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CHANGEMAKERS OF AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

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Registered offices
Bonn and Eschborn, Germany
Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resource Management Programme
A2/18, Safdarjung Enclave
New Delhi 110 029 India
T: +91 11 4949 5353
F: +91 11 4949 5391
E: info@giz.de
I: www.giz.de/india

Responsible
Rajeev Ahal
Director, Natural Resource Management and Agroecology, GIZ India
E: Rajeev.ahal@giz.de

Authors

SuATI project, GIZ India
Namerta Sharma, Senior Team Leader (State Implementation)
Sravani Reddy Avula, Junior Advisor
Manoshi Chakrovorty, Junior Agriculture Advisor

Contributions from
Rythu Sadhikara Samastha (RySS)
Sahaja Samrudha
Sanjeevini - Karnataka State Rural Livelihood Mission (KSRLM)
Wayanad Social Service Society (WSSS)
Odisha Millets Mission (OMM)
Society for Upliftment of People with People's Organization and Rural Technology (SUPPORT)
Manav Vikas Seva Sangh (MVSS)
Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN)
Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development (SPWD)
Indo - Global Social Service Society (IGSSS)
Gramya Vikash Manch (GVM)
Grameen Sahara
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CHANGEMAKERS OF AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION



MESSAGE BY SRI N.CHALUVARAYA SWAMY`

**Hon'ble Minister of Agriculture,
Government of Karnataka**

I am indeed very happy to know that the SuATI project, GIZ India in association with our Department of Agriculture, Government of Karnataka is commemorating the International Day for Rural Women 2023 in Bengaluru on the theme “RURAL WOMEN CULTIVATING FOOD FOR ALL” and the World Food Day on the theme “WATER IS LIFE; WATER IS FOOD”. The focus of the Green Revolution era-led policy efforts in India was to increase the production and productivity of major crops through intensive agriculture methods, leading to serious concerns about the degradation of soil health and depletion of water tables. Further, climate change looms large, threatening

food security and limited natural resources like land and water. A deep challenge also lies in bringing gender equality and resolving social inequities in farming sector.

The development agenda in agriculture needs to evolve from a focus on output growth to include aspects such as sustainability, input use efficiency, safe and nutritious food, efficient supply chains, mainstreaming gender concerns, secondary agriculture, marketing, export and ensuring farmers income. Over the last two decades, Karnataka witnessed 14 droughts from 2000 to 2019 indicating ‘feminisation of the agriculture sector’, a

trend that encapsulates the changing role of women in agriculture – now assuming the roles of cultivators, laborers , and entrepreneurs in the area of precision farming, processing, value addition and marketing. Recognising and supporting women farmers is key to food and nutrition security. Our late president Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, renowned as the Missile Man of India and a distinguished scientist and educator, emphasised on the importance of empowering women in the agriculture sector. I am happy that we are celebrating International Day for Rural Women to commemorate his birth day.

The Government of India has launched multiple initiatives to promote sustainable agricultural practices such as the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati (BPKP), the National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare (MoA&FW) at the state and central level offering support to farmers transitioning to natural farming. Likewise, the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY - NRLM) under the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) promotes women-friendly sustainable agroecological practices and sustainable livelihoods for women collectives.

The state of Karnataka is a pioneer in the country to announce the Karnataka Organic Farming Policy and again revising the same in the year 2017 for promoting

sustainable agriculture and conserving natural resources. Further, to promote building of soil organic carbon and to mitigate climate change effects, the state has been implementing various schemes such as SAVAYAVA SIRI, RAITHA SIRI, MILLET PROMOTION, KRISHI BHAGYA, KRISHI NAVODYAMA etc. In this regard, the state has formed 15 regional organic federations and stands fourth in terms of total organic certified production.

In the present context, we must work in harmony with nature and need to connect children with nature. This initiative of the coffee table book by the SuATI project, GIZ in India is a step in the right direction as it takes the readers through the journey of hardships and subsequent triumphs of inspiring women farmers as they navigate towards agro-ecological transitions. I hope, this initiative will empower women in agriculture, generate awareness, promote adoption, and instill confidence among the farming community and all the stakeholders towards resilient and equitable transitions.



MESSAGE BY MS. UTE RIECKMANN

**Project Director,
Support to Agroecological Transformation Processes in India,
(SuATI), GIZ India**

Women are the backbone of food systems and make significant contributions to food security and nutrition at both the household and community levels. In countries worldwide, as mothers, caregivers, farmers/farm workers, women do most of the care and domestic work and protect families and communities, the soil, and the environment, with limited decision-making power and access to productive resources. The crucial role of women in agriculture often goes unacknowledged and remains invisible.

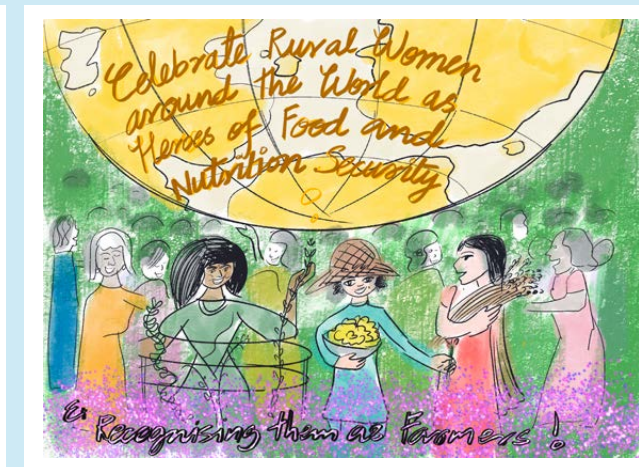
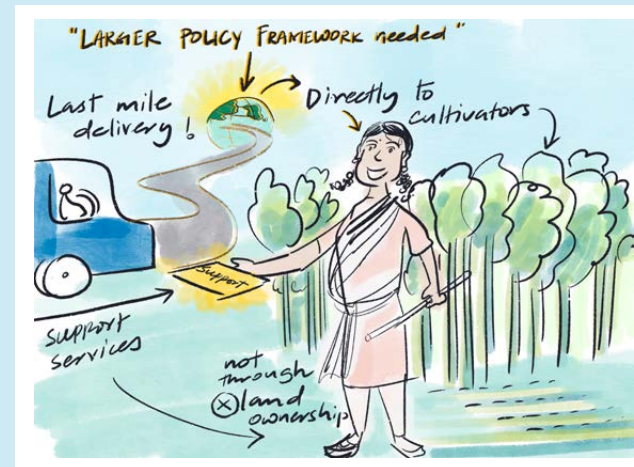
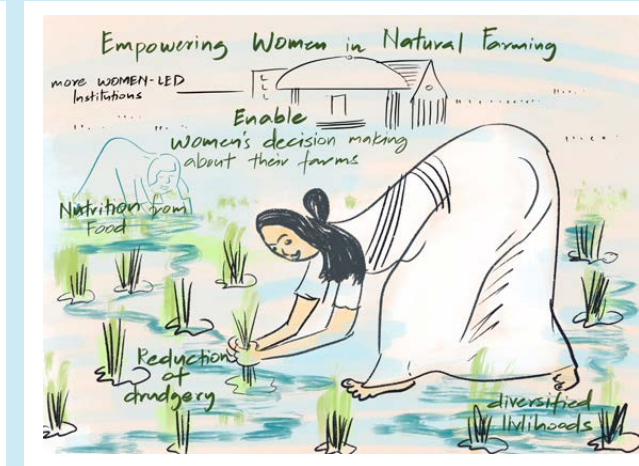
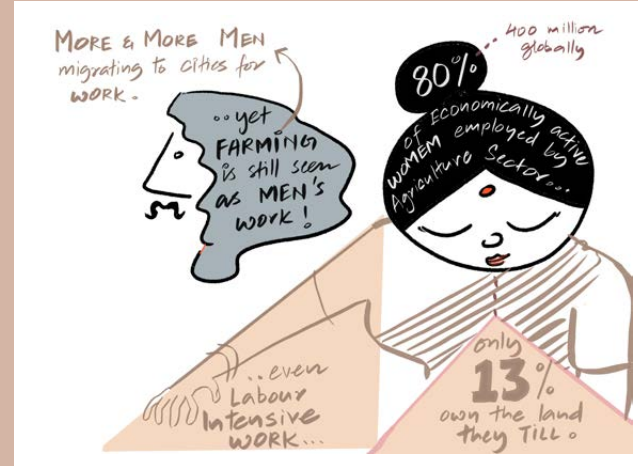
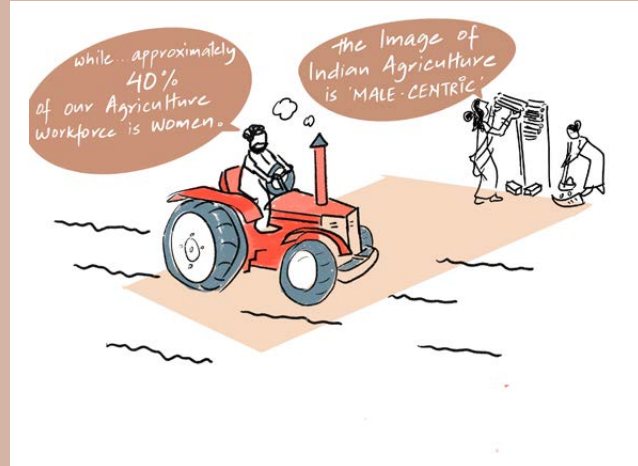
In the wake of highly complex, interlinked, and context-specific challenges in the agriculture sector, it is imperative to engage women and their social networks to accelerate food systems transformation around the world, and agroecology as an approach strengthens gender equality, enabling women to take control over their farming, acquire food autonomy and turn them into strong independent farmers of today.

The SuATI project underscores that the need for Gender Transformative Approaches are a significant aspect of agri-food systems transformation and strives to create opportunities to celebrate and promote inspiring stories of spirited champion farmers, women groups, and their federations in the realm of agroecology and natural farming. The project is implemented by GIZ India on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in cooperation

with the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoA&FW), the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD).

The coffee table book brings forth diverse experiences of women farmers across the country to commemorate the International Day of Rural Women on 15 October 2023. This book accompanies our initiative by showcasing women farmers as role models and change agents in the transformation process. I hope you enjoy their stories. This has been a collective exercise and a joint journey with our partners which has been quite enriching for the project. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to our partners for their valuable time, cooperation and generously sharing their knowledge which is reflected in the book.

As the world works towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which pledges to “leave no one behind,” there is a need for concerted efforts by all the stakeholders towards prioritising the needs of women farmers and ensuring holistic support in the form of policies, resources, and other actions to help level the farming field. Through our ongoing and upcoming initiatives under the Indo-German Development Cooperation, I hope we will be able to contribute much more to agroecological transformation and food systems development in the future.



RADHAMMA

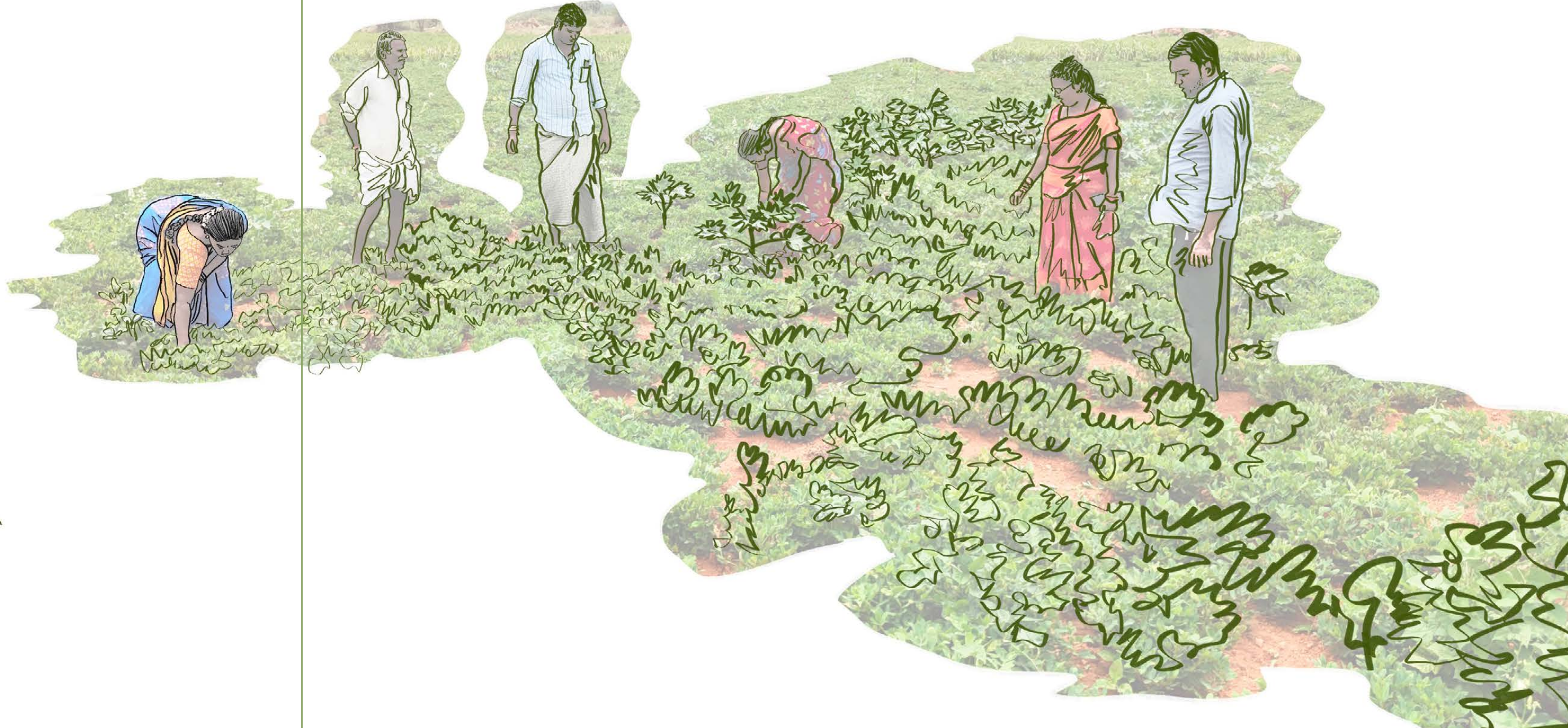
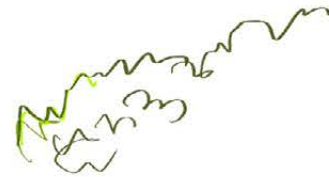
Sri Sathya Sai District, Andhra Pradesh

29-year-old Radhamma is a native of Ghantapuram village in the drought-prone region of Sri Satya Sai District in Andhra Pradesh. On the two acres of land that her family owns, she grows groundnut, pearl millet, broad beans, cluster beans, etc. Every day her family harvests two to three types of vegetables for household consumption and uses the silage of sorghum, maize, and pearl millet as fodder for her two cows, which depicts recycling and diversity at the farm level. She earns a monthly income of 18,000-20,000 INR from vegetables and milk.

Radhamma's transition into natural farming is a journey towards resilient production systems, reduced costs, enhanced incomes, and a healthier future for her and her family. She embarked upon this journey with the help of the Andhra Pradesh Community

Managed Natural Farming (APCNF) movement being implemented by Rythu Sadhikara Samastha (RySS) in Andhra Pradesh, which focuses on farmer-to-farmer extension approaches and farmer-led practices, models that help in tackling climate change, ensuring nutrition and income insecurity for farmers. "Seeing is Believing" for farmers and Radhamma, as a well-trained Community Resource Person, supports fellow farmers in villages with her demonstrations on the preparation of inputs and offers timely advice. To avoid pests and diseases to the crop, she relies on farm-based natural inputs like Beejamrutham, Ghanajeevamurtam, Dravajeevamurtham, and Neemastram and practices various methods like Pre-monsoon Dry Sowing (PMDS), relay sowing, 365-day green cover which ensures crop diversity and continuous income throughout the year.







© Rythu Sadhikara Samastha (RySS)



BERNA TATE

Baksa District, Assam

Berna Tate, who comes from a four-member family deeply rooted in agricultural practices, faced numerous challenges before the intervention of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Their traditional farming methods yielded minimal crops, and their simple life barely covered necessities. The villagers' lack of education hindered their adaptation to modern farming techniques such as using fertilisers and recognising different crop seasons. In 2016, two NGOs like SeSTa and Gramya Vikash Mancha stepped in to support farmers like Berna Tate. They provided practical trainings on vermicompost production and provided necessary tools and equipments. Gram Vikas Mancha also assisted with seeds, livestock, and vegetables.

They learned various skills, from betel nut processing to crafting utensils from tree bark, and even beekeeping and mushroom cultivation. Berna Tate became a symbol of success, inspiring nearby farmers to pursue agriculture with a newfound enthusiasm.

This transformation from struggling farmers to successful entrepreneurs illustrates that with determination, hard work, and a hunger for knowledge, anyone can overcome barriers to achieve remarkable success.





JANMONI RABHA

Kamrup Rural District, Assam

Janmoni Rabha, a resident of the small village of Kahuwa in Assam's Chhaygaon development block, embarked on a journey of empowerment through entrepreneurship. Faced with a low family income, she sought ways to improve their financial situation. Under a project by Grameen Sahara, Janmoni established a nursery for the promotion of black pepper and other horticultural crops.

She received training on natural farming practices, nursery development, vermicompost, and agricultural marketing. Recognising the demand for quality planting materials, her venture held great potential. Her husband, Mr. Ranjan Rabha, also supported her efforts. Her transformation began when she connected with a Grameen Sahara volunteer and decided to start a

horticulture-based nursery. Leveraging various project resources, she cultivated a range of crops on her two-acre homestead, including turmeric, black pepper, ginger, banana, areca nut, lemon, and seasonal vegetables. Her farm became a model for sustainable agriculture.

Her success earned her recognition as a dynamic woman entrepreneur with an income of Rs. 80,000 per month for horticulture and nursery crops. She attributed her success to natural farming practices, which increased yield, enriched soil quality, and reduced pest vulnerability. Her journey has made her a role model, inspiring others to explore alternative livelihood opportunities.



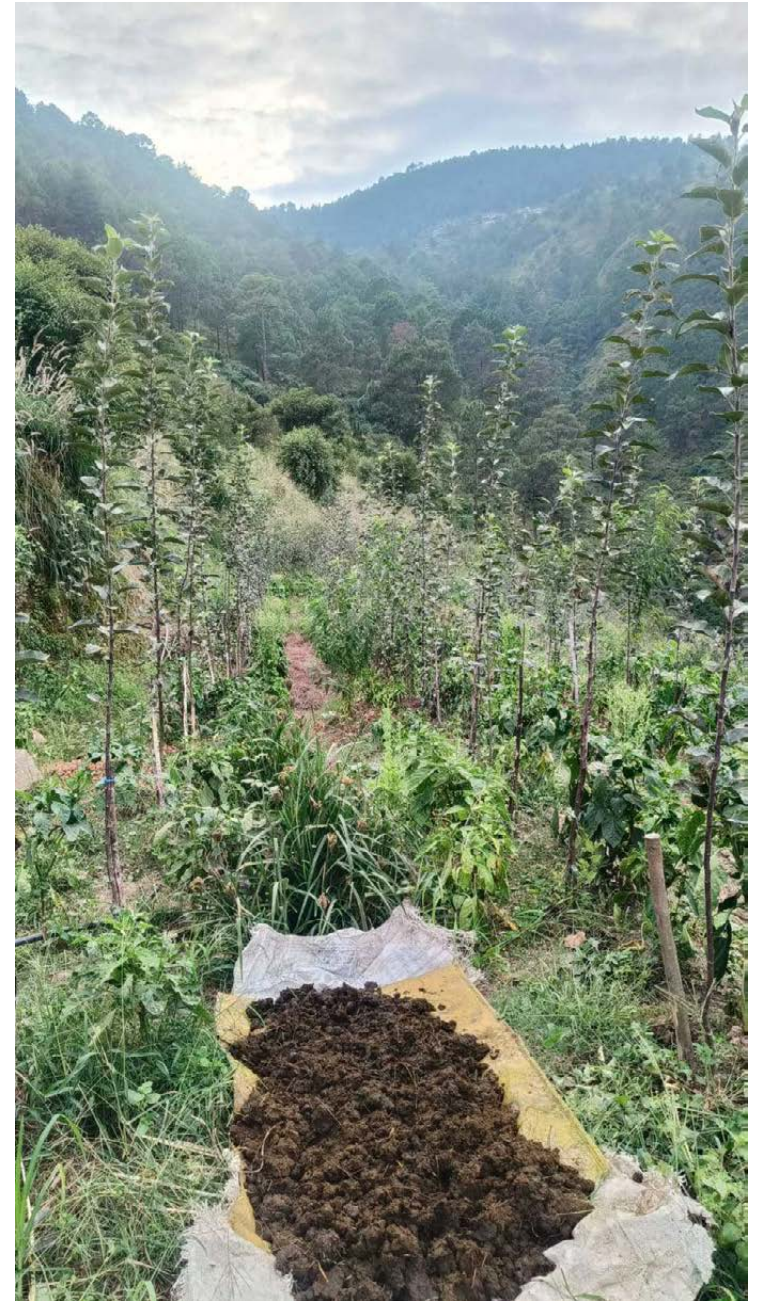
KALA DEVI

Himachal Pradesh

The pristine nature and hilly terrains of Himachal Pradesh offer a plethora of opportunities for natural farming. Farmers, especially women inherently practice principles of agroecology in Himachal Pradesh. One such farmer is Kala Devi, a 45-year-old farmer living in Kasrog Block, Mandi District. With three bighas (around 2 acres) of land under rainfed agriculture, she is currently growing a variety of crops like peas, garlic, french beans, finger millet, foxtail millet, proso millet, amaranthus, sorghum, apple, rajmash, maize, pulses, etc. Her field is a true replica of multi-cropping which enhances on-farm diversity, one of the key aspects of natural farming. The journey of Kala Devi started when she first attended a two-day training organised by the Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) on Subhash Palekar Natural Farming techniques (SPNF), through their extension officials – Block Technical Manager (BTM) and Assistant Technical Manager (ATM). Impressed with the benefits of natural farming and with the support of her husband, she practiced various components - such as jivamrit, ghanjivamrit, beejamrit, khatti lassi, agniastra, etc. in her field regularly and this boosted the yield of

crops and quality of crops. Her field is a model of demonstration for fellow farmers and is periodically visited by the Project Director, Deputy Project Director, ATMA, Mandi to take stock of the progress of the initiative, identify challenges, and devise pathways for sustainable and smooth transitions. Taking her learnings forward, Kala Devi actively promotes agroecology and natural farming, as a member of the Himachal Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture (HIMRRA) and is actively involved in the Save Seeds campaign run by HIMRRA. She is also a Board of Director (BOD) of an exclusive Natural Farming based FPO (Farmer Producer Organisation) - Karsog Natural Farming Producer Company Limited. As a master trainer, she shares her knowledge with the farming community in her block. She firmly believes that one should sow the seeds of knowledge on natural farming and agriculture in the minds of young generations and also takes time out to teach natural farming to children in schools. Her story shows that with access to knowledge and support, women are found to make decisions that are more desirable for the family, soil, and planet, beyond mere crop sustenance.







GEETA KUMARI

Mandu, Ramgarh, Jharkhand

Gita Kumari, 39, hails from the economically challenged village of Bongabar in the Mandu block of Ramgarh district, Jharkhand. Her family, consisting of her husband and daughter, faced the problem of subsistence farming due to their limited land holdings in the rainfed, infertile uplands of Jharkhand.

Gita, who had always resided in Bongabar, even after her marriage, initially relied on daily labor for income. However, in 2001, the Society for Upliftment of People with People's Organisation and Rural Technology (SUPPORT) organisation initiated a transformative intervention by forming a Self-Help Group (SHG) in the village. Over time, more women joined these groups, forming a thriving cluster in Bongabar.

In 2006, Gita joined a Self-Help Group (SHG) and actively engaged in activities such as savings and interlending. In 2013-14, SUPPORT launched the Mahila Kisan Sashatikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) under the Jharkhand Rural Livelihood Mission, promoting

dryland farming and sustainable agriculture. Inspired by Annapurna's model of farming, Gita embraced the opportunity and sought to implement it in her 50 decimal uplands. Despite initial skepticism from her husband, who agreed to her pursuit without financial support, Gita attended the training session and transformed her land into a demonstration unit of the Annapurna model. This method focused on horticulture, intercropping, and the use of natural compost resulting in reduced cost of vegetable cultivation with an annual income of 30,000 INR from the sale of vegetables alone. With guava and mango trees maturing over the years, her annual income increased to 50,000 INR. She adopted chemical-free farming practices, producing natural fertilisers and gaining a dedicated customer base in the local market. Now her husband appreciates her achievements, and she has become a respected figure in her village, actively participating in income-generating activities, leading an FPC, and promoting natural farming practices.



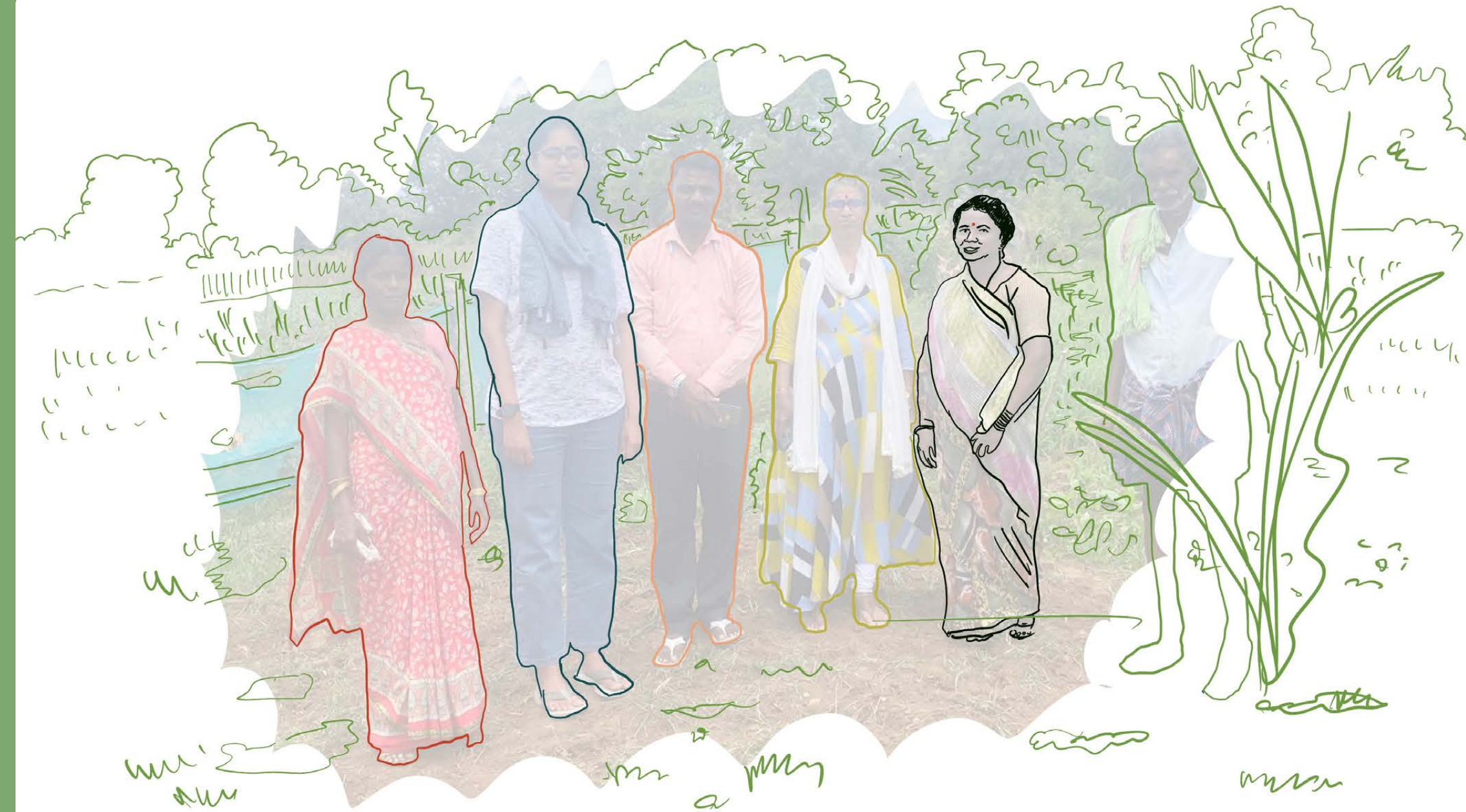


CHINNAMMA

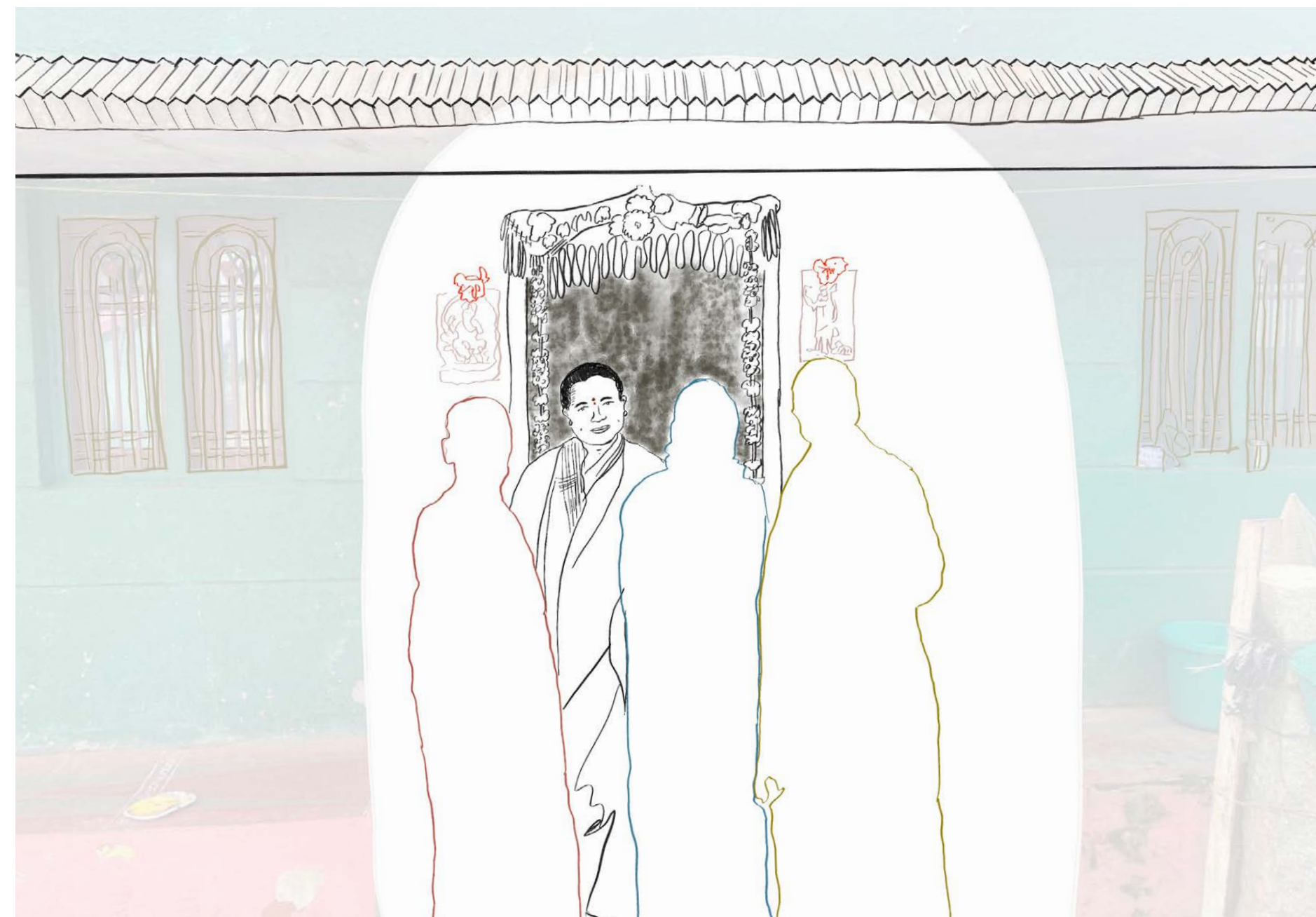
Mysore District, Karnataka

Nestled in nature, amid hills and lakes, Chinnamma hails from Heggadadevankote Taluk in Mysore District, Karnataka. Over one acre and 35 guntas piece of land, she along with her husband have been growing food crops such as millet, corn, pigeon pea, cowpea, horse gram, amaranth, etc. Despite the variety of crops, the returns were minuscule to meet their daily ends. However, life has changed in many ways for Chinnamma with the support from GIZ India under SuATI project in cooperation with the Karnataka-based civil society organisation Sahaja Samrudha. Under this cooperation, intensive hand holding was provided to Chinnamma and other farmers on agroecological-based production practices and agricultural marketing. To collectivise the produce and ensure economies of

scale among the farmers, women's self-help groups were formed in the village and Chinamma is one of the member farmers. Through this initiative, she has acquired various skills at the farm level – to manage her resources more efficiently and produce organically, while also becoming market-ready to sell her produce directly to consumers in Namma Market, a local farmers market that is organised every week in her village. Actively engaging in the marketing space, which has otherwise been dominated by men, has boosted her confidence and she is now a proud Director of a newly formed Hulikadu Farmers Produce Company. Her indomitable spirit and unwavering smile continue to inspire many women to experience the real joy of agroecological farming.







CHIKKAHULIKUNTE LOCAL GROUP

Tumkur District, Karnataka

From agrarian distress-induced poverty, and vulnerable livelihoods, to the experience of gender unequal norms multiple barriers have held back the women of the Chikkahulikunte Organic Local Group back at every step, but they have not allowed their circumstances to define them. The Sanjeevini - Karnataka State Rural Livelihood Mission (KSRLM) is working intensively to strengthen the Organic Local Group under the Organic Village Cluster Program (OVC), on sustainable agroecological practices by leveraging the social capital of women collectives. The local group consists of seven members with a landholding size of 1.5 to 2 acres of land and grows major crops such as ragi, paddy, and groundnut. The members have a dual role – as practicing farmers and Community Resource Persons – Krishi Sakhis, and Pashu Sakhis, fostering peer-to-peer extension among the women farmers in their community and village. Highly entrenched in chemical-based farming, the group felt that conventional farming

was the only possible way out for higher yields and incomes until the staff of KSRLM intervened with their initiatives on awareness creation, demonstrations on Jeevamrutha, Beejamrutha, multiple cropping patterns, etc. The members of the group initially experimented with organic farming on select areas of their... and also started kitchen gardens in their backyards. When they could see tangible differences (in terms of enhanced soil health, more earthworms in the soil, and tastier produce), they expanded to their entire fields. Through continuous experimentation, the group members feel confident to continue natural farming and have acquired knowledge (on input preparation) and skills on extension activities through their roles as Krishi Sakhis and Pashu Sakhis under SRLM, Karnataka. The whole narrative of the transition to natural farming gives them an opportunity “to get back to their roots”.





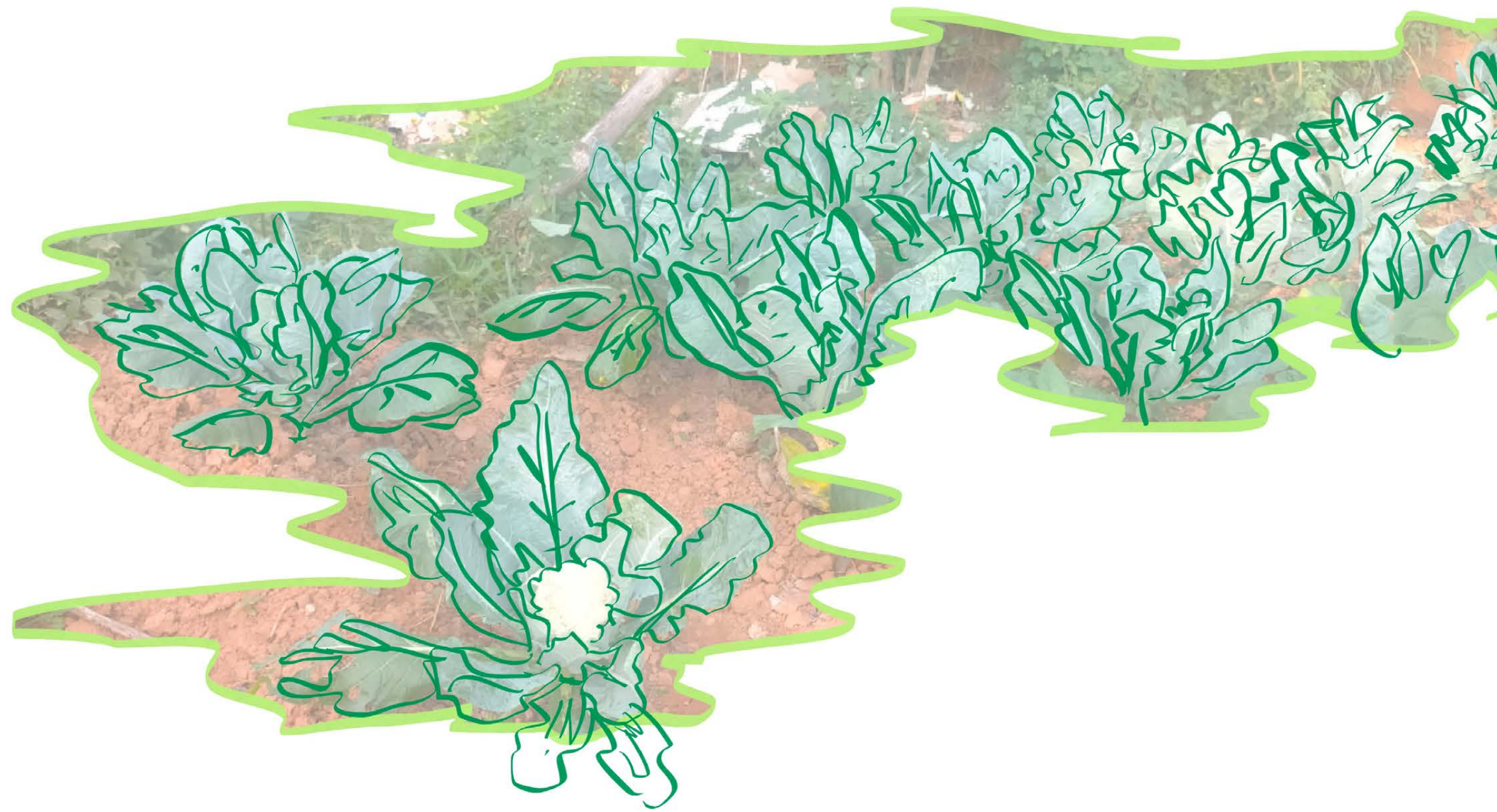
KARUNYA SHG

Wayanad , Kerala

Undeterred by frequent incessant rains and floods, the Karunya Self-Help Group (SHG) in the Manathavady area of the Wayanad is charting a revival path towards resilient livelihoods through agroecological approaches. With 10 women farmers actively pursuing chemical-free farming in coffee, spices, and vegetables, the SHG promoted by the Wayanad Social Service Society (WSSS) is leading the way towards sustainable agroecological transformation through an integrated approach with focus on production, processing, value-addition, certification, marketing, and sale of produce in domestic and international markets. The members

of the group initially faced common issues during the transition phase in terms of yield dip, increased drudgery due to the preparation of farm inputs, and managing farm and care work at home. Despite the struggles, the members continued with support of their family members at the household level. Through their community networks and SHGs, they scaled up agroecological practices at village level, improving not only household nutrition, income levels, and soil health, but also their own agency and dignity.





ANUSUIYA SINGRORE

Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh

As a woman entrepreneur crossing over to a male-dominated space, Anasuiya's story is a testament to the power of innovation, commitment, and the positive impact of social enterprises.

From transition to transformation, Anusuiya Singrore's passion for sustainable agriculture stands unparalleled. Hailing from Mandla district in Madhya Pradesh, she has been a witness and has experienced the struggles related to soil degradation, pest incidence, rising costs of chemical inputs, and spiralling debt. Working as a community agriculture trainer in her village, she has a clear understanding of the challenges faced by other farmers for the transition from conventional farming to natural farming with the biggest challenge of access to bio and natural inputs. Further, Anusuiya planned to set up a bio-resource centre as a centralised system for the production and distribution of bio-inputs to farmers in nearby villages. To bring this idea to life,

she collaborated with local women farmers to source materials like farmyard manure, cow urine, and other raw materials, prepare the inputs, and distribute them back to the farmers for a nominal price. In 2021, under an initiative of Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), she successfully set up a Bio-Input Resource Centre (BRC) as a one-stop solution, providing a host of support services such as access to inputs, knowledge, and package of practices to farmers in her village through this profitable venture. As a woman entrepreneur crossing over to a male-dominated space, Anasuiya braved through gender biases and stereotypes. Her determination and vision towards regenerative and ecological farming have inspired many other women to pursue entrepreneurship in the agriculture sector. Her story is a testament to the power of innovation, commitment, and the positive impact of social enterprises.



MANISHA LODHI

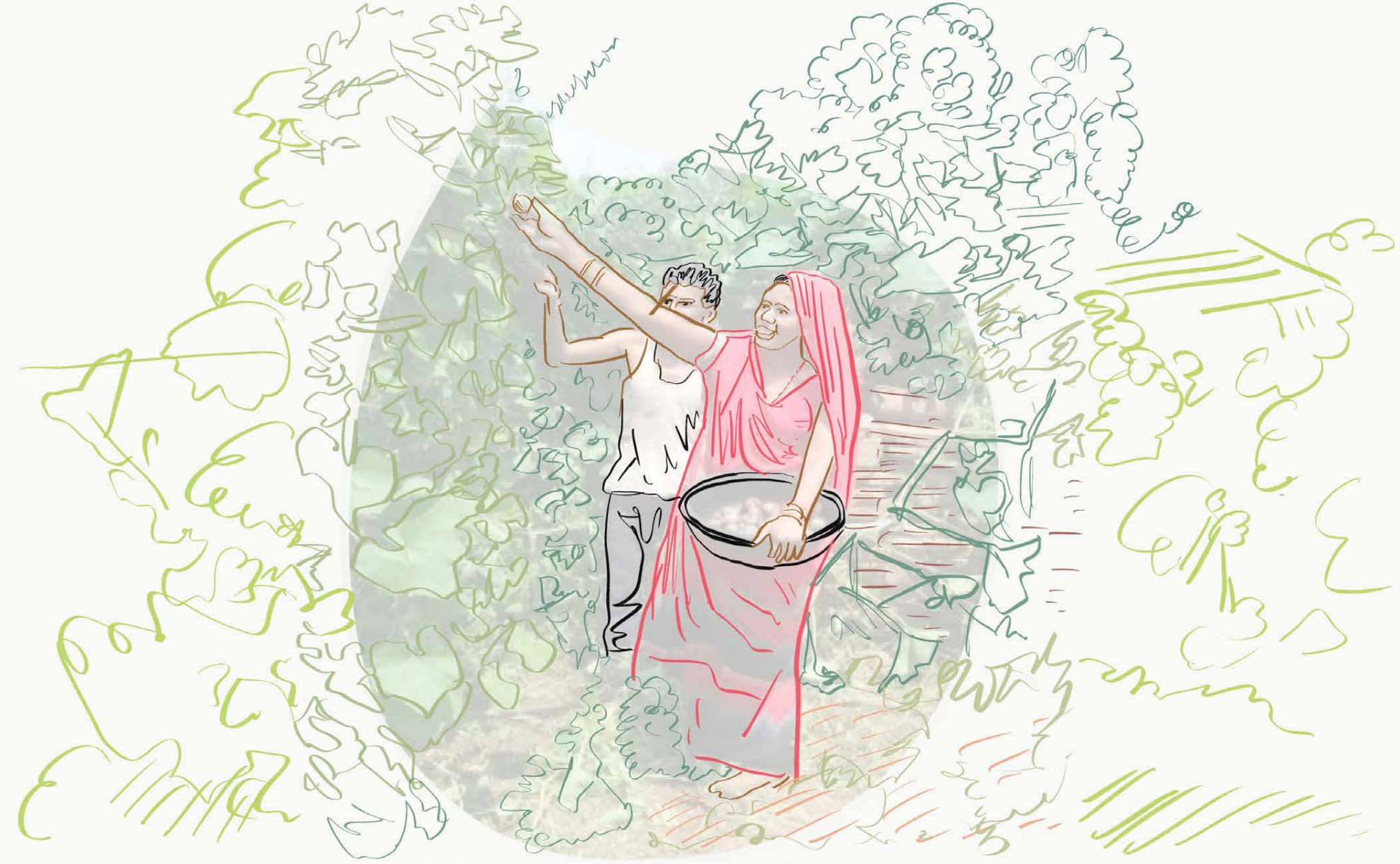
Sagar District, Madhya Pradesh

Manisha Lodhi, a resident of Shaasan village of Sagar district in Madhya Pradesh, used to live in a modest house with her family and could barely make ends meet. With 1.5 acres of land under conventional farming systems in rain-fed conditions, it was not easy to maintain sustained yield throughout the year, and her family used to take loans from people/markets to buy costly hybrid seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides. Also, the prevailing socio-cultural barriers further limited her participation to farm labour work and household domestic care, while her husband used to migrate to a nearby town in search of work. The scenario continued until they were introduced to the Strengthening Adaptive Farming in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal (SAFBIN) project of Manav Vikas Seva Sangh (MVSS). The project was catalytic in bringing remarkable changes in the lives of Manisha and her family. She took on-farm trials of wheat production through agroecological practices and witnessed significant

production levels i.e., 80 kgs of wheat from a mere 250 grams of seeds. This sowed the seeds of interest and conviction in on-farm experimentation for better results.

Gradually, she joined the women's Self-Help Group 'Sri Ram Swayong Sahayata Samong' and became the Secretary of the group. She used the platform to share her experiences, lessons, and good practices with her fellow farmers. While sharing, she realised how to start a nutritional garden that can be managed along with her domestic work. Currently, she can harvest more than 12 varieties of vegetables in her small garden, and she sold almost 300 kgs in the last season and earned an income of 15,500 INR per month. Looking forward to more profitable seasons, Manisha feels elated and satisfied with the diversification of the menu in her family and she opines that the regular intake of green and fresh vegetables has improved her family's health.





DIBYAJYOTI SELF-HELP GROUP

Sundargarh district, Odisha

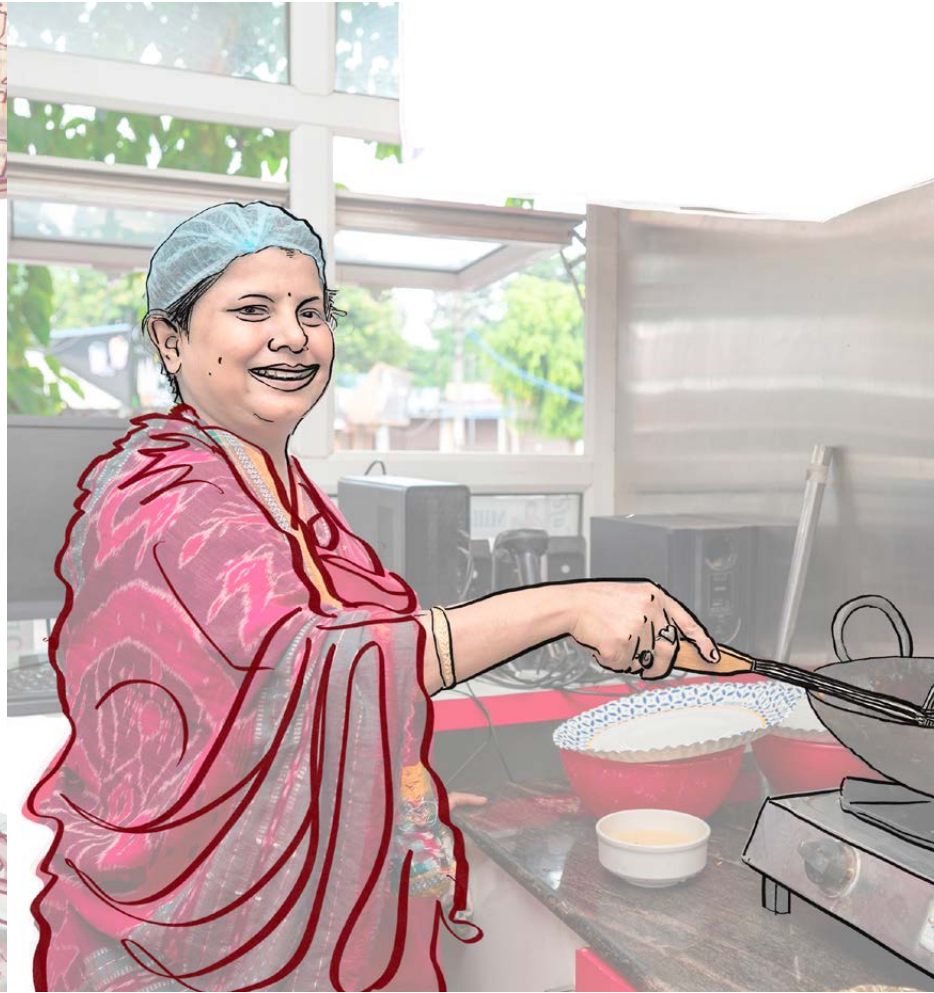
Established in 2009, in Sundargarh district Odisha, Dibyajyoti Self Help Group (SHG) initiated business activities by supplying muree (puffed rice), laddoos under a government project, following which they received an order to supply chhatua (roasted chickpea flour). Over a period of time, the SHG progressed in its profits and business activities. In 2014, the group received a major breakthrough when they secured a loan of 3 lakh INR under Mission Shakti, an initiative by the Government of Odisha that aims to empower women through self-help groups. They utilised the money to open a bakery and sold their products at Mission Shakti stalls.

In 2017, they opened the Millet Shakti Café at Koel Nagar, Rourkela, under the Odisha Millet Mission and started selling millet-based products, such as biscuits, cookies, and snacks. The SHG members have been preparing and selling cookies and biscuits made from finger millet, pearl millet, foxtail millet, little millet etc. Apart from this, they also prepare millet-based snack items including idli, vada, samosa, jalebi, pakoda, and more.

Owing to individual members enterprising abilities, Dibyajyoti SHG group has represented the millet story of Odisha during the SIAL 2022 (International Food Exhibition in Paris) and the India International Trade Fair 2022, New Delhi. They were felicitated as one of the top three women SHGs in Odisha by the Chief Minister of Odisha during the Make in Odisha Conclave 2022.

Since its inception, Dibyajyoti SHG has come a long way. The group has provided a platform for women to come together, learn new skills, and earn a steady income. Through their millet-based products, they have promoted healthy eating habits and sustainable agriculture practices. The members have also benefited from the group's profit-sharing model, which has helped improve their standard of living. They plan to establish a large-scale millet industry that will employ at least 1,000 women.







© Odisha Millet Mission (OMM)



VASANTA MARY

Dindigul, Tamil Nadu

The story of Vasanta Mary shows how agroecology systemically empowers women to play a pivotal role in the transition process. A 48-year-old lady from Vadakku Mettupatti Village, Vasanta, and her family own two-and-a-half acres of land. With more than 10 years of practical experience, she is well-informed of the risks and challenges in the agriculture sector. Despite the uncertainties, she continues to ardently pursue working on her land and owns a terrace garden with a variety of crops and flowers at her house in Dindigul.

Vasanta's field is symbolic of a mini food forest with a variety of crops - moringa groundnut, tomato, bhindi (okra), coconut, guava, water apple, bitter gourd (small), and flowers like Jasmine which are sold in the market. In addition, she grows other crops such as lemon, sapota, orange, pomegranate, turkey berry five varieties of banana, several species of green leafy vegetables, and Champak (Shenbagam) tree along with 100 native poultry birds.

Through the sustained efforts of MS Swaminathan Research Foundation to drive farmer-centric solutions among small and marginal farmers, Vasanta was

trained on the preparation of organic/plant extract-based inputs – pancha kavya, Amirtha karaisal, and Themoor karaisal and tested these inputs in her field which was found to be effective for crop growth. With the application of integrated agronomic techniques and the use of microbial and other organic inputs, she is convinced that these methods are effective in maintaining productivity and at the same time improving the ecology. The diverse vegetables and chicken from her farm are regularly consumed in her house. She also shares the surplus vegetables with her neighbors and relatives and has reduced dependencies on the market for daily consumption of vegetables.

By actively collaborating with other farmers during the training and capacity building sessions and being part of exposure visits to various research and development organisations to understand farm technologies, Vasanta firmly believes that fostering the horizontal exchange of information and technology among farmers is key to agroecological transitions at the community level. She sets an example for her community and underscores the fact that women's knowledge and skills are invaluable in promoting sustainable farming practices.





MEDKULIYA

Uttar Pradesh

The story of Medkuliya and Ratiram is the epitome of perseverance, grit, and determination. They were forced to migrate to Delhi every year in search of work due to limited agricultural prospects in Mahoba district, Uttar Pradesh. With four bighas of land under a single crop in rainfed agriculture conditions, the couple aspired for self-sufficiency through farming. Defying all odds, they constructed a dug well in their plot to provide water for their farms. They wanted to enhance their knowledge and skill set to further strengthen their farm work and the Indo-Global Social Service Society's (IGSSS) ViSTAR (Village Strengthening through Adaptation and Resilience) was a blessing in disguise for the couple. The project works on building climate-resilient villages and the adaptive capacity of small and marginal farmers. In his quest to acquire more hands-on experience, Ratiram enrolled in the programme, attended training on integrated farming systems, and

started experimenting with various crops, livestock, and trees. At present, the couple produces a variety of vegetables, fruits, and milk from small ruminants.

Medkuliya Devi preserves a variety of millet seeds - Kodo, Kutki, Jowar Bajra ragi, and vegetables so that every year she gets to grow varieties of local crops. She also promotes this practice through SHGs and is an active member of the seed-saver network. She was appreciated and recognised by the Department of Agriculture for her incredible efforts in conserving traditional agrobiodiversity. Her efforts are not only a source of inspiration for fellow farmers but also for her son, who now values and understands better the agriculture sector, also underscoring the significant role of youth in the sector. Together, the trio is able to inspire and create change waves in the community towards sustainable farming systems.





SANJHU

West Bengal

Sanjhu's journey into agriculture was a natural progression, as she hails from an agrarian family. Currently, residing in a remote village, Narandi in West Bengal, post her marriage, it was not until the last five to six years that she contemplated a significant transformation. The conventional farming methods being in practice came with substantial costs, particularly in terms of purchasing seeds and chemical fertilisers. Over time, the excessive use of these chemicals led to diminishing crop yields and, more critically, a declining interest in agriculture. Amidst the distress, she found some ray of hope in the initiatives of the Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development (SPWD) on natural and chemical-free farming and the potential benefits it offered to both the soil and people.

At the inception of her journey into sustainable and organic farming, Sanjhu encountered severe resistance from her family, arising from the belief system that chemical fertilisers are indispensable for successful farming. Taking criticism in her stride, she did not let her newfound interest and enthusiasm wane away and gradually succeeded in winning over her family's

support. One of the most rewarding aspects of Sanjhu's transition to natural farming was the evident improvement in her on-farm ecosystem. Through the judicious use of various bio-inputs such as Amrit Jal, Matka Khad, Sasyagavya, Vermicompost, and Liquid Compost, she witnessed improved soil health conditions. She further embraced new techniques such as mulching and drip irrigation and fearlessly ventured into various practices, including seed conservation, input preparation, and marketing initiatives. These endeavors endowed her with a unique edge over other farmers who practiced conventional farming.

Over time, Sanjhu's husband and family became not only supportive but immensely proud of her journey as they witnessed the transformative outcomes of natural farming. They joined her in experimenting with natural farming techniques on their own farm of the transition from conventional to natural farming, further solidifying their commitment to chemical-free agriculture. Sanjhu's message is clear: have faith, stay committed, and embrace natural farming for a sustainable future.







THOUGHT LEADERS

NAMERTA SHARMA

Senior Advisor,
SuATI project, GIZ India



Indian agriculture contributes significantly to Indian economy and food security. To curb the ill effects of chemical fertilisers, efforts are being made both at policy and practice level to move towards agroecology-based farming practices. Women farmers being dynamic and innovative are playing prominent role in agroecology all over the world. They have proven themselves as guardians of indigenous seeds, great transmitters of traditional knowledge; yet they are deprived of access to land and gender responsive agricultural services and innovations. Agroecology is an investment which supports harnessing the productive potential of soil. Hence agroecology provides an opportunity to women to be actors of their own development and vector of development. The SuATI project adopts Gender Transformative Approaches and works towards systemic changes to accelerate food system transformations in collaboration with Government, Civil Society Organisations and Private actors. This book provides an opportunity to create level playing field by devising women led support system to address both operational and strategic issues involved in the transformation of agriculture sector and promotion of agroecology-based farming practices.

PROF RAJESHWAR SINGH CHANDEL

Vice Chancellor,
Dr YS Parmar University of Horticulture and Fore



Agroecology is a fast growing social as well as farmers' movement worldwide including India. However, the most successful example of mainstreaming agroecology comes from smallholding farming community who represents only 30% of the agricultural area at the global level. It is a potential alternative to conventional farming systems in solving the current multiple human crises such as hunger, soil degradation, malnutrition, climate change, water scarcity, food and environmental contamination and unemployment. In a bid to promote low-cost, local resource based and climate resilient sustainable agriculture and reduce farmers' dependence on chemical inputs, the Himachal Pradesh government introduced a flagship programme 'Prakritik Kheti Khushhal Kisan Yojana (PK3Y)' in 2018 by adopting Subhash Palekar Natural Farming (SPNF) practices. Out of the 1.7 lakh farmers practising Natural Farming in the state, over 60% are women farmers. These women are set to be the 'change makers' in production and agro-marketing fields as they have registered their first Farmers' Producers Company (FPC) for collective chemical free produce marketing. Through the FPC, women farmers are ensured correct market prices and receive guidance to work as entrepreneurs. The women farmers are now role models for rural farmers and youth to follow and practice sustainable agricultural practices.

TAMARA LAW GOSWAMI

Advisory Board Member,
Bharath Agroecology Fund



In India's Northeast, socio-ecological relationships between the land and its people are both innate and intimate. Indigenous knowledge is largely passed on via oral tradition, mostly via women. Women are thus uniquely custodians of both the physical seeds of their dietary landscape as well as the traditional wisdom related to its agrobiodiversity. Today, with traditional lifestyles in flux against multiple hopes and perils, it has become vital to ensure that gender considerations are integrated into all aspects of agricultural practice and policy. E.g., designing more gender-sensitive research can help identify gender-specific barriers and opportunities. In the Eastern Himalaya landscape, strengthening women's voices in local governance, particularly with regard to their access to, and control over, natural resources will go a long way in supporting sovereign food systems. This warrants a holistic approach where markets, technologies, and innovations more suitable to women's participation and capabilities are integrated into landscape-level initiatives

SEEMA KULKARNI

Senior Fellow SOPPECOM
National Facilitation Team Member MAKAAM



Mainstream intensive agriculture models have marginalised women's spaces in agriculture in numerous ways, including displacing women's employment potential in agriculture. Even as they ignored and marginalised farmers in general, the commercialised model of farming has disempowered women farmers in multiple ways. The commercialised model has also led to increased marketisation of daily lives, including for food. Women bear the brunt of it as they have few resources in hand to feed themselves and their families. Agroecology has emerged as a strong response that contests the model and the control it is taking over nature and the agri-food systems. It is increasingly gaining recognition with the potential to transform the social and ecological dimensions in the context of agriculture. In its transformative sense, agroecology is not just a set of alternate practices and agricultural inputs that increase the sustainability of the environment but rather a movement that questions the current power dynamics in the present food regime or the corporate and industrialised forms of agriculture. It focuses on food and nutrition security that is appropriate to the local cultures and ecologies and health of the eco-system rather than productivity or profits. It is this understanding of Agroecology that holds a commitment to address issues of social justice and unequal power relations that we, as feminists, hold close to our hearts. As part of the women's movement and Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM), we believe in the immense potential of natural farming or agroecology-based farming to transform the lives of disadvantaged communities on the one hand and protect our environment on the other.

MR. T VIJAY KUMAR

(IAS-Retired),
Executive Vice Chairman, RySS



In spite of being the most important stakeholders in farming actual tillers, the women have only an insignificant role in the current conventional farming system. What makes the Andhra Pradesh Community managed natural farming programme unique is that women are at the centre. They have the most important role, both as producers and consumers. Through the women self-help groups and their federations, women own the knowledge for transformation to natural farming and therefore the rate of transformation is better, resources are utilised optimally and there is a collective sharing of information, trust building and learning. They also bring the men into natural farming. The integration of the natural farming knowledge through the women collectives through the champion farmers has led to the remarkable 'scaling' out of Natural farming across the state of Andhra Pradesh. Women understand Natural farming better, they adopt it sooner, and take it to scale. It is not only 'for' the women, but it is also 'by them'.

