

Old School, New Leaves

Support to Agroecological Transformation Practices in India (SuATI)



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Welfare (MoA&FW), National Bank for Agriculture
and Rural Development (NABARD), Ministry of Rural
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Project timeline: January 2021 - June 2028



Budget: EUR 17.5 million



Locations: Hubli, Karnataka; Chattarpur and Sagar,
Madhya Pradesh; Assam

SDGs addressed:



“Our fields were tired and so were we. Year after year, we had been planting the same crops, using the same chemical fertilisers and pesticides and being disappointed by the same poor yield,” says Sharda Lodi, a farmer from Gugra village in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh.



In fields and kitchens across Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Assam, women are turning a new leaf by going old school. Using traditional methods of farming and nutrition, women farmers like Sharda Lodi are bringing change to their fields and their homes.

Sharda echoes the sentiments of countless subsistence farmers across the country, who grow enough to survive but not to thrive.

In 2021, however, through the Indo-German cooperation project ‘Support to Agroecological Transformation Practices in India (SuATI)’, women farmers like Sharda began to learn of the importance of diversifying their crops for the sake of the soil, and their health. With training, workshops and demonstrations, these women were encouraged to try growing crops other than wheat, soybeans and pulses.

“I remember being curious, but also cautious”, recalls Sharda. But after a few training sessions, I felt confident enough to begin. We received seeds to start us off, and in weekly meetings we were guided. We also learnt how to make organic fertilisers, natural pesticides, what to plant according to the seasons, composting and more. It was easier than I thought! Everything from cow dung for the fertiliser to neem leaves for pesticide, or seeds for the next crop is free and available to us.”

With this change in perspective, the fields began to change their colours. Where there had once been only golden waves or green swathes, patches of red and purple vegetables began to blush. Bright green spinach, cheeky tomatoes, and shiny brinjals of deep purple began to be seen in the fields and their kitchens.



“Our plates are a lot more colourful now,” says Sharda. We can see the effect of these newly nutritious meals: our children are bursting with energy, just as our vegetables are with flavour! And with the switch from chemical fertilisers and pesticides to organic, our health has improved too. Instead of falling sick once or twice a month, it has reduced to only once or twice a year.”

The women farmers of Sagar now grow enough vegetables to sell in the market, along with leftover home-made fertiliser. Even those who don't have enough land to grow vegetables add value to their lentils by making and selling *pappad* (Indian cracker), *vadas* (deep-fried fritter), and other savouries. "We all wanted to work hard and move ahead but now we finally see a way to do it; a way to ensure that our children lead more enriching lives than we do," smiles Sharda.

With agricultural practices transforming fields, societies too begin to change. "As a Champion Farmer, I not only recommend sustainable agricultural practices but also encourage other women to join the group," says Sharda.



"My husband and mother-in-law are wonderfully supportive, helping with meals and taking care of the children whenever I have to work. Soon people everywhere will realise that when women grow, they carry their villages on their backs!"