

WOMEN FARMER ENTREPRENEURS

A report on a women's livelihood promotion
initiative in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh



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FOREWORD

For the last 30 years, ActionAid Association has been working in the semi-arid Bundelkhand region. There is acute poverty in the region, due to lack of opportunities and employment. The employment crises, coupled with social discrimination, has led to the large scale migration of local population.

The region, which is chronically drought prone, has a total population of 18.3 million. As per the 2011 Census, around 79.1 per cent of its population is living in rural areas. More than one third of these rural households are enlisted in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category.

In the absence of alternate and skilled employment, seasonal migration is a common feature of the region. Migration provides an escape from the regional stagnation and social discrimination, which prevails in Bundelkhand. Such a migration comes as a respite from economic and social bondage.

There are two major challenges in the region. The first is at the environmental front. Ruthless human interventions at various ecological levels have led to several environmental challenges including, an increasingly acute water crisis, loss of green cover, soil degradation due to excessive use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers and threat to those livelihoods that are based on the natural resources found in the region. Studies have shown that the increasing variability of weather and the higher frequency and intensity of climate events has impacted agricultural produce and livestock in the region.

The second challenge is unequal social and economic order. The region has a strongly feudal society, wherein the strong influence of upper castes and the land-owning families is not permitting any change in the social order. They exercise undue influence over the vulnerable community. So much so that on some occasions, they even forcibly reduced the wages of daily wagers.

Women Farmer Entrepreneurs: A report on a women's livelihood promotion initiative in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh has emerged from observations and facts, which were recorded during the two-year long project "Enhancing the income of small and marginal farmers through promotion of sustainable agriculture". This project has been accomplished under the Work4Progress, a programme which leverages innovation to create sustainable, good quality employment among women and young people in India, Mozambique and Peru. The Work4Progress programme has been initiated by "la Caixa" Foundation, Spain's foremost foundation and an important global entity engaged in social investment to further the interests of society at large, especially education, culture and science. Working in collaboration with Alianza por la Solidaridad, a fellow member of the ActionAid International Federation, ActionAid Association is leading the programme across 40 villages in Jhansi, Mahoba and Lalitpur districts of the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. Grounded action has been led in partnership with Gramonnati Sansthan, Mahoba and Sai Jyoti Sansthan, Lalitpur, both of which are grassroots-based civil society organisations.

The project seeks to strengthen vulnerable communities, by working with them to create livelihood opportunities best suited for landless, small and marginalized farmers, by encouraging women's leadership and entrepreneurial spirit. This report shares the advances achieved so far and concludes with a brief outline for future plans.

We are publishing this report to invite suggestions and comments about the journey ahead. Looking forward to hearing from you.

In solidarity

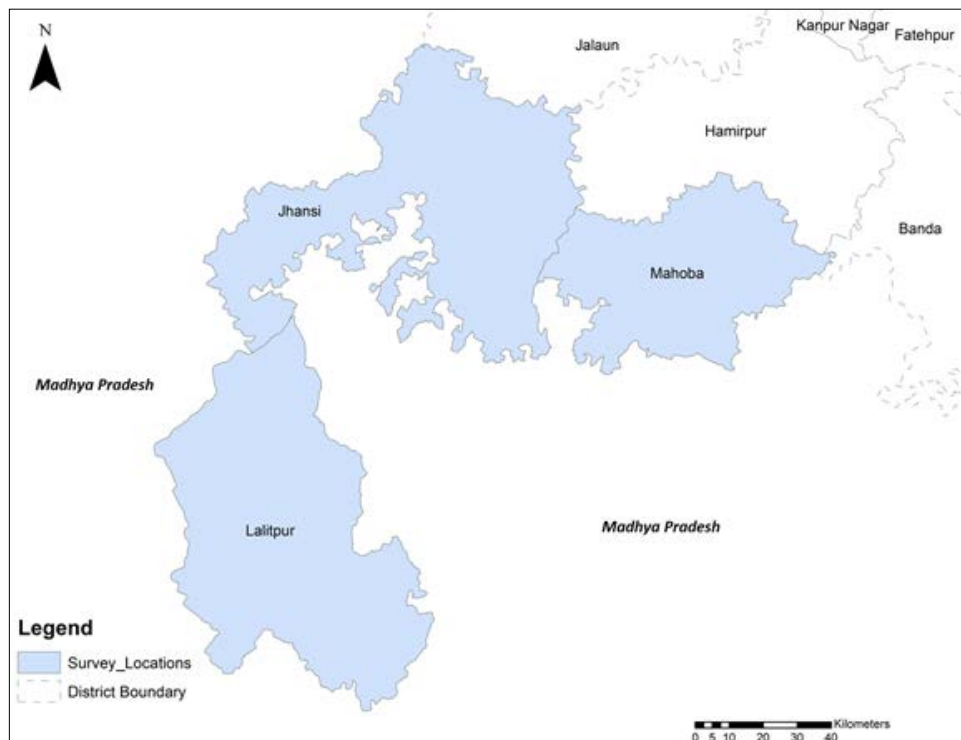
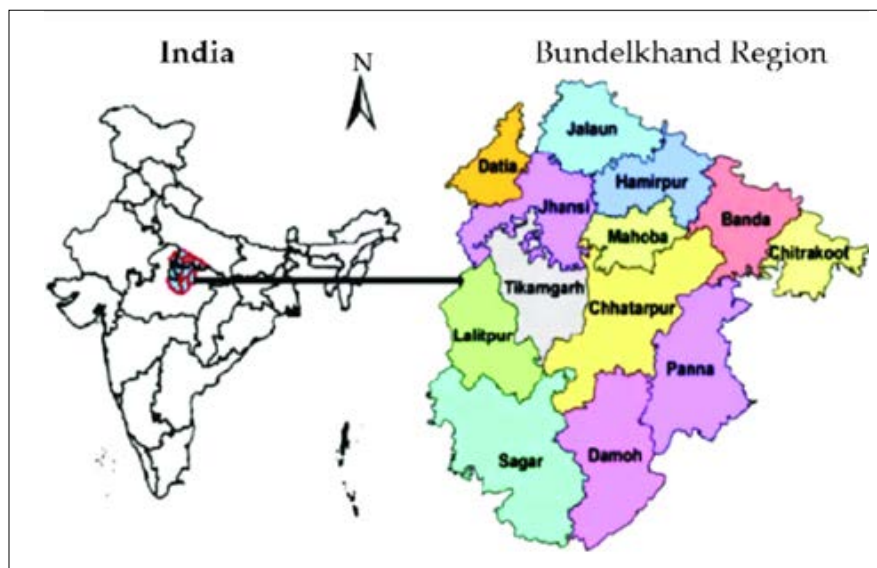
Sandeep Chachra
Executive Director
ActionAid Association



INTRODUCTION

The Bundelkhand region comprises of seven districts of Uttar Pradesh and six of Madhya Pradesh. The population of Bundelkhand is largely rural and belongs to the most backward castes. The major occupation is agriculture and animal husbandry. However, many districts falls under the drought-prone category as they receive a very little rainfall due to change in rainfall pattern.

While geographically, the region spans across two states -- Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, the entire region has a shared history, culture, folklore, religion, practices, and language, apart from similar socio-economic and cultural identity. But, since both the states have different laws and norms, they impact people of these districts differently.



Outline maps of India, the Bundelkhand region and related districts based on Survey of India maps.

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The districts that are located within the boundaries of Uttar Pradesh, namely Jhansi, Jalaun, Lalitpur, Hamirpur, Mahoba, Banda and Chitrakut -- are counted among the most backward districts of India.

A semi-arid and primarily agrarian region, the Bundelkhand region in Uttar Pradesh is characterised by extreme climatic events – recurrent droughts and erratic rains. The resultant water scarcity, infertility of land, soil erosion and crop failures, coupled with small landholdings, makes the lives of farming community vulnerable.

The condition is same for those involved in the allied agricultural practices. Such extreme climatic conditions aggravate the problem of food security. It adversely affects livelihoods of local population, which largely comprises of small and marginal farmers. This eventually leads to distress migration.

For the past several decades, Bundelkhand has been facing crises at multiple fronts due to uncertain rainfall pattern, which causes both droughts and floods in the region at different points of time. The uncertainty in the rainfall pattern causes severe crop damage and sometimes total crop failure. This pushes the farmers under debt and leaving them with no other option but to migrate to big cities in search of wages to survive. In cities, most of them have to work in exploitive conditions.

Unpredictable rain pattern manifests itself in the form of late arrival of rains, early return and long intervals between rainfall spells. This has led to depletion of sufficient water in reservoirs and drying up of wells. This, coupled with excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, leads to crop failure, which ultimately impacts livelihood in this region.

All these factors eventually causes problems like drought, floods, migration, malnutrition, excess use of chemical fertilizers, caste based discrimination, anna pratha or the practice of abandoning cattle as farmers can no longer feed livestock, early child marriage and lack of education.



As far as the development of the region is concerned, the people have low levels of education and income. Most of its inhabitants -- especially women and children -- have poor health indices. Around one-third of the total population of the region belongs to the marginalised community i.e. Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).

These communities are leading lives on the lowest pedestal of both economic and social life. The factor behind their backwardness is that they are being exploited and face discrimination in every sphere of life.

Especially, women have to face sexual and mental harassment by the members of upper caste families. Moreover, since they are less educated and there are lesser employment opportunities for them, they are not in the decision making capacity and are unaware about their rights.

In this region, unequal distribution of land is also a major reason for backwardness. Large fraction of agriculture land is possessed by upper castes. In most of the villages, SC and ST families either possess no land or a small piece of land, which is not enough to provide sustained means of livelihood. Due to abovementioned conditions, instead of cultivating small piece of land, SC and ST families rather prefer to leave it fallow or give it to other farmers on for lease for a small amount of money. Eventually, such families do manual labour, which is the only source of their income in the region.

ActionAid Association has been working in this region for the last around 30 years. We observed that this region and its people have so much potential. But the potential has not been tapped, especially in the field of agriculture. We also observed that a well-structured programme is required to improve their livelihood.

It was in this context that the project entitled “Enhancing the employment opportunities amongst the marginalized communities, especially for women and youth in three districts of Bundelkhand -- Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur in Uttar Pradesh, India” was designed and scheduled for start of implementation in March 2020. The project was to be implemented across 40 villages – 15 villages in Mahoba district, 10 villages in Jhansi district and 15 villages in Lalitpur district. With the outbreak of COVID-19 in February 2020, and the lockdown announced in March 2020, the project start date was shifted to August 2020.

Project work during the COVID-19 pandemic

Across the country, the COVID-19 pandemic and what has been called one of the strictest lockdown in the world has aggravated the economic distress that vulnerable communities were facing. Massive loss of jobs and income, especially for informal workers, saw the spectre of hunger rising in households. ActionAid Association’s survey of informal workers at the time of COVID-19 does show that public distribution system (PDS) in a major way provided essential rations to households. However with families being confined at homes additional burden on women as care givers increased, as did reports of domestic violence. The lockdown saw children being cut off from education with school closure and saw increasing risk of entering child labour and child marriage. They were also increased reports of child abuse. Migrant workers faced great distress in destination areas and there was massive reverse migration from cities to villages. This has resulted in additional pressure over resources available in rural areas.

While the project implementation was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project intervention geographies were covered by ActionAid Association’s humanitarian response to the crisis. Distribution of dry rations, sanitation material and campaigns to spread awareness about COVID-19 appropriate behaviour were conducted in the area.

The work on the project started in the month of August 2020, when there was partial relaxation in the lock down. The baseline survey was done and small group meetings were organised at the village level. During November-December 2020, capacity building of project staff and participatory rural appraisal activities were organised. The processes of listening to the community and selecting participants of the livelihood promotion activities in the first year were started. In February and March 2021, meetings and verification work were done at the village level, as well exposure visits of participants to successful projects in Bundelkhand. The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted project activities again. The humanitarian response this time had a stronger medical component in addition to distribution of ration kits. Health camps were organised, vaccination outreach services were provided and four COVID Care centres were run in the three districts.

Multiple Models of Livelihood

As mentioned earlier, the project focused on developing collectives of women entrepreneurs across 40 villages of Jhansi, Mahoba and Lalitpur districts of the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. Different models

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of livelihood were explored, that would suit landless, small and marginalised farmers, keeping in mind the impact of climate change and the objective of creating sustainable agriculture. Emphasis was on the capacity building of farmers not only to help them adopt sustainable agriculture practices, but also in the production and marketing of agriculture produce.

The type of terrain, in the region offers various opportunities including seed production, vegetable cultivation and horticulture. Interventions at various levels were explored to promote nutrition gardens to address the need for nutritional food for consumption, the availability of seeds at the village level and support related to integrated pest management and chemical free inputs for cultivation.

Seven different prototypes models were selected to bring environmentally sustainable economic opportunities to the most marginalized communities, while imparting entrepreneurship spirit among the whole community. The process involved including listening to the community, co-creating livelihood processes, setting up prototypes or models and then accelerating the activities and practices.

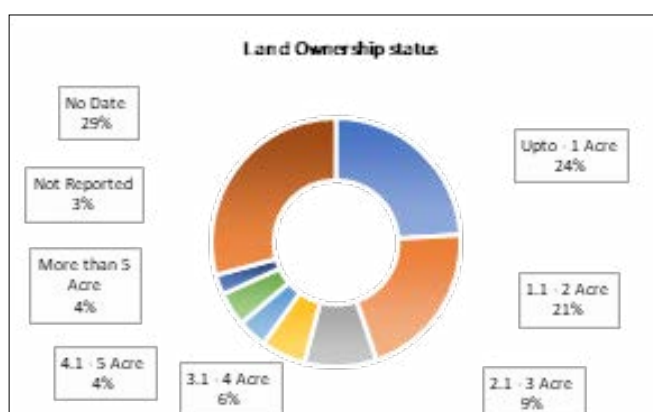
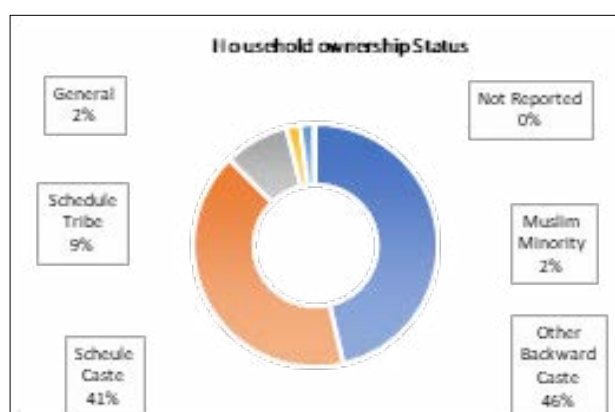
Listening

The major component of the listening process is the continuous interactions with the most vulnerable and marginalised communities through regular meetings at two levels. To understand the actual conditions of the village, meetings were conducted -- first at the village level and then at the cluster level. The project team developed an in-depth understanding of socio-economic status of the households.

Then, the baseline survey was conducted with 6,501 households across the 40 project villages. Among the respondents, 39% were women and 59% were men.



Community meeting with women entrepreneurs in Dawani village Lalitpur district



- » Sixty per cent of the respondents mentioned agriculture and allied activities as their primary occupation; 17% mentioned farm labour as their primary occupation and 21% mentioned other forms of wage labour like construction and trades as their primary occupation.
- » Amongst the respondents, 46% households belonged to Other Backward Castes (OBC); 41% to Scheduled Castes (SC); eight per cent to Scheduled Tribes (ST); two per cent to Muslims and three percent to General Caste.
- » More than ninety-six per cent of the respondents from participating households own land and 3.7% are landless

During the listening processes, we strived hard to make it possible that the major population of the village, especially the marginalised communities, could participate in the activities and process. Our aim was to get ourselves apprised of all the problems and issues, so that the actual socio-economic condition of the village could be thoroughly understood.

Co-creation

Our intervention through baseline survey and listening processes helped us to understand and identify the social and structural constraints, apart from potential opportunities within the communities.



Village resource-mapping done during a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) interaction

The situational understanding of the concerned communities and their strategies were developed through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) processes. PRA provided opportunities for thorough interaction with the communities and helped in highlighting their vulnerabilities, along with the suitability to various livelihood options. Participants in the livelihood processes were finally identified/selected on the basis of the vulnerabilities they faced and their willingness and suitability to different livelihood practices and models.

The project team interacted with the participants on a regular basis to keep a track of their needs. Out of these 40 villages, we identified 20 villages for PRA to explore about needs of the community.

The PRA was conducted in four blocks across Jhansi, Mahoba and Lalitpur districts. The objective of the exercise was to understand social, human, and economic resources of the village from the communities' perspective and formulate a comprehensive plan for villages with the involvement of the communities.

Participatory tools were used to gather information on vital indicators such as Historical Circumstances, Resource Mapping, Social Mapping, Household Asset Mapping (including livestock), Seasonal Calendars of their livelihood and livelihood resource mapping.

Using PRA techniques, we identified that due to lack of livelihood opportunities, many SC & ST individuals work as daily wagers. Due to distress in agriculture sector, 90% of the population is under debt of bank or moneylenders, which forces them to migrate in search of livelihood. Some individuals also reported "Discrimination/Atrocities" as a reason for migration to nearby areas.

This process provided an opportunity to engage deeply into the possible livelihood and employment prototype options for the vulnerable communities. Socio-economic status, assets, and preferences of the families were thoroughly studied.

Information gathered from PRA was helpful in developing Development Plans and Implementation Plans for different livelihood prototypes. During the process, the support mechanism and resources of the village were analysed. The cost, environment, social and geographical information of the village community were collected. This helped in transparently selecting the program participants for the project and also helped in the selection of livelihood promotion activities in accordance with the local resources and service facilities.

Regular meetings with village committees

Such meetings were conducted weekly and systematic recording of suggestions given by project participants helped the project team to respond in a timely manner to the needs and gaps mentioned by the community. The weekly meetings were complemented with monthly review and planning meetings with the team, which

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provide useful insights for monitoring and planning processes.

The participatory appraisal gave us insight into the kind of livelihood option that can be created for vulnerable communities. The livelihood options, which are self-sustainable and less dependent on the external factors, are considered as more effective and easily adaptable. The needs for capacity building and handholding support were also identified to help them access various government schemes.

The marginal and deprived community households were selected for the co-creation and prototyping process. Open and transparent village meetings and sharing of information fostered a good understanding of the project. These exchange processes with the community facilitated the development of collective entrepreneurship in the village, inter linkages between different prototypes, understanding of organic linkages and interdependency of prototypes and how it helps each other.

Finally, the Ecosystem Mapping exercise enabled all to visualise the links and interconnections between the prototypes and different public and private actors that may contribute to their sustainability. This exercise was driven with 19 types of stakeholders that included governmental institutions, financial institutions, co-operatives and knowledge centres.

Prototype options were discussed with the disadvantaged community based on the suitability of the tentative prototypes. For example, the landless households were provided with choices like poultry farming, animal husbandry. Marginal landowner farmers were provided with choices like multilayer vegetable farming, production of vermicompost and horticulture. The distribution criteria for each type of prototype were worked out so that inclusion of vulnerable section could be ensured.

We strived to include single women, landless labour, migrant labour, persons with disability and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. We looked at skills to adapt to new options, diet practices of families, for instances we did not link vegetarian families with goat rearing and backyard poultry. For deprived sections, livelihood options were limited as consecutive drought has severely affected the agricultural practice in the region.

We designed training modules for the identified livelihood prototypes. The modules provided details of various co-creation and prototype activities according to the seasonal calendar. The training modules also included the detailed plan and convergence activities, so that support mechanisms could be developed around the livelihood initiatives. Trainings for poultry farming, animal husbandry and fisheries as an alternative source of livelihood were also imparted to the targeted project participants.

Livelihood Prototypes

Through the co-creation process, different livelihood opportunities, the market scenario and policies ecosystem were analysed. During the livelihood prototyping phase, weekly meetings with each participant. This was done to provide technical support and to ascertain the challenges being faced while setting-up and implementing



Women entrepreneurs discussing and developing their development plan



Jai Kuwar feeding her chicks in Khajraha Bujurg village, Jhansi district

prototypes and how these were impacting their lives. The participants shared not only their challenges but also their suggestions, which were systematically recorded and forwarded to the project team to take into consideration for the planning.

We held collective meetings, took minutes of the meetings, conducted household visits and visits to the prototype site and recorded observations in a visit report template. Each field worker conducted weekly meetings with the project team. Besides, they also recorded and conveyed the information collected and

suggestions from the community to be taken into account for monthly plans.



A project participant working on backyard-poultry Farming in Saliyan village of Jhansi district

A project staff member was made responsible for mobilizing and engaging with the farmer producers' organization in each district. The district coordinators organized monthly planning and monitoring meetings with all members of project team.

During this exercise, the project team met with different challenges. In some cases, communities were very resistant to adopt new opportunities due to many external factors. For example, in some cases, dominant upper caste people had forcefully taken away goats or chickens without paying for the same. When asked to pay, they would verbally or

physically abuse the project participant.

Similarly, there was unavailability of seed variety, needed as per the geographical conditions of the region. Also, participants could not afford the fencing of their farms, which is very important to protect crops from stray animals, especially abandoned cattle.

Production of vegetables and seeds are activities that involve high cost. Pesticides and fertilizers are very costly and also harmful for human population. The various solutions that were explored included insurance support, awareness and linkage to various irrigation and agricultural schemes introduced by the government and trainings about poultry farming and animal husbandry as an alternative source of livelihood in the chronically drought prone region.



Women entrepreneurs registered BASANT Women Farmer Producer Organisation

Besides, the possibility of efficient linkage with the Department of Animal Husbandry to vaccinate chicks and goats was also explored.

For agricultural seed productions, the program participants were to produce certified traditional seeds of wheat, groundnut, pea and urad (black gram). These crops are in demand in those areas. The selected seed varieties are locally adaptive and need less water for cultivation. To minimize the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, training for preparing organic fertilizers and pesticides were also given to the farmers.

With the solutions provided by the communities, seven livelihoods models were finalised. These were Goat Rearing, Poultry Farming, Seed Production, Horticulture, Multi-Layer Cultivation, Poshan Vatika (Nutrition Garden) and Vermi

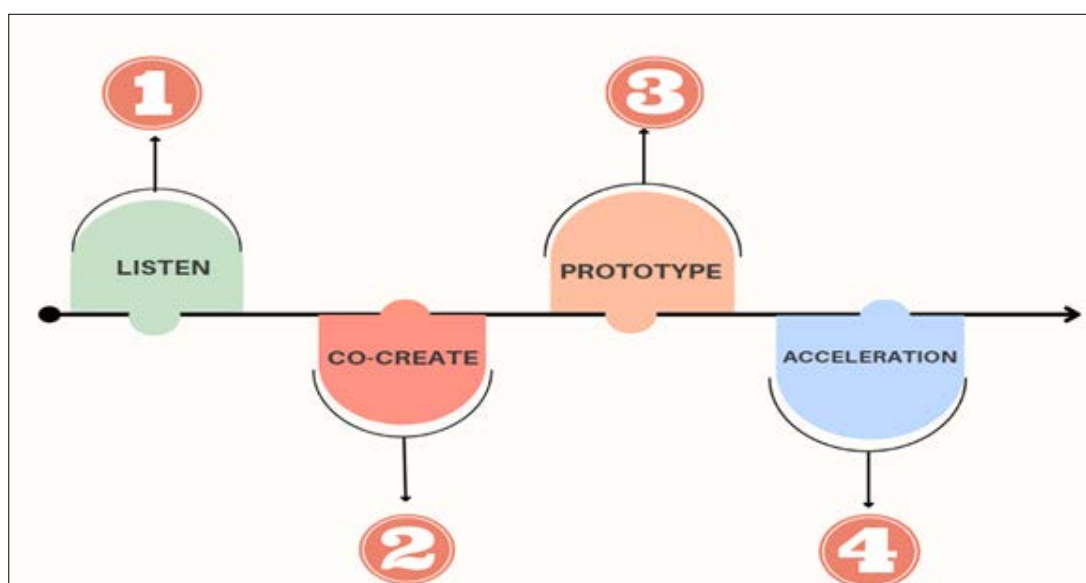
Compost) It was envisaged that these models – directly and indirectly – would create livelihood in the marginalised communities, especially among women, and help them to become farmer entrepreneurs.

Acceleration

During the acceleration phase, we observed that these seven prototype models were unique opportunities for women entrepreneurs to be self-sustainable. These models are less dependent on external factors. Capacity building, such as proper training and handholding support, were also identified to help them access various government schemes.

These entrepreneurs are now connected with the Agri Junction in all three districts. Agri Junction is India's largest digital marketplace that provides the best agricultural products, equipment and machinery. Plans are in place to develop a mother unit to access and supply chicks for the poultry prototype and breeding farm to supply kids for the goat prototype. The BASANT Women Farmer's Producer Organisation is planned to be strengthened to promote a culture of entrepreneurship among marginalised rural communities and strengthen support for micro enterprises.

These prototypes are helping in lowering the migration rate, as the participants have some livelihood opportunities due to which they now prefer to stay back in their villages instead of migrating to cities in search of work. The school enrolment of children has increased. Women entrepreneurs are now able to do advocacy for their communities to get benefits of government schemes.

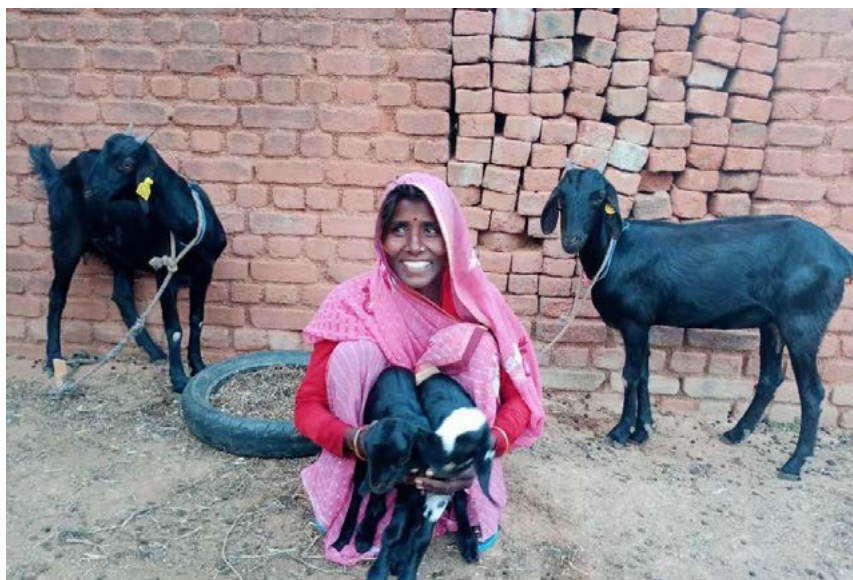


PROTOTYPE MODEL I: GOAT REARING

In India, the goat is also known as a poor person's cow. It plays a significant role in the economy and nutrition of landless, small, and marginal farmers in the country. Goat rearing is an enterprise that has been practiced by a large section of population in rural areas. Goats can efficiently survive on available shrubs and trees in adverse harsh environments of low fertile lands, where no other crops can be grown.

Similarly, goats survive well in high temperature regions such as Bundelkhand, where the mercury hovers between 40-50 degree centigrade during summers. In pastoral and agricultural subsistence societies in India, the goat is reared both as a source of additional income and an insurance against disasters like drought.

Goats are among the main meat-producing animals in India, whose meat is one of the choicest meats and has huge domestic demand. The emerging favourable market conditions and easy accessibility to improved goat technologies are also catching the attention of entrepreneurs. Due to its good economic prospects, goat rearing under the intensive and semi-intensive systems for commercial production has been gaining momentum.



Uma, an entrepreneur, with new-born goat kid in
Badhora village of Jhansi district



A member of BASANT Women FPO feeding her goats

However, there is a high incidence of foot and mouth disease among the goats. Therefore, apart from deworming and vaccination, there is a need to do convergence with the district veterinary department for the treatment of goat and capacity building of veterinary volunteers for prevention of diseases.

In our project, we have established 274 units of goat rearing. One unit comprises of three female goats and one buck. Around 50% of goats have one to two kids. As of today, 48 kids have been born. Of these

274 units, 105 are owned by SC communities, 65 by ST communities, 102 by OBC communities and two by general category communities.

Enterprise Model

The cost of a goat rearing unit is approximately INR 40,000/-, which as mentioned above includes 3 goats and one buck of a Bundelkhandi breed, a stand, medicines and insurance. Goats take about 10-12 months to become fertile. They mostly give birth to more than one kid. This model is easy to adopt for landless people as goats can survive easily in drought-prone areas. A single adult goat gives a direct benefit of INR 7,000 annually and one buck gives a direct benefit of INR 10,000 annually and each of them give almost two quintals of manure per year.

Case story – A goat rearing unit run by a collective

During the lockdown, a group of seven women of Bamuhri Kala village travelled on foot with their families to return to their villages from a big city, where they had worked in factories. All of them belonged to the Sahariya community, a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) and one of the most marginalized social group in Lalitpur District.

They returned to poor conditions, where they had no food and land. Moreover, no jobs were available for them. At the same time, they did not wish to return to the city. However, they had no idea how they could survive here as they were all landless. The women belonged to the varied age groups ranging from 26 years to 50 years. All of them were illiterate except two, who had attended school.

During interactions between community members and the project team in the village, the women expressed an interest in the goat rearing model. However, the model was originally designed as a single-family based unit. But following the discussions among the women, the idea emerged that this model could also be adopted at a community level.

The collective model would enable every member of the collective to take full responsibility for all the tasks for a day that involves feeding and cleaning the calves and taking care of them. On the other hand, others could continue to go out for their daily wage work.

These seven Sahariya women came together to set up a collective goat model. As Janki Devi has shared: "We agreed that we will have joint ownership in this model. If we earn profit or incur loss, that will be shared/borne by all seven members. But by doing this, we all will grow together."

The process also helped the women to emerge as a group supporting each other and empowering themselves to take economic decisions. The program supported the group with 21 goats and one buck. These in turn gave birth to 11 goats and nine bucks, who are still very young and not ready for sale. These goats give around 1.5 litres of milk which is used by these seven women to feed their children. They are also collecting goat dung for making compost. As they have decided to not to migrate to cities, they have enrolled their children in the village school.



Jhanki on her turn for taking goats to graze in village Bamuhri Kala in Lalitpur district

PROTOTYPE MODEL II: BACKYARD POULTRY

Poultry farming is one of the rapidly growing sub-sectors in the animal husbandry sector. Both eggs and meat are an important source of proteins, minerals and vitamins. On the world map, India has emerged as the third largest egg producer (56 billion eggs) and registered an annual growth rate of six per cent per year in the production of eggs. (Report of the Working Group on Animal Husbandry & Dairying, 12th Five Year Plan).

Majority of those involved in the poultry farming in the Bundelkhand region belong to Below Poverty Line (BPL) families, self-help groups (SHGs), landless, small and marginal farming families, who are into this practice for supplementary income and nutritional support. These households rely on low-cost backyard poultry rearing to supplement and enhance their livelihoods. Poultry farming plays a significant role in agriculture as poultry manure is a very rich nutritional supplement, used for increasing yield of all crops.



Sawana, woman entrepreneur, happily feeding her chicks
in Thanwara village of Lalitpur district

This prototype not only provides nutritional security but also reduces livelihood vulnerability. It also



BASANT women entrepreneur selling her chickens

promotes gender equity as it is a small-scale business controlled by women. The enterprise provides regular income using little inputs and the production can be solely managed by women in their households. In addition to this, there are some hidden benefits that forces rural women to rear poultry as backyard venture despite several constraints and impediments

The kuroiler breed have been distributed among the project participants in the three districts of Bundelkhand region. The kuroiler (also called crawler by many) is breed that is best suited to backyard poultry operations. They can flourish in the severe climatic conditions of the region. A bird usually lays one egg a day.

In our project, we have done partnership with program participants wherein 450 units have been established. Of the total units, 234 are from SC community, 102 from ST Communities, 113 from OBC community and one from the general community. These project participants are provided support of 50 crawler chicks and one 3-layer cage. The vaccination of chicks was done during the first 30 days.

Business model

The business model for the backyard poultry calls for six cycles of three months each, as it takes this amount of time for the one-month old chicks to reach full weight and for the hens to fulfil their egg laying potential of up to 150 eggs. The initial investment is Rs 8,000 for a three-layer cage and Rs 3,000 for 50 month-old chicks (20 roosters and 30 hens). After every three-month cycle 50 additional one-month old chicks are bought for Rs 4,000 which includes the fee for one-month of feed. After the initial investment, the additional chicks can be bought from the proceeds of sale of chickens for meat and eggs. At the fourth cycle, an additional three-layer cage would need to be bought to house the increased stock of chickens. At the end of 18 months or six 3-month cycles the backyard poultry operations would have created a stock of 300 chickens (120 roosters and 180 hens), this is on assuming a 20% death rate, a higher estimate as these are one-month old chicks which are quite hardy and capable of independent foraging for food. During this course the hens would have produced 21,600 eggs, based on estimate of 150 eggs per hen and 144 surviving hens during 18 months of operation. Projecting a sale of 80% of saleable stock this would entail total sales of Rs 1,79,880, on a total investment of Rs 39,000, which was triggered by an initial investment of Rs 11,000. As the crawler breed is quite hardy and needing minimum care, the work time invested in the operations is around three hours a day.

Investment and stock creation across 18 months (six 3-month cycles)

| Milestones | Investment | | Gender-division in poultry stock | | | Poultry stock after 20% death rate | | |
|----------------------|--|---------------|----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| | Materials | Cost | Rooster | Hen | Total | Rooster | Hen | Total |
| First 3-month cycle | Rs 8000/- for a 3-layer cage Rs 3,000 for 50 month-old chicks | 11,000 | 20 | 30 | 50 | 16 | 24 | 40 |
| Second 3-month cycle | Rs 3,000 for 50 month-old chicks Rs 1000/- for one month feed | 4,000 | 20 | 30 | 50 | 16 | 24 | 40 |
| Third 3-month cycle | Rs 3,000 for 50 month-old chicks Rs 1000/- for one month feed | 4,000 | 20 | 30 | 50 | 16 | 24 | 40 |
| Fourth 3-month cycle | Rs 8000/- for a 3-layer cage Rs 3,000 for 50 month-old chicks Rs 1000/- for one month feed | 12,000 | 20 | 30 | 50 | 16 | 24 | 40 |
| Fifth 3-month cycle | Rs 3,000 for 50 month-old chicks Rs 1000/- for one month feed | 4,000 | 20 | 30 | 50 | 16 | 24 | 40 |
| Sixth 3-month cycle | Rs 3,000 for 50 month-old chicks Rs 1000/- for one month feed | 4,000 | 20 | 30 | 50 | 16 | 24 | 40 |
| Total | | 39,000 | 120 | 180 | 300 | 96 | 144 | 240 |

Revenue Streams Across 18 months i.e. six 3-month cycles

| Particulars | Quantity | Total Value of Stock Produced |
|--|----------|-------------------------------|
| Value of roosters after three months | 96 | 57,600 |
| Value of eggs produced @ 150 eggs per hen | 21,600 | 1,72,800 |
| Value of hens after egg laying | 144 | 43,200 |
| Total value of stock | | 2,73,600 |
| Estimate of actual sales = 80% of stock | | 2,18,880 |
| Gross Profit (Estimate of Total sales less Total Investment Cost) | | 1,79,880 |

Case story – Backyard Poultry Unit in a Sahariya village

Sarwa village is a remote forest village in Babina block of Jhansi District. In a village of 719 families, 44 families belong to the Sahariya community. They are almost landless and are among the poorest in the village. During the listening phase activities done by project team, it came to light that the Sahariyas have limited employment options. They end up working under exploitative conditions on lands of powerful social groups.

The Sarwa village is close to a protected forest area and is regulated by rules of the nearby Indian Army cantonment. Earlier, when the forest was not declared the protected area, members of the Sahariya community would go to the forest to collect wood and other minor forest produce for their daily use and livelihood. However, after declaration of the forest as protected area, the community is not able to continue its traditional occupation.

Apart from some degree of minor forest produce collection, the Sahariya community is now involved in production of country made liquor and casual labour work. It was observed that there was some resistance amongst the Sahariyas to explore options beyond their traditional occupations.

Through sustained interactions, the program team was able to create confidence in the community members and they seemed more inclined towards poultry activities. A poultry unit has been set up by Siviya, a 45-yr-old Sahariya woman, working with seven members of her family. She had learnt basics of poultry farming at her parent home. Therefore, she was interested to set up her own poultry farm. She was supported with 50 chicks of the crawler breed and a 3-layer cage.



Siviya, from Sarwan village of Jhansi district, selling chicken as an entrepreneur for her livelihood



Siviya, a proud chicken farmer showing the eggs her hens produced

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As the program was strengthening her financially, she encouraged women from her community to be part of the program.

Till now, she has sold 11 cocks at the rate of rupees 250 per kg which gave her Rupees 5,500. This was the first income from her set up. Out of her 15 hens, five give eggs, which she sells at seven rupees a piece to a nearby shop. Using this income, she manages to meet her home's everyday expenses. She thinks she can be an entrepreneur and support the FPO and her community.

PROTOTYPE MODEL III: SEED PRODUCTION

The prototype has been developed because of non-availability of quality seeds and increasing cost of cultivation in drought conditions of Bundelkhand. Moreover, there is a huge demand of quality seeds in the region.

Seed is a basic agricultural input. The timely availability of good quality seed at reasonable prices helps in farmers securing profit from their operations. Farmers need access to healthy seeds, genetically suitable varieties, with high seed vigour and good germination percentage. Seeds play a vital role in agriculture and act as a carrier of the genetic potential of seed varieties.



Savita, a women farmer from Jhansi district, working in her field growing wheat seed

The Indian seed industry is one of the biggest in the world and it involves various institutions and organizations including Government institutions, public sector organizations, research and academic laboratories, institutions and private sector.

The seed sector in India is of two types -- formal and informal. Informal sector is the one wherein farmers produce seeds without following certification procedures and exchange seeds amongst themselves. The formal seed sector follows seed certification procedures and standards to produce a particular variety of seeds.

The informal production of seed is very common among the farmers of Bundelkhand region. It is affected by ignorance about standard procedures for seed production and seed certification.

In many regions, including Bundelkhand, ActionAid Association has been promoting organic farming which involves low input cost and is ecological friendly. Consumers consider organic food as a healthy and ethical choice.

The seeds available in the market are very costly. Moreover, there is not guarantee that use of such seeds will give better harvest. These seed are not necessarily adapted to local conditions and are susceptible to pest attacks. Hence, the farmers use more pesticides and chemical fertilizers, leading to increase in input costs. Due to these reasons, small and medium farmers are giving their agriculture land to big farmers on contract. Therefore, the production of seeds brings the following advantages: Local seeds are more resistant to drought, so they need less irrigation. Therefore, their use reduces the input cost. There is a high demand of local seeds. The Government is extending special support for the production of local seeds.

During the co-creation processes, the need of local seeds was highlighted by the community. Therefore, they planned to start seed production by women farmers. More than 462 persons got direct livelihood opportunities in the process of seed production.

During the rabi season (the winter crop), women farmers initiated 157 new seed production units. Wheat seed (142 units) and pea (18 units) seed was cultivated during the month of November 2021 and harvested in the months of March and April 2022.

Foundation seed of K1317 variety of wheat and IPFD-12-2 variety of pea was provided to the farmers. This stock will be used to produce a certified and truthful seed during the next three crop cycles. Germination rate of this seed is projected to be more than 90%. Moreover, due to its good germination rate, quantum of seed required at the time of sowing will also decrease by 50%. This variety will also lower the fertilizer and irrigation demand of the crop, leading to 50% reduction in the input costs. We have observed that the seeds from the seed production units have almost three times the.

The demand of these seeds at local level are so much high that some of the farmers have placed pre-orders even before the harvest. Such farmers were very impressed after physically verifying the quality of the certified seed in their own village.

Each unit of seed production has been established in one acre of agricultural land. Trainings of the farmers were conducted about various scientific methodologies including use of organic fertilizers and organic pesticides.

In partnership with the project participants around 329 seed producing units have been established. Of the total units, 167 are owned by farmers from SC communities, 39 owned by farmers from ST communities, 114 farmers are from OBC communities and nine from general communities. Each of these units have around one-acre land and irrigation facility. In this prototype, 84% of seed production is led by women and 26% are youth.

From 2020 to 2022, we have produced 1,659 quintals of wheat seeds (K1317 variety), 96 quintals of pea seed, 375 quintals of groundnut seeds and 150 quintals of urad. We are expecting to increase wheat production up to 40,000 quintals by 2023. This will ensure the availability of appropriate quantum of the seed in the region and eventually reduce the dependability on outside market.

Around 3,000 new farmers will get good quality wheat seed. Further, these new 3,000 farmers can also produce quality seed. By the second season of wheat seed production, the production of good quality wheat seed could increase up to 40,000 quintals.

Case Story – Exceeding expectations

A package of practices, using foundation seeds along with the use of organic manure to grow wheat – is being successfully adopted by a few women progressive farmers in Adwaha village of Jhakura block in Lalitpur district.

“The technology to use the foundation seed K1317 with the organic manure works well in the fields. It has not only improved the quality of seed but also the increased the production at low cost”, says Meena Rajak, project participant.

She added, “I belong to SC community. I live with my husband and son, who is also married. All my three daughters are married.



Maina standing happily in her wheat seed production field



Maina, an entrepreneur producing seeds

Our main occupation for livelihood is agriculture.”

Rajak said that for the past many years, they had been using chemical fertilizers to increase production. Despite very high input costs, produce in their fields never touched optimal levels and they never earned profit.

However, a meeting being organized by the project team in her village turned out to be a game changer for her and her family.

While revealing as to how that one meeting came as a blessing for her, she said, “One day, the ActionAid team was conducting a meeting in my village. I

also attended the meeting and came to know about the seed production prototype. The project appeared interesting and I also submit my request to be part of the project. I was selected for Rabi season support with 50 kg of foundation seeds and five drums for making organic manure.”

Rajak had taken this decision despite the fact that her husband was not in favour of organic produce. “He thought 50kg of seed for one acre of land would be not be sufficient. He thought that entire land would not be covered under cultivation with this limited quantity of seed and a large part of land will remain unused,” she added.

She said that it took 90 days to grow the seeds starting from sowing to harvesting in about one acre of land.

“Initially, the seed was treated with Jeevamrit. The first dosage of Jeevamrit was broadcasted during first 15 days and another after an interval of 15 days. Third and fourth of Jeevamrit dosages were broadcasted after intervals of 25 days each,” said Rajak.

The crop was regularly irrigated. During previous years, production in their fields would remain around 12 quintals. But scenario is far better this time. Elated over the results, her husband is happy with the initiative.

“This time, the production was beyond expectation. It was around 18 quintals. This was much more rewarding economically as well environmentally,” he said.

Rajak has sold 17 quintals of the produce at the rate of Rs 2200 per quintals. Apart from using the money to manage household finances, she has also re-paid her debt. Besides, she has stored one quintals of the seed, which will be used for sowing during next Rabi season. She is happy that in the future, she can sell and buy good quality of seeds from Basant Women FPO.

PROTOTYPE MODEL IV: NUTRITION GARDEN | POSHAN VATIKA

The main objective of this prototype is to ensure the supply of nutrition in drought-prone rural areas of Bundelkhand, where climactic conditions are severe. Poshan Vatika focuses on the organic production of the home-grown vegetables and fruits, while simultaneously ensuring maintenance of soil health.

The idea of Poshan Vatika is aimed at alleviating malnutrition. It will also help in enhancement of dietary diversity by providing micronutrients through a constant supply of fruits and vegetables to the families.

Basically, the low intake of nutrition-rich food causes various short and long-term health issues among rural people, especially among women and children. To ensure a healthy diet among women and children of marginalized communities, it is important to ensure that they cultivate a variety of vegetables and fruits in the nutrition-garden. To encourage them to do so, they must be taught about the importance of macro and micronutrients.

Nutrition-garden is an advanced form of kitchen garden wherein fruits and vegetables are grown as a source of both food and income. For small and marginal farmers, Nutrition-garden can generate a



Woman selling her vegetables in the market with the support from BASANT Women FPO in Lalitpur



In Jhansi district, a group of women being trained to prepare and sell organic manure

critical contribution towards diversified family diet.

Participants under the Poshan Vatika program were taught about the appropriate sowing periods of various vegetable crops. They were also taught as to how to prepare organic manure, pesticides, and fertilizers at a very low cost and using material that is easily available.

Importance of organic manure. The organic matter present in the organic fertilizer

improves the soil structure. As a result, the soil's ability to hold onto water and nutrients increases. Organic fertilizer is eco-friendly and increases species biodiversity.

Under this project, as many as 450 units have been established. Of the total units, 81 units belong to members from the SC community, 360 owners are from OBC communities, eight from ST Communities and one from general community. We have supported them with five drums of 35 litres each, a spray machine, and seeds of 11 vegetables (bottle gourd, two varieties of cucumber, tomato, brinjal, chili, spinach, fenugreek, onion, beet root).

Case story: Selling Tomatoes and becoming an Entrepreneur

Mamta Devi, is a 35-yr-old woman and belongs to the OBC community. She is illiterate and is married to Danush. She has two children -- Bharat, a 14-yr-old son and Seema, a 12-yr-old daughter.

She lives in Budwara village of Jhakura block, which is located 35 km from the block headquarter and 20 km from the district headquarter. She has only 1.5 acres of land, where she has been growing vegetables and grain for the past many years.

During conversations with Mamta, the project team came to know that she would use only 0.5 acres of her total land to grow vegetables. The rest of the land was used for food grain cultivation.

For years, she practised agriculture adopting traditional methods of farming. She would follow spraying method for sowing. Further, to increase the production, she would use large quantities of fertilizers and pesticides. This would eventually lead to increased cost of production and compromised the quantity and quality of food grains.

"Earnings were so low that we would struggle even to manage the family's daily basic needs," she said. "Just for our survival, I had to labour in the fields owned by other farmers and borrow some money from them, whenever required," added Mamta.

Speaking about what encouraged her to join the project, she said, "During the listening process of the Samridhi project, regular community meetings were being conducted in my village. When I enquired, I came to know that meeting organizers were telling about the new technology of vegetable cultivation."

"I was growing vegetables for a long time. I also had cows in the house. But I was unaware of organic farming, its impact and cost-effectiveness. I registered myself under Poshanvatika. I attended the training organised by ActionAid, where I learnt as to how to find the best seed. During the training program and regular meetings, I also learnt various aspects of organic farming, steps to be followed while sowing seeds and importance of minimum use of pesticides and fertilizers," she added.

Mamta said that it was during such training programmes, she, for the first time in her life, had learnt about best growing seasons for various crops. She was imparted basic training in grading management and how to explore markets to sell her produce.



Mamta showing the tomatoes grown at her vegetable farm

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Mamta showing the tomatoes grown at her vegetable farm

"With help of the team and learning from training, I decided to grow tomatoes and the crop was ready in May/June. Nowadays, I myself do grading of my tomatoes and sell them in the Lalitpur market, where I earn Rs 40 to Rs 65 per kg. Till now, I have invested approximately Rs.40,000, while returns from the market is around Rs. 1,60,000. Returns will be more as I have yet to sell part of my crop. I also decided to grow more vegetables and tomatoes so that I can get a good sale during August and September," added Mamta.

With the money she earned, Mamta has dared to dream. "I will give my children a good education, enrol them in a good school and also repay my previous loan. I am also a member of Basant Women FPO, which will help me to link with the big markets in the future for more sustainability in my livelihood," Mamta said.

PROTOTYPE MODEL V: MULTI - LAYER FARMING

“Machaan” cultivation (or multi-layer farming system) involves the simultaneous growing of multiple crops on the same land to fully utilise vertical growing spaces. The combination of the crops has to be scientifically decided. The system has the potential to scale up the productivity of small farms.

The major objective of this multi-layer farming model is to increase the cropping intensity, land-use intensity, maximize the use



Two women from one village working together and plucking vegetables from machaan in Mahoba district



Through multi-layer farming women minimize risks, maximize profits

of land and time, obtain different types of vegetables from the same field in a year and to cover the risk of low market prices and adverse climate on crops.

These multi-layer cropping patterns are very important for the farmers of Bundelkhand region, as it provides a wide variety of crops, increase farmer's net income and better utilization of labour.

Under the project, 205 units have been established out of which 27 are owned by people from SC communities, 175 owned by people from OBC communities, two from ST communities and one from general community. We have supported them with 128 wooden poles, three types of wire of different thickness (14-gauge wire, 16-gauge wire and poly wire), five drums of 35 litres each, a spray machine and seeds of 11 vegetables (bottle gourd, ridged gourd, two varieties of cucumber, tomato, brinjal, chilli, spinach, fenugreek, onion and beetroot).

Enterprise Model

At a distance of every two metres, two and a half- to three-metre-long thick wooden poles are embedded in the field. The bottoms of the poles are protected from termites and water. The poles are arranged in a square or rectangular grid. To provide support and strength to the poles, the four corners, the poles in the perimeter are given scaffolding and wires are tied at different heights to make rows or columns. This structure is also called a machaan, and the cost of setting up the structure is around Rs 19,000.

Along the rows or columns planting is done so that a variety of vegetables can simultaneously be grown in three-layers. The first layer would have underground or low-level crops like beetroot, potato, onion and spinach. The second layer are bushes like chilli, brinjal and tomatoes. And the third layer would have climbing crops like bottle gourd, ridged gourd and cucumber, which would use the poles and wires to freely grow.

Case Story

Ram Devi, from Dawani village in Jhakura block of Lalitpur district, lives with her husband and four children – two sons and two daughters. Both Mukesh, her husband and she work as labourers. The family also owns some land, which they use to grow crops while following traditional farming practices.

She first heard about machaan farming when she was attending a community meeting under the project. She was wanted to know more about this technique. She was also determined to convince her husband to adopt this new technique in her farmland. After she convinced her husband, the family decided to put under use only a portion of their land for this technique. Under the program, they were provided with wooden poles, a spray machine, three types of wires and a variety of vegetable seeds.

As taught during the training programmes, she used jeevamrit and organic manure while sowing vegetables in her field. She harvests bottle guard and ridged gourd crop from the top layer of Machaan. Both Mukesh and Ram Devi are happy with the quality of vegetables produced using Machaan farming.

"Multi-layer farming is the best way for utilisation of the small farm to grow many crops in a limited space and water," Ram Devi said.

She collected raw bamboo poles from her village itself and simple rope for the machaan and dug her farm as she was taught in the training for multilayer farming under the project and with very limited cost of wire, she has started multi-layer farming across a larger portion of her land. She got good production of the vegetables and good profit when she sold her vegetables in Lalitpur market.

The practice of machaan farming on Ram Devi farmland encouraged others also to adopt this method of cultivation. The quality of vegetables and the scale of production in Ram Devi's farmland has encouraged Phookuwar, who owns a chunk of land near Ram Devi's fields, to adopt machaan farming. Initially, Phoolkuwar was not part of the program. After learning from Ram Devi's experience, she enrolled herself under the poshan vatika prototype and has started practising machaan farming in a portion of her land.



Ram Devi showing the good quality of her bottle gourd production from multi-layer farming

PROTOTYPE MODEL VI: HORTICULTURE

Horticulture crops are an integral part of food, nutritional and economic security in India. Horticulture is one of the important sectors of agriculture, which consists of production of fruits, flowers, vegetables, spices, tuber crops, mushrooms, bamboo, medicinal and aromatic plants.

The Indian horticulture sector contributes about 33% to the gross value added (GVA) of agriculture. Apart from ensuring nutritional security of the nation, it provides alternate rural employment opportunities, diversification in the farm activities and enhanced income to farmers.

India is currently producing about 320.48 million tons of horticulture produce. The quantum of horticulture produce is more than that of food grain, that too from much less area (25.66 million hectares under horticulture against 127.6 million for food grains).

The productivity of horticulture crops is much higher compared to the productivity of food grains (12.49 tonnes/ha against 2.23 tonnes/ha.). India has emerged as the world leader in the production of variety of fruits like mango, banana, guava, papaya, sapota, pomegranate and lime. India is the second largest producer of fruits and vegetables.

Besides, India has maintained its dominance in the production of spices, coconut and cashew nut. Among the new crops, kiwi, gherkins, kinnow (tangerine), date palm and oil palm have been successfully introduced for commercial cultivation in the country.

Under the project, 92 horticulture units have been established. Of the total units, 25 are owned by people from SC communities, 58 owned by people from OBC communities, seven from ST communities and two from general communities.

We have supported participants with 150 saplings of a variety of plants such as guava, lemon, kathal, karounda, mango and pomegranate per household. Besides, steel wire for fencing, angle iron, and spray machines. Trainings were provided for all concerned participants.

Each fruit orchard is spread across one acre of land and has around 180 fruit plants. It takes three to four years to produce good quality fruit crop.



A woman spraying organic pesticide in a horticulture plantation

Case Story

After the countrywide lockdown was imposed following the COVID-19 outbreak, Radha, from Khajraha Khurd village in Babina block of Jhansi district, had to return to her village from Faridabad, where she and all her family members were working for the last 10 years. Radha, her husband, their two daughters and a son had no other option but to move back to their village, where they had no immediate source of income. That was when she attended a meeting organized in a nearby house by the project team.

Apart from discussing the socio-economic conditions of the village, the project team had also discussed about the horticulture prototype. With an idea to make use of one acre of the land that her husband owns in the village, she registered a request to be part of the horticulture prototype.



Radha doing gardening and taking care of her plant in Jhansi district



A project participant waters her plant in the field

She was provided with angles and fencing wire to prepare her field for fruit plantation. She took help of her brother-in-law and sister-in-law to make optimum use of logistics provided to her.

Thereafter, the project team supported her by providing 150 saplings of fruit plants, which included 35 lemon saplings, 35 gooseberry saplings, 10 jackfruit saplings, 60 guava saplings, five mango saplings and five pomegranates plants.

“They (the project team) have also given me training, apart from providing implements like spray machine, which is very useful for me,” said Radha.

Radha's initiative has infused confidence in the family. Today, they think that they can earn enough to manage finances of the family while living in their own village. They have even dropped the idea of migrating again to any big city in search of livelihood. Radha has now enrolled her children in the village government school.

“Now, I don't want to migrate anywhere as I have to take care of my plants. It seems cycle of migration has come to an end. I have enrolled my children in a government school and I hope that they have bright future ahead”, she said.

PROTOTYPE MODEL VII: VERMI - COMPOST

Although India has a rich history of practice of organic farming, excessive use of different types of chemical fertilizers has emerged as a major ecological challenge. Excessive use of chemicals has led to deterioration of the quality of food products. Such chemicals have emerged as a threat to the whole ecosystem. The need of the hour is to reduce the use of chemical products in our agriculture and efforts must be made to popularize use of organic fertilizers.



Women participants with their vermi-compost beds in Jhansi district



Women group learned how to set up vermi-compost beds and prepare vermi compost

Use of vermicompost in our farming has many benefits. Vermicomposting is the process wherein earthworms are used to convert organic waste material into manure, which is known as vermicompost. The goal is to process the material as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Whereas its use eliminates the input cost of chemical fertilizers, it also increases fertility of land and enhances physical, chemical, and biological properties of soil.

In our project, we have done partnership with program participants wherein 150 units have been established. Of the total units, 61 are owned by people from SC

communities, 13 from ST communities, 68 from OBC communities, and eight from general communities. We have supported them with two vermi-compost beds and a shade net, which will produce 4,500kg per unit per year and cost of each unit will be around Rs 6500.

Basant women farmer's producer organisation

The project participants in Bundelkhand face a number of challenges with respect to their engagement with the market. These challenges include lack of information about markets, prices, small volumes for sale and dispersed service points for accessing services related to input supplies. Most of the project participants are women. As they can't travel in the region freely and frequently, they also face the challenge of establishing active contacts with market players.

A network of entrepreneurs

Under the project we developed BASANT Farmers Producers Organisation (BASANT FPO), as a federation of entrepreneurs. The BASANT FPO is a collective of women entrepreneurs from three districts of Bundelkhand. The company is still a young venture. A good amount of hard work is required for making it a profitable venture.



BASANT women FPO Board of Director showcasing product's in her stall at Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Lalitpur district

We are envisaging that the company will provide capacity building inputs to its members. With the help of such inputs, members will be able to turn their livelihood ventures (micro enterprises) into sustainable profitable enterprises.

BASANT FPO has been established with the objective to provide facilitative support system, wherein entrepreneurs from marginalized community can flourish and can directly negotiate with various stakeholders. Moreover, Government of India is also promoting such women enterprises.

Objectives

1. The core objective is to enhance farmers' incomes,
 2. To facilitate various inputs on good agricultural practices for enhanced production and productivity at the farm level for small & marginalised farmers.
 3. To sustainably build the capacity of FPOs so as to help them evolve as strong rural self – governance platforms for farmers even while giving them increased bargaining strength.
 4. To ensure better access to quality inputs and services as well as markets to FPOs for intensive agriculture and value-added processing.
- » BASANT FPO would provide technical and capacity building support to marginalised women farmers, who have floated their own micro enterprises. This will help such enterprises to graduate to profitable and sustainable enterprises.
 - » BASANT FPO's support in accessing various government introduced online portals including MSME / Udyam and National Agriculture Market (eNAM) facility for marketing.
 - » BASANT FPO can develop wider network by engaging other entrepreneurs & markets.

- » BASANT FPO aspires to get recognition at the national level. It can then negotiate with the various state governments to further develop the networks of its entrepreneur members.

The farmer producers' company is procuring the quality seed, which is being produced by the women farmers. After its gradation, the procured seed will be kept in the godown. This will fulfil the demand of truthful seeds during the next season. Apart from reducing farmers' dependence on the market, it will increase the availability of quality seed and also ensure the production and profitability of marginal farmer.

As per the plan, the farmer producers' company would also be providing seed on credit basis. This will prevent poor and marginal farmer from borrowing money from moneylenders for the purpose of buying seed.

BASANT FPO will also establish an Agri junction to provide various supports to farmers at one place. It has been observed that farmer has to struggle to procure good quality seeds, organic fertiliser, organic pesticide and various small agricultural implements. To fulfil this need of marginal farmers, Agri junctions will be established in all three districts.

Farmer Producers Organisations have been envisaged as an institution to mobilise farmers, build their capacity to collectively invest in production and enable them to efficiently perform marketing of their products. Farmer Producers Organisations would be typically defined as a membership-based organisations or federations of marginal farmers with specific accountabilities

Impact & outcome of Farmer Producer Organisations

FPOs help in developing aggregation mechanism of farmers, wherein farmers/producers with common interest agree to pool in their resources to form a group. They collectively deal with various issues of farming including credit, input sourcing, deployment of farm technology and good agricultural practices, post-harvest handling or onward sale of agricultural produce.

To create a bridge between women and the market, a Farmer's Producer Organization (FPO) was conceptualized and brought into a legal form as a registered company. After a series of consultations, it was decided to set up an FPO that is completely owned and managed by women participating in the W4P program.



Rural women collective "BASANT Bazar" in Mahoba District

The women stakeholders also established its main objective, that is, to provide a facilitative support system in which entrepreneurs from marginalized communities can directly negotiate with the various stakeholders and also initiate advocacy efforts for policy initiatives. The FPO has 10 all-women Board of Directors and 445 women members as shareholders.

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Case story

Laxmi Devi, a member of a Board of Directors from Jhansi District, shared the idea of collective thinking that has led to the naming of FPO as BASANT.

"The name of the FPO should be something related to happiness and prosperity. During the spring season – Basant – in Bundelkhand, we sing folk songs, celebrate budding leaves in trees and get ready to harvest our fields. This is something all women and girls of Bundelkhand connect with deeply and so we decided to keep the name as BASANT," said Laxmi Devi.

Under its first initiative, BASANT FPO will procure quality seeds produced by the women farmers. The product will be graded, certified, stored in warehouses and eventually sold to farmers during the next sowing season.

The FPO has 445 women members and ten-member Board of Directors. FPO is also considering to provide seeds on credit to very poor farmers. It aims to provide end-to-end services covering technical areas, apart from fulfilling and processing needs for the different products produced by its members.



A women entrepreneur selling vegetables in the street market in the nearby village of Lalitpur district

CONCLUSION

The project “Enhancing the income of small and Marginal farmers through promotion of sustainable agriculture” remained operational from 2020 to 2022. Under the project, we focused on the vulnerable communities. In order to select the project participants and the type of prototype suitable for them, indicators were developed to assess the vulnerabilities and potential among the members of the communities.

In our intervention areas, we have covered 15 villages of Lalitpur district, where we have developed 715 units of all seven prototypes. Of the total units, 172 are owned by people from SC community, 236 from ST community, 298 from OBC community and nine from general community.

In Jhansi district, we have covered 10 villages wherein we have developed 500 units of all seven prototypes. 248 units are owned by people from SC community, 251 from OBC community and one from general community.

In Mahoba district, we have covered 15 villages and developed 735 units of all seven prototypes with 280 units owned by people from SC community, 441 from OBC community and 14 from general community.

Similarly, in these two years, we have established 2875 entrepreneurs from all seven prototypes across the three districts under the BASANT Women FPO. A total of 1950 women enterprises have been established. (See Table)

The project represents a sustainable livelihood approach which seeks to adopt livelihood options appropriate to rural Bundelkhand. Development of both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors is pivotal to reduce rural poverty.

The project started by listening to the community about the problems and issues of the marginalised community, while also discussing the major challenges of the region such as migration, drought etc. Using participatory rural appraisal tools, the project selected the project participants from marginal and deprived community households, and drew them into co-creation and prototyping process. Seven livelihood prototypes were adopted by the community. These impacted to increase livelihood options as per the climatic conditions of the region among the women from the marginalised community and brought them forward in participating in regular meetings, decision making roles and collectively working together for growth and earning.

In the BASANT Women FPO, we have 450 stakeholders with a share capital of Rs 2,30,000. In the acceleration phase now, the project is going to develop mother units in the case of poultry and seed production, establishing agri junctions/BASANT Bazar in all 3 districts to provide various supports to farmer at one place, and access to online market to sell their different farm and non-farm products. The first two years of the project have demonstrated the great things that women farmers can achieve if they come together to build new futures for themselves, their families and the community as a whole.

WOMEN FARMER ENTREPRENEURS

A report on a women's livelihood promotion
initiative in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh

Report on Enterprises initiated and run during 2020-22

| Details of Enterprise | Number of Planned Enterprise Units | Number of Enterprise Units initiated and running | Production and output per Unit |
|---|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Seasonal Agricultural Models- Seed production | 300 | 329 | Wheat seed (K1317 variety) 1,659 quintals Pea seed 96 quintals Groundnut 375 quintals Urad black gram 150 quintals Projected wheat seed production for 2023 40,000 quintals |
| Backyard Poultry of Kuroileris (50 chicks per units) | 300 | 450 | Net income of one Units in 18 Month – Rs 1,79,880 |
| Nutrition Garden (Poshan vatika) | 300 | 450 | Vegetable production worth of Rs 40,000/- in year. |
| Vegetable Cultivation through Machaan | | 200 | Profit in one year of operations of 20m X 20m machaan is rupees one lakh 13 varieties of vegetables are being produced. |
| Goat rearing Units | | 274 | Rs 36,000 profit from a units of 3 goats |
| Vermi Compost Units | 150 | 150 | 48,60,000 kg of vermicompost produced |
| Verma Compost Units in support of other units such as fruit | | 930 | Each fruit orchards unit is 1 acre of land and contains around 180 fruit plants. take 3 to 4 years to produce quality fruit |
| Horticulture Fruit and gardening | | 92 | |
| Total enterprise units set up and running in 2020-22 | | 2875 | - |
| Women-owned enterprise units | | 1950 | - |

Details of Collaborating Partners



The **"la Caixa" Foundation** of Spain, the third largest foundation in the world, promotes diverse social, economic, cultural and ecological initiatives to foster sustainable development across the globe. "la Caixa" has worked for more than 110 years in contributing to the advancement of society and the progress of individuals, with a special emphasis on those who need it most. Its main strategic objective is to provide opportunities and fight inequalities in Africa, Asia and Latin America through programs that contribute to the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Alianza por la Solidaridad is a nongovernmental Spanish organization that currently channels the effort and support of more than 50,000 people, amongst them members, volunteers, supporters and workers in order to fight against inequalities and contribute to protecting Human Rights in more than 19 countries in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. It is member of ActionAid.



ActionAid Association(India) is an organization working for social and ecological justice. ActionAid has been engaged with the most marginalized communities in India since 1972. In 2006, ActionAid Association was registered as an Indian organization, governed by an independent General Assembly and a Governing Board. Together with supporters, communities, institutions and governments, we strive for equality, fraternity and liberty for all. ActionAid Association works in 24 states and two union territories, with several partners and allied organizations. ActionAid Association is part of a global federation and a full affiliate of ActionAid International, that has presence in over 40 countries worldwide.

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