# ECOLOGIC

## A WOTR NEWSLETTER

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# Adaptation in women's empowerment

## *Strategies for gender mainstreaming have to go beyond education and skill development*

Arjuna Srinidhi

Women's empowerment is a mainstay of WOTR's work. A cross-cutting priority, gender concerns are embedded in each and every activity. Traditionally, this has been addressed by building women's social capital and facilitating their empowerment by organising them into solidarity groups (SHGs). Interventions also extend to building women's capacity to address their and their children's concerns through health services and providing personal care advisories, literacy, numeracy and personality development training. It has also actively engaged men in creating avenues for effective representation in the decision-making bodies of the village.

**Loksatta Archive**

These interventions have had much success in gender mainstreaming and have helped women acquire livelihood and life skills to influence the economic and sustainable development pathways of their families and communities. However, as WOTR completes 25 years of work in Maharashtra and other semi-arid parts of India, we would like to step back and critically reflect on whether the same strategies will hold good for the future. In the context of changing circumstances, market influences, resource constraints, erratic climatic conditions and rising aspirations, etc., does women's empowerment stop at education, capacity building and skill development?

While traditional women's empowerment activities have focused on women's rights and responsibilities, they have not been able to level the playing field in terms of economic parity between the sexes. As a society we appreciate that that has economic value and which, despite any idealistic stand one might have, does equate to power in today's world. Education, sensitisation, capacity building are all no doubt very important, but we can't ignore the crude, but simplistic equation in society, money = power = empowerment. With this in mind, WOTR has been rethinking its traditional women's empowerment activities. While activities like organizing women into SHGs will continue, the new focus will be on providing financial and business development support to start and successfully manage micro-enterprises and create avenues of access to micro-insurance. Our objective is to ensure that every woman has a 'choice' of what to engage in based on preference and capability, and not just dictated by gender stereotypes or skewed economic dimensions of society.

In this issue, we bring to you five stories of women's empowerment - from taking initiative to solve social issues in the village, to revolutionising rice cultivation and collective efforts of men and women to shift to organic farming. We also have a final guest article that highlights the need for a market oriented approach in women's empowerment projects. We hope these will be thought provoking and prompt you to revert with feedback - on how we continue to evolve while embarking on the next phase of WOTR's engagement in sustainable development. ■

# Punishing a truant teacher

*Women unite to take action for sake of their children's future*

Harshal Khade I Birolipar, Madhya Pradesh

Birolipar is a small village in Pandhurna block of Madhya Pradesh, situated about 55 km from the district headquarters Chhindwara. With about 70 households and a population of about 300, the main occupation of people is agriculture. The main crops are paddy, maize and chickpea.

WOTR is implementing a project titled 'Watershed Development, Sustainable Agriculture and Livelihood Development' in eight villages of Pandurna Block, Chhindwara District of Madhya Pradesh. The project began in 2016 and has as its main activities– farm bunding, digging of wells, women empowerment through Self-Help Groups and organic farming (maize in kharif; chikpea and wheat in rabi)

Women empowerment was a part of the project, through which SHGs were formed. As is often the case in rural government schools in India, teacher absenteeism was a problem in Birolipar as well. Since December 2016, one of the only two teachers at the local primary school in the village was habitually absent.

In this village, the absentee teacher, according to local women, was a major problem as it affected the future of their children. He was a teacher of standard 1 and 2, which are crucial years for children. Seema Merskole, the secretary of 'Mahalaxmi SHG' and chairperson of School Committee tells us the story.

"Since agriculture is the main occupation in our village, many people migrate for work after the rabi season every year. In such conditions, good education for children in our village is essential for them to have the freedom to choose a career of their choice. Birolipar has a government primary school; it has classes from 1 to 5. The middle school is 3 km away from the village. There are around 45 students studying in the village school. The teacher has been deputed in the school since more than four years. The biggest problem with our school was that one particular teacher was habitually absent since his appointment four years ago.

"He used to come to school very irregularly and mark himself present even for the days he was not there in the school. Sometimes, he even used to take away the muster with him and didn't turn up next day to school. On such occasions, the other teachers had to take attendance of their classes on paper. First and second standard students were not learning anything. He would simply come once in 15 days and mark himself present and leave. This was not just an issue about one student, but of all the young children in the village. Many of the students have stopped their education after 5th standard because they were not able to cope up with the studies. We women in the village decided to put an end to his thoughtless behaviour which was costing students irreversibly. The women finally ran out of patience."

Merskole says, "After discussion among other women, I formed a surveillance team of 10-11 women each. I told the other teachers that now we were looking forward to solve this issue that was pending since December 2016. For three days, different teams used to go to school to check whether he was present at the school. The teacher didn't turn up on all three days. On the third day, we called the Education Department and requested them to come here to review the situation. Then we called on the Chief Minister's Helpline and informed them as well about the situation. The whole team from Education Department arrived quickly to look into the matter. We presented the facts about his teaching and how pupils were suffering because of this inept teacher."

"The team didn't hesitate to rebuke him with a stern warning and deduct three days salary. The teacher was even categorically asked if he was really capable of performing the duties of a teacher.

He was too ashamed to say anything and remained silent. He just said he would continue to work as a teacher," says Merskole. This incident has changed the attitude of the teacher. He now comes regularly and conducts classes on time. What is more significant is the change in attitude of women of the village.

Merskole says "We refuse to remain mute when something wrong is happening. Even in Village Development Committee (VDC) meeting or other meetings when faced with resistance from men, we don't give in and try to give our honest opinion and observations," she says. This successful intervention has made the women of Birolipar look towards a bright future. With a view to promote economic empowerment, Merskole says that in the future, the SHGs want to procure oranges and sell them. "The next step is for women to empower themselves economically. This incident has made us realize that with unity and determination, we women can achieve anything we want," she signs off. ■

PHOTO: HARSHAL KHADE

**Seema Merskole, secretary of Mahalaxmi SHG and chairperson of the school committee is at the centre**

# Revolution in rice cultivation

*Women play a pivotal role in promoting the SRI method of rice cultivation*

Vikas Prakash Joshi I Kamsanpally, Telangana

Manikyamma felt a deep sense of satisfaction when she finally harvested rice in the kharif season of 2017. Some months earlier, on the advice of Vardhan Patel, Agronomist at WOTR's Narayanpet office, she had decided to go in for cultivating rice on her plot of two acres of land under the System of Rice Intensification method (SRI) in Kamsanpally village of Telangana's Mahabubnagar district. Many other villagers had criticized her decision and expressed doubt about the SRI method. "I too had doubts about whether there was any point in taking up SRI. It seemed so different from the traditional methods. Besides, the other villagers made fun of me," she laughs and claps her hands cheerfully, as she talks to me in the courtyard of the village temple.

*What is SRI Farming?*

*SRI (System of Rice Intensification) is a system of cultivation that aims to increase and optimize benefits from usage of the limited available resources. It involves soil preparation and management, decreasing crop density per acre and appropriate crop spacing, systematic application of organic inputs and spraying micro-nutrients, and uses high quality seeds.*

However, 38-year-old Manikyamma says taking up SRI cultivation of rice proved to be one of the best decisions she has ever taken.

"Earlier, I had a production of 20 to 22 bags of rice (one bag of rice is around 40 to 50 kg). But under this SRI system in the kharif season, I am able to get around 25 bags of rice. My inputs have also decreased, from four bags of DAP (Diammonium phosphate) fertiliser to just one bag. I would say my expenditure which was around Rs. 15,000 per acre, has reduced to between Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 6,000," says Manikyamma. However, she admits that SRI requires more weeding and therefore can become time consuming.

Another such beneficiary under the upscaling of SRI is J. Narasimhulu Goud (62). He says "I grow paddy on one acre of the 5 acres I have. Under the traditional systems of rice cultivation, I used to get 20 to 25 bags from one acre of rice. Now under SRI, it's gone up to around 40 bags of paddy per acre in the season. I receive Rs. 700 to 800 per bag of paddy. Effectively, I now get Rs. 32,000 against the Rs. 20,000 earlier."

The reduction in expenditure and higher yields inspired many other farmers in Kamsanpally to take up SRI in the rabi of 2017. So much so, there was a huge rise in the area under SRI in the village from four acres to 87 acres between the kharif of 2017 and the rabi of 2017. While Manikyamma's success was a factor, Ravi Prasad Mekala, Project Manager in WOTR's Narayanpet office, explains there were other factors that caused this jump.

"In October and November 2017, there was a heavy storm in the village, where hailstones fell. It was observed that the SRI standing crop was relatively less damaged by the storm, as compared to the crops grown through conventional methods. A second factor was that we trained a team of women labourers in SRI techniques, who then taught other women and in turn other women learned from them. We created this team after observing that the burden of cultivating rice fell mainly on women. Third, though the SRI method, at least in this village did not lead to much higher yields, there is a significant reduction in expenditure. Farmers realized this and decided to adopt SRI in larger numbers. The total number of farmers under SRI has thus risen to 87 acres, one acre per farmer. "

Within India, WOTR has promoted the SRI method of rice cultivation in its project areas, especially in Telangana,

PHOTO : VARDHAN PATEL

**Manikyamma, in her field of rice grown through SRI methods of cultivation**

where a project in collaboration with the German development bank KfW the German Development Bank (The KfW) has focused on up scaling the area under SRI.

However, there are challenges to promoting SRI, points out J. Narasimulu Goud, a farmer. "I have planted SRI on one acre in the rabi and got 40 bags of paddy, versus the normal rate of 25 to 30. But in SRI mode of cultivation, the amount of weeds is also substantially higher and more time gets spent in weeding. The wider spaces results in higher weed growth. You need a cono-weeder machine for de-weeding, and in this village, there are only 14 such weeder machines for 87 people. This delays the de-weeding process and consequently the farmer loses some time."

Another challenge, pointed out by a farmer, Sivaiah Goud (55), is the lack of any premium for rice grown through SRI methods, which is grown using organic farming techniques. Goud, a farmer with 5 acres of land on which he grows rice, while praising the higher yields under SRI, says "In Narayanpet and around it, we don't get higher rates for organically grown rice. The nearest market is Hyderabad where there are stores which keep organic commodities but it takes 5 hours to reach there and not every farmer can take out time and spend money to go there regularly. There needs to be a marketing infrastructure to help the farmer go organic, if SRI methods are to be upscaled further."

Another hurdle to greater adoption of SRI is that while rice grown through organic methods does fetch a higher price, farmers need to maintain organic methods for three years to get an organic certification from the state government's Agriculture Department. This also means dealing with challenges like more time spent on de-weeding and labour charges.

On the whole though, farmers are quite happy with the SRI method of cultivating rice. They concur it has raised yields, and reduces expenditure and is more sustainable.

Ravi Prasad Mekala concludes "Hitherto, we focused on upscaling the area under agriculture. Going forward, we need to combine better farming practices, sustainable resource utilization and market linkages, through Farmer Producer Organisations for instance. If this is done, SRI will surely be successful in the longer term."

# Uniting to quench a village's thirst

*Self-help group gets borewell sanctioned for drinking water*

PHOTO: MOHAN DHULDHAR

**For the women of Padampur, water scarcity was a way of life before 2015**

Nilima Jorwar I Padampur, Maharashtra

The villagers of Padampur stood around the borewell with bated breath. The village women, in particular, waited keenly. The borewell drilling machine had been drilling for some time with no sign of water; the men jeered, whispering that the whole idea of drilling a borewell in this parched Marathwada village was lunacy. Just then, when the women were on the verge of giving up hope, a spray of water shot up into the air, at least 10 feet, and drenched everyone around it. For the women of Padampur, the moment was a fulfillment of all that they had worked for.

It is a cliché that big projects, like major dams, highways, airports and so on end up being built on the sacrifices of smaller communities. The case of the Jayakwadi dam in Aurangabad district of Maharashtra is no different. Over 70,000 persons were displaced by the dam according to media reports, which is today considered the lifeline of Aurangabad city. Some of those displaced by the dam, with the compensation they received from the government and their own meagre savings, bought land in the Gangapur taluka of Aurangabad district in the 1980s.

The village that they formed, which today has 47 households and 250 people, came to be called Padampur. For the last 30 years, acute water shortages were a never ending problem for Padampur village. The women share heart-rending stories of the suffering they experienced from water shortages.

Saira Nabab Sheikh, one of the village women, said "There were hardly three or four wells in our village of around 250 people. The whole village was dependent on those wells, which were owned by the money lenders in in the village. So we had to beg them for water or work for low wages on their fields. Lewd comments would be made against us by the owners of the wells. As these wells were the only sources of water, they felt they could say whatever they wanted."

Meerabai Shinde concurs saying "There were occasions when electricity would be

supplied at 11 pm at night, so women would rush to the pump and put on the motor. But water did not come so easily. There was a lot of arguments and many women would helplessly come back with their vessels empty."

Meerabai adds "When we come to the conclusion that we needed to drill a borewell, we realized that we needed to raise funds for the same. We decided to ask for contributions as everybody in the village was going to drink the water."

It was at this point in 2015, with support from the Becker Cordes Foundation, that WOTR started a health project in the village. The original aim was to focus on women's health, but the field staff quickly realized that water was the pressing problem of this village. "Clean and regular water supply is the foundation of good health. We realized that we needed to tackle this problem if we were to improve their health, else women would abandon health camps whenever there was an announcement of water being supplied," says Bhagyashree Moholkar, Officer, Women's Development and Health.

To raise money for it, the members of the SHGs in the village went from door to door, collecting small amounts of money. They were also sanctioned funds under the project taken up by WOTR. The total cost of the borewell was Rs. 1,34,000 of which the women collected Rs. 34,000 and WOTR, through the Mumbai-based Ammada Trust, contributed Rs. 1 lakh.

When drilling for the borewell started in May 2015, a number of village residents had gathered around the borewell drilling machine. The men, in particular, were skeptical of the idea. But at a depth of 60 feet, the borewell drilling machine struck water. A spout of water shot out into the air, drenching everyone around. What is truly remarkable is that generally, striking water at 60 feet is rare in this part of Maharashtra. Gopal Thakur, Programme Officer says with a smile "We asked experts from the Pune-based Groundwater Survey and Development Agency to take a look, but even they were unable to explain this miracle."

Gradually, thanks to this new borewell, the water supply in the village improved. Women no longer had to depend only on the wells of the money-lender and instead could come here. Taps, pipes were also laid to make it more convenient to access water while a tank was built to store water. Water supply in Padampur has become much more reliable as a result.

What is even more significant is that the villagers have maintained these facilities even after the project has ended in December 2017.■

*(Adapted and translated from Marathi by Vikas Prakash Joshi)*


PHOTO: MOHAN DHULDHAR

**A photo of the water tank, with taps, constructed in Padampur village of Aurangabad, Maharashtra**

# Alternate energy for pumping water

*Solar based drinking water system reduces drudgery*

PHOTO: ISHA FULETRA

**Women from Kadfala hamlet in Udaipur district talking about their water-related challenges of the past**

Isha Fuletra I Modwa, Udaipur

For decades, academic reports and media publications have talked about the plight of women across the world who travel miles every day to fetch water for their families, or the young girls who are forced to drop out of their schools due to lack of a nearby water source. The scenario was no different in the village of Modwa, in Rajasthan's Udaipur district until 2016. But a solar operated water system has ended this age old scenario and improved quality of life.

Situated near the majestic Aravalli mountain range of Rajasthan, the Modwa village houses 233 families. The village is divided in eight smaller hamlets. Even though almost each of these hamlets has had its own source of water in the vicinity, the water quality and availability is poor.

Kadfala, one of the hamlets of the village, houses twenty-five families of Gamiti tribe. To address their water-requirements, there was a well in the vicinity. The well was situated about 200 m away from the locality. The community has always preferred to use the water from the well for their personal as well as cattle's consumption. As a result, the women of the family, who were solely responsible for fetching water, had to make multiple rounds till the well. Wardibai, one of the eldest women of Kadfala, estimates that during the summer days she would have to make as many as ten rounds to the well.

She continues, "The walk itself wasn't very long at all, but what was painful was the task of fetching water from the well." She goes ahead to explain me that the well did not have a proper pulley system attached to it. The women would have to climb down the well using the stairway-like structure which was originally a series of rocks protruding out from the surface of the well's

walls. Not only were these steps slippery, but also did not provide a large enough surface to be able to walk safely and comfortably.

I was shocked when Bhuribai, another middle-aged woman from the locality, narrated how a few years ago she had slipped and fallen in the well. Fortunately, she could swim and thus, she was able to reach out to rocks and creepers on the well's wall. But others were not that lucky. There had even been a case of a child drowning a few years ago.

Another such story was reported from the Modwa main village which is a heterogeneous community of 33 households. Here, unlike Kadfala, the only source of water for this hamlet was a hand-pump located about 400 m from the locality on the side of a main road which connects the hamlet to the other hamlets, nearby villages and to Udaipur district. This meant that the women would have to make several trips to this spot to suffice all the needs of the family. Moreover, with no other source of water in the hamlet both men and women had no choice but to use this place for bathing purposes as well. The lack of privacy, especially for the women, was a big problem. Along with this, the hand pump was also the reason for a few major and minor accidents of the locals, especially the children, due to clashes with the motor bikes and carriage vehicles passing on the road.

To help address some of these grievances, there have been some attempts by the administration, like the installation of hand-pump near the main road in the Modwa hamlet village, but this did not make a big difference.

With the passage of time, the villagers felt there was a dire need to address the problem of drinking water in the village. With that in-mind, WOTR in 2016 decided to install a solar-operated drinking water system in both these hamlets. The financial help for this initiative was provided by Concern India Foundation, while each household in both these hamlets also donated Rs. 1,000 and four-days of labour work as their voluntary contribution. At time of installation, it was also agreed that the community would pay the maintenance expenses in future.

This newly installed system

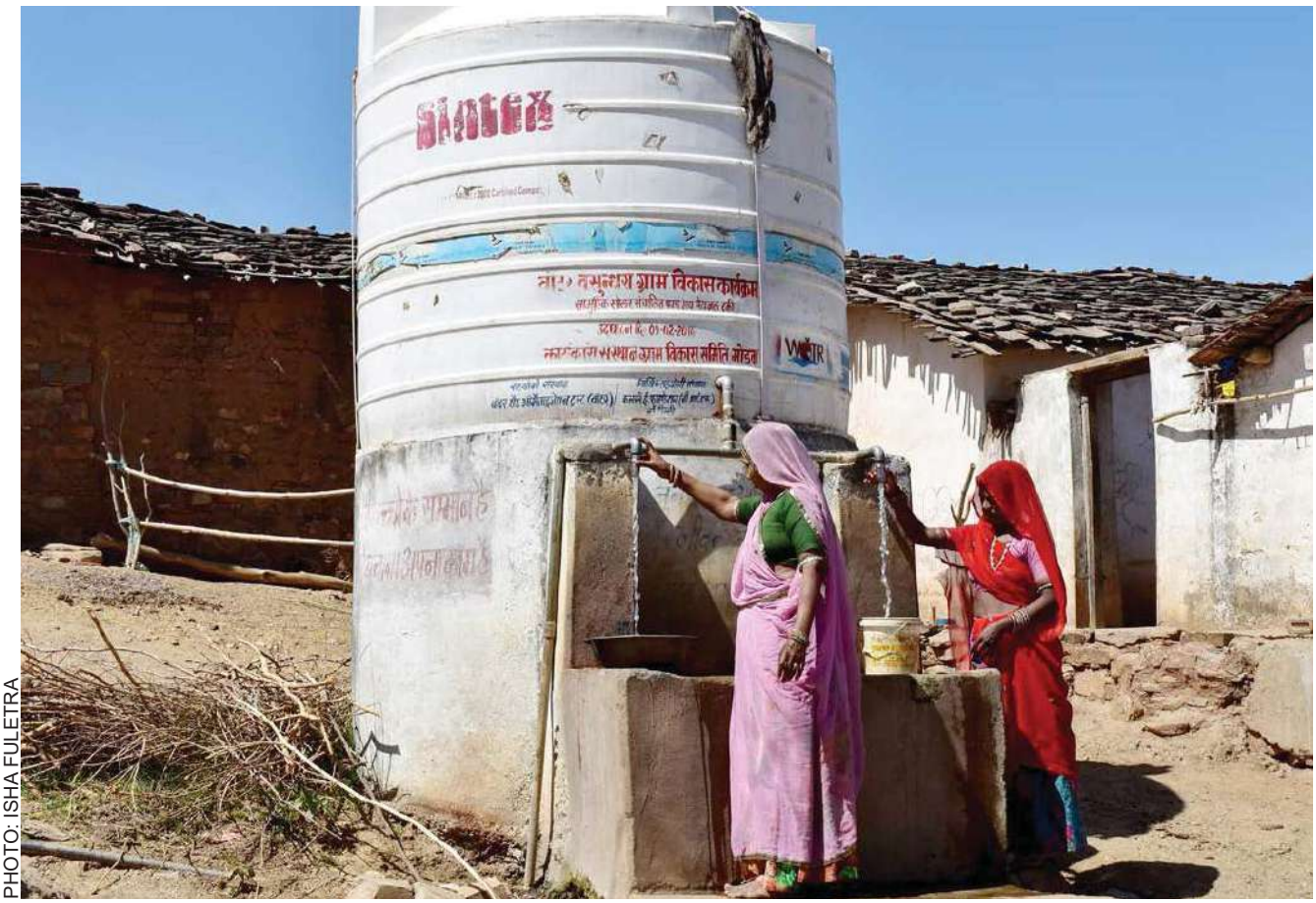


PHOTO: ISHA FULETRA

**Solar-operated drinking water system in Kadfala hamlet of Modwa village, Udaipur district**


PHOTO: ISHA FULETRA

**A drone shot of the water tank and solar panel in Modwa village, Udaipur district**

consists of a solar-operated fully-automatic motor pump which draws water from a nearby well and thus, keeps the overhead tank filled all the time. Alongside the tank, several taps have been installed which can be easily accessed by the community to fill their buckets and bottles. Also, a specific place has been allotted near the tank for cattle to drink water.

The impact of this novel initiative was evident to me in my very first interaction with a group of women from Kadfala. Not only does the initiative significantly reduces the drudgery of women in both the hamlets by simply reducing the walking distance, but also makes the water-source more accessible to men and children. In fact, now the children and men themselves fetch water.

Also, the allocation of a separate spot for the cattle to drink water maintains cleanliness and hygiene. But more importantly, the initiative has helped secure and safeguard the lives of locals of the Kadfala hamlet which otherwise were under fear of drowning in the well or that of a snake-bite. ■

# Agriculture goes organic

*Vermicomposting takes off in Maharashtra*

PHOTO: PRAGATI KHABIYA

**Mangesh Bharad, a farmer in Yesgaon village, Aurangabad holding carrots grown using vermicompost as fertiliser**

Vikas Prakash Joshi I Vadgaon, Maharashtra

Vijay Khamkar, a farmer in the small village of Vadgaon, Satara district, would often watch TV shows like *Amchi Maati Amchi Mansa* (Our soil, our people) and wonder what he could do as a farmer to help the environment, in whatever small way. "Such shows would always stress that farmers should take up eco-friendly and organic practices but I wasn't sure what exactly to do," he recounts to us. But in July 2017, his wife Seema Khamkar attended an agricultural demonstration by Watershed Organisation Trust on vermicomposting and advised him to follow the same. Since then, the couple have become enthusiastic advocates of this practice.

"I have 1.5 acres of land, on which I grow wheat, jowar and various crops. To give you an idea of the impact of vermicomposting, on 0.5 acres of land I could get generally 8-9 pothis or jute bags (1 pothi=100 kg) of wheat in the rabi season. But in the rabi of 2017, I got 10 or 11 such pothis. Farmers generally get Rs. 2,500 per 100 kg, so vermicomposting has definitely given us financial benefits," says Vijay with a smile.

## What is vermicomposting?

*Vermicompost (or vermi-compost) is the product of the composting process using various species of worms, usually red wigglers, white worms, and other earthworms, to create a mixture of decomposing vegetable or food waste, bedding materials, and vermicast.Vermicompost contains water-soluble nutrients and is an excellent, nutrient-rich organic fertilizer and soil conditioner. It is used in farming and small scale sustainable, organic farming (Source: Wikipedia)*

vermicomposting is a process of composting organic waste using earthworms. The resultant worm castings are rich in nutrients like nitrogen, potassium, manganese and calcium, which are all beneficial for crops. Despite this, farmers in the last 15-20 years in many parts of Maharashtra (and India) had shifted away from vermicomposting to chemical fertilizers.

But the growing awareness of the need to adopt eco-friendly practices leading to a change in the mindset of farmers, especially women farmers. Prithviraj Gaikwad, Researcher in WOTR's Agriculture team, explains why there was a focus on women farmers.

Prithviraj says "Apart from performing domestic duties, women are also responsible for agriculture activities like weeding, sowing and application of fertilizer. Using chemical based inputs to agriculture can eventually lead to hazardous residue left in agri-products later consumed by people and farm animals. We decided that if we want to popularize vermicompost as a more eco-friendly and healthier kind of fertilizer, we needed to get the support of women. Considering women tend to be home more than men, they could pay attention to the vermi beds. Women were already aware that organic agriculture is good for health, and hence enthusiastically supported us."

What is remarkable though that WOTR held just four demonstrations of vermicompost initially in four villages in the Beed Aurangabad, Ahmednagar and Satara districts in July 2016 and August 2017 respectively. From just 10 vermi beds, there are now over 800 vermi beds. Interestingly, farmers received no financial assistance.

Bhagyashree Moholkar, Officer, Women's Development and Health, explains why farmers got no financial assistance under this scheme. She says "Our experience shows us that people don't value those assets they get for free. So when we held demos in those four villages, we made it clear that we would not give any money. Instead Rs. 600 was collected as contribution from every farmer who was interested in vermicompost, to ensure they took it seriously."

One such beneficiary was Surekha Kadam, a farmer in the Wing village of Satara district. She works on the 5-acre farm of Ashatai Sudhir Mangre. Surekha asserts that while vermicompost has certainly reduced the expenses, we should be realistic and not expect any miraculous change in output.

"I use the vermi wash ( liquid by product of vermicomposting ) to spray on the *mirchi* and *bhindi* crops. In the past I would buy pesticides for the same, which would cost me around Rs. 1,500

PHOTO: GOPAL THAKUR

**An awareness programme being conducted on vermicomposting for women in Yesgaon village of Aurangabad district**

PHOTO: VIKAS PRAKASH JOSHI

**Vijay Khamkar explaining the benefits of vermicompost. Seen here is his vermi bed at his farm in Vadgaon village, Satara**

This was totally saved. If I talk about the disadvantages of vermicompost, one minus point is that it takes longer to harvest the crop," says Surekha talking about the financial incentive to carry out vermicomposting.

Another point highlighted by farmers practicing vermicomposting is related to the quality of the produce. "For example, onions grown on vermicompost take up to six months to harvest whereas with chemical fertilizers it can be done in five months. But the plus side is, in my experience, onions or other crops grown through vermicompost last for a longer time," says Surekha's husband, Khandu Kadam.

However, some farmers like Madhukar Barad from Yesgaon village of Aurangabad district have gone beyond using vermicompost as fertilizer and are selling vermi wash and worms commercially. Madhukar, who has four acres of land says "I sell earthworms at the rate of Rs. 150 per kg and I could sell 75 kg of worms last year. Vermicompost has thus made me an entrepreneur as well."

In conclusion, vermicompost has several advantages in terms of soil health, lower costs and eco friendliness. But for it to be more popular, farmers, more needs to be done. "Both the government and NGOs have tried to promote vermicompost. But the efforts have not paid off in many cases as farmers had no guidance on basic aspects like not using waste water in the vermi beds, controlling white grubs in vermi beds with biopesticides and covering the beds in times of rain. Second, we need to make long term investments, like cement vermi beds, and not just use the cheap plastic ones often promoted in agricultural schemes. If these are done, vermicomposting may gain even further in popularity," signs off Seema Khamkar. ■

*( with inputs from Preetilata Gaikwad )*

# Embrace a market oriented mindset

## *Non-profits must prioritise consumer needs*

Shilpa Mittal Singh

Over the last 70 years in India, women have made tremendous progress in every field, breaking hitherto impenetrable glass ceilings. There has also been a steady rise in women's education levels in both rural and urban areas. However, even today in the rural areas of our country women lack financial power. They do not have a voice. To truly empower women, economic empowerment is a must. This realization is what gave birth to Women on Wings in 2007.

We are all familiar with Lijjat Papad in Mumbai and SEWA in Ahmedabad, but there are other less publicised examples of organizations across the country, that are doing a lot for women empowerment too. In textiles and soaps, Rangsutra, Banyan Roots and Mandala come to my mind immediately.

To my mind, these show the potential of women's livelihood promotion. Individually, these women have no power; but at a collective level, they are able to empower themselves.

However, while it is commendable that women empowerment has become a priority for NGOs and the government, there are issues with the model that the NGOs tend to use.

The first missing element in the non-profit model is that they often lack a market orientation. For understandable reasons, the focus of many NGOs is on getting project funding and creating products without sensitivity to market needs. Once the project funding is over, the work of empowering women also stops. We often see products being made far beyond the demand for them. The women who make these products do not always understand why there is a particular cost price.

I strongly believe that for any women livelihood programme to be successful even after donor funding ends, it must take into account market needs. It is in this light that we at Women on Wings have a stringent criterion for choosing businesses to aid. We look at three things: the business must have scale; it must be in rural areas and aim at empowering women. We do a thorough assessment of the entrepreneur and their capability on these criteria before giving any assistance.

Second, in social enterprises generally there is a shortage of managerial capacity. This lack of capacity also adversely affects the success of rural businesses.

Third, the money that is flowing into CSR from companies and foundations is not always as well directed as it could be. While companies mean well, their efforts are limited to areas near their factories or industries and lack scale. To have bigger impact, companies need to come together and combine their efforts. Otherwise, even with huge expenditure, the impact is very limited.

When it comes to any enterprise, there are three critical elements that one needs: access to capital, access to human capital and market linkages. Any company must focus on all these aspects. These are, by and large, areas that need a lot of improvement for social enterprises and non-profits.

Despite the severe challenges outlined above, I see several big opportunities in the next 10 years or so, as far women empowerment and women entrepreneurship are concerned.

local level needs to be nurtured and developed. Bright young graduates of local colleges should be groomed to hold managerial positions in NGOs and 'Farm Producer Organisations' FPOs, rather than importing graduates from outside. Rising educating levels of women have created an unmet desire for white collar jobs in rural areas; hence, this could be a perfect way to kill several birds with one stone.

Second, big corporates like IKEA, Amazon and Walmart have made a conscious effort to source from small-scale producers and artisans. More companies are in the pipeline. This represents a golden opportunity for women artisans and non-profits working to enhance women's livelihoods. Of course, such producers would have to meet the exacting standards of these MNCs.

Third, the term 'women empowerment' has itself become a buzzword in the last 10 years, which is a positive thing. Both public and private sectors are placing emphasis on this concept. What is needed now is greater knowledge sharing within the non-profit community.

In conclusion, my extensive experience dealing with social enterprises from every corner of our country convinces me that there is a widespread and genuine desire to promote women empowerment through creation of sustainable livelihoods. There is also no shortage of funds. Non-profits and social enterprises must move away from a project driven, producer oriented mindset to one that is sustainable and consumer oriented. The future is bright for those who can pull it off. ■

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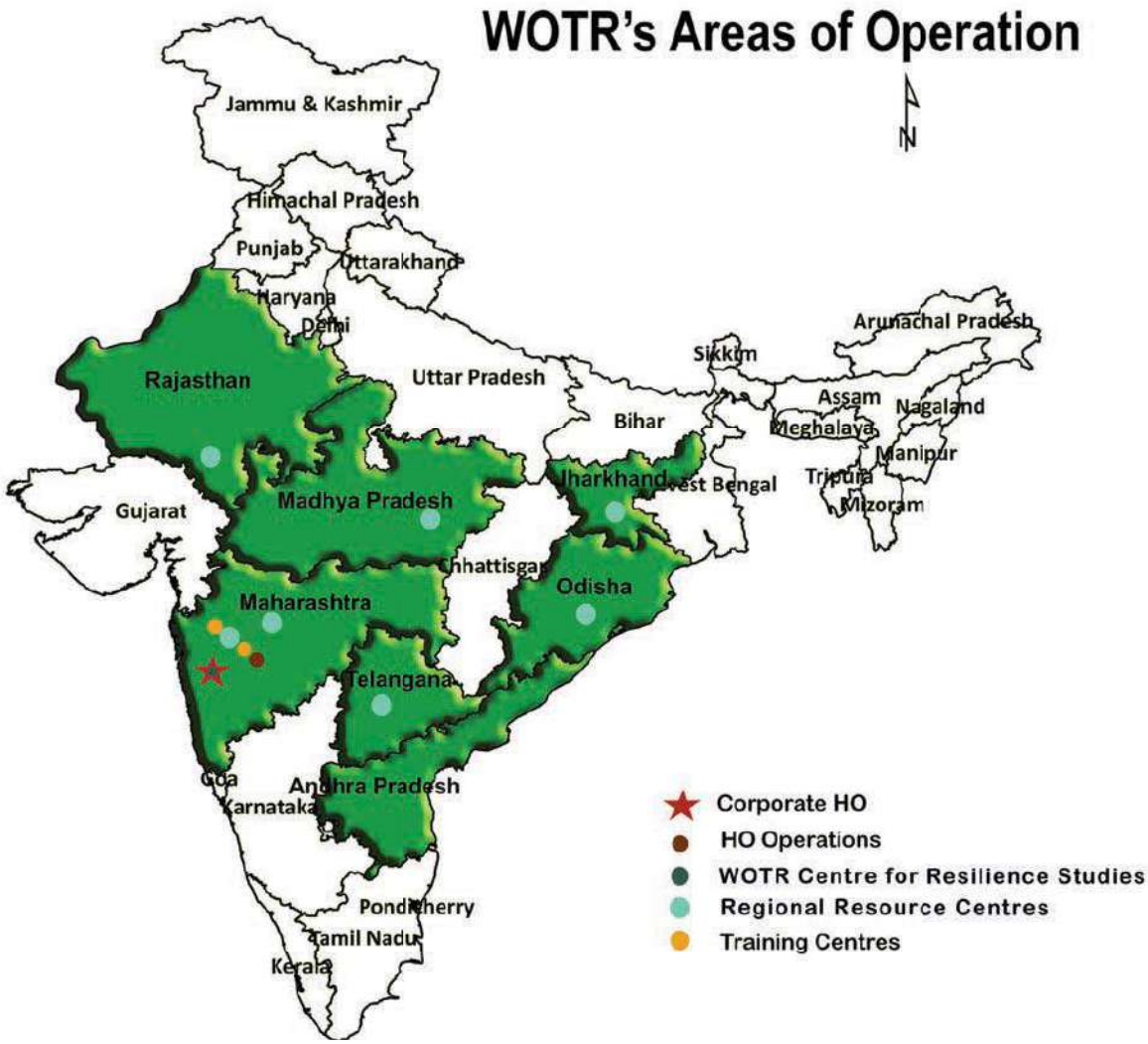
PHOTO: WOMEN ON WINGS

**The textile sector is a major employer of women, especially those from poor backgrounds**




Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR) is a globally recognized organization dedicated to transforming the lives of millions across India through participatory watershed development and eco-systems restoration, adaptive sustainable agriculture, integrated and efficient water management and climate change adaptation, with a special emphasis on building resilience of vulnerable communities, farmers and women. It was established in 1993 and is headquartered in Pune, Maharashtra India. WOTR's mandate is to reduce poverty through community mobilization for sustainable watershed development and integrated rural development. At present, it carries out rural development works in 2,922 villages in 7 states of the country, directly and indirectly benefiting 2.8 million people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