

Story of women leadership in sustainable agriculture

Chivri village, Osmanabad, Maharashtra

Chivri is a small village situated near Tuljapur in Osmanabad district. Agriculture is the main source of income for the community. Due to high use of chemicals in agriculture, changes in climate and over utilisation of water for cash crops like sugar cane affected the community badly. They face water scarcity and drought situation every year. This led to low output in agriculture as well as income. Water for drinking and irrigation is another serious problem in the village.

How the changes happened



Vanita

To address these issues, SSP mobilised women groups to learn innovative practices to implement in the village. It was not easy in the beginning. Women Federation leaders like Godavari and Leela used to visit this village and try to mobilise women groups to address the issues faced by the community. But the community was not interested to do any activity apart from normal savings in SHGs.

But Godavari did not give up the idea of motivating and transforming the village. She used to visit and in one occasion she invited women groups to participate in an agriculture fair organised by Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Tuljapur in 2013. The fair was jointly organised by Women Federation, Tuljapur and KVK. The event was an exhibition organic agriculture products cultivated by women groups and learning and sharing events among the groups. The event was also recognition of women groups from KVK as change makers in local development.

Four women including Vanita Manshetty and Amarja Tai had participated in the Krishi Melava and found interesting on the collective initiative started by women groups in agriculture from other villages. This has prompted the leader Vanita Manshetty to think seriously to do something in the village. The same night around 11 pm Godavari got a call from Vanita saying that they need to form women farmer group in the village. Godavari was surprised by Vanita's call and her encouraging voice.

Vanita Mansetty – The leader from the village

Vanita is a leader in the village who took initiative to form Krishi Mahila Mandal and implementing sustainable agriculture activities. Earlier they were doing agriculture with lots of chemicals fertilisers. Now they reduce chemicals thru using cow manure and in the field. She has 5 cows and it is sufficient to get manure for the cultivation.

She did soil testing on her land at KVK, Tuljapur. Based on the result and scientists advice, she prepared land with balanced organic manure. Vanita also started preparing local seeds to use in her own field. Seeds of Tur, soyabean, green gram, red gram, urid are some she preserve and use.

She has cultivated Kala Chena in half acre last year and got good profit. This year she got 50 quintal of Kala chena. There is an increase of 4 quintals due to proper planning in farming by her.

Vanit says, "Normally in one acre we get only 1 quintal. But thru organic inputs we got 4 quintal now."

She believes vegetable cultivation is the most important activity that rural women should take. The reason she says, "It gives you regular income, cash comes in your hand and it is healthy to eat. Vanita got a profit of Rs. 2000 from the cultivation of palak, tomato, kothambir, mrchi in 3 gunte. The expense was Rs. 5000 for seeds, labour and organic fertiliser.

Learning visits

Women groups attended various trainings organised by SSP and KVK in regular intervals. This has opened an opportunity for women groups to experiment new agriculture practices in their own land.

As a learning enthusiast and active leader, Vanita visited Latur, Kolhapur, Barabangi to learn new practices in February and March 2015. Women groups also went to Kolhapur to see 1 acre model of agriculture. They found 80 varieties in 1 acre with no chemicals. They tried to do the same kind of initiatives in their village.



"Learning and teaching should be always there to make changes within the community". - Amarja.

Impact

Awareness programme organised by SSP has helped women groups to do adaptive agriculture practices. After the change, women members are discussing health, nutrition and agriculture related activities in the SHG meetings. Through continuous interaction and learning they started thinking about how to produce local good quality of food crops to address food security and health.

According to a women leader "Whatever food needed by the household should start cultivating by themselves. These initiatives provide daily fresh vegetables, it increase nutrition status of the family, and get additional income."

Through vegetable cultivation, they get additional income and healthy food. Earlier they used to spend around 1000 rupees every year for health expenditure. Now it is being reduced to Rs. 500 and women's HB level is normal now.

“Our confidence increase when we see other leaders’ activities. If they do, why can't I? ask Vanita”.

With her leadership they have formed 20 groups in 2 neighbouring villages with 25 members. One major change in their life is shifting from chemical to organic practices. Now she can take own decisions on what to cultivate, use of money from vegetables.

She never went outside village till 2013. Now she is visiting various places to learn and share best practices. Confidence has increased as a leader and she is recognised by family for her efforts.

“I changed myself and my daughters also observing the change and they are proud about her activities. I am happy and my family is happy.” – Vanita.