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Inspiration

How Gujarat Women Farmers Forge Identity As Economic Contributors

Over 5,000 women in coastal and tribal villages of Gujarat are being empowered through sustainable agriculture practices. Storming another male bastion, women farmers are now earning respect and recognition in the region.



Photo provided by Sonal Kellogg, Laadli Media Fellow



Kansara is now a Krishi Sakhi (lead farmer) and a trainer who passes on her knowledge and practice of sustainable agriculture, which even earned her an award from the Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Gujarat, to other women.

Hansaben has trained over 90 women in her village in farming techniques which ensures that their produce is organic and also has a better yield of higher quality. Hansaben and other women farmers make their own natural fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides using materials easily available on their farms. They have also implemented many good practices like drip irrigation, solar electricity for irrigation, water management, using a fortified and better variety of seeds treated to resist pests and have learnt new methods in the various pieces of training organised by Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KCK), other government institutes and Non-government organisations (NGOs).

Storming another male bastion earning respect and recognition

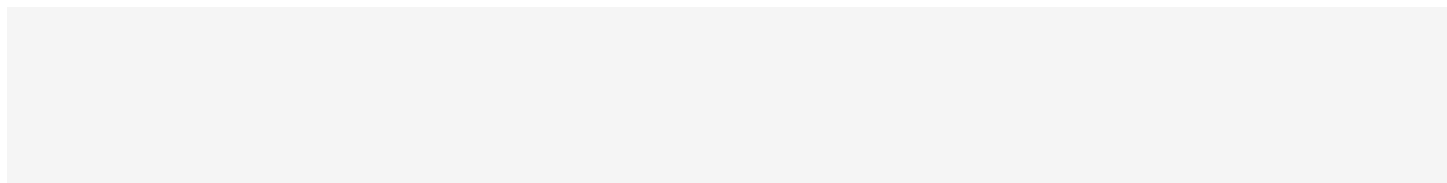
Over 5000 women in coastal and tribal villages of Gujarat are being empowered through sustainable agriculture practices.

This has increased yield, improved the quality of the land, improved the quality of crops grown on their land, reduced costs and they also go for value addition of their crops to increase their incomes. Their crops fetch better prices than what is grown in other farms using chemical fertilizers, pesticides, etc.

Speaking about her success, Hansaben Kansara said, "Earlier we didn't have any say in farming practices and we also were into regular farming using chemical fertilizers, pesticides, etc but after I got trained at Utthan (an NGO working to empower poor rural women in Gujarat), I starting implementing my learnings, using fertilizers I learnt to make along with other women farmers and we started getting better quality yield. Also, our crops are sold on our farms itself, we don't even need to go to the market. And the quality of my land has also improved. Our produce tastes much better than other farms and is very sort after."



we were just going through the hard labour on the farms but now, I am consulted. My husband and I decide together what we will grow on our 17 Bigha farm and what type of seeds we will buy. We decide when we will sell our crops and at what price. I am now recognized and respected in my village. People know me,” she added.



Empowering Her Harvest

Utthan, an NGO working in Gujarat since 1981 for gender justice and community empowerment has trained over 5500 women farmers in sustainable agricultural practices and natural farming methods to counter climate change and to increase incomes in Gujarat.

The Joint Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Utthan, Pallavi Sobti Rajpal explained their work. She said, “Utthan's initiative: Empowering Her Harvest: Women Farmers Cultivating Food Security and Sustainability’ is actively promoting the socio-technical capacitation of small and marginal women farmers in Bhavnagar, Dahod, Panchmahals and Mahisagar districts of Gujarat. This is a multi-layered initiative which put women farmers as knowledge holders and decision-makers at the centre was strategized.”

“We want to see that women facilitate and navigate this process progressively, adopt sustainable agriculture, reclaim their identity as farmers and resource holders, lead efforts in food and nutritional security and influence the larger community. As many as 60 Krishi Sakhis have been trained and handheld to pivot these efforts at the community level. The programme is also building a mechanism to access rightful land and property rights,” she added.

They have got good support from the local Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), an initiative of the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR), where the women farmers were trained in the latest technological advances and taught best practices as per their regional requirements. It was the KVK in Bhavnagar which recognized Hansaben’s efforts and awarded her on Women’s Day in 2021 for her implementation of good organic farming practices, training other women farmers and



Women farmers in Gujarat

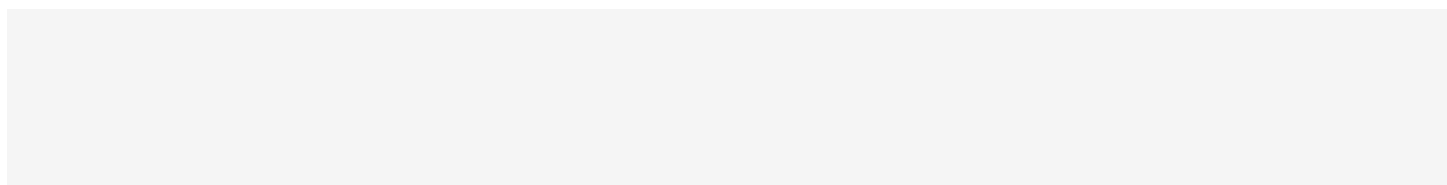
Surpassing multitudes of challenges

Due to climate change in the coastal area of Bhavnagar where there is a lot of salinity in the land itself, farming has been a challenge. This directly affected women as they are the ones who have to deal with water scarcity, lower farm yield meaning lower income and other related issues. To counter this women farmers were provided seeds better suited to grow on saline land. They were taught proper techniques to ensure better yield and they learnt to make their pesticides and fertilizers from neem leaves, cow dung, cow urine, jaggery, chickpea powder and other leaves like from the Thornapple plant, all of which either grow on their farms or is easily available in their villages itself.

The women make Amrit Pani, used as a pesticide and fertilizer, Beej Amrit for treating seeds before planting, and Jeevamrut as a pesticide and other products. They have also accessed



get training.



Once trained, these women become Krishi Sakhi and are in charge in their villages, two in each village, who in turn train 90 women each to learn these sustainable agriculture practices. Another Krishi Sakhi Leelaben from another village in Bhavnagar district said, “Earlier when we used chemical fertilizers, often some of our plants would get burnt due to excessive usage of fertilizers and it also affected our health but now with natural farming, we are healthier and others are constantly asking us to teach them our farming practices so that they too can adopt them.”

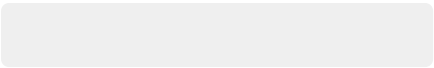
When women farmers have agency they ensure that they use the additional incomes for better education of their children and their own nutritional needs.

As Ms Rajpal said, “A woman farmer in our post-Covid conversations mentioned, “I will first ensure we harvest our family food requirements first and then sell the balance.”

Krishi Vigyan Kendra of Gujarat has trained and created awareness for around 22,000 women farmers in 2022 alone. Speaking about their work, KVK Dahod head Dr Hiteshkumar Kacha said, “In the last five years, participation of women farmers in our training programmes has increased two to three times due to our efforts. We tell them that if their husbands attend, they will not get to learn everything first-hand. Women farmers in Dahod constitute about 75 percent of all farmers and when it comes to allied sectors like poultry, grocery, dairy farming, horticulture, prawn cultivation, etc, women are 100 percent involved. We teach the latest innovations and practices all through the year.” We have a very good relationship with Utthan and we have trained many of their women farmers, he added.

India has 731 KVKs across the country of which 19 are in Gujarat.

Allied farming sector incomes help in augmenting the income of farmers who rely on rain-fed farming and don't have access to irrigation. Women are at the forefront of ensuring that the



(WOWLE) in 2002 to work on women's land rights and identity as farmers which helped them immensely. They also looked at public land and government land from a gender perspective which gradually expanded from women's rights to private land to include public land- forest, common land and government land.

Note: Sonal Kellogg is a Laadli Media Fellow. The opinions and views expressed are those of the author. Laadli and UNFPA do not necessarily endorse those views.

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