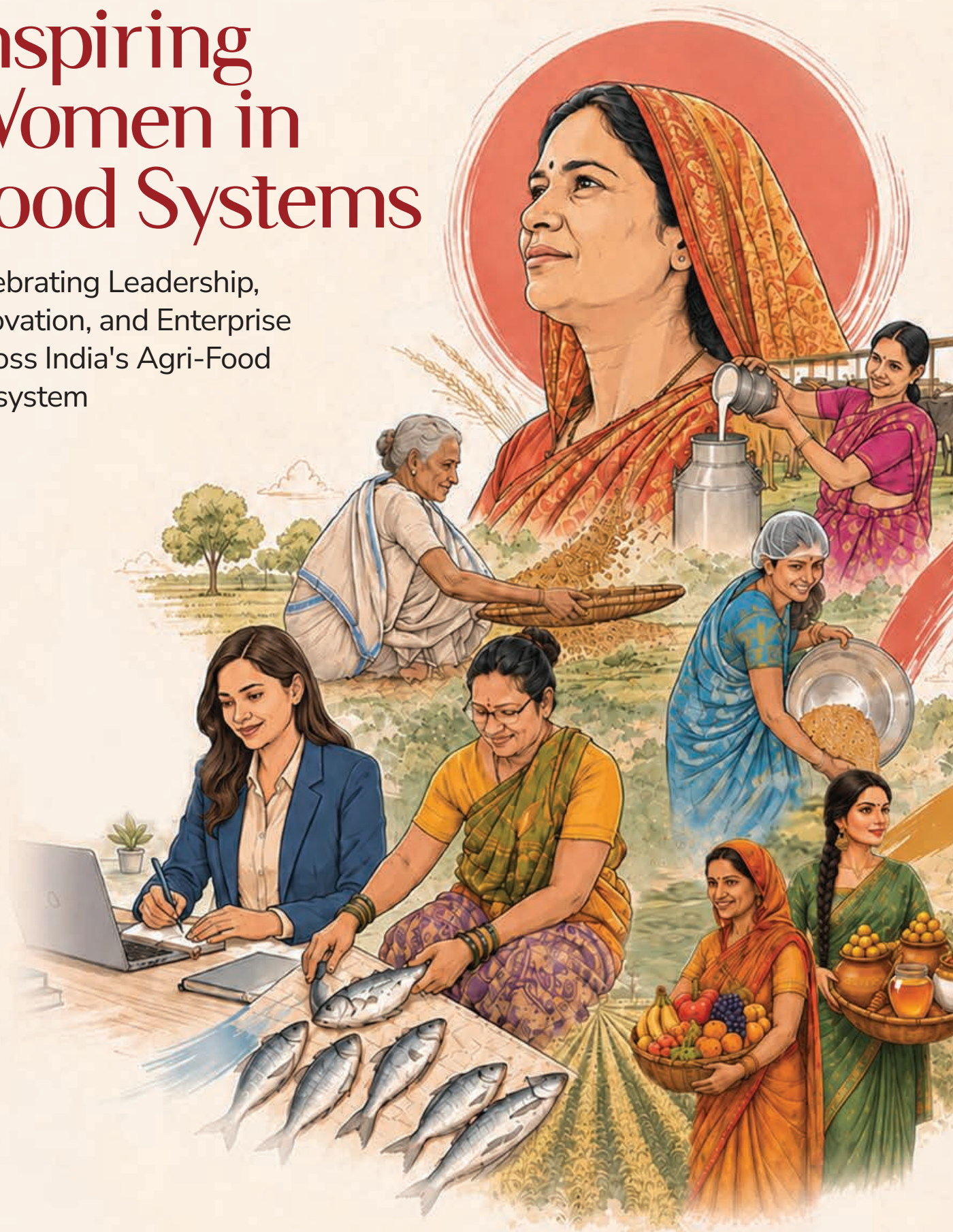


COMPENDIUM OF

# Inspiring Women in Food Systems

Celebrating Leadership,  
Innovation, and Enterprise  
Across India's Agri-Food  
Ecosystem



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Celebrating Leadership, Innovation,  
and Enterprise Across India's  
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**For suggestions/feedback write to us at [face-info@cii.in](mailto:face-info@cii.in)**

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# Introduction

India's food and agriculture sector is undergoing a rapid transformation. Changing consumer preferences, technological advancements, climate change, and the growing focus on sustainability are reshaping the way food is produced, processed, and marketed. Agriculture today extends far beyond crop production-it includes value addition, food processing, logistics, digital technologies, agribusiness, exports, nutrition, and the circular economy. At the heart of this transformation, women are playing an increasingly important role in building a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food system.

Women have always been the backbone of Indian agriculture. They sow and harvest crops, manage livestock, undertake post-harvest activities, run farm enterprises, and ensure household food and nutrition security. They also preserve traditional knowledge, strengthen community institutions, and contribute significantly to rural livelihoods.

Despite their immense contribution, much of women's work in agriculture remains unrecognised and undervalued. Many continue to face barriers in accessing land, credit, technology, markets, training, and leadership opportunities. While women make up a significant share of India's agricultural workforce, they remain underrepresented as enterprise owners, business leaders, and decision-makers within agricultural institutions.

Encouragingly, this landscape is changing. Across the country, women are emerging as successful agri-entrepreneurs, leading Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), adopting climate-smart farming practices, developing value-added food products, and building enterprises that generate livelihoods for rural communities. Their achievements demonstrate that women are not only contributing to agriculture but are also driving innovation, enterprise development, and sustainable growth across the food system.

Recognising this growing leadership, the United Nations has declared **2026** as the '**International Year of the Woman Farmer**'. The declaration highlights the critical role of women in shaping the future of agriculture and calls for greater investment in improving their access to land, finance, technology, markets, skills, and leadership opportunities. Empowering women farmers is no longer just a matter of social inclusion-it is essential for building resilient, sustainable, and future-ready food systems. It is in this context that the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) – **Food & Agriculture Centre of Excellence (CII FACE)** has developed this ***Compendium of Inspiring Women in Food Systems***.

The compendium showcases the journeys of women from diverse segments of India's food system. It features dairy and livestock entrepreneurs who transformed small

beginnings into thriving businesses through scientific farming practices and cooperative support. It highlights progressive farmers who have adopted modern technologies, efficient irrigation systems, mechanisation, and integrated farming to improve productivity and profitability. It also includes women promoting nutrition through biofortified crops, extension workers bringing scientific knowledge directly to farmers, and entrepreneurs creating value-added food products that strengthen local economies.

Many of the women featured in this compendium are leading Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), enabling hundreds and, in many cases, thousands of women farmers to access better markets, improve their bargaining power, and build stronger collective enterprises. Their stories demonstrate the transformative impact of women-led institutions in creating sustainable livelihoods and strengthening rural communities.

The compendium also features women innovators who are applying science and technology to solve agricultural challenges, from soil health management and sustainable farming practices to strengthening forest produce value chains. It highlights leaders who have built training, mentoring, and community support networks, empowering thousands of women with knowledge, confidence, and new livelihood opportunities.

Together, these stories reflect the resilience, innovation, and leadership of women who are transforming India's food systems. They offer valuable lessons and inspiration for policymakers, businesses, development organisations, researchers, and aspiring entrepreneurs committed to building a more inclusive and sustainable agricultural future. The case studies reveal eight common themes across different regions, sectors, and business models. Together, these findings offer valuable lessons for policymakers, industry, and development partners working to promote women's participation and leadership in agriculture.

- **Access to finance and credit** was one of the biggest challenges faced by women. Many had the skills and determination to grow their enterprises but lacked the funds needed to buy livestock, invest in equipment, or expand their businesses. Women who were able to access loans through banks, cooperatives, or government-supported schemes were often able to scale their enterprises much more quickly.
- **Technical knowledge and training** played an important role in business growth. Many women built successful enterprises by learning through experience, demonstrations, and guidance from peers because formal extension services did not

reach them. Where technical support and expert guidance were available, women were able to improve their productivity and adopt better practices much faster.

- **Land and asset ownership** remained a significant barrier. Many women did not own land or productive assets in their own names, making it difficult to access institutional finance. Even successful women entrepreneurs often depended on family-owned land or livestock rather than having ownership themselves.
- **Market access and collective action** were key factors behind the success of many Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs). By working together, women were able to access better markets, negotiate fair prices, and reduce their dependence on middlemen. In many cases, collective marketing significantly increased their incomes, highlighting that access to markets was often a bigger challenge than production itself.
- **Social norms and mobility restrictions** continued to affect women's participation. Many women faced resistance from their families or communities when they wanted to attend training programmes, travel for business, or take up leadership roles. These barriers gradually reduced as families

witnessed the positive impact of women's work and increased incomes.

- **Leadership and representation** remained another important gap. Although many women were actively managing enterprises and community activities, they often took much longer to receive formal leadership positions. Their responsibilities frequently exceeded the recognition and decision-making authority they were given.
- **Digital and financial literacy** contributed significantly to stronger livelihoods. Women who learned to use digital payments, mobile applications, and online market information were better able to manage their businesses and increase their earnings. However, these skills usually required continuous training and mentoring, as access to technology alone was not enough.
- **Value addition and processing** helped women build more profitable and resilient enterprises. Businesses involved in processing, packaging, branding, or developing value-added products earned higher returns than those selling raw produce. Access to processing facilities, equipment, and packaging support often transformed small livelihood activities into sustainable and scalable enterprises.

## Key Recommendations

- **Improve access to finance** by introducing more credit products designed for women-led agricultural enterprises with flexible collateral requirements. Successful models supported by SFAC, cooperatives, and financial institutions can be expanded to reach women who are not yet part of formal FPOs.
- **Strengthen technical support and extension services** through existing platforms such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs). Delivering training through trusted community institutions can help women adopt better farming and business practices more effectively.
- **Promote women's leadership in FPOs and cooperatives** by ensuring their representation in governing boards and decision-making bodies from the beginning. Women should have leadership roles that reflect the responsibilities they already undertake within these organisations.
- **Invest in shared processing and value-addition infrastructure** at the block or cluster level. Common facilities for processing, packaging, and storage can help women-led enterprises produce higher-value products without bearing the high cost of setting up individual units.

- **Enhance digital and financial literacy** by combining training with access to digital tools and financial services. Women should receive continuous guidance on using mobile applications, digital payments, banking services, and other technologies so they can confidently manage and grow their enterprises.

Achieving this will require the collective efforts of governments, businesses, financial institutions, FPOs, research organisations, and development partners. By working together, they can improve women's access to finance, technology, markets, mentorship, and other resources needed to build successful and sustainable agricultural enterprises.

As India moves towards becoming a developed economy, the future of agriculture will depend not only on better policies and technologies but also on stronger and more inclusive leadership. Empowering more women to lead enterprises, institutions, and farmer collectives will be essential for building resilient and sustainable food systems.

This compendium celebrates the achievements of inspiring women who are transforming Indian agriculture. At the same time, it serves as a call to action for policymakers, businesses, investors, and development partners to create an enabling ecosystem where more women can grow, lead, and drive the future of agriculture.

Case Study 01

# From Science to Sustainability

How Charmi Modi is Building a Zero-Waste Dairy Enterprise Rooted in Purity, Innovation, and Circular Economy



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                         |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Charmi Jaydip Modi                                      |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Agripreneur • Dairy & Livestock Entrepreneur            |
| ENTERPRISE     | Gitamrutam Gau Farm                                     |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union (Amul) |
| LOCATION       | Anand, Gujarat                                          |
| ESTABLISHED    | 3 March 2019                                            |

## A Journey Inspired by the Search for Pure Food

For Mrs. Charmi Jaydip Modi, entrepreneurship did not begin with a business opportunity but with a personal concern. Despite being willing to pay a premium for quality food, she found it increasingly difficult to source pure and unadulterated dairy products for her family. Holding a Master's degree in Biochemistry, she understood the health consequences of chemical adulteration, indiscriminate hormone use, and poor livestock management, and her scientific training led her to question not only the quality of food available in the market but also the long-term sustainability of prevailing dairy practices. Rather than accept the status quo, she decided to become part of the solution.

In March 2019, she established Gitamrutam Gau Farm in Anand, Gujarat, with a clear purpose: to build a transparent, sustainable dairy enterprise that delivers safe, nutritious, and ethically produced dairy products directly from farm to table. What began as a personal search for healthier food gradually evolved into a full entrepreneurial venture dedicated to sustainable dairy farming and circular agriculture.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Building a dairy enterprise as a woman entrepreneur was not without difficulty. Like many women in agriculture, Charmi encountered structural barriers such as limited access to land ownership, insufficient collateral for institutional finance, and slow credit approval processes. Operating within a largely male-dominated ecosystem also meant navigating wholesale markets, supply chains, and business negotiations in which women were consistently underrepresented. She observed, too, that women farmers were often excluded from technical training programmes, veterinary

advisory services, and modern dairy management practices, owing to social expectations and logistical constraints that limited their mobility and access to information.

Balancing these business responsibilities with family commitments added a further layer of complexity, as managing livestock, supervising farm operations, attending to customers, and caring for her household demanded exceptional discipline and time management. Charmi responded to these pressures not by scaling back her ambitions but by relying on meticulous planning, sustained perseverance, and continuous learning. As she put it, every challenge became an opportunity to improve her systems, strengthen her resolve, and demonstrate that women can successfully build and manage sustainable agribusinesses.

*“She transformed every challenge into an opportunity, proving that women can build and lead sustainable agribusinesses.”*

## Key Partners and Their Role

Charmi's growth as an entrepreneur has been closely tied to her association with the Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union, widely known as Amul, whose cooperative structure gave her a credible and well-established framework within which to build her enterprise. Alongside this institutional relationship, she has drawn on veterinary advisory networks and agricultural knowledge sources to refine her scientific approach to livestock management, and on the informal but essential support of her family, who shared the burden of running both the household and the farm during the enterprise's formative years.

## Building a Zero-Waste Dairy Enterprise

Since its establishment, Gitamrutam Gau Farm has evolved far beyond a conventional dairy operation. Starting with the production of clean and unadulterated milk, the enterprise gradually expanded into premium value-added dairy products, including A2 Vedic Bilona Ghee, paneer, and curd, allowing the business to access higher-value markets while meeting rising consumer demand for authentic, naturally produced dairy.

Charmi's vision, however, extended well beyond milk production. Inspired by the principles of the circular economy, she developed a zero-waste farm model in which every resource generated on the farm is productively used. Cow dung, traditionally regarded as waste, is converted into high-quality organic vermicompost, natural fertilisers, eco-friendly diyas, dhoop cups, and Vedic Holi products. This innovative approach has transformed waste management into a profitable secondary business while significantly reducing the farm's environmental footprint, and it demonstrates that sustainability and profitability need not be in conflict.

## Innovation Rooted in Science

Drawing on her academic background in biochemistry, Charmi has introduced several scientific innovations into everyday farm management. She developed nutrient-balanced cattle feed formulations that improve animal health naturally while enhancing both the quality and yield of A2 milk, and the enterprise follows chemical-free processing techniques for manufacturing eco-friendly products from cow dung, creating sustainable alternatives for consumers while minimising waste.

By combining scientific rigour with traditional dairy practices, she has built a business model that is both environmentally responsible and economically resilient.

## Impact and Reach

Although Gitamrutam Gau Farm remains a growing enterprise, its influence already extends well beyond its own operations. The enterprise currently works with 25 farmers, has directly benefited 10 women, generated employment for seven people, and operates across two villages. Charmi considers one of her most meaningful achievements to be a shift in mindset among fellow farmers rather than any single financial milestone: a Rabari cattle caretaker on her farm, observing how she allowed calves to consume adequate milk and raised healthy indigenous cattle capable of maturing within just two and a half years, adopted the same scientific practices himself. The results challenged long-held misconceptions about indigenous breeds and encouraged others in the community to reconsider conventional livestock management, and Charmi's work more broadly has encouraged women to look beyond traditional farm labour toward entrepreneurship as a viable career.

## Her Greatest Strength

Charmi's defining strength lies in her ability to translate scientific knowledge into practical, farm-level solutions that others can see and adopt for themselves. Rather than relying on argument or persuasion, she builds credibility through visible results - healthier cattle, better-quality milk, and a demonstrably profitable zero-waste model - and this evidence-based, demonstration-led approach has proven far more persuasive than instruction alone.

## The Road Ahead

Charmi envisions transforming Gitamrutam Gau Farm into a larger platform for rural women's entrepreneurship. Her future plans include establishing a modern dairy processing unit supported by solar-powered cold chain infrastructure, expanding her value-added product lines, and developing a direct-to-consumer digital brand for premium dairy and eco-friendly products. Most significantly, she hopes to establish a women-led Farmer Producer Organization that brings together more than 200 rural women farmers to collectively access markets, technology, finance, and stronger business opportunities. Her vision is not merely to grow a single business, but to build an ecosystem in which women become confident entrepreneurs and leaders within India's evolving food systems.

## Leadership Lessons

Reflecting on her journey, Charmi believes that leadership is built through action rather than words: when people saw healthier cattle, better-quality milk, and a successful zero-waste business model, they became willing to adopt new ideas themselves. She also believes that innovation often begins with solving everyday problems, observing that waste is not a burden but an opportunity waiting to be transformed into value, and that sustainable businesses are built when entrepreneurs learn to see possibilities where others see only limitations. Her message to aspiring women entrepreneurs is direct: do not let challenges define the journey. Every obstacle - whether gender bias, limited market access, or scarce resources - can become the foundation of an innovative business. The most important step, she says, is to start with purpose, remain consistent, and let the work itself inspire others.

# From Dairy Farming to Integrated Enterprise

How Gayatri Ritesh Patel is Building a Zero-Waste, Multi-Product Dairy Business Rooted in Indigenous Livestock



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                          |
|----------------|------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Gayatri Ritesh Patel                     |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Dairy & Livestock Entrepreneur           |
| ENTERPRISE     | Vansh Dairy Farm                         |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Amul; Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society |
| LOCATION       | Anand, Gujarat                           |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2016                                     |

## Building a Business Rooted at Home

For Gayatri Ritesh Patel, dairy farming offered something few professions could: the opportunity to build a serious business while remaining rooted in her land and her home. She began her animal husbandry venture in 2016, laying the foundation for what would grow into a diversified, integrated agri-enterprise built around the belief that a woman could run a substantial business without leaving her land or her family behind.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Like many women entering agribusiness, Gayatri faced a combination of structural and environmental obstacles in her early years, including gender-based inequities in how her business was perceived by suppliers and buyers, limited access to technical knowledge and institutional finance, and the unpredictability of a changing climate that made planning difficult. She addressed these challenges methodically, actively seeking out knowledge relevant to her business and securing bank loans to fund expansion, rather than waiting for circumstances to improve on their own.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Her family, particularly her husband, and her association with Amul provided the steady institutional and personal support that allowed her to build confidence and capacity over time. Amul's cooperative framework in particular gave her a stable, established structure through which to sell milk and access technical guidance, while in 2022 her own election as Chairperson of the Ajarpura Dairy Cooperative Society expanded both her responsibilities and her platform for influencing dairy practices within her wider community.

## Diversifying Through Innovation

Gayatri's enterprise has evolved considerably since its founding. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she launched a cow-dung-based products initiative, opening a new and sustainable revenue stream from material that many dairy operations simply treat as waste. She also experimented with mushroom farming, though the venture did not sustain itself due to insufficient consumer demand, an experience she regards as part of the broader process of testing and refining a diversified business model rather than as a setback. Today, her enterprise integrates multiple activities, including the production of panchgavya-based products and natural farming inputs derived from the dung and urine of indigenous cattle breeds, an approach designed to keep inputs affordable while supporting environmentally sustainable agriculture.

“Gayatri transformed waste into value, building a diversified enterprise rooted in innovation and sustainable agriculture.”

## Impact and Reach

Gayatri's integrated approach has translated into measurable financial returns: in the most recent year, she received a bonus of ₹2,13,000 from her dairy cooperative society, a clear indicator of the productivity and efficiency of her operations, while also strengthening her standing and credibility within her community. Her innovations extend to how she reaches customers as well, since alongside her cow-dung and panchgavya product lines she has adopted social media and digital marketing to expand her market reach. Beyond her own enterprise, she has observed

genuine change among women in her community, including greater financial independence, a stronger role in household decision-making, improved digital and business literacy, and a growing number of young women inspired to consider agriculture as a serious career path. Her contribution has been formally recognised: she was named a Successful Women Dairy Farmer by the Gujarat Progressive Farmers Association in 2021, and received the Indian Dairy Association (West Zone) award in 2023, presented by the Union Cooperation Minister.

### Her Greatest Strength

Gayatri's greatest strength is her willingness to experiment and adapt rather than commit rigidly to a single business line. Her track record - testing mushroom farming, accepting its failure without abandoning the broader diversification strategy, and instead building successful cow-dung and panchgavya product lines in its place - reflects a resilience and pragmatism that has allowed her enterprise to grow steadily despite setbacks.

### The Road Ahead

Gayatri's future plans centre on expanding participation, drawing more members of the next generation, and more women in particular, into dairy entrepreneurship and integrated farming enterprises. She sees considerable opportunity ahead for women in dairy entrepreneurship over the coming decade, provided they are supported with better access to land and resources, finance and credit, technology and skill development, collective institutions, and enabling policy.

### Leadership Lessons

Gayatri's reflections on leadership are direct and shaped by hard-won experience. She emphasises the importance of exercising independent judgement, making impartial decisions, and leading with confidence and courage, and she often tells other women that if a woman can give birth, she can do anything, even without formal education. Gayatri Patel's journey demonstrates how a willingness to experiment, adapt, and diversify, combined with strong institutional backing through the dairy cooperative system, can transform a single-product dairy operation into a resilient, multi-stream enterprise, while opening pathways for other women in her community to do the same.

### Case Study 03

# One Cow to Sixty-Five

How Manjulaben Desai Built a Scaled Dairy Enterprise Through the Cooperative Model



### Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Manjulaben Ashokbhai Desai                                                                                                       |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Dairy & Livestock Entrepreneur                                                                                                   |
| ENTERPRISE     | Individual Dairy Farm                                                                                                            |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Shri Kheralu Bhag Dudh Utpadak Sahakari Mandali Ltd.;<br>Mehsana District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union<br>(Dudhsagar Dairy) |
| LOCATION       | Mahesana, Gujarat                                                                                                                |
| ESTABLISHED    | 1994                                                                                                                             |

## From One Cow to a Full-Scale Enterprise

Manjulaben Desai's journey in dairy farming began modestly in 1994, with a single cow. Over three decades, that beginning has grown into an enterprise of more than 65 cows and buffaloes, a scale of growth built on sustained hard work and a steady embrace of new technology and practices. Her motivation to work in animal husbandry, she notes, was shaped in part by the transparency and professional model of ownership within Gujarat's dairy cooperative structure, which gave her confidence that the sector offered a credible, well-supported path to building a serious enterprise.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

In her early years, Manjulaben's biggest obstacle was capital, specifically the cost of acquiring animals and constructing adequate shelter for them. Rather than facing these challenges alone, she drew on the technical guidance and institutional support of Dudhsagar Dairy and her village cooperative society, which provided direction whenever she encountered a new problem or needed information on emerging technology. Her central operating challenge over time became managing a growing cattle farm with minimal labour, a constraint she addressed by systematically adopting technology across her operations rather than simply expanding her workforce.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Manjulaben's enterprise has depended throughout on the institutional support of Dudhsagar Dairy and its associated village cooperative society, which provided consistent technical guidance whenever she encountered a new problem or needed information on emerging technology. This cooperative

relationship gave her both a reliable market for her milk and access to the collective knowledge base built up across the district's dairy sector.

*“Supported by a strong dairy cooperative, Manjulaben transformed expert guidance & reliable market access into a thriving dairy enterprise.”*

## Scaling Through Technology and Efficient Management

Her farm now uses biogas plants, milking machines, scientific calf-rearing systems, sexed semen technology, and mechanised chaff cutters, allowing her to run a large herd efficiently without a proportionate increase in labour. The results are reflected clearly in her farm's productivity: she produces an average of 20 litres of milk per animal per day, a benchmark that speaks directly to the quality of her herd management and feeding practices.

## Impact and Reach

Manjulaben's enterprise today engages 10 members, spans 5 villages, and has directly benefited 10 women farmers. It generates employment for 10 people and recorded a turnover of ₹89,00,000 in the most recent financial year, figures that reflect both the scale of her operation and its role as a source of stable rural livelihoods. She also points to the story of Naynaben Prakashbhai Chaudhary, from a village roughly 8 kilometres from her own, as one that captures the wider potential of the dairy sector for women. After her marriage, Naynaben separated from her father's farm in 2012 with just two crossbred cows; today, she manages a herd of 35 cows and 7 buffaloes, and earned ₹88 lakh in the last financial year alone, a trajectory Manjulaben cites as proof of what disciplined, technology-driven dairy farming can achieve within a single decade.

## Her Greatest Strength

Manjulaben's greatest strength lies in her disciplined, technology-first approach to scaling a labour-constrained enterprise. Rather than accepting labour scarcity as a ceiling on growth, she systematically replaced manual bottlenecks with mechanisation and scientific practice, allowing her herd to expand more than sixty-fold without a corresponding increase in workforce.

## Recognition

Manjulaben's work has been recognised with the Best ATMA Farmer award from the Government of Gujarat, and the Best Milk Producer award from Dudhsagar Dairy, Mehsana.

## The Road Ahead

Looking forward, Manjulaben's plans centre on continuous improvement: reducing the cost of production and increasing profit margins with

the support of expert technical guidance. She believes women with access to agricultural land have a significant opportunity to build income through cattle farming, provided they have the right technological support, and she identifies access to agricultural experts, specifically for cost reduction and productivity improvement, as the support most needed to help more women succeed in the sector.

## Leadership Lessons

Manjulaben's central lesson from three decades in dairy farming is direct: combining technology and innovative practices with a traditional business is what drives profitability. Manjulaben Desai's journey, from a single cow to a 65-animal enterprise generating employment for ten people, demonstrates how a well-organised dairy cooperative system, combined with sustained technology adoption and family partnership, can turn a modest beginning into a substantial, professionally run agribusiness.

# From One Goat to a Sustainable Herd

How Arti Devi Turned a Single Goat into a 25-Animal Livestock Enterprise



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                                                |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Arti Devi                                                                      |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Dairy & Livestock Entrepreneur (Goats)                                         |
| ENTERPRISE     | BSLD-Supported Goat Enterprise                                                 |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Heifer International's Bihar Sustainable Livelihood Development Program (BSLD) |
| LOCATION       | Madhubani, Bihar                                                               |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2021                                                                           |

## From Daily Wage Labour to a Stable Livelihood

Before joining the BSLD Program, Arti Devi's family depended mainly on daily wage labour, an income source that was irregular and often insufficient to cover household needs. Seeking a more stable and sustainable source of income, she joined the BSLD-supported goat enterprise initiative, wanting a livelihood that could steadily improve her family's income and bring more stability to her household rather than a single, one-time source of relief.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Arti's central challenges were irregular income, limited livelihood opportunities, and the ongoing difficulty of meeting household expenses on unpredictable daily wages. She overcame these by joining the BSLD-supported goat enterprise initiative and receiving training in scientific goat rearing, animal health management, and business planning, and then applying improved feeding, vaccination, and breeding practices consistently rather than treating them as one-off adjustments.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Arti's transformation has been made possible by Heifer International's Bihar Sustainable Livelihood Development Program, which provided her with the structured training in scientific goat rearing, animal health management, and business planning that allowed her to expand her herd responsibly. This institutional support gave her not only technical knowledge but also the confidence to reinvest her early earnings into further growth rather than treating them as a one-time windfall.

## Building on a Single Animal

Arti started with just one goat, and by applying improved feeding, vaccination, and breeding practices and reinvesting carefully, she gradually expanded her herd to more than 25 goats. Today, her goat enterprise generates an annual income of about ₹85,000 to ₹90,000, and she sold 13 goats in the last year alone.

*“From one goat to a thriving enterprise, Arti's journey showcases the power of perseverance, scientific practices, and smart reinvestment.”*

## Impact and Reach

This growth has helped improve household savings, support her children's education, and provide better access to healthcare when needed. Beyond the financial gains, the enterprise has strengthened her confidence and increased her recognition in the community, and her experience stands as an inspiring example of women's economic empowerment and rural livelihood growth, demonstrating how small beginnings, when supported by training and determination, can grow into a meaningful livelihood enterprise.

## Her Greatest Strength

Arti's greatest strength is her discipline around reinvestment. Rather than spending her early earnings as they came in, she consistently ploughed profits back into her herd, and this single habit, more than any individual technical skill, is what allowed a single goat to become a herd of more than 25 within a few years.

### The Road Ahead

To expand the herd size and ensure timely insurance coverage is Arti's stated future plan, reflecting a continued focus on careful, protected growth rather than rapid but risky expansion. She believes women taking leadership positions and owning self-sustaining enterprises represents one of the biggest opportunities for women in food systems over the next decade, provided they gain access to finance and digital advisories.

### Leadership Lessons

Arti's central lesson is that small beginnings, when supported by knowledge and persistence, can grow into a sustainable livelihood, and her message to aspiring women farmers and entrepreneurs is to start goat rearing at a larger scale, since it can repay more than the investment and also build self-dependence and confidence.

### Case Study 05

# Growing Opportunities through Sustainable Farming and Continuous Learning

How Chitrakala Namdev Jadhav is Inspiring Women Farmers through Sustainable Agriculture



### Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                                   |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Chitrakala Namdev Jadhav                                          |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Progressive Woman Farmer                                          |
| ENTERPRISE     | Individual Farm (Shirol)                                          |
| KEY PARTNERS   | ADM Sustainable Agriculture Program;<br>ADM Agro Industries India |
| LOCATION       | Latur, Maharashtra                                                |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2021                                                              |

## Choosing Farming with Purpose

For many families, farming is a way of life passed down through generations. For Chitrakala Namdev Jadhav, however, it became a conscious career choice, driven by conviction rather than compulsion. In 2021, she decided to dedicate herself to farming full-time, believing that agriculture, when managed with commitment and care, could provide not only a livelihood but also a sustainable and profitable future. In her own words, farming is a very good profession, and if it is given proper attention and managed efficiently by the farmer personally, it can become a genuinely profitable business.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

From the beginning, Chitrakala embraced the responsibility of managing farm operations and continuously expanded her knowledge through hands-on experience, expert guidance, and active participation in agricultural activities. Her willingness to learn, experiment with improved practices, and remain closely involved in day-to-day farm decisions has enabled her to steadily strengthen her farming enterprise. Supported by her family, she has developed into a confident and capable farm manager who actively seeks opportunities to improve productivity and sustainability.

She was never alone in this journey. Her husband became her greatest source of encouragement and inspiration, while her son and other family members stood beside her at every stage, and their unwavering support enabled her to overcome difficulties and gradually build genuine confidence as a farmer in her own right.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Beyond her family, Chitrakala's growth as a farmer has been shaped significantly by institutional support, particularly through the ADM Sustainable Agriculture Program Shashwat Sheti Upakram (SSU), which provided her with guidance from agricultural experts and advisors who helped her adopt more scientific approaches to cultivation. This partnership has also supported her market access: she sells her produce through local markets as well as through ADM, drawing on marketing guidance and information supplied by ADM Agro Industries India, which has helped her make more informed decisions about pricing and timing.

*“With expert guidance and stronger market access, Chitrakala transformed her farm into a more sustainable and profitable enterprise.”*

## Embracing Modern Agriculture

One of the key reasons behind Chitrakala's success has been her willingness to adopt new technologies and scientific farming methods. Her farm now uses several modern interventions, including Broad Bed Furrow (BBF) sowing, drip irrigation, sprinkler irrigation, mini-sprinklers, and farm mechanisation through tractors. The adoption of these technologies has improved water-use efficiency, enhanced crop management, and produced a noticeable increase in productivity. Beyond crop cultivation, she has also diversified her livelihood by integrating allied agricultural activities such as dairy farming and vermicomposting, creating additional sources of income while promoting more sustainable farming practices overall.

## Impact and Reach

Producing quality crops is only one part of successful farming; ensuring fair market access is equally important, and Chitrakala's experience illustrates the value of connecting smallholder farmers with organised value chains that offer better market opportunities than informal, individual sales. Today, she is not only managing her own farm but also actively encouraging other women in her community to view agriculture as a viable profession, motivating them to adopt improved technologies, participate directly in farming decisions, and build confidence in managing agricultural enterprises of their own.

## Her Greatest Strength

Chitrakala's greatest strength lies in treating her farm as a genuine business rather than an inherited routine. Her insistence that farming rewards personal involvement, timely decision-making, and continuous learning has allowed her, despite a landholding of just 1.62 acres, to build a diversified, technologically modern operation that consistently outperforms less deliberately managed farms of similar size.

## Looking Ahead

Chitrakala's vision for the future is centred on sustainability. She plans to further strengthen her farm by adopting environmentally friendly farming practices, reducing production costs, and gradually moving towards more sustainable and organic cultivation methods. She firmly

believes that the future of Indian agriculture lies in efficient resource management, integrated farming systems, and continuous learning.

## Leadership Lessons

Reflecting on her journey, Chitrakala believes one lesson stands above all others: farming should be treated as an enterprise rather than simply a traditional occupation. When farmers actively participate in decision-making, embrace new technologies, and manage their resources efficiently, agriculture becomes not only sustainable but also economically rewarding. She often tells other women that they are equally capable of managing farms successfully, and that adopting new technologies and making informed decisions is what allows a farmer to succeed and, in turn, to inspire others to do the same. Her journey demonstrates that with family support, technical guidance, and a genuine willingness to learn, even a small landholding can become the foundation for growth, resilience, and leadership. As more women take ownership of farming decisions, stories such as Chitrakala's are helping reshape the narrative of Indian agriculture, in which women are recognised not merely as contributors but as confident farmers, entrepreneurs, and changemakers.

Today, Chitrakala is not only building a successful and sustainable farm enterprise but also encouraging other women to recognise the opportunities available in agriculture. Through her example, she demonstrates how determination, continuous learning, and thoughtful management can help farmers create lasting value for their families and communities.

# Building a Thriving Farm Enterprise through Vision, Innovation, and Leadership

How Pallavi Jadhav Turned Farming into a Profession and Inspired Women to Lead



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                                                                    |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | <b>Pallavi Jadhav</b>                                                                              |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Progressive Woman Farmer                                                                           |
| ENTERPRISE     | Individual Farm                                                                                    |
| KEY PARTNERS   | ADM Sustainable Agriculture Programme;<br>Agriculture Department; agricultural universities; NAFED |
| LOCATION       | Dharashiv, Maharashtra                                                                             |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2000                                                                                               |

## Choosing Farming as a Career

For more than two decades, Pallavi Jadhav has demonstrated how vision, dedication, and continuous learning can transform agriculture into a thriving enterprise. Since choosing farming as her profession around the year 2000, she has steadily expanded her knowledge, diversified her activities, and created opportunities that extend beyond her own farm to benefit other women in her community.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Like many entrepreneurs, Pallavi's journey involved learning new skills in farm management, financial planning, and enterprise development. She approached each stage as an opportunity to grow, gradually strengthening both her technical expertise and business acumen. With strong family support and a clear long-term vision, she successfully built a diversified and resilient farming enterprise.

At the same time, managing household responsibilities alongside full-time farming demanded constant balancing, and although her family stood firmly by her, they too had to make real sacrifices as she devoted increasing time and energy to the farm.

Pallavi worked through each of these challenges by combining sustained perseverance with disciplined financial learning, gradually building both the technical and business competence her enterprise required. Throughout this process, one person remained her steadiest source of support: her husband, Mr. Suraj Jadhav, whose encouragement gave her the confidence to continue pursuing her vision even when the surrounding community remained sceptical.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Pallavi's technical progress owes much to sustained institutional guidance from the ADM Sustainable Agriculture Programme, the Agriculture Department, and agricultural universities, all of whom supported her gradual introduction of modern technologies that improved both productivity and efficiency on her farm. On the marketing side, her produce reaches consumers through multiple channels, including local markets, ADM-supported procurement, and NAFED whenever required, a diversified approach that has strengthened her income while reducing dependence on any single buyer.

## Learning, Adapting, and Growing

Pallavi believes that successful farming depends on continuous learning and the willingness to adopt better practices. Her farm now incorporates drip irrigation, sprinkler and mini-sprinkler systems, Broad Bed Furrow (BBF) sowing, farm mechanisation, and a range of improved cultivation practices, all of which have significantly increased crop productivity while improving resource-use efficiency. Beyond crop cultivation, she diversified into dairy farming and began producing organic farm inputs and natural formulations, reducing her dependence on external inputs and lowering overall production costs.

## Adding Value Beyond the Farm

Recognising that greater income comes not only from production but also from value addition, Pallavi expanded her activities well beyond cultivation. Instead of selling produce only as raw commodities, she began processing, packaging, and marketing products

such as tur dal, wheat, jowar, soybean seed, and pigeon pea seed. For Pallavi, this shift toward value addition has become an important step in building a more resilient farm enterprise, one less exposed to the price volatility that affects raw commodity sales.

## Impact and Reach

Perhaps the most striking outcome of Pallavi's journey has been the change in how her community perceives her: the same neighbours who once questioned whether a woman could succeed in farming now recognise her as a progressive farmer and a genuine role model. Her example has encouraged many other women to participate more actively in agriculture, adopt improved technologies, and take on greater responsibility in farm management. Today, a women farmers' group operates actively under her leadership, and she is preparing to take the next step by establishing a Farmer Producer Organisation to strengthen collective marketing, improve market access, and create new opportunities for women farmers in her area.

## Her Greatest Strength

Pallavi's greatest strength is her persistence in the face of sustained social scepticism. Rather than seeking to prove herself through a single dramatic success, she built credibility gradually, year after year, until the accumulated evidence of her farm's productivity and her sound financial management made her position within the community unassailable.

## Looking Towards Sustainable Agriculture

Pallavi's vision for the future extends beyond simply increasing production. She aims to promote organic farming, encourage the use of

farm-produced organic inputs, reduce production costs, and strengthen collective institutions led by women. She believes that sustainable farming practices, combined with better organisation and market access, will help build more resilient farming communities, and she emphasises the continuing need for institutional support through easier access to finance, modern technology, and training programmes designed specifically for women farmers.

*Pallavi's vision goes beyond increasing production - she is building a future of sustainable, women-led, and resilient farming communities.*

## Leadership Lessons

Looking back on her journey, Pallavi believes that perseverance is the single most important quality for any entrepreneur, and that every challenge she encountered - whether social, financial, or personal - became an opportunity to learn and improve. Her advice to aspiring women farmers is both simple and direct: believe in yourself, become self-reliant, and participate actively in farming, because success does not come overnight, but with persistence, continuous learning, and hard work, every challenge can be overcome. She also reminds others that while technology and innovation are transforming agriculture, the role of the farmer remains irreplaceable, since farmers are, in her words, the foundation of food security and of the country's future. Mrs. Pallavi Jadhav's journey demonstrates how determination, family support, scientific farming, and women's leadership can transform not only agricultural productivity but also social attitudes, rural livelihoods, and the aspirations of future generations of women farmers.

### Case Study 07

# Combining Experience, Technology, and Vision for Sustainable Growth

How Padminibai Somnath Jamale Turned Traditional Farming into a Sustainable, Technology-Driven Livelihood



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                           |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Padminibai Somnath Jamale                                 |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Progressive Woman Farmer                                  |
| ENTERPRISE     | Individual Farm                                           |
| KEY PARTNERS   | ADM Agro; agricultural departments and extension officers |
| LOCATION       | Dharashiv, Maharashtra                                    |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2016-17                                                   |

## From Family Tradition to Active Leadership

Padminbai Jamale's connection to agriculture began early, growing up in a farming family where the work was simply part of life. What set her apart was her ambition to reshape that inheritance, to turn traditional farming into a sustainable, profitable livelihood rather than accept it as a fixed way of life, and with the support of her husband and family she took an active role in farm management and household economic decision-making, beginning in earnest in 2016–17.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Padminbai's early experience reflected a pattern familiar to many rural women: farming decisions were widely viewed as a male responsibility, and social convention offered little room for women to participate directly in them, compounded by more concrete barriers, including limited access to information, technology, and financial resources. Rather than accepting these constraints, she committed to closing the knowledge gap deliberately, attending training programmes, seeking guidance from agricultural experts, adopting scientific farming methods, and building her expertise through hands-on field experience. Every challenge, in her view, became an opportunity to improve and grow, and persistence, hard work, and a positive attitude ultimately helped her overcome the barriers she faced.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Padminbai's progress was supported by agricultural departments, extension officers, and local institutions, which provided technical guidance and training, along with exposure to modern technologies and field demonstrations that helped her refine her farming practices. Her adoption of improved crop management

techniques, better-quality seeds, and modern machinery has been significantly supported by guidance received through ADM Agro, contributing meaningfully to gains in both productivity and profitability.

*“With expert guidance and modern farming practices, Padminbai built a more productive, profitable, and sustainable agricultural enterprise.”*

## Technology as a Decision-Making Tool

Padminbai identifies technology as a genuinely transformative factor in her success. Access to online information, mobile applications, weather forecasts, and market price updates has enabled sharper planning and more informed decision-making, while modern farm equipment and improved cultivation techniques have reduced labour requirements and increased both productivity and efficiency on her farm. Padminbai views technology as an important tool that complements practical farming experience. By using digital platforms, weather forecasts, market information, and agricultural advisories, she is able to make more informed decisions throughout the crop cycle. This combination of experience, information, and planning has strengthened both efficiency and profitability on her farm.

## Impact and Reach

Alongside crop cultivation, Padminbai has built dairy farming into her operation as an integrated allied enterprise, a diversification that provides an additional, more stable income stream and strengthens her family's overall economic resilience. Given agriculture's inherent exposure to weather fluctuations and market volatility, she manages risk through careful crop planning, timely sowing, and the income diversification

her dairy operation provides, an approach she credits with minimising losses and improving the overall sustainability of her farm. Her journey has had a visible ripple effect within her community, with women who once hesitated to take on leadership roles now confidently contributing to farm management and income-generating activities, encouraged in part by her example.

## Her Greatest Strength

Padminbai's greatest strength lies in her disciplined use of diversification as a deliberate risk-management strategy rather than an incidental choice. By integrating dairy alongside crop cultivation and consistently applying scientific planning to both, she has built an operation that is far more resilient to weather and market shocks than a single-crop farm of comparable size.

## Leadership Lessons

Padminbai's reflections centre on the immense opportunity agriculture holds for women, provided they approach it with determination and a genuine willingness to learn. Her message to aspiring women farmers is direct: actively seek knowledge, adopt modern technologies, and believe in your own potential to create positive change. Padminbai Somnath Jamale's journey, from a traditional farming household to a technology-enabled, diversified agricultural enterprise, demonstrates how determination, family partnership, and a willingness to integrate modern tools into farming can transform not only a single household's fortunes but the confidence and aspirations of an entire community of women around her.

# Bridging Knowledge and Nutrition

How Babli Singh is Empowering Women Farmers Through Biofortification and Digital Agriculture



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                                           |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Babli Singh                                                               |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Social Changemaker • Agri-Entrepreneur                                    |
| ENTERPRISE     | UPPRO Kisan Producer Company Limited                                      |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Producer Company Limited, SFAC; HarvestPlus (biofortification initiative) |
| LOCATION       | Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh                                                  |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2015                                                                      |

## From Self-Help Group Member to Agri-Entrepreneur

Mrs. Babli Singh's journey into agricultural leadership began not in a boardroom but within the ranks of a Self-Help Group in Shankargarh, Prayagraj. Growing up in the region, she watched women work tirelessly across every stage of agriculture - sowing, transplanting, harvesting, livestock care, and household management - while their contribution went largely unrecognised, and very few had access to technical knowledge, market information, or a voice in farming decisions. Her early years with the Self-Help Group sharpened this observation into conviction, as she met women eager to improve their livelihoods but held back by limited confidence, limited financial resources, and limited exposure to new opportunities, in communities where agricultural decision-making was widely regarded as a male responsibility. These interactions convinced her that empowering women begins with helping them believe in their own abilities.

A turning point came when she joined UPPRO Kisan Producer Company Limited - a state-level federation of Farmer Producer Organisations established in 2015 with support from the Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC), Department of Agriculture, Government of India - as its first female Agri-Entrepreneur. UPPRO today brings together close to 100 FPOs and a member base of over 55,600 small and marginal farmers across 20 districts of Uttar Pradesh, working to connect them with markets, technology, and financial services. Stepping into this role gave Babli the opportunity to work directly with women farmers who had limited access to modern agricultural knowledge, institutional credit, quality inputs, and organised markets.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Acceptance did not come easily. Agricultural advisory work in her region had traditionally

been associated with men, and Babli's early visits were met with scepticism: some farmers openly questioned whether a woman could offer credible technical guidance on crop production and seed selection, and a few preferred to wait for a male agriculture officer rather than take part in her meetings. Working with women farmers presented a related challenge, since most women were actively involved in farming but were rarely recognised as farmers in their own right - agricultural decisions were generally taken by male family members, leaving women with limited access to technical knowledge, quality inputs, institutional credit, or markets, and many also lacked the confidence to attend training programmes or speak openly in community meetings.

Rather than allow these attitudes to discourage her, Babli chose an approach built on consistency and demonstrated results rather than persuasion alone. She visited villages regularly, listened to farmers' concerns, and worked alongside them in their own fields, establishing demonstration plots where they could directly observe the performance of new practices under local conditions and compare them with conventional varieties. As tangible results became visible - healthy crops, comparable yields, and a clearer understanding of nutritional benefits - hesitation gradually gave way to curiosity, and curiosity to genuine confidence in her guidance.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Babli's work has been made possible by the institutional backing of UPPRO Kisan Producer Company Limited, whose scale - nearly 100 member FPOs and over 55,600 farmers across Uttar Pradesh - gave her both the platform and the credibility to reach women farmers who would otherwise have remained isolated from formal agricultural support systems. Her nutrition-focused work has also drawn on a dedicated biofortification and nutrition initiative, whose technical guidance shaped her approach to introducing and popularising biofortified crop varieties among sceptical farming communities.

## Tackling Hidden Hunger Through Biofortification

Through her involvement with this biofortification and nutrition initiative, Babli identified a challenge that was widespread yet largely unrecognised: hidden hunger. Many families in the communities she worked with believed that having enough food to eat was sufficient for good nutrition, even as iron and zinc deficiencies persisted among children and mothers. Addressing this required more than distributing information; it required a sustained programme of awareness-building, conducted in accessible local language and reinforced through practical demonstration. Babli travelled from village to village, introducing biofortified crop varieties alongside training in Good Agricultural Practices, including seed selection, timely sowing, balanced nutrient management, integrated pest management, water conservation, weed management, harvesting, grading, and safe storage, while conducting dedicated nutrition awareness sessions explaining the role of iron- and zinc-rich biofortified crops in reducing hidden hunger among women and children.

## Impact and Reach

For Babli, the purpose of agricultural extension work extends well beyond production figures. The changes she has observed span several dimensions: women who once considered themselves only helpers on family farms now identify as farmers, entrepreneurs, and members of Farmer Producer Organisations, actively attending trainings and contributing to household farming decisions; awareness of nutrition has improved markedly, with many households adopting biofortified crops, balanced diets, and Good Agricultural Practices; and through Self-Help Groups and institutional linkages, many women have opened bank accounts, accessed credit, adopted digital payments, and begun participating in collective marketing, strengthening both their financial

independence and their standing within their families and communities. The most meaningful outcomes, she notes, are visible in the women she has trained — many of whom once hesitated to speak in public and now confidently train other farmers, participate in producer organisations, and lead change within their own communities.

## Her Greatest Strength

Babli's greatest strength lies in her ability to connect agriculture, nutrition, technology, and women's empowerment into a single, coherent approach rather than treating improved crop production as an end in itself. As the federation's first female Agri-Entrepreneur, her own experience of navigating scepticism gave her a genuine understanding of the barriers rural women face, and this understanding has consistently helped her build trust and encourage active participation in training, digital learning, and producer organisations.

*Babli's holistic approach united agriculture, technology, nutrition, and women's empowerment to create lasting rural transformation.*

## A Story of Transformation : Biofortified Wheat in Shankargarh

Among the experiences Babli considers most representative of her work is that of a group of women farmers in a village in Shankargarh who were initially reluctant to adopt biofortified wheat, as their families doubted whether the new variety would perform well or find a market at all. Rather than asking them to commit their entire landholding, Babli encouraged the

women to begin with small demonstration plots, visiting their fields regularly through the season, guiding them on Good Agricultural Practices, and explaining the nutritional benefits of the crop. At harvest, the women saw for themselves that the variety performed well under local conditions and understood its value for family nutrition, and the results encouraged neighbouring farmers to adopt the crop the following season. Today, several women from the same village actively participate in awareness programmes and motivate others to cultivate biofortified crops, standing as living proof, in Babli's view, that women equipped with the right knowledge and support become the most effective ambassadors of agricultural innovation.

## The Road Ahead

Babli's vision is to build stronger, more resilient farming communities in which women are recognised as knowledgeable farmers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. She plans to expand awareness of biofortified crops, Good Agricultural Practices, and nutrition-sensitive agriculture so that more families benefit from healthier diets and sustainable farming systems, and she hopes in the coming years to mentor more rural women as Agri-Entrepreneurs, strengthen women-led Farmer Producer Organisations, promote value addition and collective marketing, and encourage wider adoption of digital agriculture. She sees considerable opportunity for women

across the sector over the next decade - as agri-entrepreneurs, FPO leaders, seed producers, agri-processors, and value chain entrepreneurs - driven by rising demand for nutritious food, biofortified crops, organic produce, and climate-smart agriculture, though she believes realising this potential will require continued investment in capacity building, financial inclusion, digital literacy, and market access, alongside a broader shift in social attitudes toward recognising women as equal partners in agricultural decision-making.

## Leadership Lessons

Reflecting on her journey, Babli describes leadership as something built on trust, humility, and service rather than instruction. She points to patience as one of the essential qualities of community leadership, observing that changing mindsets around women's participation and new agricultural technologies requires sustained engagement and practical demonstration rather than persuasion alone, since every farmer adopts change at a different pace. She measures success not by the number of training programmes conducted, but by the number of women who go on to lead change within their own communities. As the first woman to hold her role within this federation, Babli Singh's work stands as a model for how technical expertise, combined with grassroots trust-building, can transform women from farm labourers into recognised farmers, informed decision-makers, and community leaders.

# From Self-Help Groups to Systemic Change

How Kiran is Empowering Rural Women Through Biofortified Agriculture and Community Leadership



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                  |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| NAME           | Kiran                            |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Agripreneur • Social Changemaker |
| ENTERPRISE     | Jaya Foundation (WAVES Project)  |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Jaya Foundation; WAVES Project   |
| LOCATION       | Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh         |

## A Belief That Education Should Empower the Community

Mrs. Kiran's path into agricultural leadership began with a conviction formed early in her career, that education should empower not only the individual but the entire community. After completing her graduation, she began working with Self-Help Groups in Koraon Block, Prayagraj, engaging closely with women from economically weaker backgrounds, many of them navigating poverty, domestic violence, poor health, and limited access to education or livelihood opportunities. Through sustained interaction, counselling, and financial literacy sessions, she worked to restore these women's confidence and help them move toward financial independence, and it was this grassroots experience that revealed to her agriculture's deeper potential, not simply as a livelihood, but as a lever for transforming household nutrition and health.

This recognition led her to join Jaya Foundation as an Agri-Entrepreneur under the WAVES (Women Agri-Entrepreneurs for Value Enhancement of Smallholder Farmers) Project, where she began working with an initial group of 22 women farmers to promote biofortified crops, organic farming, and nutrition-sensitive agriculture.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

The obstacles Kiran encountered were as much social as technical. In many villages, women were expected to remain confined to household responsibilities, with their agricultural work viewed as labour rather than leadership, and persuading families to allow women to attend meetings or training sessions required patience and sustained dialogue rather than one-time appeals. Farmers were similarly cautious about biofortified crops and new practices, uncertain about productivity, market demand, and

unfamiliar technology, while working with women facing domestic violence and financial hardship demanded particular emotional resilience, since many had lost belief in their own agency and rebuilding that self-belief had to come before any livelihood intervention could take hold.

Rather than pressing for immediate acceptance, Kiran built her approach around consistent, patient engagement. She worked through Self-Help Groups to create spaces where women could save together, learn together, and support one another, organising sessions on financial literacy, nutrition, and leadership that helped women recognise their own capacity to shape their circumstances. For agricultural adoption specifically, she relied on demonstration plots that let farmers compare biofortified varieties against traditional crops under real local conditions, reinforced by exposure visits and farmer field schools that gave women direct, first-hand evidence rather than secondhand assurance.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Kiran's work has been anchored by her association with Jaya Foundation, whose officials first introduced her to the vision of Women Agri-Entrepreneurs and whose WAVES Project provided the technical framework, training, and initial cohort of 22 women farmers through which her broader movement grew. The Foundation's continued institutional backing has allowed her initiative to scale from a single village group into a community-driven movement spanning multiple villages in Koraon Block.

## An Integrated Approach to Agriculture and Nutrition

What distinguishes Kiran's work, in her own description, is a refusal to treat agriculture, nutrition, women's empowerment, and livelihoods as separate problems. Her initiative integrates farmer training, demonstration plots,

and field visits on biofortified crops and organic, climate-resilient agriculture with kitchen nutrition gardens and nutrition awareness sessions aimed specifically at women and pregnant mothers, directly targeting hidden hunger while diversifying household diets. Production improvements are linked closely to income, as the initiative supports grading, packaging, branding, and collective marketing for women farmers, alongside capacity-building in financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and digital awareness.

## Impact and Reach

Since its founding with 22 women farmers, the initiative has grown into a community-driven movement across villages in Koraon Block. Kiran points to a range of changes among the women she has worked with: growing confidence and public participation, with women once hesitant to speak now attending Gram Sabha meetings and leading Self-Help Groups; wider adoption of biofortified crops and kitchen nutrition gardens, improving household nutrition while lowering cultivation costs; and greater financial inclusion, with many women opening bank accounts, saving regularly, and participating in collective marketing. She also notes a gradual shift in community attitudes, with families increasingly recognising women as equal partners in agriculture rather than supporting labour, a change she believes has inspired younger girls to pursue education and engage more confidently in agriculture and community life. Her contribution has been formally recognised through a Best Progressive Women Farmer Award, presented by Jaya Foundation.

## Her Greatest Strength

Kiran's greatest strength is her insistence on treating agriculture, nutrition, and women's empowerment as a single, unified problem rather than three separate initiatives. This integrated approach - training farmers, building

kitchen gardens, and developing women's leadership simultaneously - has allowed gains in one area to reinforce progress in the others, producing change that is more durable than any single intervention could achieve alone.

*“Kiran's integrated approach brought together agriculture, nutrition, and women's empowerment to create lasting and sustainable change.”*

## A Story of Transformation: Sushila Devi

Among the stories Kiran considers most representative of her work is that of Sushila Devi, a woman from a marginal farming family who had endured years of domestic violence and financial hardship. When she first joined the Self-Help Group, she rarely spoke in meetings, believing her role was confined to household work. Through regular counselling, sustained participation in group meetings, and continuous encouragement, Sushila gradually rebuilt her confidence, attended agricultural trainings, adopted biofortified wheat cultivation, and established a small kitchen nutrition garden using locally available resources. The additional income from selling surplus vegetables, combined with improved household nutrition, began to shift her family's outlook, and as her confidence grew she started participating in village meetings and encouraging other women to adopt improved practices. Today, Sushila is recognised as a progressive farmer and an active community resource person in her own right, a transformation Kiran cites as proof that empowering one woman often ripples outward to an entire family and, eventually, an entire community.

## The Road Ahead

Kiran's vision is to build villages where every woman farmer has the confidence, knowledge, and resources to be self-reliant. She plans to expand the adoption of biofortified crops, organic farming, and nutrition-sensitive agriculture, and to mentor more rural women as agri-entrepreneurs while strengthening women-led producer groups, value addition, and market linkages. She sees considerable opportunity for women across the food system over the next decade, not only as cultivators but as leaders of Farmer Producer Organisations, agri-enterprise managers, and champions of climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive agriculture, provided they are supported with better access to training, finance, technology, and organised markets.

## Leadership Lessons

Kiran describes leadership as an act of service rather than authority, rooted in listening, understanding people's challenges, and walking alongside them until they are ready to lead themselves. She emphasises that transforming mindsets in rural communities takes patience and persistence, and that change accumulates through repeated conversations and small, demonstrated successes rather than arriving all at once. Kiran's work demonstrates how agriculture, when linked closely to nutrition, financial literacy, and women's leadership, can become a durable pathway out of poverty and social exclusion, transforming not only individual livelihoods but the standing of women within their families and communities.

# Scaling Nutrition Through Scientific Poultry Farming

How Sonam Kumari is Building a Community of Confident Women Poultry Entrepreneurs



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                 |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Sonam Kumari                                    |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Poultry Master Trainer                          |
| ENTERPRISE     | Hatching Hope Project                           |
| KEY PARTNERS   | HarvestPlus Solutions; JEEViKA (BRLPS); Cargill |
| LOCATION       | Patna, Bihar                                    |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2025                                            |

## From Household Practice to Sustainable Enterprise

Growing up in a rural community, Sonam Kumari saw first-hand how backyard poultry supported household livelihoods, and how much of its potential went unrealised because of traditional practices and limited technical knowledge. High chick mortality, disease outbreaks, and low productivity were common, while many families remained unaware of the nutritional value eggs and poultry could offer their children. These observations shaped her decision to join the Hatching Hope Project as a Master Trainer, working to help women overcome these constraints through scientific poultry management covering feeding, vaccination, biosecurity, and proper housing, while simultaneously improving family nutrition through greater egg and poultry consumption.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Sonam's central challenge was convincing rural women to move away from familiar traditional practices toward a scientific approach they had little exposure to, since vaccination schedules, biosecurity protocols, and balanced feeding were unfamiliar concepts to many. Mobilising women for training carried its own complications, as many had to balance the sessions against household responsibilities and some initially expected free inputs rather than technical knowledge. As a woman Master Trainer travelling to remote villages while managing her own family responsibilities, Sonam faced logistical demands on top of these programme challenges.

She built trust through regular field visits, hands-on demonstrations, and continuous follow-up, working closely with JEEViKA Self-Help Groups, Poultry Resource Persons, and community leaders to mobilise participation. As women witnessed healthier birds, lower

chick mortality, and higher incomes, their confidence grew, and many became advocates for the programme themselves.

*“Through trust, hands-on training, and continuous support, Sonam empowered rural women to adopt scientific poultry farming and improve their livelihoods.”*

## Key Partners and Their Role

Sonam's work operates within a structured partnership involving HarvestPlus Solutions, JEEViKA (the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society, or BRLPS), and Cargill, whose combined support underpins the Hatching Hope Project. JEEViKA's existing Self-Help Group network gave her immediate, trusted access to women in remote villages, while Cargill and HarvestPlus Solutions provided the technical curriculum, standard operating procedures, and refresher training that allowed her to teach with confidence.

## A Train-the-Trainer Model for Lasting Reach

Central to Sonam's approach is the Train-the-Trainer model, in which Master Trainers like herself build the capacity of Poultry Resource Persons, who in turn extend technical support within their own communities, creating a sustainable, community-owned support system rather than one dependent on external experts. She emphasises practical, field-based learning through demonstrations and household visits over classroom instruction, and consistently integrates nutrition awareness alongside technical training, encouraging families to consume more eggs and poultry as part of their regular diet.

## Impact and Reach

Since its launch in Bihar, the Hatching Hope Project has reached 1,950 farmers and directly benefited 670 women across 18 villages, with 670 women actively engaged as programme participants. The project's growth, from initial training sessions to sustained mentoring and field support, has translated into measurably reduced chick mortality, improved poultry productivity, and stronger household nutrition and income. Sonam points to the story of Sona Devi, from a village in Patna district, as representative of this change: Sona initially faced regular chick mortality and low productivity due to limited technical knowledge, but after training under the Hatching Hope Project she adopted scientific brooding, balanced feeding, timely vaccination, biosecurity, and improved shed management, and now successfully rears 55 chicks with markedly improved survival and flock management.

## Her Greatest Strength

Sonam's greatest strength lies in her practical, field-based teaching style. Rather than relying on classroom instruction, she demonstrates each practice directly in farmers' own backyards, which allows women to see results in familiar conditions before adopting a new method themselves, and this hands-on credibility has been central to the programme's rapid uptake.

## The Road Ahead

Sonam's plans centre on expanding scientific backyard poultry farming further across Bihar, strengthening the capacities of both women farmers and Poultry Resource Persons, and developing more women leaders capable of serving as Master Trainers themselves, ensuring that technical knowledge continues to reach new villages rather than remaining concentrated with a small number of trainers. She sees considerable opportunity for women to emerge as farmers, entrepreneurs, trainers, and community leaders across food systems over the next decade, provided they receive sustained investment in training, mentoring, and access to modern technology and finance.

## Leadership Lessons

Sonam's experience as a Master Trainer has taught her that true leadership lies in empowering others with knowledge and confidence, not in exercising authority. She points to patience, consistency, and leading by example as the qualities that make lasting change possible, listening to farmers, understanding their specific challenges, and offering practical, continuous support rather than one-off instruction. Sonam Kumari's work demonstrates how a structured, mentorship-driven approach to a traditionally overlooked activity, backyard poultry, can be transformed into a scalable engine for both women's economic independence and household nutrition security across rural Bihar.

### Case Study II

# From Financial Hardship to Community Leadership

How Twinkle Devi Built a Livelihood in Livestock Advisory and Became a Role Model for Rural Women



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                     |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Twinkle Devi                        |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Dairy & Livestock Entrepreneur      |
| ENTERPRISE     | JEEViKA Livestock Programme         |
| KEY PARTNERS   | JEEViKA Livestock Programme (BRLPS) |
| LOCATION       | Purnia, Bihar                       |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2020                                |

## A Journey Rooted in Hardship

Twinkle Devi's story begins not with an opportunity, but with adversity. Before joining Jeevika, her family faced severe financial constraints; there were periods when they could not afford two proper meals a day, her children's education suffered for lack of resources, and the family lived in an inadequate house. In 2020, she became a doorstep livestock advisor under the programme, taking on the role of guiding goat farmers in her community on scientific rearing and healthcare, a decision born of necessity that would fundamentally alter the course of her family's life.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Twinkle's path to becoming a trusted livestock advisor required sustained investment in her own capability, built with no prior background in the field and starting entirely from scratch. Through regular training, continuous field practice, and mentoring support from Jeevika and the Demo Center initiative, she built the technical knowledge and confidence needed to guide farmers on scientific goat rearing and preventive healthcare. Her credibility grew steadily as farmers began to see tangible results from her guidance, including reduced goat mortality, improved rearing practices, and stronger household incomes, which in turn built the trust that expanded her reach into new villages.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Twinkle's development as an advisor has depended throughout on the Jeevika Livestock Programme, run under the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS), which

provided both her initial training and the Demo Center initiative that later expanded her responsibilities. By 2022, her demonstrated commitment and skill led to her selection as a Demo Center Sanchalika, where she began running demonstrations and awareness activities to promote scientific goat management practices at a community level, in addition to her ongoing advisory work.

*“With training, dedication, and community leadership, Twinkle transformed knowledge into lasting impact through scientific goat farming.”*

## Doorstep Advisory as a Model for Access

What distinguishes Twinkle's work is its accessibility: rather than requiring farmers to seek out technical support, she brings doorstep livestock advisory and healthcare services directly to goat-rearing households, combined with practical, demonstration-based learning. This model has made scientific goat farming genuinely accessible to rural women and small farmers who might otherwise have limited access to veterinary or technical guidance.

## Impact and Reach

From an initial base of a few farmers, Twinkle's work has expanded to reach 270 households across 4 villages, with all 270 members directly engaged in improved livestock management practices under her guidance. She describes the collective shift among these women as one of growing confidence, stronger technical skill, and greater financial independence. Asked to share

an inspiring success story, Twinkle points to her own life: her combined income from her two roles, approximately ₹15,000 and ₹8,000 per month respectively, totalling around ₹23,000, has transformed her family's circumstances. She has built a pucca house, purchased a gold chain, and, most significantly, secured better educational opportunities for her children, with her son now studying in Class 8 and her daughter in Class 5, both at an English-medium school.

## Her Greatest Strength

Twinkle's greatest strength is the way her own transformation reinforces her credibility as an advisor. Because she began with nothing and built her expertise entirely through the programme, farmers in her community see in her a living demonstration of what disciplined application of scientific livestock practices can achieve, which makes her guidance carry a weight that outside experts often struggle to match.

## The Road Ahead

Twinkle's future plans centre on expanding her reach, supporting more women goat farmers across additional villages, improving livestock productivity further, and encouraging more rural women to pursue self-reliance through livestock-based livelihoods. She sees considerable opportunity for women across livestock farming, value addition, and digital agriculture in the coming decade, provided they receive continuous skill development, access to finance, and technical guidance.

## Leadership Lessons

Twinkle Devi's journey, from a household unable to guarantee two meals a day to a recognised community resource person supporting 270 families, stands as a direct demonstration of how structured livelihood programmes, combined with sustained personal determination, can transform not just individual circumstances but the standing of women within their communities.

Case Study 12

# Turning Backyard Birds into a Business

How Kamlesh Kumari is Building a Community of Master Trainers in Scientific Poultry Farming



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                                                                    |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | <b>Kamlesh Kumari</b>                                                                              |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | SHG (Self Help Group) Leader                                                                       |
| ENTERPRISE     | Hatching Hope Initiative                                                                           |
| KEY PARTNERS   | HarvestPlus Solutions; Cargill; Heifer International; UPSRLM; Department of Veterinary Science, UP |
| LOCATION       | Hamirpur, Uttar Pradesh                                                                            |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2025                                                                                               |

## From Backyard Hens to a Recognised Trade

For most of her life, Kamlesh Kumari kept a few desi hens in her backyard, as most women in Sumerpur Block, Hamirpur, did, and it was never regarded as genuine farming, only a small extra source of eggs or income. That changed when HarvestPlus Solutions brought the Hatching Hope programme to her block and looked for local women to train as master trainers. Kamlesh put her name forward, and during training she learned that the same backyard birds she had always kept could, with proper vaccination, a suitable night shelter, and appropriate feed, become a steady source of household income.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Kamlesh's early challenge was simply being taken seriously. When she stood in front of a group to explain vaccination or deworming, she often faced doubt, including from men who questioned what a woman could teach them about their own chickens, and travelling alone between villages for training raised further questions at home, in a region where women did not typically move independently from block to block. On top of this, she was learning new professional skills herself, coordinating with self-help groups and government officers, organising trainings, and keeping records, all while carrying the private concern that if a batch of birds died, the women she trained would hold her responsible.

Rather than arguing her way past doubt, Kamlesh let outcomes speak for her. Once the first women who followed her advice, proper vaccination, night shelters, and correct feeding, saw their birds survive and their flocks grow, word spread on its own, and the same people who doubted her began sending their own wives and daughters to her trainings. Working through the self-help group network meant she rarely walked into a village as a stranger, since the women already trusted these groups, and

for travel she began coordinating with fellow trainers and UPSRLM staff so that she was rarely moving alone.

*“Kamlesh turned scepticism into trust by letting her results speak, inspiring more women to embrace scientific poultry farming.”*

## Key Partners and Their Role

Kamlesh works as a master trainer under HarvestPlus Solutions, which runs the Hatching Hope initiative, a global programme of Cargill and Heifer International launched in India in 2018, in Uttar Pradesh. HarvestPlus provided refresher trainings and standard operating procedures that gave her confidence in what she was teaching, while the programme's close coordination with the Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission (UPSRLM) and the Department of Veterinary Science, Uttar Pradesh, under a formal technical agreement, ensured she had reliable institutional backing for vaccination and animal health support.

## Training Trainers, Not Just Farmers

The model behind Kamlesh's work is simple: HarvestPlus trains local women like her as master trainers, who then train women directly in the villages, keeping the knowledge inside the community rather than relying on outside experts. What makes the model work, in Kamlesh's view, is that the trainers are women from the same community, keeping the same kind of birds and facing the same problems as the women they train, so that when she says a practice works, women believe her because they can see it working in her own backyard. The programme is deliberately structured as a business rather than a handout: women are taught to treat poultry as a small enterprise they run and grow themselves, not as a one-time gift of inputs.

## Impact and Reach

Since Kamlesh joined as a master trainer, the initiative in her area has reached 736 farmers and directly benefited 670 women, with 327 members actively engaged across 31 villages. The pool of trainers has grown alongside this reach, as women she trained have themselves become confident enough to guide others, allowing the knowledge to spread without depending on her direct involvement. Kamlesh points to Laxmi, from ChandraPurva village, as a clear example of the programme's effect: when they first met, Laxmi kept only 8 to 10 desi hens and lost most of her chicks each season, having nearly given up on the activity. After joining the training, she began vaccinating her birds, built a simple raised night shelter, and adopted proper feeding, and within a year her flock had grown substantially; she now sells birds and eggs regularly, earning close to ₹2,900 extra each month, which she puts toward her children's school fees.

## Her Greatest Strength

Kamlesh's greatest strength is her insistence on demonstrated results over verbal persuasion. Her guiding principle, that people follow what you do rather than what you say, has shaped her entire training method, and it is the single factor she credits most for winning over an initially sceptical audience of both women and men.

## The Road Ahead

Kamlesh's plans centre on reaching more villages across her block and neighbouring blocks, and on helping the women she has already trained become trainers themselves, so that the chain of knowledge continues to grow. She also hopes to help women organise into groups to sell birds and eggs together at fairer prices, and to move some into related work such as feed-making or small chick-rearing units. She sees considerable opportunity for women in the poultry economy over the next decade, given rising demand for eggs and chicken and the low cost of starting backyard poultry, provided women continue to receive training, small loans, and reliable veterinary support.

## Leadership Lessons

Kamlesh's central lesson is that a leader's role is not to remain the only expert but to make others capable enough that the work continues without her. She points to patience as essential, noting that change in a village moves slowly and cannot be forced. Kamlesh Kumari's work shows how a community-based, train-the-trainer model, backed by strong technical partnerships, can turn an overlooked household activity into a genuine, scalable rural enterprise for women.

## Case Study 13

# Building a Women-Led Enterprise from the Ground Up

How Lovely Singh is Turning Cholapur Kalyan Farmer Producer Company into a Model of Collective, Women-Led Agribusiness



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                         |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Lovely Singh                            |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | FPO Leader                              |
| ENTERPRISE     | Cholapur Kalyan Farmer Producer Company |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Samunnati Foundation                    |
| LOCATION       | Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh                 |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2021                                    |

## From Observation to Organised Action

Lovely Singh's entry into agricultural leadership was driven by a clear-eyed observation: despite their significant contribution to farming, women had limited access to markets, quality inputs, training, and leadership opportunities. Rather than treating this as a background condition of rural life, she chose to address it directly by becoming actively involved in the Cholapur Kalyan Farmer Producer Company, focusing her efforts on mobilising women farmers and encouraging them to become shareholders and active members, not passive participants, in the organisation.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Lovely's early leadership was met with the scepticism common to women stepping into roles traditionally held by men; many people were hesitant to accept a woman in a leadership position, and building trust within farming communities took sustained, deliberate effort. Convincing women to become shareholders presented its own difficulties, as many lacked confidence, faced mobility constraints, or were fully occupied with household responsibilities. She addressed these barriers through patience and consistent community engagement, including regular village visits, direct conversation with women farmers and their families, and transparent communication about how the FPO's activities would benefit them concretely. As members began experiencing tangible results, better access to inputs, fairer prices, and rising incomes, broader family and community support followed.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Lovely's own capability grew alongside the organisation's, as she actively pursued training

in leadership, business management, and agriculture, channelling what she learned back to members through regular meetings. Support from the Board of Directors, guidance and capacity-building assistance from Samunnati Foundation, and technical input from agricultural experts and government departments all played a role in strengthening the FPO's governance, business planning, and market linkages, giving her the institutional scaffolding needed to translate personal conviction into organisational structure. This was supported under Corteva's 2MillionWomen program that aims to nurture two million women across the agriculture value chain by 2030.

*“With continuous learning and strong institutional support, Lovely transformed personal leadership into a thriving farmer-led organisation.”*

## An Integrated, End-to-End Business Model

What distinguishes the Cholapur Kalyan Farmer Producer Company, in Lovely's description, is that it is a genuinely women-led enterprise, in which women are not simply farmers within it but shareholders, decision-makers, and business leaders. The organisation combines agri-input supply, collective marketing of produce, and nursery development under a single platform, an integrated approach designed to reduce production costs, improve productivity, and secure better prices for members. On the input side, the FPO supplies quality seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, and other essentials at affordable, timely rates; on the output side, it aggregates farmers' produce and connects them to reliable markets, reducing dependence on middlemen and strengthening collective bargaining power.

## Impact and Reach

Lovely points to a group of rural women who had never previously participated in business activity as one of the FPO's most representative successes. These women had depended entirely on low-income, traditional farming, lacked access to quality inputs, and routinely sold their produce to local traders at low prices. After becoming FPO shareholders, they began participating in training on improved farming practices, collective marketing, and business management, while gaining access to affordable inputs and stronger markets through the organisation, and over time their farm productivity and household incomes improved substantially. Since its establishment in 2021, the FPO has grown steadily in both membership and the scope of its business operations, and Lovely describes a broad shift among women associated with the organisation, with many who were once involved only in farm labour now active shareholders, decision-makers, and entrepreneurs.

## Her Greatest Strength

Lovely's greatest strength is her patient, relationship-first approach to institution building. Rather than pushing for rapid enrolment, she prioritised earning the trust of individual families before asking them to commit financially, and this deliberate, credibility-first strategy has allowed the FPO to grow on a foundation of genuine confidence rather than short-term persuasion.

## The Road Ahead

Lovely's vision centres on continued expansion: growing FPO membership, strengthening both agri-input and agri-output businesses, expanding the nursery enterprise, and developing value-addition and food processing activities to further increase members' incomes. She sees substantial opportunity for women across food systems over the coming decade as FPO leaders, agribusiness owners, and participants in food processing and value addition, provided they receive continued investment in capacity building, access to finance and credit, modern technology, and reliable market linkages.

## Leadership Lessons

Lovely's central lesson is that leadership is fundamentally about service, trust, and example rather than authority: listening to people's concerns, making transparent decisions, and working as a team are, in her view, essential for creating a strong and successful Farmer Producer Organisation, and true leadership is not about individual success but about empowering others to succeed together. Lovely Singh's work demonstrates how a deliberately women-led Farmer Producer Organization, combining input supply, collective marketing, and enterprise diversification with sustained capacity building, can convert individual economic vulnerability into collective bargaining power, transforming both household incomes and the standing of women within their communities.

# Building an All-Women Enterprise from Day One

How Santoshi Barmaiya Helped Mobilise 750 Women Shareholders in a Single Founding Year



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                                                    |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Santoshi Barmaiya                                                                  |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | FPO Leader                                                                         |
| ENTERPRISE     | Mogli Agroventure Women Farmer Producer Company Limited                            |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Action for Social Advancement (ASA); Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium(SFAC) |
| LOCATION       | Seoni, Madhya Pradesh                                                              |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2024                                                                               |

## From Individual Struggle to Collective Enterprise

Santoshi Barmaiya's path into FPO leadership was shaped by lived experience, her own understanding, as a woman farmer, of the everyday constraints small and medium farmers face, particularly the limited access to organised markets, better prices, modern farming knowledge, and a genuine seat at the decision-making table. In 2024, she was elected a Director of Mogli Agroventure Women Farmer Producer Company Ltd., an entirely women-led FPO established that year in Seoni district, Madhya Pradesh, and from its formation she played a foundational role in shaping the organisation's governance, systems, and growth trajectory.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Leading a newly established FPO carried a distinct set of early challenges. Many women were entirely unfamiliar with the concept of a Farmer Producer Organization and were hesitant to become shareholders or participate in governance and business decisions that were new territory for them. Establishing transparent systems, ensuring regulatory compliance, and building a strong institutional foundation from scratch required significant, sustained effort, layered on top of the familiar challenge of balancing family responsibilities with leadership work. Santoshi's response was methodical and grounded in direct engagement: regular village meetings, active listening to women's concerns, and consistent encouragement toward active membership, alongside her own participation in Board meetings to build her understanding of governance, compliance, and institutional management.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Santoshi's efforts were reinforced through Corteva's 2MillionWomen program. The program strengthens women farmers' leadership, entrepreneurship, and participation in farmer institutions through targeted capacity-building, mentorship, training, and access to knowledge and networks. As the implementation partner, ASA provided continuous handholding, governance support, technical guidance, and institutional capacity-building throughout the FPO's formation. In addition, SFAC's support under the Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations scheme helped establish the strong institutional systems the organisation runs on today.

“Strong institutional partnerships and community leadership enabled Santoshi to build a resilient and thriving farmer-led organisation.”

## A Fully Women-Led Institutional Model

What distinguishes Mogli Agroventure, in Santoshi's description, is that it is women-led at every level, women are not simply members but shareholders, decision-makers, and institutional leaders from the organisation's very first year. The FPO's approach pairs this leadership model with scientific agriculture, notably through the introduction of soil testing services that help farmers optimise input costs, improve productivity, and adopt more sustainable farming practices.

## Impact and Reach

In its first year of operation, Mogli Agroventure mobilised more than 750 women shareholder members and achieved a business turnover of approximately ₹1 crore, figures Santoshi points to as clear evidence of both the trust members placed in the collective model and the effectiveness of its early execution. The FPO has reached 2,500 farmers and directly benefited 500 women, with 750 members actively engaged across 15 villages, generating employment for 7 people. Santoshi describes the changes among women linked to the organisation in terms of growing ownership and voice, with many who were initially hesitant to participate in meetings now actively engaging in discussions and taking genuine interest in the organisation's decisions.

## Her Greatest Strength

Santoshi's greatest strength is her ability to combine grassroots trust-building with rigorous institutional discipline. She treated governance, compliance, and financial transparency as founding priorities rather than later refinements, which allowed Mogli Agroventure to earn both member confidence and a substantial turnover within a single founding year, a pace of institutional maturity that is unusual among newly formed FPOs.

## The Road Ahead

Santoshi's plans centre on strengthening Mogli Agroventure into a financially sustainable, professionally managed enterprise, growing turnover to ₹2 crore, scaling soil testing services, and deepening market links for members. A key priority is increasing women's participation specifically in leadership roles, encouraging more members to move from shareholders into entrepreneurs, and she sees considerable opportunity for women across the food system over the next decade provided they receive continued investment in capacity building, finance, digital literacy, and leadership development.

## Leadership Lessons

Santoshi believes that building a strong institution requires patience, continuous learning, and the ability to bring people together around a shared vision, and that when women are empowered with knowledge, responsibility, and equal opportunities, they become capable leaders who can transform not only their own lives but also their communities. Santoshi Barmaiya's work shows how a deliberately women-led institutional model, built on transparent governance and sustained community engagement from day one, can mobilise hundreds of first-time shareholders and generate substantial collective turnover within a single founding year.

### Case Study 15

# From Survey Volunteer to Board Director

How Sita Devi is Helping Scale a Fully Women-Led Pomegranate Enterprise in Arid Rajasthan



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                                           |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Sita Devi                                                                 |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | FPO Leader                                                                |
| ENTERPRISE     | Bawatra Mahila Agro Producer Company Ltd                                  |
| KEY PARTNERS   | ACCESS Development Services; Corteva Agriscience<br>2MillionWomen program |
| LOCATION       | Jalore, Rajasthan                                                         |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2023                                                                      |

## From Survey Volunteer to Board Member

Sita Devi's involvement with Bawatra Mahila Agro Producer Company Ltd. began at its earliest, most unglamorous stage, the initial documentation and survey processes required to establish a new Farmer Producer Company. Her early commitment reflected strong faith in collective action and women-led institutional platforms as a means of strengthening farm livelihoods, even before the organisation had taken formal shape. As the FPO grew, her consistent engagement and deep community connection led to her selection as a Member of the Board of Directors, a role in which she now actively supports governance processes and community mobilisation.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Working in Bawatra Mahila FPO's drought-prone operating area, where agriculture depends heavily on rainfall and borewell irrigation, presented Sita Devi with the same challenges facing every member she works to recruit: unpredictable rainfall, the labour and cost of shifting toward scientific cultivation, and the difficulty of persuading farmers to invest time and trust in an institution still building its track record. She addressed this by playing a direct, hands-on role explaining the benefits of FPO membership to women farmers, encouraging shareholding, and strengthening participation in meetings and decision-making forums, contributing directly to expanding women's membership and reinforcing trust in the institution.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Under Corteva's 2MillionWomen program implemented with ACCESS Development Services, Sita Devi adopted improved scientific

practices in pomegranate cultivation, the primary crop in her region, promoting disease-free cultivation, optimised input usage, and improved crop management practices, which resulted in reduced pesticide use and better productivity on her own land. This partnership provided both the technical training and the field-level credibility she needed when encouraging other women farmers, through exposure meetings and awareness sessions, to adopt the same improved and cost-effective methods.

## A Fully Women-Owned Institution in Arid Terrain

Bawatra Mahila Agro Producer Company Limited, known as Bawatra Mahila FPO, is a fully women-owned and women-governed farmer collective established in January 2025 in Jalore district of Rajasthan, formed with the vision of building a socially inclusive, climate-resilient, and economically sustainable agribusiness platform for marginal women farmers in the arid regions of western Rajasthan. The organisation supports women farmers through collective agriculture, scientific crop management, aggregation, value addition, and direct market linkages, working primarily with pomegranate growers while also promoting climate-resilient field crops such as bajra and mustard.

## Diversifying Beyond Horticulture

Beyond horticulture, Sita Devi diversified into allied activities to strengthen household income, establishing a vermicomposting unit to improve soil health and reduce chemical fertiliser dependence, and introducing azolla cultivation as nutritious livestock feed, which has contributed to enhanced milk production and supplementary income for her household.

## Impact and Reach

Bawatra Mahila FPO's growth reflects the strength of its collective model. Shareholder membership grew from 320 in FY 23–24 to 601 women farmers by FY 25–26, with total share capital of ₹4,68,500, approximately ₹780 per member. The FPO's turnover rose from nil in FY 2024–25 to approximately ₹51 lakh in FY 2025–26, with an estimated gross profit of ₹5.5 lakh, driven by a business mix spanning input supply and output aggregation, with pomegranate sales alone contributing approximately ₹19.35 lakh in revenue. Its market linkage work has proven especially significant: by aggregating produce and connecting directly with institutional buyers and agri-tech platforms including DeHaat and Reliance-linked market channels, member farmers have secured improved price realisation of approximately ₹150 to ₹200 per quintal compared with local mandi sales, with produce transported directly to markets in Delhi.

## Her Greatest Strength

Sita Devi's greatest strength is the credibility she carries from having been present at the organisation's founding. Because members have watched her involvement grow from early survey work to Board leadership, her advocacy for FPO membership carries the weight of someone who has grown alongside the institution rather than been appointed to lead it from outside.

## The Road Ahead

Looking ahead, Sita Devi envisions stronger governance systems, enhanced market linkages, value addition initiatives, and expanded women shareholding within the FPO. She advocates for soil testing, weather-based advisory services, and integrated farming systems to ensure sustainable and resilient livelihoods, and at the institutional level, Bawatra Mahila FPO's future plans include bajra flour and mustard oil processing units, expansion of direct corporate and institutional market linkages, and promotion of branded value-added products for urban retail markets.

*“Sita Devi envisions a future where sustainable farming, value addition, and women-led enterprises create resilient rural communities.”*

## Leadership Lessons

Sita Devi's journey exemplifies how women's leadership within FPOs can drive productivity, institutional growth, and long-term community transformation, and her continued advocacy for soil testing and integrated farming reflects a leadership style built less on formal instruction than on demonstrated, personally adopted practice, the same approach that first drew her into the organisation's founding work.

# From Household Labour to Institutional Leadership

How Shobha Devi is Building a Farmer-Owned Enterprise Around Makhana, Maize, and Collective Marketing



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                                                             |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Shobha Devi                                                                                 |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Agripreneur • SHG Leader                                                                    |
| ENTERPRISE     | Kisanekta Farmer Producer Company Limited                                                   |
| KEY PARTNERS   | PRADAN; Agriculture Department; Horticulture Department; NABARD; Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) |
| LOCATION       | Katihar, Bihar                                                                              |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2021                                                                                        |

## Rooted in the Realities of Small Farming

Shobha Devi was born and raised in a farming family in Katihar, Bihar, where agriculture has always been the family's primary source of livelihood. From an early age, she worked alongside her family in the fields and witnessed both the importance of farming and the hardships faced by small and marginal farmers: low productivity, limited market access, and dependence on middlemen that often reduced household income despite hard work. Her journey in agriculture became more purposeful when she joined Kisanekta Farmer Producer Company Limited, which helped her understand the power of collective action, modern farming practices, and the importance of connecting farmers to better markets.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

As a woman leading an agricultural initiative, Shobha faced overcoming deeply rooted social norms, where women were often expected to limit their role to household responsibilities rather than participating in decision-making or leadership. Convincing people that women could successfully lead a Farmer Producer Organisation and manage business activities required patience and determination, and another major challenge was building the confidence of women farmers to join collective farming initiatives and adopt improved agricultural practices, since many were hesitant to try new technologies or participate in market-oriented agriculture because of limited exposure and fear of financial risk.

She overcame these challenges by continuing to work closely with the community, organising meetings, participating in training programmes, and demonstrating the benefits of collective action through Kisanekta itself. As farmers

began to see improved incomes, better market opportunities, and stronger support systems, their trust and participation gradually increased, and Shobha found that perseverance, collaboration, and continuous learning were essential to bringing meaningful change.

“Through perseverance and collective action, Shobha transformed scepticism into trust, empowering women to lead and thrive in agriculture.”

## Key Partners and Their Role

Through Corteva's 2MillionWomen program, Shobha has gained the knowledge, skills, and confidence to strengthen her leadership. The program's capacity-building support, implemented by PRADAN, has enhanced her expertise in sustainable agriculture, business management, and farmer mobilisation, positioning her to lead and inspire other women farmers. The Agriculture Department, Horticulture Department, NABARD, and the Krishi Vigyan Kendra have provided technical guidance, training, and support through various agricultural schemes, and this collective support of institutions, alongside the trust and participation of the farming community, has enabled Shobha to overcome challenges and strengthen the organisation.

## A Farmer-Owned Enterprise Built for Collective Strength

Kisanekta Farmer Producer Company Limited was established in Katihar district to organise small and marginal farmers into a collective enterprise, improving access to quality inputs,

technical support, financial services, and better markets. The organisation aggregates produce to reduce production costs and increase members' bargaining power in the marketplace, supporting members through capacity-building programmes, technical training, and advisory services that enable them to adopt improved cultivation practices and diversify their income sources, with a strong focus on empowering women's participation in leadership and decision-making.

### Impact and Reach

One of the most inspiring stories from Shobha's community is that of a woman farmer who had been cultivating makhana, maize, and paddy on a small piece of land but earned very little because she sold her produce individually to local traders. After joining Kisanekta, she participated in training programmes on improved farming practices and became an active member of the collective marketing initiative, gaining access to quality seeds, technical guidance, and better market linkages, and the increase in her income enabled her to invest in her farm and support her children's education. Since its establishment, Kisanekta has reached 1,760 farmers and directly benefited 1,760 women, with all 1,760 members actively engaged across 30 villages, recording a turnover of ₹5,50,00,000 and generating employment for 5 people.

### Her Greatest Strength

Shobha's greatest strength is her ability to translate an institution's technical offerings

into visible income gains for individual women, one farmer at a time. Her habit of pointing to specific, named success stories, rather than relying on abstract claims about collective benefit, has proven to be her most effective tool for persuading hesitant women to join.

### The Road Ahead

Shobha's plans centre on connecting more small and marginal farmers, especially women, with the FPO so they can benefit from better inputs, technical support, financial services, and reliable market opportunities. She plans to expand value addition and processing of crops such as makhana and maize through improved grading, packaging, branding, and market linkages, while promoting climate-resilient and sustainable farming practices and strengthening partnerships with government departments and financial institutions.

### Leadership Lessons

Shobha's journey has taught her that true leadership is about serving the community, listening to people, and leading by example, and that a good leader earns trust through honesty, transparency, and consistent actions rather than words alone. Through the Farmer Producer Company, she realised that collective action enables small and marginal farmers to overcome challenges they cannot address individually, and she believes that empowering others is the greatest measure of leadership.

### Case Study 17

# From a Tribal Village to the Boardroom

How Pramila Jharbade Helped Scale a ₹2.8 Crore Women-Led FPO with Over 1,000 Shareholders



### Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                  |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Pramila Jharbade                                 |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | FPO Leader                                       |
| ENTERPRISE     | Betul SFAC Women Farmer Producer Company Limited |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Action for Social Advancement (ASA); SFAC        |
| LOCATION       | Betul, Madhya Pradesh                            |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2021                                             |

## From a Tribal Farming Household to Institutional Governance

Pramila Jharbade's journey into agricultural leadership began with her own life as a small tribal farmer in Betul, Madhya Pradesh. Growing up in an Adivasi farming family, she experienced the everyday challenges faced by small and marginal farmers, including limited resources, dependence on local traders, and the lack of fair market opportunities, and these experiences inspired her to work towards creating better opportunities for farming communities, especially women farmers. In 2021, she joined Betul SFAC Women Farmer Producer Company, and in 2022 she was elected as a Director.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

As a woman from a tribal farming community, Pramila's journey was not without challenges. In the beginning, she had limited exposure outside her village and lacked confidence to speak in public or participate in decision-making forums, and social norms often restricted women's involvement in leadership and financial matters, making it difficult to encourage women farmers to take active roles in the FPO. Building trust among members and motivating them to become shareholders also required continuous effort, but she overcame these obstacles through continuous learning, determination, and the support of Corteva's 2MillionWomen program, which strengthened her leadership skills and confidence, alongside active participation in Farmer Producer Organisation Board meetings, training programmes, and discussions.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Pramila's growth has been supported by multiple stakeholders. Corteva's 2MillionWomen program contributed to strengthening her leadership and capacity and backed implementation partner - ASA that functions as the FPO's Cluster-Based Business Organisation. ASA provides governance support, technical guidance, and institutional capacity-building. The SFAC, through the Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations scheme, also played an important role in supporting the FPO's development.

*“With strong institutional support and collective leadership, Pramila transformed into a confident leader driving women-led agricultural growth.”*

## A Women-Led, Multi-Enterprise Institution

Betul SFAC Women Farmer Producer Company is a women-led Farmer Producer Organisation established to strengthen the livelihoods of small and marginal farmers by promoting collective farming, better market access, and sustainable agricultural practices. The FPO has over 1,000 women shareholder members who actively participate in its governance and business activities, providing agricultural inputs, market linkages, capacity-building programmes, and technical support while encouraging scientific and climate-resilient farming practices. The organisation is also expanding through initiatives such as a seed processing unit, silage production to support dairy-based livelihoods,

and soil testing services that help farmers improve productivity and adopt balanced nutrient management.

## Impact and Reach

Under the leadership of the Board of Directors, the FPO has achieved an annual turnover of approximately ₹2.6 crore and is working towards a target of ₹5 crore in the coming financial year. The organisation has reached 7,500 farmers and directly benefited 655 women, with 1,005 members actively engaged across 32 villages, and has generated employment for 5 people on a recorded turnover of ₹2.6 crore. Women who were once limited to farming activities within their households are now active shareholders, decision-makers, and contributors to the growth of the FPO, participating in village meetings, interacting with institutions, and taking leadership roles within the organisation.

## Her Greatest Strength

Pramila's greatest strength is her success in translating personal, hard-won confidence into a template that other women in her community can follow. Having moved herself from limited public exposure to active Board leadership, she is able to guide other tribal women through the same stages of confidence-building with genuine, first-hand credibility.

## The Road Ahead

Pramila's future vision is to strengthen Betul SFAC Women Farmer Producer Company into a financially sustainable and nationally recognised women-led Farmer Producer Organisation, increasing annual turnover from approximately ₹2.8 crore to ₹5 crore by expanding business activities and creating greater value for members. She plans to establish a seed processing unit, scale up silage production, and strengthen soil testing services to promote scientific and sustainable farming, with a key priority of increasing women's participation in leadership roles.

## Leadership Lessons

Pramila's leadership journey has taught her that true leadership is built on trust, integrity, and service to the community, and that listening to farmers, making collective decisions, and maintaining transparency are essential for building a strong and sustainable organisation. As a woman leader from a tribal farming community, she has gained confidence through continuous learning, active participation, and teamwork, and she believes that inclusive leadership and collective action are the foundation of sustainable agricultural development.

# From Scepticism to a 509-Member Movement

How Anuradha Dwaram Built One of Kurnool District's Top-Performing Women-Led FPOs



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                             |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Anuradha Dwaram                                             |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | FPO Leader                                                  |
| ENTERPRISE     | Sri Bramarambika Mahila Shakti Nandikotkur FPO MACS Limited |
| KEY PARTNERS   | APMAS; Horticulture Department; FarmRise One; Axis Bank     |
| LOCATION       | Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh                                     |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2019                                                        |

## A Gap Rooted in Everyday Observation

Agriculture has always been part of Anuradha Dwaram's life; she comes from a family that has farmed the land for generations, and this work has always felt like part of who she is. But over time, she noticed how much harder farming was for women in her community compared to men. Women did as much work in the fields as anyone else, yet had little say in decisions around inputs, pricing, or markets, and that gap is what pulled her from simply farming to actively organising farmers, especially women, so that they could have a collective voice.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

The biggest challenge was gaining the confidence of farmers, along with limited access to affordable credit for inputs and working capital. Building trust among the community took significant effort and continuous engagement, since many questioned the purpose of joining the FPO, the membership fees, and whether they would receive any real benefits. In the beginning, convincing women farmers to become members was challenging because they were hesitant to pay the ₹1,500 share capital and ₹150 registration fee, but Anuradha and her team explained the long-term benefits, such as access to quality agricultural inputs at affordable prices and better returns through collective procurement and marketing, and as members started experiencing these benefits, more farmers joined and the FPO steadily grew.

## Key Partners and Their Role

The FPO's journey was supported by APMAS, which played a key role in establishing the organisation, and by the Horticulture Department, which sanctioned a grant for

developing an input shop and collection centre. Through FarmRise One, member farmers received consistent access to verified, high-quality inputs from authentic distributors, better market linkage for their produce, and a credit linkage with Axis Bank, together resulting in over a 60 percent increase in business profits and better yields.

*“Strong institutional partnerships and better market access enabled the FPO to drive higher productivity, profitability, and sustainable growth for its members.”*

## Building Infrastructure That Reduces Real Costs

Sri Bramarambika Mahila Shakti Nandikotkur FPO MACS Limited is a women-led Farmer Producer Organisation based in Andhra Pradesh, serving 509 farmer members across 11 villages, of whom over 50 percent are women. The organisation established a collection centre and opened a fertiliser shop on the main road, making quality agricultural inputs easily accessible to farmers and reducing their transportation costs, addressing the fragmented access to quality agri-inputs, weak price realisation, and limited access to affordable credit that had left farmers without collective bargaining power on either the input or output sides of the market.

## Impact and Reach

The FPO has reached 509 farmers and directly benefited 255 women, with all 509 members actively engaged across 11 villages, generating employment for 5 people and recording a turnover of ₹1.98 crore. One story that stays with Anuradha is that of a woman farmer who was among the most hesitant to join the FPO,

unsure whether it would deliver on its promises even after months of persuasion. Within two seasons, through the FPO's collective procurement of inputs and better market linkages, especially after the partnership with FarmRise One, she saw noticeably better returns from selling her maize, and went from being the most sceptical voice in her village to becoming one of the members who now convinces others to join. Members also make use of their free time or off-season periods by working with value-added enterprises, providing an additional source of income and improving financial independence.

## Her Greatest Strength

Anuradha's greatest strength is her patience in the face of financial scepticism. Rather than pressuring farmers to pay membership fees quickly, she allowed early results to build the case for the FPO on their own, a strategy that converted her most vocal doubter into one of the organisation's strongest advocates.

## The Road Ahead

The FPO's future plan is to establish chilli and turmeric processing units with grinding and packing facilities, and to rent machinery to farmers and expand value-added agriculture businesses, creating additional income for both the FPO and its members. Anuradha sees immense potential for women to transition from being the hidden backbone of agriculture to becoming its acknowledged leaders, with formal women-led FPOs offering the strongest path to market access.

## Leadership Lessons

Anuradha and her team have learned that trust, transparency, and consistent communication are the foundations of a successful FPO, and that when farmers see genuine benefits and feel included, they actively participate and contribute to the organisation's growth. Her message to aspiring women farmers is that they should make use of their free time or off-season periods by starting small businesses or value-added enterprises, which can provide an additional source of income and improve financial independence.

### Case Study 19

# From Self-Help Group to Bio-Fertilizer Enterprise

How Preeti Verma Built a ₹7 Crore FPO Around Sustainable, Chemical-Free Farming



## Profile at a Glance

|              |                                                                                              |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME         | <b>Preeti Verma</b>                                                                          |
| CATEGORY     | FPO Leader • Agripreneur • Food Processing Entrepreneur<br>• SHG Leader • Social Changemaker |
| ENTERPRISE   | Aatm Nirbhar Mahila Farmer Producer Company Ltd.                                             |
| KEY PARTNERS | ITC MAARS; ATMA; Department of Agriculture; NABARD                                           |
| ESTABLISHED  | 2022 (FPO); SHG formed in 2018                                                               |
| LOCATION     | Sehore District, Madhya Pradesh                                                              |

## From a Self-Help Group to a Farmer Company

Preeti Verma's leadership journey began in 2018, when she mobilised women in her community into a Self-Help Group. Recognising that individual SHGs, however well organised, had limits on the scale of change they could achieve, she helped form the Aatm Nirbhar Mahila Farmer Producer Company Ltd. in 2022, moving from grassroots mobilisation into formal institutional leadership. Her focus since has centred on establishing and running a press unit that produces bio-fertiliser, alongside its packaging and marketing, while encouraging farmers to adopt organic and sustainable practices more broadly.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Preeti's central challenges were limited access to credit, gaps in physical infrastructure, and weak market linkages, constraints common to many newly formed farmer institutions attempting to build a processing business from scratch. She addressed these by mobilising members around a shared collective purpose and by leveraging support from ITC MAARS and ATMA for training, advisory services, and market connections, allowing the organisation to build capacity and credibility faster than it could have on its own.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Support from ATMA and ITC MAARS proved crucial to Preeti's progress, providing training, advisory services, and market linkages that strengthened member capacity and improved access to buyers. The Department of Agriculture and NABARD provided further institutional backing, helping the organisation navigate the credit and infrastructure gaps that had constrained its early growth.

## Turning Waste Reduction into a Business Model

The problem Preeti's enterprise set out to solve was straightforward but significant: farmers in her area lacked affordable, eco-friendly fertiliser options and organised processing facilities to support a shift away from chemical inputs. In response, the FPO established a bio-fertiliser press unit that produces, packages, and markets bio-fertiliser collectively, reducing chemical dependency, promoting soil health, and supporting more sustainable farming practices across member villages. The unit's focus on packaging and branding, rather than simply producing raw bio-fertiliser, has ensured wider market reach and stronger recognition for the product.

*“Preeti transformed sustainable farming by making eco-friendly bio-fertilisers accessible, market-ready, and farmer-led.”*

## Impact and Reach

Preeti's enterprise has reached substantial scale for a five-year-old institution: the FPO records an annual turnover of ₹7 crore, with the bio-fertiliser press unit alone generating ₹3,51,000. The organisation spans 43 villages and engages 3,000 farmer members, and has generated 6 permanent jobs alongside 10 additional positions on an as-needed basis. Women who once relied entirely on chemical fertilisers now produce and market bio-fertilisers collectively, improving soil health on their own farms while earning better returns than they did as individual, unorganised producers. Beyond production, Preeti's leadership has visibly strengthened women's confidence and opened genuine leadership opportunities through both SHG and FPO activities.

## Her Greatest Strength

Preeti's greatest strength lies in her ability to convert a genuine sustainability need, reducing farmers' dependence on chemical fertiliser, into a viable, scaled business rather than treating it as a standalone environmental initiative. By building the bio-fertiliser unit around collective production, packaging, and marketing from the outset, she created an enterprise that pays for itself and reduces farmers' dependence on middlemen, rather than one dependent on ongoing external subsidy.

## The Road Ahead

Preeti's future plans centre on scaling bio-fertiliser production, expanding organic farming initiatives, and creating more employment opportunities while continuing to promote sustainability. She sees considerable opportunity ahead in eco-friendly fertiliser production, sustainable agriculture, and women-led enterprises more broadly,

provided the sector receives continued support in affordable credit, improved infrastructure, and stronger market linkages, the same three gaps she identifies as most constraining her own organisation's growth today.

## Leadership Lessons

Preeti's central lesson is that sustainable practices, collective action, and innovation are what allow a resilient enterprise to be built from limited beginnings. Her leadership has been marked by persistence: despite early challenges around credit and infrastructure, she built strong farmer groups and promoted collective marketing, an approach that has reduced members' dependence on middlemen and secured fairer prices across the organisation. Her message to aspiring women entrepreneurs is direct: embrace eco-friendly innovation, work together, and lead with courage. Her recognition as "Best Social Worker" by NRLM reflects the scale of impact this approach has achieved across 43 villages and 3,000 members.

# Turning Around a Struggling FPO into a Multi-Crore Enterprise

How Savitri Gour Bai Rebuilt Samruddhi Mahila FPO from the Brink of Closure into a Thriving Women-Led Agribusiness



## Profile at a Glance

|              |                                                                           |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME         | Savitri Gour Bai                                                          |
| CATEGORY     | FPO Leader • Agripreneur • Social Changemaker • Climate Champion          |
| ENTERPRISE   | Samruddhi Mahila Farmer Producer Organization                             |
| KEY PARTNERS | ITC MAARS; Srijan NGO; Government Agriculture Institutions & Universities |
| LOCATION     | Bundi District, Rajasthan                                                 |
| ESTABLISHED  | 2011                                                                      |

## Building an Institution to Strengthen Women Farmers

Savitri Gour Bai's motivation for her work was rooted in a desire to improve the livelihoods of rural women farmers and strengthen their role in agriculture more broadly. Seeing the challenges facing small farmers in her district firsthand motivated her to build a stronger collective institution capable of offering better market access, services, and genuine opportunities, rather than leaving women to navigate agricultural markets individually.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

By 2022, Samruddhi Mahila FPO, established in 2011, faced weak business performance, limited market opportunities, low member participation, and serious financial sustainability challenges, compounded by limited confidence among women farmers in taking on leadership roles. The organisation was, in effect, at risk of closure. Savitri responded by strengthening governance systems, improving member engagement, adopting innovative business models, and building stronger market linkages, drawing heavily on support from the ITC MAARS ecosystem to rebuild the institution from a position of near-collapse into a functioning enterprise.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Savitri's turnaround of the FPO depended substantially on ITC MAARS, whose ecosystem support underpinned her governance reforms and market-linkage work, and on Srijan NGO, which provided further institutional backing. Government agriculture institutions and universities contributed technical grounding for the climate-smart initiatives she went on to introduce, while the FPO's women farmer members themselves formed the collective base without which none of the turnaround would have been possible.

## From Near-Closure to Multi-Crore Turnover

Samruddhi Mahila Farmer Producer Organization is an all-women farmer collective working across agricultural productivity, market access, value addition, input supply, procurement, and women's economic empowerment. What distinguishes Savitri's leadership is the scale of the turnaround she achieved: annual turnover grew from approximately ₹30 lakh in FY 2022 to ₹1.5 crore in FY 2023, with the FPO generating nearly ₹7 crore in cumulative business turnover over four years. She combined this business recovery with climate-smart agriculture and agribusiness innovation, introducing Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) promotion, soil testing services, biomass aggregation, and solar-dried value-added products, an integrated approach that positions her as both a genuine Social Changemaker and Climate Champion rather than a leader focused on financial metrics alone.

“Savitri transformed an all-women FPO into a high-growth, climate-smart enterprise driving sustainable rural prosperity.”

## Impact and Reach

Savitri's FPO has reached more than 500 women farmers and members, operating across FPO villages in Bundi district. Beyond the turnover figures, she promoted Direct Seeded Rice technology across nearly 200 acres, helping farmers reduce cultivation costs and improve resource efficiency, and established soil testing services that conducted around 300 soil tests, enabling farmers to make more informed decisions about soil health. The FPO also introduced biomass aggregation and value-added products including tomato and

amla powder, diversifying income streams beyond raw agricultural produce.

The most inspiring achievement, in Savitri's own view, is the transformation of the FPO itself, from an organisation facing closure to a successful, multi-crore-turnover agribusiness led entirely by women farmers. Women associated with the FPO have become more financially independent, confident, and actively involved in business and agricultural decision-making, with many now managing agricultural enterprises and participating directly in governance and leadership roles.

### Her Greatest Strength

Savitri's greatest strength is her ability to combine institutional turnaround with genuine climate innovation, rather than treating the two as separate priorities. Having inherited an FPO close to collapse, she rebuilt its financial fundamentals while simultaneously introducing Direct Seeded Rice, soil testing, and solar drying, proving that governance discipline and climate-smart agriculture can be pursued together rather than sequentially.

### The Road Ahead

Savitri's future plans include establishing a women-led spice processing and manufacturing unit focused on processing, packaging, branding, and marketing agricultural products, expanding value-addition activities to increase income opportunities for members, and further strengthening climate-smart agriculture initiatives including DSR, soil health management, and digital advisory services. Her broader ambition is to position Samruddhi Mahila FPO as a leading women-led agribusiness organisation in Rajasthan, built on stronger market linkages and branded products.

### Leadership Lessons

Savitri's central lesson is that leadership requires vision, persistence, teamwork, and the ability to create opportunities for others, and that when women are trusted with genuine responsibility, they can achieve extraordinary results. Her message to aspiring women farmers, entrepreneurs, and changemakers is direct: never underestimate your potential, because with determination, knowledge, and collective effort, women can transform agriculture, strengthen communities, and build a better future for the next generation.

### Case Study 21

# Turning Millets into a Movement

How Anju Chaturvedi is Building a Value-Added Food Enterprise Rooted in Traditional Recipes



### Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                    |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Anju Chaturvedi                                    |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | FPO Leader                                         |
| ENTERPRISE     | Lahuri Kashi Women Farmer Producer Company Limited |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Krishi Vibhag, Ghazipur                            |
| LOCATION       | Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh                            |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2023                                               |

## From Raw Produce to Value-Added Enterprise

Anju Chaturvedi's motivation for founding Lahuri Kashi Women Farmers Producer Company Limited came from a straightforward but consequential observation: farmers earned limited income from selling raw produce, while women had limited access to income-generating opportunities of their own. To address this, she and her fellow founders started processing locally grown crops into value-added products such as millet-based cookies, sweets, achar, and murabba, using traditional recipes combined with improved processing and packaging.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

As a woman leading this initiative, Anju faced overcoming social norms and building the confidence to take on a leadership role in business and agriculture. Many women farmers had limited exposure to entrepreneurship, financial management, and market linkages, and access to finance, technology, and training opportunities was also limited. Building trust among farmers, organising them into a collective, and encouraging them to adopt value-added processing required continuous effort, and marketing the enterprise's products while competing with established brands presented a further challenge.

The organisation overcame these barriers through teamwork, determination, and continuous learning, attending training programmes on entrepreneurship, food processing, financial management, and marketing to improve members' skills and confidence. By working collectively, women farmers were able to share knowledge, resources, and responsibilities, and the enterprise built trust by maintaining product quality and transparency, supported by technical guidance and market opportunities from government agencies and development organisations.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Corteva's 2MillionWomen program has played a key role in advancing Anju's enterprise by providing capacity-building support that strengthened her entrepreneurial capabilities and helped her expand her millet-based business. This support has been complemented by training and technical guidance from government departments and agricultural extension agencies, creating an enabling ecosystem for her enterprise. Her achievements were formally recognised when she received the Prashasti Patra as "Millet Mahila Udyami" from Krishi Vibhag, Ghazipur.

*“Empowered by Corteva's 2MillionWomen program, Anju earned recognition as Millet Mahila Udyami while successfully expanding her millet-based enterprise.”*

## Tradition Meets Modern Value Addition

What makes Lahuri Kashi's work unique is that it combines traditional knowledge with modern value addition, transforming locally grown millets and other farm produce into nutritious products such as millet cookies, sweets, achar, and murabba, creating higher incomes for small farmers. The focus on women's leadership, local sourcing, and community-based entrepreneurship sets the enterprise apart, and by promoting climate-resilient crops such as millets, it is strengthening rural livelihoods, preserving traditional food heritage, and building a sustainable, farmer-owned business that benefits the entire community.

## Impact and Reach

Since its establishment on 6 October 2023, Lahuri Kashi has steadily grown in membership, production, and market reach, expanding its product range and gaining acceptance in nearby villages and local markets. Women farmers have gained additional income through value-added products, improving their financial security and supporting their families, while developing new skills in food processing, business management, and marketing that have increased their confidence and leadership abilities. The organisation has reached 350 farmers and directly benefited 100 women, with 882 members engaged across 12 villages, recording a turnover of ₹55,00,000 and generating employment for 20 to 30 people.

## Her Greatest Strength

Anju's greatest strength is her ability to root a modern food-processing business in genuinely traditional recipes, giving Lahuri Kashi's products a distinct identity that larger, less locally grounded competitors cannot easily replicate. This combination of authenticity and improved packaging has allowed the enterprise to build consumer trust quickly, even while competing against established brands.

## The Road Ahead

Anju's future plans are to expand the reach of Lahuri Kashi Women Farmers Producer Company Limited and strengthen the livelihoods of member farmers, increasing the production and marketing of millet-based products while improving product quality, packaging, and branding. She plans to reach new markets beyond the local area through retail partnerships, exhibitions, and digital platforms, while increasing the participation of women farmers and promoting climate-resilient crops such as millets.

## Leadership Lessons

Through her journey, Anju has learned that effective leadership is built on teamwork, trust, and perseverance, and that a good leader listens to people, understands their challenges, and works together to find solutions. She has learned the importance of empowering others, especially women farmers, by building their confidence and encouraging their participation in decision-making, and believes that collective effort can achieve far greater results than individual work.

Case Study 22

# Building Women-Led Food Systems for a Climate-Resilient India

How Vishalakshi Reddy Vuyyala Turned Millet Revival into a National Enterprise and an Ecosystem for Women Entrepreneurs



## Profile at a Glance

|              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME         | <b>Vishalakshi Reddy Vuyyala</b>                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| CATEGORY     | Agripreneur • Food Processing Entrepreneur<br>• Social Changemaker • Climate Champion                                                                                                                                       |
| ENTERPRISE   | Millet Bank (Legal Entity: Minkan Agro Industries Pvt. Ltd.);<br>VISV Foundation (Vishalakshi Innovations for Sustainable Value Chain)                                                                                      |
| KEY PARTNERS | Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP); IIMR–Nutrihub; NITI<br>Aayog; DPIIT, Government of India; institutional clients including<br>Microsoft, Amazon, Google, S&P Global, Hindalco, Aurobindo Pharma, and Rapido |
| LOCATION     | Hyderabad, Telangana                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| ESTABLISHED  | 2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

## A Childhood Shaped by a Disappearing Food System

Vishalakshi Reddy Vuyyala grew up in a farming family in the drought-prone Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh, where she watched traditional food systems gradually disappear over the years. Millets, once central to local diets, were steadily replaced by water-intensive crops and processed foods, a shift that affected both environmental sustainability and community health simultaneously. Across two decades of professional experience spanning entrepreneurship, hospitality, destination development, and community engagement, she arrived at a conclusion that would shape the rest of her career: the revival of traditional grains could not happen through agriculture alone. Farmers needed better markets, consumers needed convenient and aspirational products, women needed sustainable enterprises rather than one-time training programmes, and communities needed local food systems that created livelihoods while improving nutrition.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

The central challenge Vishalakshi identified, once Millet Bank was underway, was not unique to her own enterprise but reflected a pattern she observed across rural India: thousands of women had received training in food processing, yet very few were able to translate that training into a sustainable enterprise of their own. The missing link, she concluded, was not capability but the absence of integrated ecosystems, common infrastructure, branding, packaging, quality systems, market access, finance, and long-term mentoring, all of which a single training programme could never provide on its own.

Rather than adding another isolated training initiative to an already crowded field, she addressed this gap structurally, first by building Millet Bank into a genuine market for millet-based products, and then by establishing VISV Foundation specifically to build the complete entrepreneurship ecosystems that women needed in order to convert training into lasting business ownership.

*Vishalakshi transformed training into sustainable entrepreneurship by building the complete ecosystem women need to succeed.*

## Key Partners and Their Role

Vishalakshi's work has been reinforced by a wide network of institutional partners. The Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) has been central to VISV Foundation's training work, partnering to train more than 460 rural women in millet-based food processing and entrepreneurship. IIMR–Nutrihub recognised Millet Bank's branding and promotion work for three consecutive years, while NITI Aayog and DPIIT, Government of India, provided national platforms and recognition that extended Millet Bank's credibility well beyond a single regional enterprise. On the commercial side, partnerships with major institutional clients, including Microsoft, Amazon, Google, S&P Global, Hindalco, Aurobindo Pharma, and Rapido, have made Millet Bank's products a consistent presence in corporate food systems across the country.

## Millet Bank: Building Markets for Climate-Resilient Foods

Founded in 2021, Millet Bank was established to create genuine market demand for millets through innovation, branding, and value addition, beginning with just three products. It has since grown into one of India's leading millet-focused food enterprises, offering more than 50 value-added products across ready-to-cook, ready-to-eat, and healthy food categories. The company now operates across 18 states in India, exports to more than five countries, and has built an omnichannel distribution network spanning leading retail, e-commerce, and quick-commerce platforms including Amazon, Swiggy Instamart, and Blinkit. Beyond retail, the organisation has developed an integrated ecosystem connecting over 500 farmers, women entrepreneurs, processors, rural artisans, and micro-enterprises, creating value across the entire supply chain, from cultivation and processing through to branding and market access.

## VISV Foundation: Building the Ecosystem Women Actually Need

VISV Foundation (Vishalakshi Innovations for Sustainable Value Chain), a Section 8 organisation, was established specifically to close the gap Vishalakshi identified between training and enterprise ownership. The Foundation works at the intersection of women's entrepreneurship, climate-resilient agriculture, millet revival, food processing and value addition, livelihood generation, community capacity building, nutrition, and sustainable value chain development, moving deliberately beyond isolated training

programmes toward complete entrepreneurship ecosystems that enable women to build genuinely viable and sustainable enterprises.

## Impact and Reach

Through Millet Bank and VISV Foundation together, Vishalakshi's work has trained more than 460 rural women in millet-based food processing and entrepreneurship in partnership with SERP, built market linkages connecting farmers, processors, artisans, and women entrepreneurs into a single integrated value chain, and designed and implemented Decode Millets, a workplace awareness initiative promoting healthy millet-based diets across corporate India. She has curated more than 40 millet exhibitions, demonstrations, and public installations across regional, national, and international platforms, and delivered keynote addresses and thought leadership at more than 100 national and international forums on indigenous food systems, climate resilience, and women's entrepreneurship. Millet Bank itself has grown from a startup with three products and three team members into an enterprise with more than 50 products, a 58-member team, distribution across 18 Indian states, and exports to five countries.

## Her Greatest Strength

Vishalakshi's greatest strength lies in her refusal to treat market-building and women's enterprise development as separate problems. By building Millet Bank into a genuine, scaled commercial market for millets first, she created the demand-side infrastructure that made VISV Foundation's women-led micro-enterprises commercially viable rather than dependent on subsidy, a combination that few millet-revival initiatives in India have achieved at comparable scale.

## Current Flagship Initiative

VISV Foundation is currently leading the Kuppam Millet Revival Project, a constituency-level food systems restoration initiative that integrates agriculture, women's entrepreneurship, local processing, nutrition awareness, and institutional consumption into a single place-based development model, demonstrating how women-led enterprises can become the foundation for healthier communities, stronger local economies, and climate-resilient rural development.

## The Road Ahead

Millet Bank is currently in its growth and scaling phase, with its next stage of development focused on expanding institutional partnerships, strengthening women-led micro-enterprises, scaling local

food system models, and making millet-based foods accessible to millions of consumers across India and global markets.

## Leadership Lessons

Vishalakshi's leadership philosophy rests on a single, clear idea: sustainable development cannot be achieved through isolated interventions. When women become entrepreneurs, farmers become suppliers, local communities become producers, and consumers embrace healthier foods, an entire food system begins to regenerate. Her work is therefore focused not merely on promoting millets as a commodity, but on building resilient local economies in which women become enterprise leaders, traditional knowledge creates modern value, and climate-resilient agriculture drives genuinely inclusive economic growth.

# Building India’s Most Trusted Traditional Food Brand

How Manjari Sharma Turned FarmDidi into India's #1 Pickle Brand While Building Livelihoods for Thousands of Rural Women



## Profile at a Glance

|              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME         | Manjari Sharma                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| CATEGORY     | Food Processing Entrepreneur • Agripreneur • Social Changemaker                                                                                                                                                              |
| ENTERPRISE   | FarmDidi (Missiondidis Private Limited)                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| KEY PARTNERS | Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and NGO partners across Maharashtra; Maharashtra State Rural Livelihood Mission (MSRLM); DRDO; National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM); Shark Tank India investors Peyush Bansal and Vineeta Singh |
| ESTABLISHED  | 2021–2022                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| LOCATION     | Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra (registered headquarters); operations originally centred in Pune and rural Maharashtra                                                                                                              |
| RECOGNITION  | Featured on Shark Tank India (secured ₹1 crore investment at a ₹20 crore valuation); recognised by UNDP, the Wharton Economic Forum, the Government of Maharashtra, and featured in NITI Aayog's Coffee Table Book           |

## From a Small Town in Haryana to a National Food Brand

Manjari Sharma was born in Bahadurgarh, Haryana, a region she has spoken of as shaped by difficult social realities around the status of women. Growing up watching her grandfather's active involvement in social service and community mentorship left a lasting impression on her, and by the time she completed her MBA at IIM Calcutta and moved into management consulting, she carried with her a persistent interest in doing something more directly connected to social impact than a conventional corporate career typically allows.

That interest crystallised into FarmDidi, which she founded alongside Anukrit Johari and Asmita Ghodeshwar. The company set out with a vision to build India's most trusted traditional food brand while creating sustainable livelihoods for one million rural women, and its mission centres on preserving India's culinary heritage by bringing authentic, handcrafted, preservative-free foods to consumers without compromising on quality, safety, or taste.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Manjari and her co-founders faced a challenge common to many enterprises built around home-based, artisanal production: how to scale a genuinely homemade product, one whose entire appeal rested on authenticity and a personal touch, without losing the very qualities that made it valuable to consumers in the first place. Rather than centralising production in a conventional factory model, which would have stripped away the “homely” character central to the brand's identity, the founders integrated technology into the system to manage orders, quality checks, and logistics, allowing them to maintain rigorous food safety

standards while keeping production genuinely decentralised across rural women's kitchens. A second, related challenge was building urban consumer trust in a product made across a dispersed network of home producers rather than a single controlled facility. The founders addressed this through hygiene audits, quality checklists, and batch-level traceability, all streamlined through digital systems, alongside a deliberate storytelling strategy that highlighted the women behind each recipe, helping build the confidence urban buyers needed to trust a genuinely homemade product at scale.

## Key Partners and Their Role

FarmDidi's model depends fundamentally on its partnerships with Self-Help Groups and NGOs across Maharashtra, which provided the existing women's networks through which the company could recruit and train its “Didis,” the rural women producers at the heart of its supply chain. The company has also formalised its institutional standing through an MoU with the Government of Maharashtra to work with self-organised groups, and has built relationships with the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihood Mission (MSRLM), DRDO, and the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM), giving it institutional backing well beyond a typical consumer food startup. Its appearance on Shark Tank India proved a further turning point: Peyush Bansal and Vineeta Singh jointly invested ₹1 crore for a 10 percent equity stake, a deal that both provided growth capital and gave the brand's social mission national visibility.

## A Decentralised Model Built Around Rural Women

Through its decentralised manufacturing model, rural women entrepreneurs, whom the company calls “Didis,” produce premium pickles, chutneys, and traditional spice mixes that meet modern

quality standards, enabling them to earn dignified incomes from within their own villages rather than requiring migration to urban centres or centralised production facilities. According to the founders, Didis working with FarmDidi can earn a monthly income in the range of ₹5,000 to ₹10,000, a meaningful and steady supplement to household income for many participating women.

### Impact and Reach

Since its founding, FarmDidi has empowered more than 2,200 rural women across multiple states, and earlier company disclosures put the number of villages reached at more than 40 across rural Maharashtra alone. The company has served over 4 lakh customers, built a fast-growing national food brand, and become the #1 pickle brand on Amazon, with products now available through its own website, major e-commerce marketplaces, and quick-commerce platforms. In 2024, FarmDidi raised more than ₹7 crore in seed funding specifically to grow its online presence and expand its impact to more than 5,000 rural women.

### Her Greatest Strength

Manjari's greatest strength lies in treating technology and tradition as complementary rather than competing forces. Rather than industrialising production to achieve scale, in a way that would have sacrificed the authenticity central to the brand, she and her co-founders built a digital layer of quality control, traceability, and logistics around a genuinely decentralised, home-based production model, allowing FarmDidi to scale nationally while keeping its actual manufacturing rooted in individual women's kitchens.

### The Road Ahead

FarmDidi's long-term mission remains ambitious: to empower at least one million rural women entrepreneurs and become one of India's most respected food brands. The company continues to expand its product range, professionalise its kitchen protocols and quality systems, and strengthen its network of rural women makers, building toward a future in which its decentralised model can scale well beyond its current base in Maharashtra.

*“FarmDidi aims to empower one million rural women entrepreneurs while building one of India's most trusted food brands.”*

### Leadership Lessons

Manjari has been clear that FarmDidi's success is not a story about a single founder but about a collective effort. As she has put it, the brand's journey does not take one person but an army, an acknowledgement of her co-founders, the women entrepreneurs who make up FarmDidi's “Didi” network, and the wider ecosystem of SHGs, NGOs, and government partners that support the brand. This orientation toward shared credit and collective impact runs through the company's public identity: by combining technology, strong quality systems, and rural entrepreneurship, FarmDidi is demonstrating that a business can scale profitably while creating meaningful social impact, rather than treating commercial growth and rural livelihood creation as competing priorities.

### Case Study 24

# Bringing the Soil Lab to the Farm Gate

How Dr. Sudha Karbari is Building India's Largest Decentralised Soil Testing Network



### Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                     |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | Dr. Sudha Ramesh Karbari                            |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Climate Champion • Agri-Tech Innovator              |
| ENTERPRISE     | ArkaShine Innovations Pvt. Ltd                      |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Agricultural universities and research institutions |
| LOCATION       | Bidar, Karnataka                                    |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2021                                                |

## From Nanoelectronics to the Farm Gate

Dr. Sudha Karbari's path into agriculture was not one she had planned. As an electronics engineer and researcher with a PhD in Micro and Nanosciences, her early career was rooted in deep-tech research rather than farming, but through direct work with farming communities she reached a realisation that would redirect her career entirely: the foundation of food security lies in the soil, yet millions of farmers make fertiliser and crop decisions without any scientific soil information, because conventional soil testing remains expensive, slow, and difficult to access in rural areas. This conviction led to the founding of ArkaShine Innovations Pvt. Ltd. in 2021, a deep-tech agritech company built on the idea that scientific soil health management should be a right rather than a privilege reserved for those with access to distant, slow laboratories.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Running a deep-tech startup brought its own set of demands. Sudha found herself balancing technology development, business growth, and extensive field travel simultaneously, pressures that tested her personally as much as professionally. Rather than trying to manage perceptions around a young, ambitious technology company, she focused deliberately on execution, prioritising product performance and building strong ties with research institutions, non-governmental organisations, and farming communities as the foundation for credibility, choosing to let results speak rather than respond directly to scepticism.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Sudha credits farmers as her most important teachers throughout ArkaShine's development, alongside institutional partners including agricultural universities, research organisations, incubators, and implementation partners, whose scientific validation and mentorship helped turn an early idea into a working, field-ready product. These relationships gave ArkaShine the technical credibility it needed to move from prototype to a commercially deployed system trusted by farmers and institutions alike.

## SoiLENZ: A Laboratory in the Field

At the heart of ArkaShine's offering is SoiLENZ, a portable soil laboratory that delivers laboratory-grade, 14-parameter soil analysis with AI-powered fertiliser recommendations in just 15 minutes, directly at the farm gate, with no need for a central laboratory. The technology combines indigenous hardware, proprietary chemistry, and artificial intelligence, and is protected by 14 patents, four of which have already been granted, alongside seven commercialised indigenous technologies. What sets ArkaShine's model apart, in Sudha's words, is that the company does not simply sell diagnostic devices; it delivers a complete Soil Testing-as-a-Service system, combining personalised fertiliser advice, crop suitability analysis, and local guidance delivered through a trained network of rural entrepreneurs.

## The Soil Partner Model: Technology Meets Rural Livelihoods

ArkaShine's most distinctive innovation is not technical but structural: the Soil Partner initiative, through which Village Level Entrepreneurs are trained and certified to deliver

soil testing services in their own communities, working under a 50:50 revenue-sharing model. This embeds the technology directly within rural economies, creating sustainable local livelihoods while bringing scientific soil testing to farmers who would otherwise have no access to it, and the model has proven especially valuable for women, who have found new roles as trained soil testing professionals and entrepreneurs through the programme.

## Impact and Reach

ArkaShine has deployed 15 SoiLENZ systems across six states, reaching thousands of farmers through its Soil Testing-as-a-Service model. To date, the company has reached around 4,000 farmers and directly benefited around 500 women, engaging 20 members across 60 villages, with a turnover of ₹15,00,000 and employment for 10 people. Sudha points to the journey of one of ArkaShine's Soil Partners as a strong illustration of the model's impact: a local farmer who became a certified soil testing entrepreneur, now providing scientific soil diagnostics and advice to hundreds of farmers while building a livelihood of his own, and whose success has encouraged neighbouring villages to adopt scientific soil testing as standard practice before every cropping season.

## Her Greatest Strength

Sudha's greatest strength lies in combining deep technical expertise with a genuinely inclusive delivery model. Rather than treating rural distribution as an afterthought, she built the Soil Partner network as central to ArkaShine's design from the outset, which has allowed a sophisticated deep-tech product to reach the last mile in a way that most agritech innovations, built with technology alone as their focus, typically fail to achieve.

## The Road Ahead

Sudha's plans extend well beyond ArkaShine's current footprint: to build a nationwide network of soil labs in the field by deploying thousands of SoiLENZ systems through Soil Partners, making rapid soil diagnostics available to every farmer in the country. Her ambitions reach further still, toward expansion into global markets and the construction of what she describes as the world's largest decentralised soil health network for sustainable and regenerative agriculture. She sees the next decade as one in which women increasingly lead decentralised agricultural services, digital farming, and value addition, provided they receive the technology, finance, and support needed to take on those roles.

*“Sudha envisions a future where technology, healthy soils, and women-led innovation drive sustainable agriculture at scale.”*

## Leadership Lessons

For Sudha, the most important leadership lesson from building a deep-tech agricultural company is that innovation succeeds only when people believe in it, a belief that has shaped her focus on building strong teams, nurturing partnerships, and keeping farmers at the centre of every decision. Dr. Sudha Karbari's work shows how deep scientific expertise, paired with an inclusive, community-based delivery model, can turn a basic agricultural bottleneck, access to soil information, into a scalable engine for both technological advancement and rural livelihoods.

# Building the Infrastructure Layer of the Forest Economy

How Dr. Manisha Oraon is Turning Non-Timber Forest Produce into Sustainable, Community-Owned Enterprise



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                                                                |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | <b>Dr. Manisha Oraon</b>                                                       |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Agripreneur • Social Changemaker • Agri-Tech Innovator                         |
| ENTERPRISE     | The Open Field                                                                 |
| KEY PARTNERS   | NSRCEL–IIM Bangalore; ABIF–IIT Kharagpur; WRI Land Accelerator India; CCS NIAM |
| LOCATION       | Ranchi, Jharkhand                                                              |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2023                                                                           |

## From Dentistry to the Forest Economy

Dr. Manisha Oraon's path into agriculture and food systems began, unexpectedly, in a dental clinic. Her career started as a dental surgeon, working to make quality healthcare accessible in remote and underserved regions through Paroksha Foundation, the non-profit organisation she founded, and since 2014 she has worked extensively with tribal communities in Ladakh and Jharkhand. While providing healthcare, she realised that many of the health challenges she encountered were deeply connected to poverty, poor nutrition, and the lack of sustainable livelihoods, and that treating illness addressed only the symptoms, while improving livelihoods could address the root causes.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

One of the biggest challenges Manisha faced was being taken seriously as a young woman leading a business in rural and forest landscapes, where leadership is often perceived as a male role, and whether engaging with government officials, buyers, investors, or community institutions, she often had to work harder to establish credibility. Another challenge was balancing multiple identities: as a dentist transitioning into agriculture, food systems, and entrepreneurship, she had to constantly prove her expertise in sectors where she did not come from a conventional background, while building trust with tribal communities and earning the confidence of corporate partners and policymakers simultaneously, all in remote forest areas with limited infrastructure and limited access to finance and technology.

Manisha overcame these challenges by staying deeply connected to the communities

she serves and letting impact speak louder than assumptions. Instead of trying to scale quickly, she focused on building trust through consistent fieldwork, listening to community needs, and delivering measurable results, continuously investing in her own learning and seeking guidance from mentors while building collaborations with government agencies, research institutions, incubators, and private sector partners who shared her vision.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Manisha's journey has been supported by her family, especially her husband, alongside friends, colleagues, and a dedicated project team who stood by her through uncertainty. She has also been fortunate to receive guidance from mentors and institutions including NSRCEL–IIM Bangalore, ABIF–IIT Kharagpur, WRI Land Accelerator India, and CCS NIAM, along with various government departments, which have provided mentorship, incubation, and opportunities that strengthened both her leadership and the growth of The Open Field.

## An Integrated Infrastructure Model for Forest Produce

The Open Field builds the infrastructure layer for the forest economy by integrating decentralised processing infrastructure, digital intelligence, and market systems for forest-dependent communities. It strengthens non-timber forest produce value chains by enabling local processing through AYAN hubs, generating field intelligence through Forest OS, and connecting communities to reliable institutional buyers, working with tribal and forest-dependent communities across Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh to transform fragmented forest produce supply chains into organised, traceable, and commercially viable enterprises.

## Impact and Reach

The Open Field began with small, community-level efforts to improve the value of indigenous foods and forest produce, and over time this work grew into a structured enterprise operating across multiple districts in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, engaging more than 1,500 forest-dependent producers across value chains including Mahua, Chironji, Jamun, Tamarind, Jackfruit, Sal seeds, and native rice. The organisation has reached 1,500 farmers and directly benefited 880 women, with all 1,500 members actively engaged across 35 villages, generating employment for 20 people and recording a turnover of ₹48,00,000 in FY 2025–26. Manisha points to Suman Khandulna, from Bhagiya village in Khunti district, as a powerful example of how the right support can unlock local leadership: Suman traditionally collected Mahua and other forest produce but had limited opportunities to earn beyond selling it raw, and through training in scientific collection, processing, quality management, and value addition, she quickly emerged as a committed community leader who now organises local collection and processing activities and motivates other women to participate in forest-based enterprises.

## Her Greatest Strength

Manisha's greatest strength is her insistence on building infrastructure rather than simply running a single supply chain. By investing in decentralised processing hubs, a digital intelligence platform, and buyer linkages simultaneously, she has created a system that other forest-produce enterprises can plug into, rather than one that depends entirely on her own organisation to function.

## The Road Ahead

The Open Field's goal is to build a nationwide network of forest-produce value chains by expanding its AYAN micro-processing hubs, Forest OS, and buyer-linked market systems, working with more forest-dependent communities, strengthening women-led enterprises, and creating transparent, climate-resilient value chains for non-timber forest produce. In the long term, Manisha wants to build a globally recognised model where indigenous knowledge, technology, and entrepreneurship come together to improve rural livelihoods while conserving forests.

“*Manisha envisions a future where indigenous knowledge, technology, and women-led enterprises drive sustainable livelihoods and forest conservation.*”

## Leadership Lessons

Manisha has learned that leadership begins with listening and earning trust, and that lasting change cannot be imposed from outside but must be built with communities and shaped by their knowledge and priorities. She has learned to remain patient, adapt when plans do not work, and make difficult decisions without losing sight of the larger purpose, believing that a good leader does not need every answer but must build the right team and create space for others to lead.

## Case Study 26

# Drone Didi: Scaling Precision Agriculture Across Ayodhya

How Shabina Khatoon Turned a Government Drone Scheme into a Thriving Custom-Hiring Enterprise and a Training Network for Rural Women



## Profile at a Glance

|              |                                                                                  |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME         | Shabina Khatoon                                                                  |
| CATEGORY     | Agri-Tech Innovator • Agripreneur                                                |
| ENTERPRISE   | Integrated Polyhouse Farming and Drone-Spraying Custom Hiring Service            |
| KEY PARTNERS | Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Ayodhya; NAMO Drone Didi Scheme, Government of India |
| ESTABLISHED  | 2020 (polyhouse); drone enterprise under the NAMO Drone Didi Scheme              |
| LOCATION     | Sandwa Village, Mawai Block, Ayodhya District, Uttar Pradesh                     |

## Choosing Agriculture Over a Conventional Career

Shabina Khatoon comes from a farming family in Sandwa village, Mawai block, Ayodhya district. Despite holding a university degree, she consciously chose agriculture over a conventional salaried job, driven by a clear vision of becoming an independent agri-entrepreneur rather than following the more predictable path her education might have opened for her. She initially practised conventional subsistence agriculture, earning an annual income of only ₹2.00–2.50 lakh, a level of return that reflected the limits of traditional farming methods rather than any lack of effort on her part.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Despite her educational background, Shabina faced several real constraints in her early years, including limited capital, inadequate exposure to scientific farming practices, and social hesitation toward women adopting technology-driven agriculture in her region. Her transformation began through regular, sustained engagement with Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Ayodhya, which provided her with technical guidance, growing confidence, and direct exposure to modern agricultural innovations she would otherwise have had little access to. A major turning point came when she was registered under the Government of India's NAMO Drone Didi Scheme through KVK support and received an agricultural drone free of cost, an intervention that proved genuinely transformative and opened entirely new avenues for enterprise and leadership.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Ayodhya, has been the central institutional partner throughout Shabina's transformation, providing not just the technical training behind her polyhouse

cultivation but also the pathway into the NAMO Drone Didi Scheme itself. The scheme's provision of a free agricultural drone removed what would otherwise have been a prohibitive capital barrier, allowing her to build an entirely new service line without the upfront investment that typically constrains women entering agri-tech enterprise.

*KVK Ayodhya and the NAMO Drone Didi Scheme enabled Shabina to launch her agri-tech enterprise.*

## Building an Integrated Enterprise: From Polyhouse to Drone Services

In 2020, Shabina established a 2,000 square metre polyhouse, adopting recommended scientific packages of practices for the cultivation of capsicum, strawberries, and seasonal vegetables. Protected cultivation allowed her to achieve higher productivity, superior quality produce, and more efficient use of water and inputs than open-field farming would have permitted. Alongside crop production, she began using agricultural drones for pesticide and herbicide application in crops such as pigeon pea, oilseeds, sugarcane, and horticultural plantations including banana and mango, crops where manual spraying is genuinely difficult due to crop height and dense canopy.

Recognising the clear demand for this technology among neighbouring farmers, she expanded into offering drone-spraying services on a custom-hiring basis across villages in Ayodhya district, charging a nominal fee of about ₹400 per acre. Her services gained popularity quickly, owing to reduced labour costs, precision application, time efficiency, and visibly improved crop health compared with manual spraying.

## Impact and Reach

Shabina's integrated agri-enterprise currently generates an annual gross income of ₹8.00–10.00 lakh, with a net income of ₹5.50–6.50 lakh, compared with her earlier earnings of ₹2.00–2.50 lakh, a nearly fourfold increase that demonstrates clearly the economic impact of KVK-led technological intervention combined with government support. She earns ₹4,000–5,000 per spraying operation, with substantially higher income during peak agricultural seasons, and generates additional revenue through farmer trainings, on-field demonstrations, and awareness programmes for rural youth. Her initiative has also created seasonal employment opportunities, particularly for local women, through their participation in drone demonstrations, training programmes, and peak-season operational support. Beyond her own enterprise, Shabina has trained 80 women farmers in drone operation and application in agriculture, and has specifically trained six women from her village Self-Help Group as “Drone Didis” in their own right, who now independently operate drones and provide spraying services in farmers' fields, a genuine milestone in women's participation in technology-enabled agriculture rather than a one-off individual success.

## Her Greatest Strength

Shabina's greatest strength lies in recognising a genuine, unmet service need, and building a repeatable, replicable business model around it rather than treating the drone as a personal convenience. By pricing her services accessibly and training other women to become “Drone Didis” themselves, she converted a single government scheme benefit into a scalable, women-led service network across her district.

## Market Linkages and Recognition

To promote her drone-based services, Shabina effectively used social media platforms alongside banners and posters, significantly enhancing her visibility at both district and state levels. Farmers now fondly recognise her as “Drone Didi,” a title that has come to symbolise women's leadership in modern agriculture across the region. Her farm produce, including vegetables and strawberries, is marketed directly to local vendors, wholesalers, and end consumers, including bulk orders for weddings and social events, a direct, market-oriented approach that ensures better price realisation while minimising marketing risk.

## The Road Ahead

Shabina envisions building a strong network of “Drone Didis” who can confidently and independently deliver drone-based agricultural services at the grassroots level across a wider area than she alone can currently reach.

## Leadership Lessons

Shabina Khatoon's journey demonstrates clearly how the convergence of Krishi Vigyan Kendra support, government schemes, and women's leadership can drive sustainable agricultural development, rural entrepreneurship, and inclusive growth. Her transformation, from ₹2.00–2.50 lakh in subsistence-level annual income to a diversified enterprise generating up to ₹10 lakh gross, alongside 80 women trained and 6 independently operating as fellow “Drone Didis,” shows how a single, well-targeted technology intervention, when paired with sustained institutional support, can compound into a genuinely community-wide transformation.

# From a Locked Door to a Movement of 65,000 Women

How Archana Gokul Mane Turned Personal Hardship into a Statewide Rural Empowerment Movement



## Profile at a Glance

|                |                                               |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| NAME           | <b>Archana Gokul Mane</b>                     |
| KEY FOCUS AREA | Social Changemaker • Agripreneur              |
| ENTERPRISE     | Manjiri Sakhi Producer Company                |
| KEY PARTNERS   | Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP); Pani Foundation |
| LOCATION       | Dharashiv, Maharashtra                        |
| ESTABLISHED    | 2017                                          |

## A Childhood Cut Short, A Crisis That Changed Everything

Archana Gokul Mane's story begins with hardship rather than opportunity. Married while still in the 10th standard, she was forced to leave her education behind, and a year into her marriage she gave birth to a daughter under conditions made dangerous by her village's lack of transport and poor roads, since the family's difficult circumstances meant private vehicles and private hospitals were simply out of reach. Two years later, her infant son fell seriously ill at just one and a half months old, and Archana did not have ₹150 for his treatment, forcing her to borrow money at interest just to take him to a government hospital. The family's home, three sheets of tin without even a proper door, reflected how precarious their situation was.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

It was in the aftermath of this crisis, lying awake through the night, that Archana resolved to act, not only for her own family but for the women around her and the conditions of her village as a whole; her own family, at first, did not support her stepping outside the home. Around this time, Swayam Shikshan Prayog was running a training programme in her village, but Archana did not even have her family's permission to attend the sessions, and it took her six months of persistent effort to convince her household to allow her to participate. In 2009, she joined SSP as a farmer-member, and within six months had been recognised as a leader within the organisation.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Swayam Shikshan Prayog gave Archana her first structured platform for leadership, providing the five-day training on women's health that launched her work training 4,000 women across 35 villages, and later supporting

her in establishing the Manjiri Sakhi Producer Company in 2017. Separately, the Pani Foundation's watershed conservation programme gave her a formal channel through which to direct her community's collective labour toward water security, an area she had identified as critical to her village's long-term resilience.

*“With strong institutional support, Archana transformed leadership into lasting impact, empowering women and building resilient rural communities.”*

## Building a Movement Village by Village

Archana completed a five-day training on women's health and went on to train 4,000 women across 35 villages on health awareness, travelling on foot for distances of four kilometres at a stretch with no vehicle available, and never giving up despite the physical demands. When her village submitted a proposal to the Gram Panchayat for a proper road and received no response, she escalated the matter to the Panchayat Samiti, and when that too failed, she organised a group of fifty women, hired a tempo, and travelled to the Collector's office in person; three years later, the road was sanctioned.

## Responding to Crisis: The One Acre Model

In 2014, a severe drought struck her district, driving many men in the region to suicide, and Archana responded by training women in supplementary, farming-linked businesses, teaching them how to stand on their own feet financially. She developed what she calls the One Acre Model, planting 25 to 30 different crop varieties across a single acre so that if one crop failed, another would still succeed,

protecting the household from total dependence on any one harvest, and following this training, women began running four to five separate businesses alongside their farming.

### Impact and Reach

Between 2009 and 2026, Archana has trained 65,000 women and brought 20,000 women into farming and allied agricultural businesses, and has helped more than 1,000 women secure loans totalling ₹1 crore, along with providing 270 women with ₹5 lakh worth of equipment such as farm medicines, sewing machines, and chutney-grinding units. Her training has reached village, district, state, and national levels, and she has represented this work in three other countries. She personally contributed 50 days of shramdan, or voluntary manual labour, to the Pani Foundation's watershed programme, under which her community built 7 farm ponds, 72 continuous contour trenches, and 36 earthen bunds, and she now runs four agriculture-linked businesses of her own, with a combined turnover of ₹10 lakh.

### Her Greatest Strength

Archana's greatest strength is her refusal to separate material support from dignity and recognition. Throughout her work with

widowed, deserted, landless, and marginal women farmers, she has insisted on formally recognising them as farmers in their own right and connecting them to government schemes designed for farmers, a combination of practical assistance and social recognition that has proven far more durable than material support alone.

### Recognition

Archana has received 39 awards and holds more than 70 certificates spanning village to national level recognition, a body of recognition that reflects nearly two decades of continuous, wide-ranging community work.

### Leadership Lessons

Archana's journey has taught her that people follow what you do, not what you say, and that change in a village is slow and cannot be forced, but must be won over one person at a time. She has also learned that a leader does not need to know everything, only to be willing to learn and honest when she does not know something, and that a leader's ultimate job is not to remain the only expert but to make others capable so that the work continues even without her.

### Case Study 28

# Reviving a Forgotten Crop

How Jashodaben Ravjibhai Parmar Brought Ragi Back to the Fields and Kitchens of Anand District



### Profile at a Glance

|                     |                                                                                   |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NAME                | Jashodaben Ravjibhai Parmar                                                       |
| CATEGORY            | Agripreneur • Climate Champion                                                    |
| KEY PARTNERS        | Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA),<br>Kheti Zumbesh (Agriculture Campaign) |
| LOCATION            | Village Sanjya, Taluka Petlad, District Anand, Gujarat                            |
| INITIATIVE LAUNCHED | 2022 (SEWA's Forgotten Crops Initiative)                                          |

## A Farming Family, a Forgotten Grain

Jashodaben Ravjibhai Parmar comes from a farming family where ragi had been cultivated for generations, using seeds carefully preserved by her father. She had always continued growing this traditional crop, but for most of her life she knew little about its nutritional value or its real potential to improve her family's livelihood. That changed through SEWA's Forgotten Crops Initiative, launched in 2022, which introduced her to the idea that ragi is a climate-resilient, highly nutritious millet capable of strengthening the health of women, children, and elderly people while also supporting more sustainable agriculture.

As a member of the Self Employed Women's Association, a women-led organisation that empowers poor self-employed women through collective strength and sustainable livelihoods, Jashodaben became part of SEWA's Kheti Zumbesh, or Agriculture Campaign, working alongside other women farmers to revive forgotten crops and strengthen local food systems.

## Challenges Faced and How They Were Overcome

Jashodaben's biggest early challenge was the low productivity of the traditional ragi variety her family had always grown, combined with a broader lack of awareness among farmers about the nutritional and economic value of millets. Many women in her community had lost confidence in growing these forgotten crops altogether, and convincing others to try something that had gradually disappeared from local farming was not an easy task.

With guidance from SEWA, she took part in a varietal trial on her own farm during the Kharif

2024 season, comparing her traditional ragi variety against improved varieties under identical growing conditions. The results were striking: Gujarat Nagli 9 produced nearly double the yield of the traditional variety, rising from about 20 mann to 40 mann per vigha, (≈ approx 9.3 t/ha), while also offering better nutritional value. Rather than keeping this knowledge to herself, Jashodaben openly shared her experience, invited other women farmers to visit her field, and encouraged them to learn through direct demonstration rather than instruction.

## Key Partners and Their Role

Jashodaben's technical progress was shaped significantly by SEWA, which strengthened her knowledge through training, technical guidance, and field demonstrations, and by agricultural scientists from the Waghai Research Station, who provided the scientific backing for the varietal trials conducted on her farm. Her own family also played a foundational role: the traditional ragi seeds she used as her baseline for comparison had been preserved by her father over many years, connecting her scientific trial directly to her family's agricultural inheritance.

## A Farmer-Led Model of Innovation

What distinguishes Jashodaben's work is that it combines traditional farming knowledge with scientific research, and is led by women farmers themselves rather than depending only on external recommendations. Instead of simply accepting outside guidance, she tested and demonstrated improved practices on her own farm, learned directly from the results, and then shared what she learned with other women. This farmer-led approach helped restore a forgotten crop, improve nutrition, strengthen climate resilience, and inspire many women to adopt sustainable agriculture together.

## Impact and Reach

The increase in yield from Gujarat Nagli 9 raised potential income from approximately ₹10,000 to ₹20,000 per vigha, demonstrating that a traditional crop could also be economically rewarding. Since the initiative began in 2022, it has grown from a small demonstration involving 25 women farmers into a genuine community movement for reviving forgotten crops. Following the success of Jashodaben's varietal trial in 2024, 25 more women farmers began cultivating ragi themselves, and the initiative has since reached 50 women farmers across 2 villages, with women actively conserving traditional seeds, adopting climate-resilient farming practices, and cooking nutritious millet-based foods such as rotla, khichdi, laddus, and upma for their families.

Beyond the numbers, Jashodaben has seen women regain confidence in cultivating traditional crops that were once disappearing from local farms, growing a nutritious, climate-resilient crop at lower cultivation cost while improving both household nutrition and farm income. Women have also become knowledge leaders in their own right, sharing seeds, experience, and farming practices with one another, and strengthening collective learning and food sovereignty within their communities.

## Her Greatest Strength

Jashodaben's greatest strength lies in her use of her own farm as a living demonstration rather than relying on argument or instruction to persuade others. By running the varietal trial on her own land and inviting other women to see the results for themselves, she built trust in a way that no amount of outside advocacy could have achieved, allowing scepticism about a forgotten crop to give way to genuine enthusiasm within a single growing season.

## The Road Ahead

Jashodaben wants to encourage more women farmers to cultivate ragi and other forgotten crops, conserve traditional seeds, and improve household nutrition through millet-based foods. She hopes to continue sharing her experience with other women so that, together, they can build stronger, more climate-resilient farming communities and help restore traditional food systems for future generations.

*“Jashodaben envisions a future where women farmers revive traditional crops, strengthen nutrition, and build climate-resilient communities.”*

## Leadership Lessons

Jashodaben has learned that true leadership begins with learning, experimenting, and sharing knowledge with others, and that when women see results on another woman's farm, they gain the confidence to try new practices themselves. In her view, leadership is not about working alone; it is about bringing people together, building trust, and creating opportunities for everyone to grow. Her message to aspiring women farmers, entrepreneurs, and changemakers is direct: believe in your own knowledge and never hesitate to learn something new. Traditional wisdom is valuable, and when combined with scientific knowledge, it can create lasting change. Start with what you have, work collectively, and share your experience with others, because when one woman succeeds, she inspires many more to move forward.





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For more than 130 years, CII has been engaged in shaping India's development journey and works proactively on transforming Indian Industry's engagement in national development. With its extensive network across the country and the world, CII serves as a reference point for Indian industry and the international business community.

In the journey of India's economic resurgence, CII facilitates the multifaceted contributions of the Indian Industry, charting a path towards a prosperous and sustainable future. With this backdrop, CII has identified "Accelerating Competitiveness: Growth, Resilience, Inclusion, Sustainability, Trust" as its theme for 2026-27, prioritising five key pillars. During the year, CII will align its policy advocacy, institutional initiatives, partnerships, and outreach to support Indian industry in strengthening these five interconnected pillars of competitiveness.

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FACE is CII's Centre of Excellence dedicated to building efficiencies across the agricultural value chain from farm to fork. FACE is charged with the mission of improving competitiveness of India's agriculture and food sector by catalyzing innovation, building capacity and enhancing productivity across the value chain. FACE works with farmers, companies, development institutions and the government to

- Improve on and off-farm productivity through the dissemination of best practices and technological innovation
- Invest in capacity building initiatives and skill development for supply chain participants across the value chain
- Strengthen linkages across the value chain through market access initiatives, thereby reducing losses and increasing farmer incomes

FACE's service portfolio comprises commodity specific value chain assessments and supply chain advisory services for food and agri businesses, training and consulting services in the area of food safety, and sectoral research across different market segments. FACE also works on projects in PPP mode, to develop business models that are scalable and replicable across geographies.

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