



Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience (SENU) Project

# GROWING TOGETHER

Women-Led Gardens Reviving Land, Culture,  
and Local Nutrition





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New Delhi, August 2025

# Message From the Country Director GIZ, India

Food and nutrition security is a cornerstone of sustainable development, forming the foundation for healthy communities, economic resilience, and social equity. The Indian Government has been making concerted efforts with its innovative schemes responding to fast-changing ground realities. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), is proud to have contributed to this journey with the India component of the Global Project “Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience (SENU)”.

In India, SENU has been working with the Government of India on improving nutrition outcomes through community participation and sustainable and healthy consumption practices in selected regions of India.

Mission Poshan 2.0 is an admirable Government initiative aimed at the urgent issues of combating malnutrition among children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers through targeted nutrition schemes. Contributing to this Mission, SENU provided systematic capacity building and trainings for the frontline workers of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). Similarly, the project strengthened women’s self-help groups (SHGs) by linking nutrition trainings with Community Nutrition Gardens. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), its Department in Madhya Pradesh as well as the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (Mahatma Gandhi NREGS) of the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj in Madhya Pradesh have been valuable partners in implementing a nutrition-sensitive integrated approach towards food and nutrition security.

While development interventions and their assessments focus on fixed metrics of numerically quantifiable results, it is equally important to focus on human stories and lived experiences from the ground. This collection is a step in that direction. It captures the spirit and strength of rural communities in Madhya Pradesh, where the SENU project’s efforts were focused for the good part of a decade.

These stories showcase the journey of community members, especially women leading local Community Nutrition Gardens, towards a more resilient food and nutrition situation, bolstered household incomes, and an improved social and economic status of women. They show how social and behavioural change at a granular level can drive sustainable, community-driven change that nourishes both people and progress. This is a true testament to what Indo-German development cooperation – already almost seven-decade-long and counting – can achieve.

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Country Director

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At the heart of this journey are the women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Madhya Pradesh, whose commitment, courage, and collective spirit have turned barren plots into vibrant Community Nutrition Gardens. Their leadership is the driving force behind everything this book represents.

We extend our appreciation to the many hands and institutions that made this transformation possible:

- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), the State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM), Community Resource Persons (CRPs), and Gram Panchayats (local council) with Gram Rozgar Sahayaks (GRS) who provided daily operational and financial support.
- The Agriculture and Horticulture Departments, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) and Anganwadi Workers (AWWs: frontline workers).
- The supportive district and block-level officials, whose strategic vision and coordination helped connect local efforts to broader systems of change.
- Our implementation partners SRIJAN, Harsha Trust and PRADAN, who offered technical guidance and capacity building.

We are thankful to the community members who welcomed us, shared their experiences, and allowed us to carry their stories forward.

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## List of Abbreviations


<b>AWW</b>	Anganwadi Worker, Community-based frontline worker in the Integrated Child Development Services programme in India
<b>CDPO</b>	Child Development Project Officer
<b>CNG</b>	Community Nutrition Gardens
<b>Dept.</b>	Department
<b>Dist.</b>	District, Administrative Unit in India
<b>DPO</b>	District Project Officer
<b>GIZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
<b>ICDS</b>	Integrated Child Development Scheme
<b>KVK</b>	Krishi Vigyan Kendra (Farm Science Centre)
<b>MGNREGS</b>	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
<b>MWCD</b>	Ministry of Women and Child Development
<b>PRADAN</b>	Professional Assistance for Development Action
<b>Sarpanch</b>	Elected head of a Village Council in India
<b>SENU</b>	Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience
<b>SHG</b>	Self-Help Groups
<b>SPANDAN</b>	SPANDAN
<b>SRIJAN</b>	Self-Reliant Initiatives through Joint Action
<b>SRLM</b>	State Rural Livelihood Mission
<b>WHH</b>	Welthungerhilfe





## CHAPTER 1

# Seeds of Change

 What is the Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience (SENU) Project?





## What is the Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience (SENU) Project?

The India Component of the global development cooperation project 'Securing Nutrition, Enhancing Resilience (SENU)' is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) under its Special Initiative 'Transformation of Agricultural and Food Systems (SI AGER)'. It is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH in cooperation with the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Government of India.

In India, the project is providing technical assistance to MWCD to improve the nutrition situation of women of reproductive age (15–49 years), adolescent girls (14–18 years) and young children (6–23 months) from vulnerable communities in ten *Utkarsh* districts across ten states in India.

In four districts of Madhya Pradesh (Khandwa, Barwani, Sheopur & Chhatarpur), the SENU project implemented a social behaviour change-driven integrated approach by linking participatory nutrition trainings (N-PLA) on nutrition, dietary diversity and hygiene practices with actual access and availability to nutritious and diverse food through Community Nutrition Gardens (CNGs). Furthermore, the SENU project collaborated with and supported the Department of Rural Development and Panchayat to roll-out the CNG initiative across the state.







## The Heart of the Idea

- What are Community Nutrition Gardens?
- How do a fruit forest, a millet porridge, and a grandmother's recipe bring nutrition home?
- What grows stronger when we return to the foods our soil remembers best?
- Why does food grown in our gardens feel like it belongs on our plates?

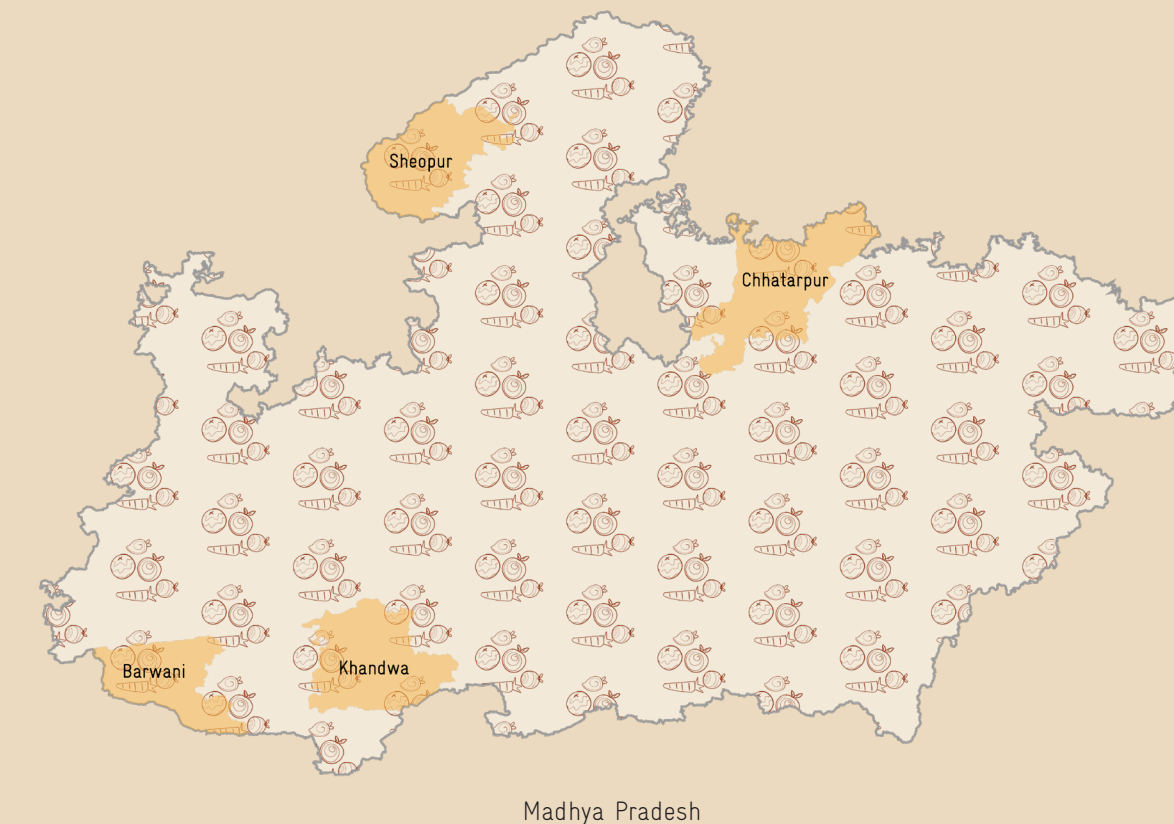




## What are Community Nutrition Gardens (CNGs)?

Community nutrition gardens (CNGs) are established on commons land and engage landless women from vulnerable communities who are organised in women's collectives, self-help groups (SHGs) comprising 10-15 women. In CNGs, vegetables and fruits are grown to ensure year-round availability of diverse and nutritious food for household consumption. The SHGs develop and maintain the CNGs and receive wages for their work through the governmental Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Hence, CNGs not only improve the access and availability of a variety of healthy foods but also diversify sources of income through paid work under MGNREGS along with the sale of surplus fruit and vegetable produce.

They follow agro-ecological principles and are more than plots of land— they are collective spaces where SHG women reclaim agency, apply indigenous knowledge, and build resilience in the face of climate and social challenges. Alongside food production, these agro-ecologically sound gardens promote nutrition education and social behaviour change, ensuring better food security.



Over 1,000  
Gardens in  
53 districts



Over  
16,000  
Women



Thousands  
of Meals  
Transformed



## How do a fruit forest, a millet porridge, and a grandmother's recipe bring nutrition home?

CNGs have the potential to enhance dietary diversity at household level besides providing multiple social benefits such as enhancing food and nutritional security, empowering women, promoting social justice and equality and preserving indigenous knowledge and culture. A wide variety of horticultural crops can be grown in the CNGs including fruits, vegetables, root and tuber crops, millets, aromatic and medicinal plants, spices and plantation crops, which enhances diversity in nutrition.

“Our vegetables have a different taste, they do not need much oil while cooking. In another two years, this garden will be in full bloom with fruit trees and fruits. It will be like a huge fruit forest!”

— Buri Bai, SHG Member, Lafangaon, Barwani District, Madhya Pradesh

In another district, Rewa, Asha Bai from Sewariya village, mentions that,

“Even two years back, our vegetable consumption was limited to three or four times a week. Now with the CNG in place, our plates are much more greener and colourful.”

— Asha Bai, SHG Member, Sewariya Village, Rewa District, Madhya Pradesh

## What grows stronger when we return to the foods our soil remembers best?

“Farmers are considering returning to millet farming, seed banks are being set up, and in the kitchens you can see millets making a comeback in some form or the another. It could be a porridge, rice or a snack. Older women are encouraged to teach traditional nutritional recipes to the younger women, especially daughters-in-laws who manage the kitchen. This has given us very encouraging results.”

— Seema Prakash, Founding Member SPANDAN, Mojiwada Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

“We feel really happy today. We are growing more than 7-8 varieties of vegetables and fruits in CNGs. This aids the development process in the minds and bodies of our children. We are also using indigenous techniques and knowledge to preserve seeds and plant varieties in order to sustain our community. If I sow about 6 kgs of corn, I get an output of 7 quintals. It requires purchase of fertilisers from the market. But if I sow Kodo and Kutki (millets) with just 1 kg of seeds, I get a yield of 2 quintals without any chemicals and using little water.”

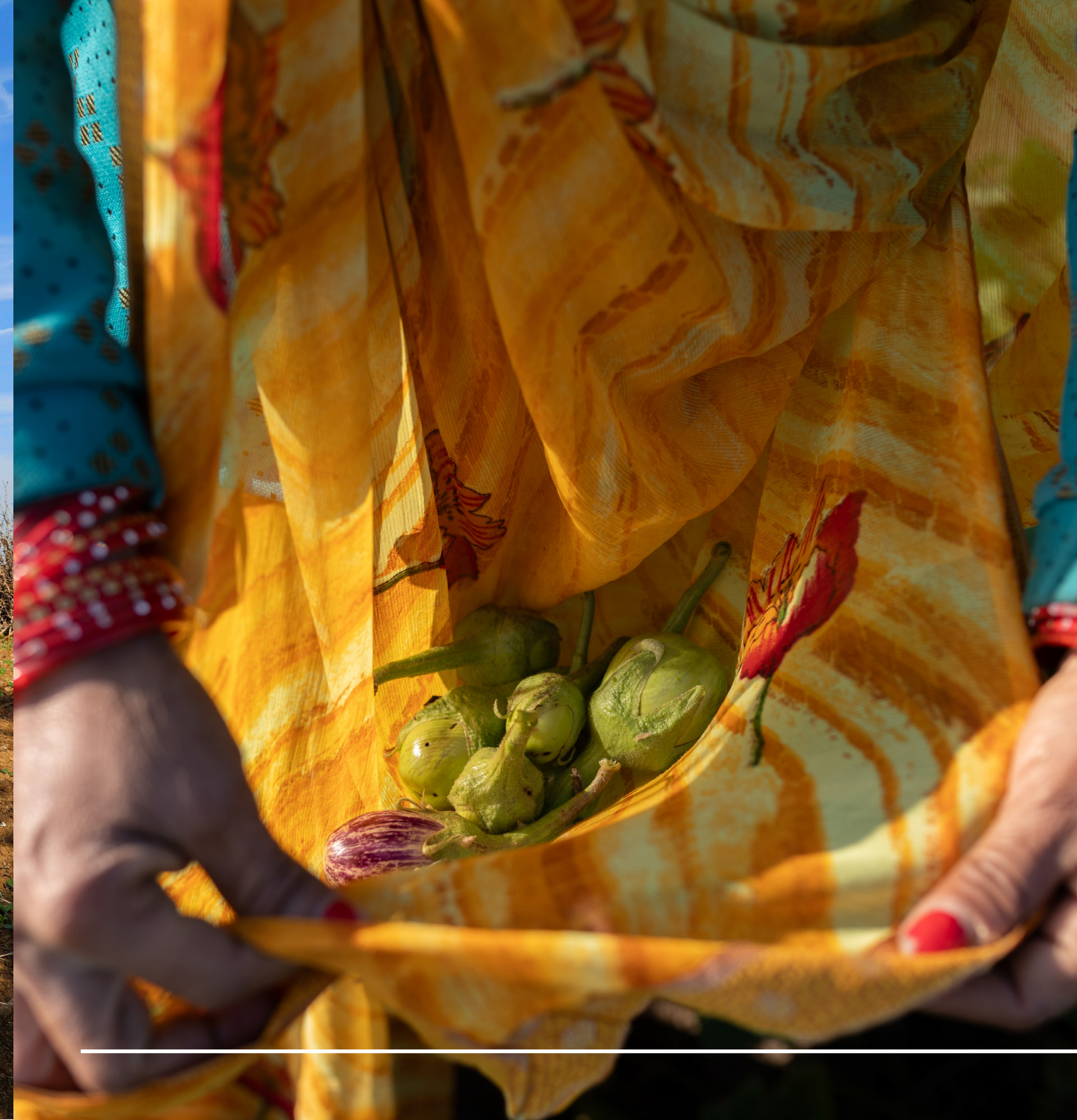
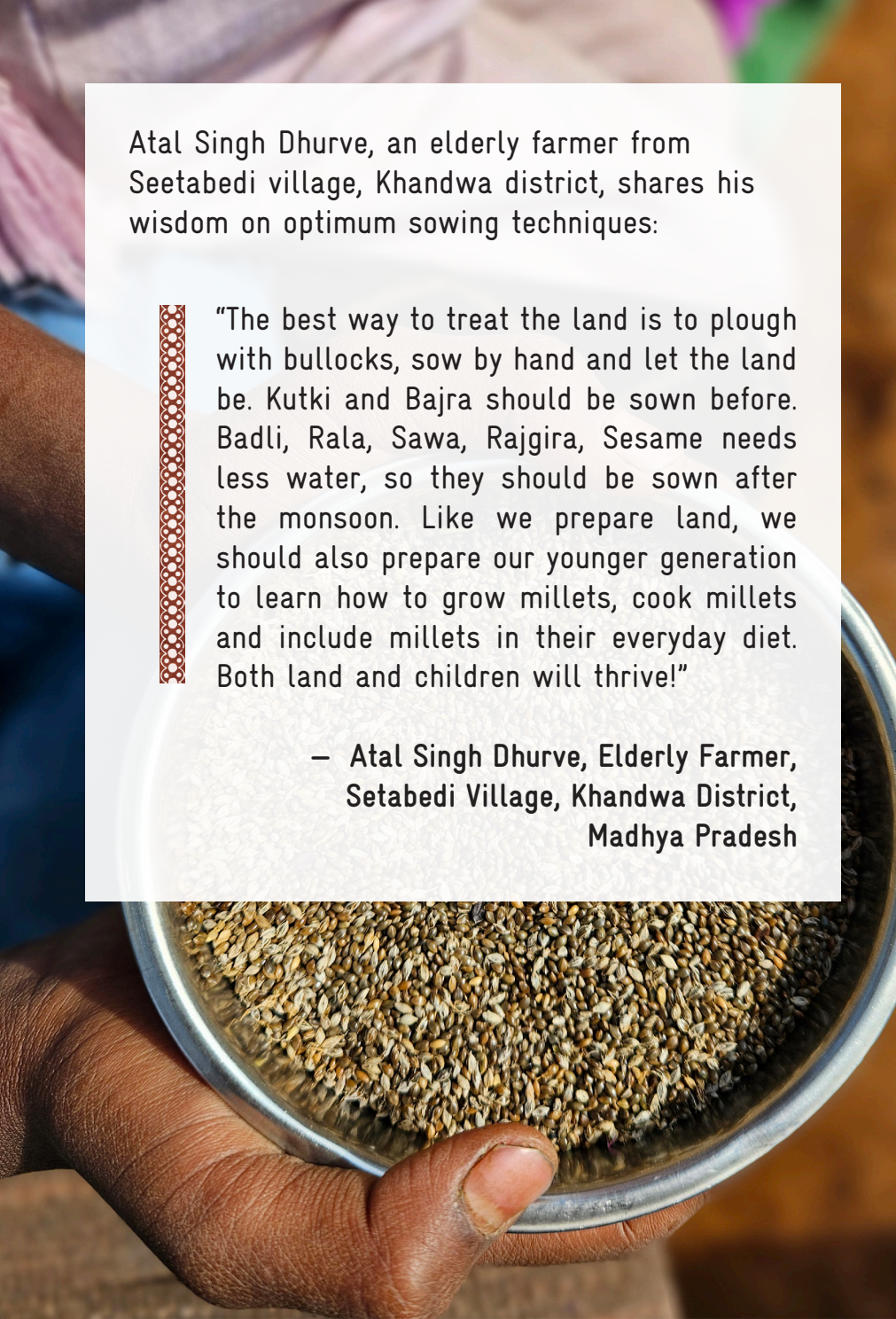
— Ram Kumari, SHG Member, Mojiwada Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh



Atal Singh Dhurve, an elderly farmer from Seetabedi village, Khandwa district, shares his wisdom on optimum sowing techniques:

"The best way to treat the land is to plough with bullocks, sow by hand and let the land be. Kutki and Bajra should be sown before. Badli, Rala, Sawa, Rajgira, Sesame needs less water, so they should be sown after the monsoon. Like we prepare land, we should also prepare our younger generation to learn how to grow millets, cook millets and include millets in their everyday diet. Both land and children will thrive!"

— Atal Singh Dhurve, Elderly Farmer,  
Setabedi Village, Khandwa District,  
Madhya Pradesh







## CHAPTER 3

## Growing Together: How did communities make this happen?

- How was life before Community Nutrition Gardens came into the lives of the women?
- What stood in the way when the idea of growing something first took root?
- What happens when tradition says, 'this is not your role'?
- How did local governments, MGNREGS, and frontline workers become allies in turning bare soil into something beautiful?





## How was life before Community Nutrition Gardens came into the lives of the women?

“We had land, but without water, it was useless. We had to migrate for work. For years, we are struggling to make ends meet, often having no choice but to migrate in search of daily wage labour. But change arrived in an unexpected way: through a shared dream, now we earn from our own land. Each woman in our group saved 2,000 to 2,500 rupees every month by no longer needing to buy vegetables. By selling their surplus produce, we earned an additional amount every season.”

— Jyoti Dhurve, SHG Member, Munderi Village, Damoh District, Madhya Pradesh



“I worked night shifts from 12 am to 12 noon. We had no choice but to accept this drudgery. Once back home, more work awaited us. At times, I would just walk out of the house with my food, sit under a tree and cry out of sheer exhaustion. One had to eat, irrespective of whether we were happy or sad. We had only that much. Such was the life of women back then!”

— Turali Bai, SHG Member, Lafangaon, Bharwani District, Madhya Pradesh





## What stood in the way when the idea of growing something first took root?

Praveen Chauhan, Community Resource Person (CRP), from Amalpura village Khandwa shares the story of their CNG and the resilience of SHG women.

“Our women worked hard to remove the rocks and level the land. Much to our delight, the shoots began to appear— a sign that our hard work was paying off. But our joy was short-lived. Within weeks, disaster struck our CNG. Grazing cattle trampled over our shoots, ate everything up and destroyed our CNG. It felt like all our hard work had gone to waste.”

— Praveen Chauhan, Community Resource Person (CRP), Amalpura Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

“We were used to hearing men say, ‘Nothing will grow here in this barren hill. Better to leave the land for cattle grazing.’ There were many to demotivate us, but we continued watering our plants.”

— Ms Shadma, Team Member, Harsha Trust, Amalpura Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh





## What happens when tradition says, 'this is not your role'?

"What would be farming without women? Who would do all the difficult tasks like sowing, weeding, transplanting, harvesting and clearing the field?"

In our family farms, we are just farm labourers. But in our CNG, we have the status of owners and farmers. Drunken men would trespass into our CNG, snatch away our working tools and even give us death threats." But we did not step back. We asked the Patwari, Gram Panchayat Secretary and Sarpanch to intervene."

— Bhuri Bai, SHG Member, Lafangaon, Barwani District, Madhya Pradesh

"We pledged to work hard, prepare the land and sow the seeds that we had received. After years of toil, a life of drudgery, we are able to build our identity as a group of women achievers. Why would we let go of that!"

— Turli Bai, SHG Member, Lafangaon, Barwani District, Madhya Pradesh





## How did local governments, MGNREGS, and frontline workers become allies in turning bare soil into something beautiful?

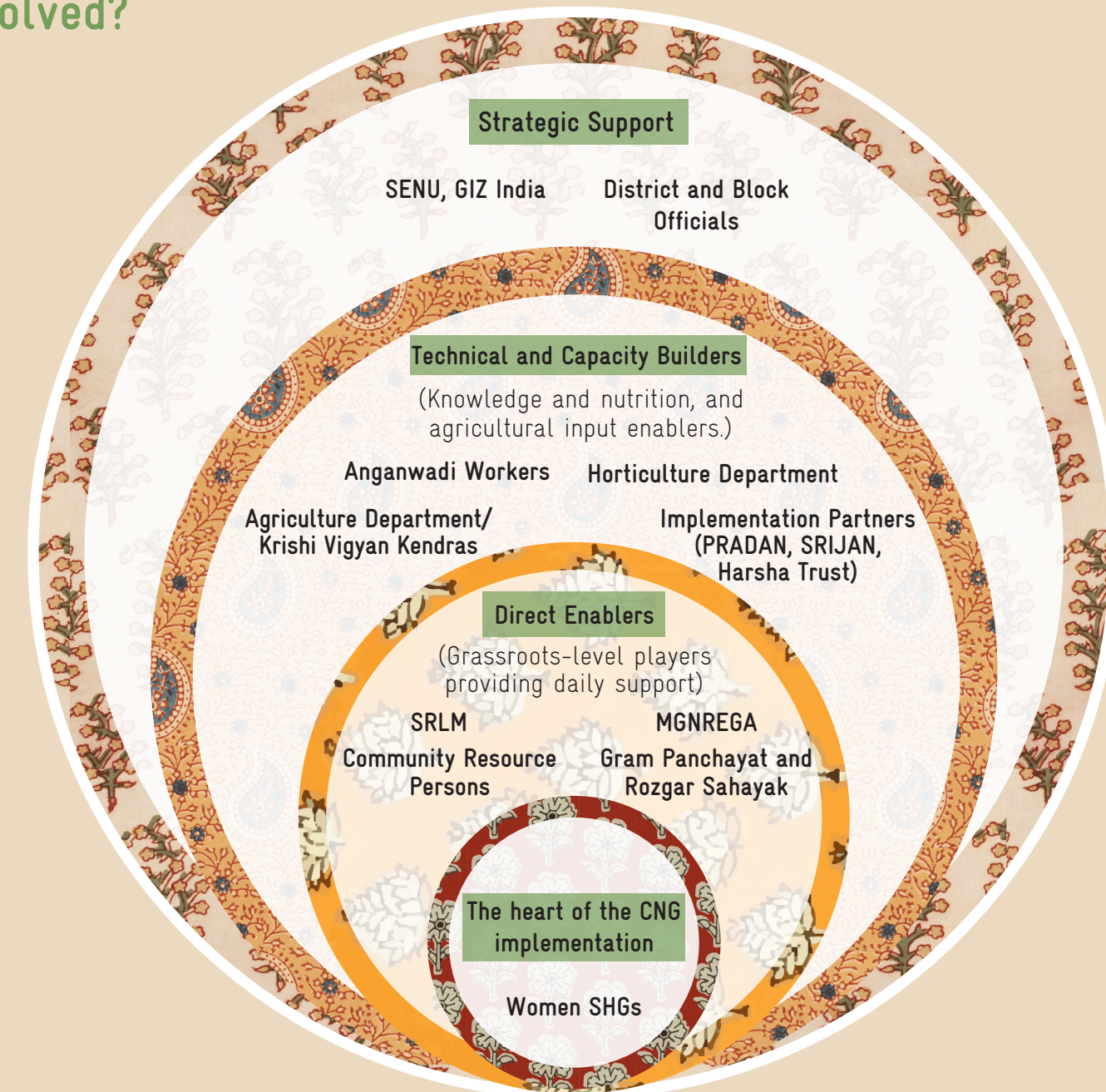
“Our collaboration with various departments has been essential. The Integrated Child Development Services department has been a major supporter at different levels. From the district level with the District Programme Officer to the block level with Child Development Project Officers, their approval and support have been crucial for our activities. In the Community Nutrition Garden work, departments like horticulture and agriculture have played key roles. They provided technical guidance on what and how to grow. The support from the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM) officials was also vital. This multi-sectoral approach ensured that all relevant departments contributed to the project's success, as nutrition is connected to every sector.

The colleagues from Welthungerhilfe have built the capacity of our entire team. They taught us how to understand and implement this process at the district, block, and community levels to achieve better behaviour change. This led to the emergence of a strong group of trainers who played a crucial role in advancing the programme and delivering better results.”

— Jeetu Chauhan, Project Coordinator at Darshana Mahila Kalyan Samiti, Padariya Village, Chattarpur District, Madhya Pradesh



## Who was involved?







## CHAPTER 4

## Nourishing Minds: How did we link nutrition with daily life?

- 🌀 What do a street play, a picture card, and a shared meal have in common? They can all spark transformation
- 🌀 What changed when respected voices spoke up for better nutrition?





## What do a street play, a picture card, and a shared meal have in common? They can all spark transformation

In less than two years, Pathwapurwa village in Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh has scripted a success story in the domain of nutrition and food security. Ensuring dietary diversity through an integrated approach spearheaded by the women's group has been a key process to achieve this challenging goal. Today, most houses in Pathwapurwa have blooming kitchen gardens with green vegetables and fruits.

Clad in a red *saree*, Sita Devi, an SHG (Self Help Group) member, sings a song on nutrition that she has learnt and composed with her group in the N-PLA meeting. The song attaches the importance of diverse food groups to different gods to make the concept of dietary diversity more relevant for the residents of Pathwapurwa village.



## What changed when respected voices spoke up for better nutrition?

“During the SBCC workshop, we had discussed the need to engage with local influencers to promote nutritional practices. The *Padiyaars* held the highest influence in the community. Also, unlike the ASHA, ANM, AWW and Sarpanch, he was not a government representative with a job at hand. We met him several times before he agreed to join the team of nutrition ambassadors. We were careful to not question traditional practices but rather to focus on adding nutrition-related messaging into his communication process.”

— Roshni, SPANDAN, Seetabedi Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh





## From Villages To Visionaries

What is an Innovation Hub?

A living laboratory of change





## What is an Innovation Hub?

Across Mandla and Barwani districts, eight Community Nutrition Gardens were piloted as Innovation Hubs where women-led self-help groups co-created, tested, and refined solutions grounded in agroecology, nutrition, and local knowledge.

- **From Barren to Blooming:** In Badgaon, what was once rocky, eroded land now flourishes with papaya trees and multi-layer vegetable beds, thanks to local innovations like stone bunding and raised beds.
- **Tools of Transformation:** With the help of body maps, seasonal calendars, and crop planning exercises, CNG members map their dreams: ponds in barren plots, trellis gardens for climbers, and spice corridors rich with fennel and carom seeds.



"At first, we didn't understand what a map would do— now we can show anyone what our garden is, where the water comes from, and where we grow what."

"Looking at this land before the CNG started, it was mostly barren and useless. Now, we have crops growing in many places!"

— CNG Members

## मेरी पोषण बाड़ी

1. लौंकी

2. तुरई

3. बैंगन

4. टमाटर

5. आलू

6. पालक

7. मेथी

8. धनियाँ

9. खीरा

10. मुनगा

11. पपीता

12. अमरुद

13. अदरक

14. लहसुन

15. प्याज

16. सेम

17. हल्दी

18. कद्दू

19. केरला

20. मीठी नीम

21. बेर

जो खाते हैं, वो उगाते हैं।



## A living laboratory of change

What sets these Innovation Hubs apart is their ability to turn ideas into action — shaped by lived experience, trial and error, and a deep understanding of what works on their land.

- **Water Wisdom:** In Sakri, women pushed for a fish pond in an unused *jalkund* (small rainwater harvesting structure). Legal roadblocks didn't stop them, they took their case to the District CEO.
- **Farming for the Future:** In Lafangaon, members tested pulses on hard soil to revive fertility, while others planned for solar pumps to break dependence on unreliable electricity.
- **Economic Seeds:** From vermicompost units to selling vegetables in local *haat bazaars* (periodic open markets), women are generating income and reducing household expenses.
- **Layering for Impact:** In Niwari, a 2-decimal (approximately 870 square feet) land patch became a test site for multilayer cropping, now being expanded to five times the size due to its success.



“In the early days, my family kept asking—why do you have to go there? But after a few months, everything changed.”

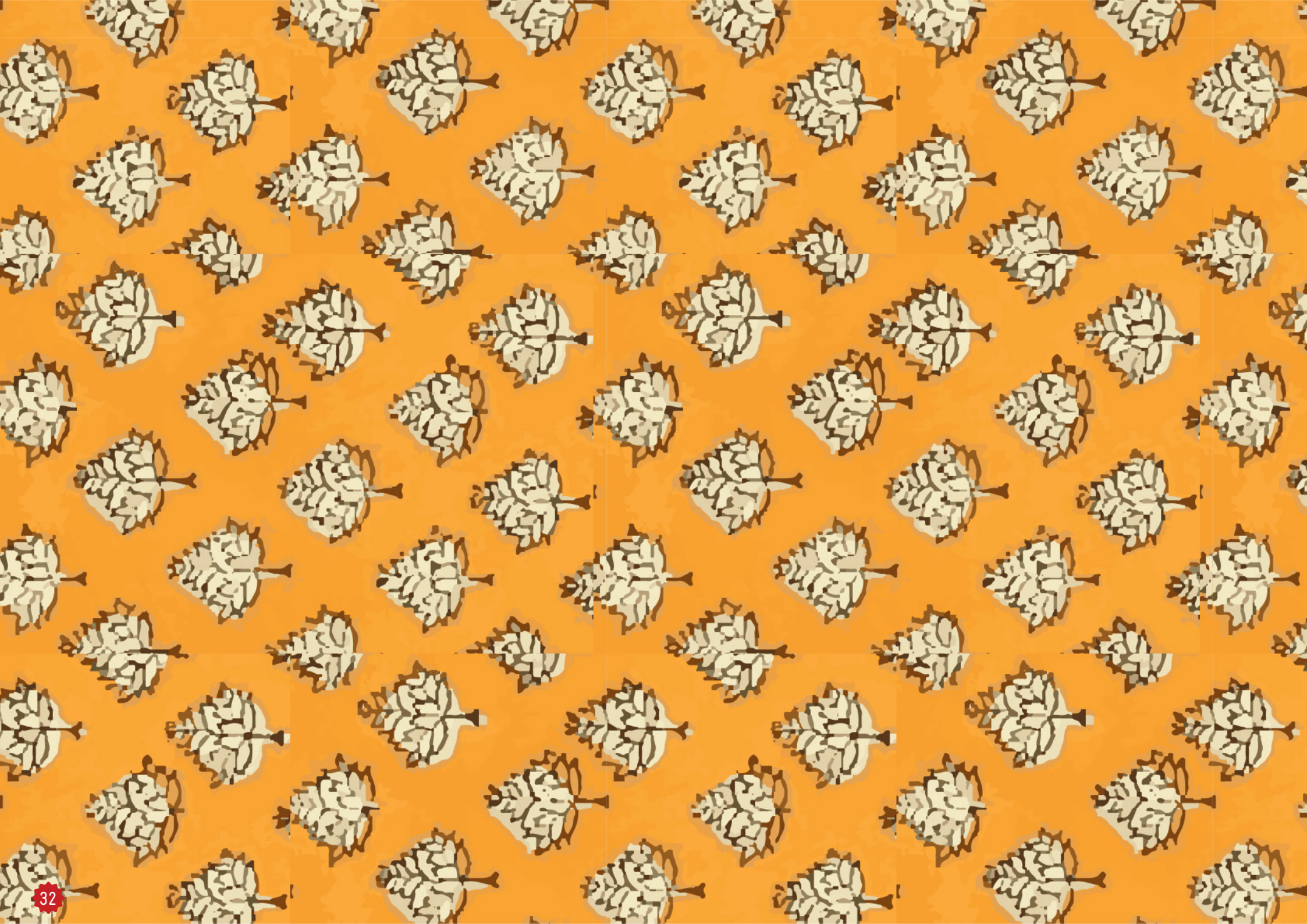
“We treated seeds with jaggery and cow dung, like our elders used to. The germination was amazing.”

“We want to grow indigenous vegetables. That's who we are.”

— CNG Members







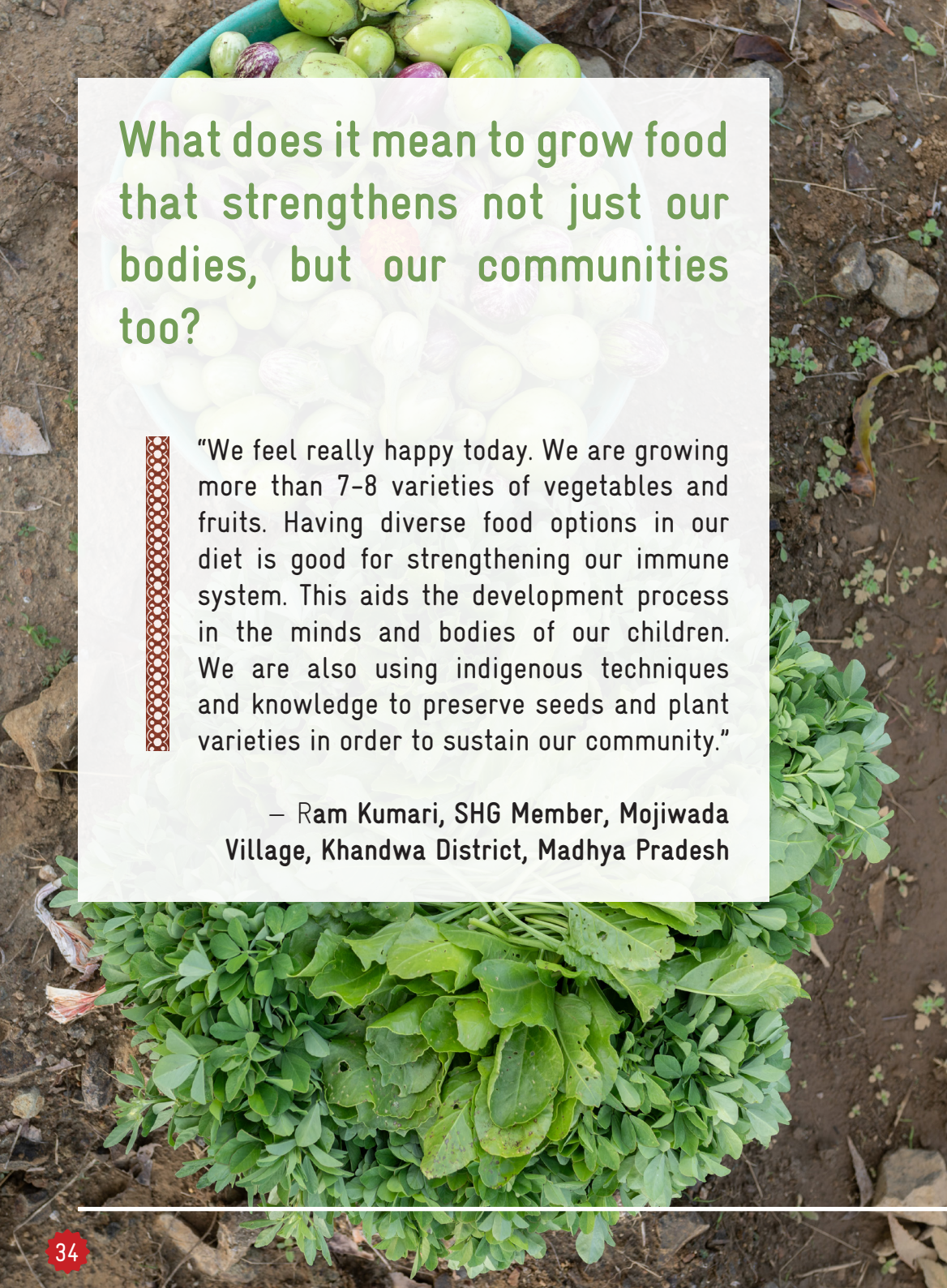
## CHAPTER 6

## Deep Roots: What has changed on the long run?

- What does it mean to grow food that strengthens not just our bodies, but our communities too?
- How a small patch of land grows both food and financial freedom?
- How a garden transforms a village's diet?
- We farm our own land, and it feels incredible
- They believed in us. Now we speak for many
- Generations of tradition are rewritten through shared learning
- What changes when fathers step into the circle of care?








## What does it mean to grow food that strengthens not just our bodies, but our communities too?

“We feel really happy today. We are growing more than 7-8 varieties of vegetables and fruits. Having diverse food options in our diet is good for strengthening our immune system. This aids the development process in the minds and bodies of our children. We are also using indigenous techniques and knowledge to preserve seeds and plant varieties in order to sustain our community.”

— Ram Kumari, SHG Member, Mojiwada Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh



## How a small patch of land grows both food and financial freedom?

“Some days when we have excess produce, we sell it in the market. On a good day, we may earn up to 1000 rupees.”

— Susheela Bai, CNG Member, Setabedi Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh

“This land belongs to our group. The vegetables that we take from here are purely organic. We are saving up to 200 rupees per week that we used to spend for buying vegetables from the market.”

— Tulsabai Uike, Sarpanch & CNG Member, Setabedi Village, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh





## How a garden transforms a village's diet?

"The concept of CNG has worked well with the community. Kitchen gardens too are being promoted actively. The community appreciates the concept of "Farm to Plate" and is implementing ideas shared through the CNG and N-PLA meetings. Several households now have access to chemical-free produce. Dietary diversity has improved. We currently have 3-5 food groups in the community diet. Soon, we hope this goes up to 7 or 10."

— Roshni, Project Coordinator, SPANDAN, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh



## We farm our own land, and it feels incredible

"Land gets divided between men, gets passed on to men. We have this land in our names, we plough this land and grow all that we wish to. This may be very less, but it gives us a deep satisfaction to eat what we grow. I feel immense joy when I see our CNG greening up in the monsoon. It is a fruit of our hard labour."

— Bhuri Bai, SHG Member, Lafangaon, Barwani District, Madhya Pradesh





## They believed in us. Now we speak for many

“SRIJAN has held our hand all through. We had no voice, confidence or any idea of the world outside. But they pushed us to move ahead, speak up. Now we speak for all other women as well. We have emerged from darkness. *Naari Shakti Zindabad!*” (Long live the power of women!)

— Kaushalya, CNG Member



## Generations of tradition are rewritten through shared learning

“In our times, we had only roti and chutney to eat. Sometimes dal. Vegetables were a luxury. Our elders would tell us to not eat brinjals, masoor dal, curds and rice during pregnancy. I advised the same for my daughter-in-law. But now, it seems these are all good for pregnant women. We had to work till the last day of pregnancy and get back to work after a month. They said in the meetings this is not good. We will not send her to work till her child grows up. I have changed my thinking now.”

— Jija Bai, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh





## What changes when fathers step into the circle of care?

Kera Devi and her daughter-in-law, Rubi, represent two generations of change. Kera Devi recalls,

“When I was pregnant, my husband’s contribution to my care and that of our newborn was very minimal due to his busy schedule and the different social dynamics of that time.”

Rubi, however, paints a different picture.

“My husband was fully involved in taking care of my health during pregnancy. He helped with heavy lifting, assisted in cooking, and attended every appointment with the doctor and Anganwadi didi with me.”





# 16,000+ Women Empowered



2,031 Women



193 SHGs



180 Gram Panchayats



From Unpaid Farmhand

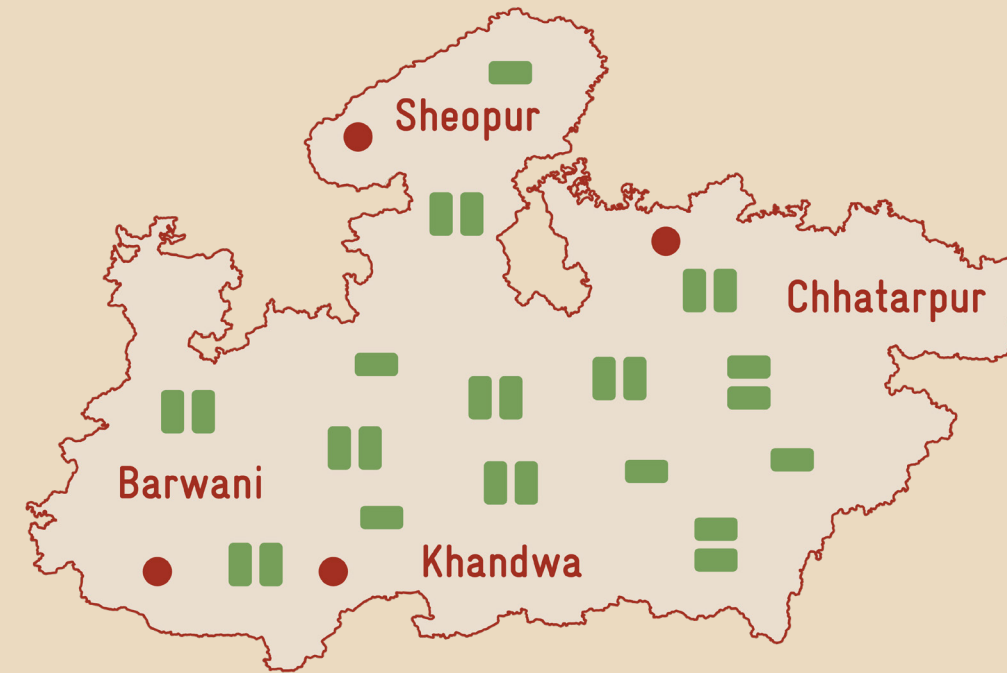
Gained confidence, negotiation skills, and public identity through CNG leadership roles



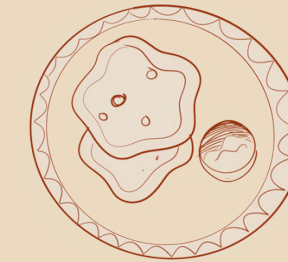
To Recognised Farmer and Leader

# 1000+ CNGs across Madhya Pradesh

Focused Intervention in Khandwa, Barwani, Chhatarpur, and Sheopur



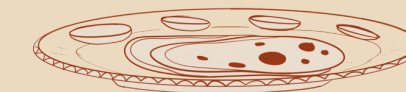
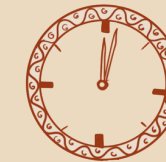
Improved dietary diversity at the household level:



From eating dal 7 times a week



to consuming fresh vegetables daily

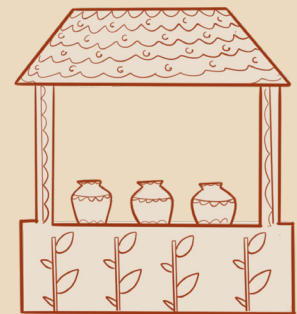


Fresh produce shared with Anganwadis under Mid-Day Meal Scheme



# Livelihood and Economic Impact

- CNGs linked to MGNREGS for paid employment
- Diversified income through sale of surplus produce
- Women-led SHGs engaged in value addition, seed banks, and even market access planning



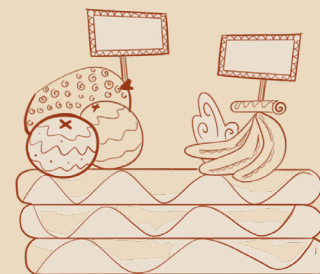
Seed Bank



CNG Field



Harvest Basket



Market Stall

Women-led SHGs are engaged in value addition, seed banks, and even market access planning.



Wages Paid through MGNREGS



Sale of Surplus

# Training and Capacity Building



**1,230  
women trained**

in CNG methods and nutrition



**4,500+  
Households**

directly impacted





## CHAPTER 7

## Branching out: From vision to long-term impact





Over the past decade, women-led, community-driven nutrition gardens (CNGs) have proven their impact on food security, livelihoods, and empowerment. With over 200 CNGs, 2,000+ women empowered, and thousands of families nourished, the model is ready for wider replication and ownership by local communities.

At this crucial moment, we invite you to help sustain and scale these efforts. With support, this model can be integrated into long-term systems of support and ensure its continued success. We have developed comprehensive implementation materials, including manuals for CNGs and nutrition training, to facilitate this process.

The foundations are strong, the communities are ready, and the model works. Now, your commitment is key to making it last.





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