

Empowering Women Farmers: Unveiling Utthan's Strategic Approach from Farms to Future

In the quiet expanse of Bhavnagar, where tradition and modernity converge, a beacon of change is quietly revolutionizing the lives of women farmers. This transformative journey is intricately woven into Utthan's practice of Sustainable Farming, a blueprint for empowerment that transcends conventional interventions. We unveil the soul-stirring narrative, where Utthan's Socio-Technical Innovation Bundles (STIBs) emerge as the driving force behind the empowerment of women farmers.

Utthan, a Gujarat based organisation in India is working towards Rights of women's livelihood and land ownership; delves into the harsh realities faced by women farmers, especially in the context of climate change. In a country where a substantial percentage of women are engaged in agriculture but face abysmal land ownership rates, the gendered impact of climate change is undeniable. Limited capacity, lack of safety nets, and systemic barriers perpetuate a cycle of vulnerability, impacting not just economic empowerment but also contributing to broader issues of resource scarcity, health disparities, and poverty.

Utthan recognizes and addresses the intricate vulnerabilities faced by women farmers through a transformative approach. By identifying and empowering Lead farmers or Krushi Sakhis (KSs) within communities, Utthan establishes a cascade effect, where each KS mobilizes and guides 90 Women Farmers (WFs). The intervention involves comprehensive training for KSs in 13 Package of Practices (POPs), emphasizing sustainable farming techniques like soil health testing, Jeevamrut, and Beejamrut preparation. Utthan employs innovative participatory methods, including audio-visual materials, to impart crucial knowledge on sustainable farming, bridging the education gap for Women Farmers with limited formal education.

In the pursuit of spearheading a grassroots movement in adoption of sustainable agriculture practices, the KSs undergo extensive training, both on-farm and off-farm, spanning around 20 days. These sessions not only delved into the intricacies of scientific Package of Practices (PoP) but also emphasized fostering a gendered perspective in agriculture and nurturing women's leadership. KSs honed their understanding of women as farmers, developing skills in leadership, advocating for space, voice, and identity, while also strategizing for equitable work distribution and promoting sustainable farming practices. Their training extended

beyond theoretical knowledge, including exposure to best practices through visits to agriculture universities, government/non-government initiatives, and successful projects, supplemented by Training of Trainers (TOT) programs to enhance their skills in training delivery.

In the tapestry of agricultural empowerment, KSs are pivotal connectors. Their multifaceted role involves mobilizing communities, imparting agricultural wisdom, and championing women's rights through Sustainable Farming practices. Beyond training, they play a vital role in securing access to government schemes like Ayushman card and Kisan credit card for women farmers. Acting as bridges, KSs link Women Farmers with Para-Legal Workers (PLWs), contributing to the cultivation of women's identity as farmers and their rights over ownership of land.

Utthan's approach extends beyond agriculture. Recognizing the importance of land rights, the program connects women farmers with Para Legal Workers (PLWs) to navigate the bureaucratic landscape. The socio-legal security provided by *Nyay Samiti* adds a layer of empowerment, allowing women to stand against violence and injustice. The outcomes of Utthan highlights a compelling story. Women farmers, equipped with knowledge and support, report increased decision-making power, reduced costs of production, and higher selling prices. Beyond economic gains, there's a ripple effect—increased mobility, decreased domestic violence, and a newfound confidence that transcends the boundaries of their farms.

The STIBs aren't just about technical interventions; they're about creating a support system, a sisterhood of empowerment. Through collectives and *Bachat Mandals*, Utthan builds a social structure that acts as an accelerator for sustainable farming and developing a sense of identity as farmers amongst the women they work with. Peer-to-peer learning becomes a catalyst, enabling women farmers to share challenges, solutions, and successes. Exposure visits and linkages with government institutions further equip them with the tools for experimentation and growth.

This case study is a testament to the fact that economic empowerment alone isn't enough. Utthan's holistic approach, combining technical training with socio-political reforms, has broken down structural barriers. Solidarity and collectivization have become powerful tools, transforming women's roles as farmers and citizens. To truly make women climate change resilient, the integration of empowering tools and systems is not just strategic; it's

indispensable. Utthan's STIBs stand as a beacon, illuminating the path toward true women's economic empowerment.