholdings are in women's names. Women make up just 23% of PM-KISAN beneficiaries, so most farm decisions still rest with men.

**Women take up opportunities when they are offered:** NRLM has brought about 10 crore households into nearly 9 lakh women's SHGs. Women already make up 66% of trainees at Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETIs) and 52% under Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY).

**Agriculture is where funds for women can create the most impact:** Cash transfer schemes for women and MUDRA loans, where 70% of beneficiaries are women, have brought liquidity to villages, but transfers alone do not empower women. The task now is to channel these funds into agriculture and move beyond raw produce to processing and value addition.

**Convergence has opened new channels for women:** NRLM's tie-up with other ministries channelled ₹800 crore under the PMFME scheme, followed by a ₹1,200 crore project, to SHG women for food processing. It has also enabled around 800 all-women FPOs and a minimum share for women in Ministry of Agriculture schemes.




"We need a long-term handholding support to transition towards and sustain natural farming - in which Women SHGs can play a pivotal role"

SHRI T. VIJAY KUMAR,
IAS, FORMER SPECIAL CHIEF SECRETARY,
GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

# Keynote Address by Shri T. Vijay Kumar, IAS, Former Special Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh

Shri T. Vijay Kumar, IAS, former Special Chief Secretary and Advisor to the Government of Andhra Pradesh, joined virtually to give the keynote address and shared perspectives across four thematic areas.

## Key Perspectives

**Andhra Pradesh's vision for natural farming at scale:** Andhra Pradesh aims to transition all 60 lakh farmers and 20 lakh landless farm workers to natural farming by 2035. Building on work with women's SHGs since 2004, the programme began in 2016 with 40,000 farmers in 700 villages. Last year it reached 18 lakh farmers across about 60% of villages, and it plans to cover every village by 2027.

**The APCNF model rests on soil science, not external inputs:** Plants release about 30% of the food they make into the soil to feed microbes, which in turn supply the nutrients the plant needs. So APCNF uses no external fertilisers, synthetic or organic. Its nine principles include keeping the soil covered with living plants, growing diverse crops, not disturbing the soil, using farmers' own seeds, and using bio-stimulants only as catalysts.

**Five factors have made the model work at scale:** *Government funding:* about 80% of the roughly ₹1,800 crore spent over 11 years came from government, and philanthropy's 20% has paid for innovation and research. *Science and farmer innovation:* the model combines global and Indian science with farmers' own innovations. *Women's SHGs as first movers:* 90% of the state's women are in SHGs, and women often trial the practice on a small plot before the family switches. *Farmer-to-farmer extension:* the best-practising farmers act as trainers, and women deliver 60% of extension work. *Long-term handholding:* a farmer takes 3–5 years to transition and a village 10–15 years, with no cash incentives.

**Higher incomes and climate resilience:** Paddy farmers see no fall in net income in the first year and earn 56% more by the fifth year. Innovations such as pre-monsoon dry sowing with pelleted seeds, and multi-crop models, including an "ATM model" on just 20 cents of land, give smallholders year-round income and resilience to drought.



"You cannot just tell farmers to switch to natural farming. It is a transition, and it needs a strong body of tried and tested scientific knowledge."

DR. SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN
CHAIRPERSON, MSSRF

# Keynote Address by Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Chairperson, MSSRF

Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Chairperson, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), shared her keynote through a pre-recorded video message for the dialogue, offering perspectives across four thematic areas.

## Key Perspectives

**Women do most of the farming but are not recognised as farmers:** As men move to other jobs, women carry most of the farm work, including livestock, poultry and fisheries. Yet most schemes are tied to land ownership, and women's names are rarely on land records. Maharashtra's Women Farmers Empowerment Act 2026 addresses this with a "Mahila Kisan" card that gives women farmers access to state schemes, and other states should follow.

**Better policies need data on women's role in farming:** Today only landholding data is available, and Agri Stack records only landowners. That leaves out the women who actually do the farming, as well as tenant farmers. Every state needs data on its women farmers to design better policies.

**Every policiy needs a gender lens, shaped by women's feedback:** Central and state schemes should be reviewed and their rules adjusted to make them accessible to women, with tracking of how many women actually benefit. Women farmers should shape schemes from the design stage, with feedback gathered through NGOs and civil society. Credit for women, now tied to property ownership, also needs attention.

**The transition needs validated science, bio-inputs and income security:** Farmers cannot simply be told to switch. They need field-tested knowledge turned into SOPs, training modules and farm schools for peer learning, along with access to seeds and bio-inputs. The transition should serve three goals: ecological security, better food and nutritional quality, and economic security for smallholders through value addition, post-harvest technology and market links.

# Launch of the Public Report



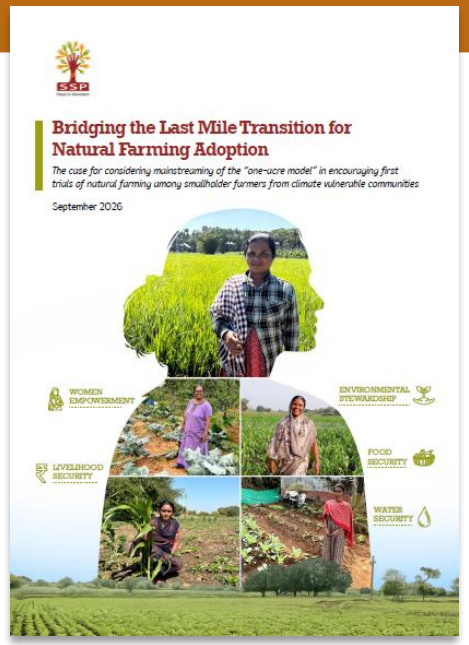

Launch of the Report (clockwise): Suranjana Gupta (Board Member of Swayam Shikshan Prayog), Laxmikant Malvadkar (Director, IT and Knowledge Management, Swayam Shikshan Prayog), Naseem Shaikh (CEO, Swayam Shikshan Prayog), Radha Nambiar (HUME, Kerala), Priya Patil (Board Member of Swayam Shikshan Prayog), Shri Charanjit Singh (Former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India), Avik Roy (Founder & MD, Re-emerging World), Abhishek Kadam (Board Member of Swayam Shikshan Prayog)

## About the Report

*The Report – "Bridging the Last Mile Transition for Natural Farming Adoption"* makes the case for mainstreaming the One-Acre model as a low-risk entry pathway, helping smallholder farmers from climate-vulnerable communities take their first steps into natural farming.

It draws on over a decade of SSP's field experience in Maharashtra, along with new evidence from pilots in Bidar (Karnataka) and Wayanad (Kerala). It shows how the model improves food and nutrition security, lowers input costs, restores soil health and strengthens women's role in farm decisions. The report sets out seven policy recommendations for building transition quality into NMNF implementation.

Re-emerging World led the research, design and development of the report.




**DOWNLOAD FULL REPORT**



"This transition needs a strong body of scientific knowledge: tried, tested and validated in the field, and turned into SOPs and training modules"

DR. SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN
CHAIRPERSON, MSSRF



"The transition towards natural farming will require the collective strength of the ecosystem to deliver impact at scale"

SHRI CHARANJIT SINGH
FORMER ADDITIONAL SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



"Under the WCRF model, a farmer can begin the journey with just 10 gunta (0.25 acre) of land. Starting small, with food security and health as the motivation, is what makes the transition possible"

NASEEM SHAIKH
CEO, SWAYAM SHIKSHAN PRAYOG

# Introduction to the WCRF Model by Naseem Shaikh, CEO, SSP

## Key Perspectives

**Women do most of the farm work but lack recognition, resources and a say in decisions:** Women carry out about 80% of farm work, from sowing to harvest, yet they receive the least respect, resources and support. Because land titles are rarely in their names, they are often not counted as farmers.

**Women need an enabling environment that makes natural farming easier to adopt:** Bio-inputs must be available at an affordable cost so the shift doesn't add to women's workload, whether they are produced by women's groups, private companies or through government support. Women also need recognition, respect and resources as farmers, a step Maharashtra has taken with its women farmers' legislation. Building this environment requires NRLM and the agriculture, soil and water conservation, and animal husbandry departments to work together.

**Reviving traditional farming knowledge offers a proven pathway to natural farming:** SSP did not approach the transition as a technical organisation. It went back to the way earlier generations farmed. Conversations with village elders in their seventies and eighties, especially women, revealed a set of principles: bring nothing from outside, grow food for the family first, and sell only the surplus. The model was built on these principles, using farmers' own saved seeds, neem and other local resources.

**Adopting natural farming requires behaviour change, so training and handholding must be long term:** Awareness alone is not enough. The transition changes farmers' mindsets and practices, not just their inputs and seeds. In One Acre Model Farmers begin on as little as 10 gunta, motivated by food security and health, and expand gradually through small demonstrations. That calls for handholding over at least five to six years, and around 12 years when building women's agency alongside natural farming.




# Panel 01
# From Awareness to Adoption: What Will It Take to Scale Natural Farming Among Smallholder Farmers?

**Panellists**

- Amit Khurana, Director, Sustainable Food Systems Programme, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)
- Dr. Samarth Lal Meena, Principal Scientist, Division of Agronomy, ICAR–Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI)
- Abhijeet Kamble, Environment Specialist, Nanaji Deshmukh Krishi Sanjivani Prakalp (PoCRA), Government of Maharashtra
- Priya Rakhunde, Farmer Leader, Dharashiv, Maharashtra (SSP)
- Janaki Sasidharan, WCRF Model Farmer and Trainer, Wayanad, Kerala (SSP)

**Moderator**: Mr. Avimuktesh Bhardwaj, Chief Operating Officer, Back to Village (B2V)

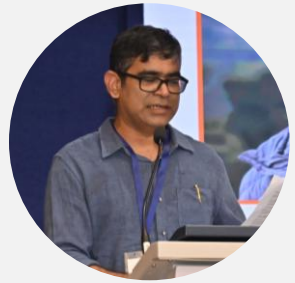
# Theme Background

The Government of India launched the National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF) in 2024 with ambitious targets: 1 crore farmers, 7.5 lakh hectares, 10,000 Bio-Input Resource Centres and 70,000 Krishi Sakhis. As the Mission moves from policy to implementation, enabling adoption among smallholder farmers has emerged as the central challenge. For farmers locked into chemical-intensive systems, the barrier is rarely a lack of awareness. What they lack is a credible, low-risk way to begin, given fears of yield loss, income uncertainty, labour demands and limited access to inputs, markets and sustained handholding.

In the first panel discussion, the panellists shared perspectives on the barriers slowing adoption, the technical and institutional support farmers need through a multi-season transition, and how NMNF implementation can be strengthened. Women farmer leaders also shared their journeys of transitioning to natural farming.

# Key Questions Raised

- How can women, as practitioners and early adopters of natural farming, partner with government to accelerate the transition?
- What technical and institutional support do farmers need as they transition from chemical to natural farming?
- How can natural farming programmes build women's agency, and not just their participation?
- What should be prioritised to move natural farming from awareness to adoption at scale?



"Transition is not a switch where we turn chemical farming off and natural farming on. It is a journey, and every journey needs a process, a system and an institutional framework"

MR. AVIMUKTESH BHARDWAJ
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, BACK TO VILLAGE (B2V)

# Key Perspectives

Amit Khurana, Director, Sustainable Food Systems Programme, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)

+ **Farmers are aware of natural farming; the gap is in the 'why' and the 'how':** Messaging on natural farming is patchy. There is no strong, consistent mass campaign, on the scale of Swachh Bharat or polio eradication, to explain why farmers should switch and how to begin.
+ **Too many overlapping terms confuse farmers and practitioners:** Organic, natural, biodynamic, permaculture, agroecology and regenerative farming are used interchangeably. Grant-funded organisations also promote whichever practice their funder backs. The core message should be simple: no chemicals, and no inputs bought from the market.
+ **Markets are the biggest missing link, and farmers carry the risk alone:** Seeds and inputs are hard to get and often poor quality. PGS-certified produce is almost absent from retail. Support is partial, returns are uncertain.
+ **States must lead with a phased approach:** Stop subsidising monoculture, localise solutions, and link natural farming produce to institutional buyers such as schools, the PDS (public ration shops), hospitals and railways.

Dr. Samarth Lal Meena, Principal Scientist, Division of Agronomy, ICAR–Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI)

+ **The transition must be gradual, not an overnight ban on chemicals:** An abrupt switch puts food security at risk. Farmers should cut chemical doses step by step (for example, below the usual 120 kg of urea for rice and wheat) and add green manure and pulses, such as moong after rice–wheat. Yields may dip for 3–4 years before matching conventional levels.
+ **Natural farming should begin with selected areas and crops:** At the policy level, the areas and crops best suited to natural farming should be selected, and ground implementation driven accordingly. Single-cereal systems need heavy nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, so natural farming works better when legumes are intercropped or rotated in.
+ **Integrated farming systems offer the best route for small farmers:** 86% of Indian farmers are smallholders. Combining crops with livestock, poultry, fisheries and dairy turns one enterprise's by-product into another's input and spreads income across the year.



"Farmers already know chemicals are poison. What they lack is a clear 'why' and a clear 'how' to begin the transition."

AMIT KHURANA
DIRECTOR, SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS PROGRAMME, CENTRE FOR SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT



"We cannot stop chemicals overnight. We must reduce them step by step, adding green manure and pulses, without putting food security at risk."

DR. SAMARTH LAL MEENA
PRINCIPAL SCIENTIST, DIVISION OF AGRONOMY, ICAR-INDIAN AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Abhijeet Kamble, Environment Specialist, Nanaji Deshmukh Krishi Sanjivani Prakalp (PoCRA), Government of Maharashtra

+ **Build capacity at every level, starting with policy and extension staff:** Farmers need to know which bio-inputs (Jeevamrit, Ghanjeevamrit, Beejamrit, Neemastra, Brahmastra) they can make from what is on their own farm.
+ **Women extension workers should be recognised as village-level agriculture doctors as a part of the institutional framework:** Krishi Sakhis and Krishi Tais go to farms, diagnose each farmer's specific problem and suggest the right fix.
+ **Small, structured support drives adoption more than large subsidies:** Farmers don't expect lakhs of rupees. They need support of ₹10,000–20,000 for things like compost units. PoCRA provides this through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
+ **Livestock integration must come before natural farming:** Without enough cow dung and urine, farmers cannot rebuild soil organic carbon. Hence Animal husbandry has to be strengthened alongside the natural farming process.
+ **Bio-Input Resource Centres (BRCs) should be run by individual farmers as well as by groups, and need both hardware and know-how:** Each BRC needs equipment (drums, mixers and other basic tools) and training on how to prepare and use each input. BRCs are already taking different forms.

# Key Takeaways

1. Make the transition gradual and phased: cut chemicals step by step, starting with soil health, crop diversification and legumes, to protect food security
2. A clear, consistent national message on why and how to adopt natural farming will cut through the confusion over overlapping terms
3. Strengthening extension systems and Krishi Sakhis, alongside Bio-Input Resource Centres run by individuals and groups, will help farmers manage the risks of transition
4. Integrating livestock and adopting integrated farming systems will give small farmers the on-farm inputs and diversified incomes they need to sustain natural farming
5. Assured markets through public procurement, together with state-led, locally adapted programmes and documented indigenous practices, will help scale adoption



"Before we talk about natural farming, we must talk about animal husbandry. Without dung and urine, farmers cannot rebuild soil carbon naturally"

ABHIJEET KAMBLE
ENVIRONMENT SPECIALIST, NANAJI DESHMUKH KRISHI SANJIVANI PRAKALP (POCRA), GOVERNMENT OF MAHARASHTRA

# Farmers share their Experiences



"I had no land in my name, so I planted drumsticks on half an acre of our farm and earned ₹76,000 in a year. Once that money came in, my family started listening, and we expanded natural farming to our entire land"

PRIYA RAKHUNDE
FARMER, DHARASHIV, MAHARASHTRA
SSP WCRF ADOPTER



"I started with a nutrition garden on just five cents of land. Today I grow over 40 crops, run a bio-input centre and have trained more than 1,000 women farmers."

JANAKI SASIDHARAN
FARMER, WAYANAD, KERALA
SSP WCRF ADOPTER

THE SESSION IN PICTURES












# Panel 02
# Women as Catalysts of Change: Unlocking Women's Role in Accelerating Natural Farming Adoption

**Panellists**

- Varsha K. Marwalikar, Subject Matter Specialist, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Tuljapur, Dharashiv, Maharashtra
- Dr. Soma Kishore Parthasarathy, National Facilitator, Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM)
- Priya Pillai, Chief of Strategic Partnerships, Asar
- Dr. Pavni Sachdeva, Programme Lead, Sustainable Food Systems, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)
- Godavari Dange, Grassroots Leader, Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP); Member of the Governing Council and President – Asia Region, Huairou Commission

**Moderator**: Ms. Suranjana Gupta, Trustee, Swayam Shikshan Prayog; Special Advisor on Community Resilience, Huairou Commission

# Theme Background

Women play a critical yet often under-recognised role in Indian agriculture, contributing to crop production, livestock management, seed preservation, household nutrition and natural resource management. They are also among the first to feel the impact of climate variability and rising input costs. Yet they continue to face barriers in accessing land, extension services, finance, markets and decision-making platforms. The National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF) recognises women as key actors through its plan to mobilise 70,000 Krishi Sakhis and strengthen community-based extension.

In this panel discussion, the panellists explored how women can move beyond participating in natural farming programmes to driving its adoption at scale. They shared perspectives on field models that put women at the centre, the partnerships and policy support needed to strengthen women's agency, and the evidence required to make the case to policymakers.

# Key Questions Raised

- How can women, as practitioners and early adopters of natural farming, partner with the government to accelerate the transition?
- What approaches and institutional models have enabled women to move from participants to leaders of agricultural transition?
- What partnerships and policy changes are needed to strengthen women-led pathways for scaling natural farming under NMNF?

## THE SESSION IN PICTURES








# Key Perspectives

Dr. Pavni Sachdeva, Programme Lead, Sustainable Food Systems, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)

+ **When women are involved in farm decisions, households adopt more natural farming practices:** CEEW's research on Andhra Pradesh Community-managed Natural Farming (APCNF) shows households adopt 14% more natural farming practices when women take part in farm decisions.
+ **The time women spend making bio-inputs is a major barrier to scale, so bio-input access must improve:** Women spend about 24% of their time making natural farming inputs, against about 7% for other household members this becomes main reason for not switching. Hence BRCs should increase to make bio-inputs accessible and affordable.
+ **The policy goal should be nutritional security, not just food security**: Food security is limited to calorie intake. The real question is whether natural farming can deliver nutritional security, and that is how its benefits should be framed and measured.
+ **Support farmers through the full transition, technically and financially:** Moving from chemical to natural farming takes at least 3–4 years, yet NMNF is a two-year programme. With droughts, excess rain and new pest attacks, farmers need sustained handholding and financial support beyond two years.
+ **Build a long-term scientific evidence base that reaches policymakers**: Evidence/ Data behind natural farming produce is more nutritious or better for soil is weak. One season or one crop cycle (kharif or rabi) cannot establish a causal link, so natural farming needs consistent, multi-year monitoring and research.

Priya Pillai, Chief of Strategic Partnerships, Asar

+ **Collective farming models must build women's agency, not just their incomes:** Kerala's Kudumbashree has unlocked finance, schemes and panchayat support through collective farming, but women still farm on leased land and have never demanded land rights.
+ **Policymakers need a change of mindset to design women-centric policies:** Training matters, but success should be judged by whether women gain access to land, finance, markets and institutional support, and a greater say in decisions.



"Natural farming practices are adopted 14% more when women are involved in decision-making. The more women lead, the more natural farming scales"

DR. PAVNI SACHDEVA
PROGRAMME LEAD, SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS, COUNCIL ON ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT AND WATER



"Training is necessary, but we must ask: is it giving women access to land, finance, markets and a voice in decisions?"

PRIYA PILLAI
CHIEF OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS, ASAR

# Key Perspectives

Varsha K. Marwalikar, Subject Matter Specialist, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Tuljapur, Dharashiv, Maharashtra

+ **Women farmers learn, retain and implement**: Women not only learn quickly but put what they learn into practice. Their patience, willingness to take risks and care for the household make them natural leaders of the transition.
+ **Scale women-led adoption through more training and demonstrations:** Capacity building for women, backed by field demonstrations, is the most direct way to accelerate natural farming adoption.

Dr. Soma Kishore Parthasarathy, National Facilitator, Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM)

+ **Resilience lies in a basket of activities, not a single crop:** Women in drought-prone areas rely on several activities that shift with the seasons instead of one crop.
+ **The transition to natural farming is really a "reverse transition" to knowledge women already hold:** Women in tribal and marginal communities still hold traditional farming knowledge and indigenous technologies
+ **Address the gender division of labour so women can lead**: The unequal split of farm and care work has to change so women have the time and agency to take part in institutions and policy forums. Men must be partners and collaborators in this.



"When we worked with male farmers, adoption was low. Women farmers not only learn, they implement what they learn"

VARSHA K. MARWALIKAR
SUBJECT MATTER SPECIALIST, KRISHI VIGYAN KENDRA (KVK) TULJAPUR, DHARASHIV, MAHARASHTRA



"What we call the transition to natural farming is really a reverse transition, back to the knowledge that women farmers have always held"

DR. SOMA KISHORE PARTHASARATHY
NATIONAL FACILITATOR, MAHILA KISAN ADHIKAAR MANCH

Godavari Dange, Grassroots Leader, Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP); Member of the Governing Council and President – Asia Region, Huairou Commission

+ **Recognition as farmers is the first barrier, and land in women's names is the solution:** When the first women farmers' groups were formed in 2013, women were not counted as farmers because the land was not in their names. So they began on unused patches of family land. The government should now address this issue first.
+ **Women at the centre of policy plan for the whole community:** Women in decision-making roles think about what will benefit everyone, not just themselves.

# Key Takeaways

1. Involving women in farm decisions increases natural farming adoption, as women farmers learn, retain and implement new practices
2. Reducing women's time burden through dense BRC networks and group production of bio-inputs will remove a key barrier to scale
3. Recognising women's traditional knowledge, and addressing land rights and the gender division of labour, will turn women from workers into decision-makers
4. Framing natural farming around nutritional security, backed by long-term evidence and sustained transition support, will help convince policymakers



"When women decide what to sow, they plan for the whole family's food and the health of the land. That is why women can lead this transition"

GODAVARI DANGE
GRASSROOTS LEADER
SWAYAM SHIKSHAN PRAYOG (SSP); MEMBER OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL AND PRESIDENT – ASIA REGION, HUAIROU COMMISSION

# The Event in Pictures































# Event Agenda (1/2)

| TIME | SESSION | AGENDA |
|---|---|---|
| 10.00 am to 10.30 am | Registration and Tea | Participants register and walk through the live demonstration models |
| 10.30 am to 10.50 am | Welcome Address | Welcome on behalf of SSP; introduction to the WCRF model and the context and objectives of the dialogue |
| | Mr. Anup Nair, CEO, LEDS (Master of Ceremonies) | |
| 10.50 am to 11.30 am | Inauguration Session | Lighting of the lamp, songs in local languages by Sakhis from Kerala, Bihar and Karnataka, impact stories by women farmers, and premiere of the WCRF documentary |
| | Shri Charanjit Singh, Former Additional Secretary, MoRD, Government of India<br>Dr. Shraman Jha, CEO, Hindustan Unilever Foundation (HUF)<br>Ms. Naseem Shaikh, CEO, Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) | Ms. Priya Patil, Board Member, SSP<br>Mr. Abhishek Kadam, Board Member, SSP<br>Women farmers from Bihar, Wayanad (Kerala) and Bidar (Karnataka) |
| 11.30 am to 12.10 pm | Keynote Addresses | Chief guests share perspectives on scaling natural farming and the role of women-led transition pathways |
| | Shri T. Vijay Kumar, IAS, Former Special Chief Secretary and Advisor, Government of Andhra Pradesh (virtual)<br>Dr. Shraman Jha, CEO, Hindustan Unilever Foundation (HUF)<br>Shri Charanjit Singh, Former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India<br>Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Chairperson, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (pre-recorded video) | |
| 12.10 pm to 12.30 pm | Introduction to the WCRF Model | SSP presents its 12-year journey with the WCRF (One-Acre) model and what it takes to enable a women-led transition |
| | Ms. Naseem Shaikh, CEO, Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) | |
| 12.30 pm to 12.45 pm | Launch of the Public Report | Launch of 'Bridging the Last Mile Transition for Natural Farming Adoption' by dignitaries, SSP and Re-emerging World |
| | Shri Charanjit Singh, Former Additional Secretary, MoRD, Government of India<br>Ms. Naseem Shaikh, CEO, Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP)<br>Ms. Priya Patil, Board Member, SSP<br>Mr. Abhishek Kadam, Board Member, SSP | Mr. Laxmikant Malvadkar, Director, IT and Knowledge Management, SSP<br>Ms. Suranjana Gupta, Board Member, SSP<br>Ms. Radha Nambiar, Community Leader, HUME Centre, Kerala<br>Mr. Avik Roy, Founder and Managing Director, Re-emerging World |

# Event Agenda (2/2)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 12.45 pm to 1.15 pm | **LUNCH BREAK** | |
| 1.15 pm to 2.15 pm | Panel 1: From Awareness to Adoption – What Will It Take to Scale Natural Farming Among Smallholder Farmers? | A moderated panel discussion on the barriers to adoption, the support farmers need through the transition, and strengthening NMNF implementation |
| | Mr. Amit Khurana, Director, Sustainable Food Systems Programme, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)<br>Dr. Samarth Lal Meena, Principal Scientist, Division of Agronomy, ICAR–Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI)<br>Mr. Abhijeet Kamble, Environment Specialist, Nanaji Deshmukh Krishi Sanjivani Prakalp (PoCRA), Government of Maharashtra<br>Farmer leaders Priya Rakhunde (Dharashiv) and Janaki Sasidharan (Wayanad) share their experiences<br>Moderator: Mr. Avimuktesh Bhardwaj, Chief Operating Officer, Back to Village (B2V) | |
| 2.15 pm to 2.30 pm | **BREAK** | |
| 2.30 pm to 3.30 pm | Panel 2: Women as Catalysts of Change – Unlocking Women's Role in Accelerating Natural Farming Adoption | A moderated panel discussion on women-led models, partnerships and policy support to strengthen women's leadership under NMNF |
| | Ms. Varsha K. Marwalikar, Subject Matter Specialist, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Tuljapur, Dharashiv<br>Dr. Soma Kishore Parthasarathy, National Facilitator, Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM)<br>Ms. Priya Pillai, Chief of Strategic Partnerships, Asar<br>Dr. Pavni Sachdeva, Programme Lead, Sustainable Food Systems, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)<br>Ms. Godavari Dange, Grassroots Leader, SSP; President – Asia Region, Huairou Commission<br>Moderator: Ms. Suranjana Gupta, Senior Advisor on Community Resilience, Huairou Commission | |
| 3.30 pm to 4.00 pm | Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks | Reflections from participants and partner organisations, followed by a vote of thanks from SSP |
| | Partner organisations, practitioners and community representatives; Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) | |
| 4.00 pm onwards | **TEA AND NETWORKING** | |

# List of Participants

## Honourable Guests

| | Name | Designation | Department and Organisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Dr. Shraman Jha | CEO | Hindustan Unilever Foundation (HUF) |
| 2 | Shri Charanjit Singh | Former Additional Secretary | Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India |
| 3 | Dr. Soumya Swaminathan | Chairperson (pre-recorded video message) | M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) |
| 4 | Shri T. Vijay Kumar, IAS | Former Special Chief Secretary and Advisor (joined online) | Government of Andhra Pradesh |

## Government Officials

| | Name | Designation | Department and Organisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | Mr. Abhijeet Kamble | Environment Specialist | Nanaji Deshmukh Krishi Sanjivani Prakalp (PoCRA), Government of Maharashtra |
| 6 | Ms. Varsha K. Marwalikar | Subject Matter Specialist | Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Tuljapur, Dharashiv |

## Academia and Research Institutions

| | Name | Designation | Department and Organisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Dr. Samarth Lal Meena | Principal Scientist, Division of Agronomy | ICAR–Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) |
| 8 | Mr. Satish Kumar | Principal Scientist – Policy (Agriculture and Livelihoods) | M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) |
| 9 | Ms. Janvi Andharia | Director and Research Fellow | Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) |
| 10 | Dr. Rashmi Mahajan | Independent Researcher (Agro-ecology, Food Systems and Resource Governance) | Independent |
| 11 | Dr. Pavni Sachdeva | Programme Lead, Sustainable Food Systems | Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) |

## Media

| | Name | Designation | Department and Organisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | Ms. Tanupriya Singh | Editorial Associate | India Development Review (IDR) |

## Farmers and Community Members

| | Name | Designation | Department and Organisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | Ms. Sudha D evi | Community Leader | Ghoghardiha Prakhand Swarajya Vikas Sangh (GPSVS) |
| 14 | Ms. Sunita Devi | Community Leader | Ghoghardiha Prakhand Swarajya Vikas Sangh (GPSVS) |
| 15 | Ms. Radha Nambiar | Community Leader | Hume Centre for Ecology and Wildlife Biology, Kerala |
| 16 | Ms. Janaki Sasidharan | Community Leader | Keravriksha FPC |
| 17 | Ms. Mariyam | Community Leader | Keravriksha FPC |
| 18 | Ms. Godavari Dange | Grassroots Leader | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 19 | Ms. Priya Rakhunde | Community Leader | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 20 | Ms. Sulochana Parith | Community Leader | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 21 | Ms. Punam Kumari | Community Leader | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 22 | Ms. Anita Kumari | Community Leader | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 23 | Ms. Sangita Devi | Community Leader | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 24 | Ms. Anita Devi | Community Leader | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 25 | Ms. Suman Devi | Community Leader | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |

## Other Guests, Partners, Experts

| | Name | Designation | Department and Organisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 26 | Ms. Priya Pillai | Chief of Strategic Partnerships | Asar Social Impact Advisors (Asar) |
| 27 | Mr. Vishwajeet Poojary | Lead – State Climate Action (Maharashtra) | Asar Social Impact Advisors (Asar) |
| 28 | Mr. Sudeep KS | Head, Planning and Operations | Asar Social Impact Advisors (Asar) |
| 29 | Mr. Omkar Nagawade | Senior Program Officer (Jharkhand and Bihar) | Asar Social Impact Advisors (Asar) |
| 30 | Mr. Hari Subbish Kumar | Head, Climate Change, Kerala and Tamil Nadu | Asar Social Impact Advisors (Asar) |
| 31 | Ms. Harshitha | Fundraising Consultant | Asar – Team Street |
| 32 | Mr. Avimuktesh Bhardwaj | Chief Operating Officer | Back to Village (B2V) |
| 33 | Mr. Amit Khurana | Director, Sustainable Food Systems Programme | Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) |
| 34 | Mr. K. Vishnu Mohan Rao | Programme Lead, Electricity Governance | Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) |
| 35 | Mr. Ashok Kumar | Coordinator | Ghoghardiha Prakhand Swarajya Vikas Sangh (GPSVS) |
| 36 | Ms. Ratna Mathur | Consultant – Gender, Inclusion, Strategy and Grant Making | Huairou Commission |
| 37 | Mr. Nibin Naiju | Coordinator, Weather Information | Hume Centre for Ecology and Wildlife Biology |
| 38 | Mr. Jaisreekumar | Lead – Climate Action | Hume Centre for Ecology and Wildlife Biology |
| 39 | Mr. Shymjith M S | CEO | Keravriksha FPC |
| 40 | Mr. Anup Nair | CEO | LEDS |
| 41 | Mr. Ramesh Bigaokar | Founder President | Mahamaya Rural Development Society |
| 42 | Ms. Padmavati | Project Coordinator | Mahamaya Rural Development Society |
| 43 | Dr. Soma Kishore Parthasarathy | National Facilitator | Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM) |
| 44 | Mr. Avik Roy | Founder and Managing Director | Re-emerging World |

## Other Guests, Partners, Experts (contd.)

| | Name | Designation | Department and Organisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 45 | Mr. Debanjan Nag | Project Manager | Re-emerging World |
| 46 | Mr. Rajarshi Nandi | Analyst | Re-emerging World |
| 47 | Mr. P L Patel | Lead – Ecopreneur | VAAGDHARA |
| 48 | Ms. Preety Bhandari | Senior Advisor, Climate and Finance | Independent |

## Swayam Shikshan Prayog

| | Name | Designation | Department and Organisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 49 | Ms. Priya Patil | Board Member | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 50 | Mr. Nisheeth Kumar | Board Member | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 51 | Ms. Suranjana Gupta | Board Member, SSP; Senior Advisor on Community Resilience | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP); Huairou Commission |
| 52 | Mr. Abhishek Kadam | Board Member | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 53 | Ms. Naseem Shaikh | Chief Executive Officer | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 54 | Ms. Jiji Sebastian | Director, Partnerships, Documentation and Communications | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 55 | Mr. Laxmikant Malvadkar | Director, IT and Knowledge Management | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 56 | Mr. Chandran Puthiyottil | Senior Programme Manager, Community Resilience | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 57 | Ms. Devkanya Jagdale | Director, WILL | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 58 | Ms. Priti Sirsat | Project Manager | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 59 | Mr. Jinto Jose | Project Manager | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 60 | Ms. Athira K Shaji | Project Manager | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |
| 61 | Mr. Gautam Kumar | Project Manager | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) |

## About SSP

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) stands for self-education for empowerment and aims to bring grassroots women from the margin to the mainstream to achieve inclusive, sustainable development. By choice, SSP works in and has scaled to 16 climate-threatened rural districts across India. In the last two and a half decades, SSP has built robust ecosystems – community-level federations, associate non-profit companies, producer companies, and social enterprises that enhance women's access to rights, entitlements, skills, and health-enhancing opportunities. SSP has reached over 7 million people and empowered over 710,614 women to revitalise agriculture and enterprise and take on decision-making roles in their households, communities, and local economies.


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## About Re-emerging World

Re-emerging World (ReW) is a strategic advisory firm that engages with purpose-driven organisations to support their inclusive growth agenda and impact solutions. Over the last 19 years, ReW has delivered more than 130 research, consulting, and advisory projects for Fortune 100 companies, corporates, social enterprises, donor institutions, and NGOs across 18 countries and 14 sectors. ReW supported SSP in designing and executing the event and led the development of this national dialogue report.


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