



INSIDE STORIES

on climate compatible development

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Key messages

A project in the villages of Campierganj, Uttar Pradesh in northern India, has demonstrated how training women in climate-smart agriculture can:

- develop women farmers' skills effectively
- make the agriculture sector more climate-resilient, with more reliable yields
- improve income for women
- develop women's personal confidence and improve women's standing in the community – including instances of more female involvement in community decision-making and fewer early marriages among girls.

The project was carried out by the Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG), an Indian non-governmental organisation, with the support of SEED Division, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India. In the project area, women make up at least 40% of the agricultural workforce.

Instrumental to the success of the climate-smart agriculture initiatives in improving both climate resilience and gender equality were GEAG's strategies, as follows:

- to reach out and involve local women's groups in agricultural trainings, so that women attain collective bargaining power and influence
- to support women to adopt leadership roles in community-based agricultural institutions
- to involve both women and men as beneficiaries in agricultural training so that there is transparency and co-ownership between the sexes regarding both contributions to and benefits from the programme.

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Empowering women as climate-smart agriculture leaders proves key to resilience

A cluster of about 90 villages called Campierganj, in northern India's Uttar Pradesh state, floods every year. Villagers plan their farming activities around the floods. However, farmers have experienced considerable changes in the climate in recent years. Summers are longer, winters are sometimes harsher, and the rains are more unpredictable.

Now the area has become prone to flash floods, as large amounts of rain fall within a short space of time. These sudden events cause more damage than previous rainfall patterns did. Uttar Pradesh is one of India's poorest states. The grandmothers of the village had low social status in the past, from the time when they were young women. They married in their teens, bore children soon after and spent much of their lives cooking food and taking care of livestock. This region in India has among the highest child marriage rates and the lowest participation of women in the workforce in the country.

Women are bold in adopting climate-smart techniques

Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG) has been offering climate-smart agriculture training in Campierganj to help local people address climate change and its impact on agriculture.

Women – who make up more than 40% of the agricultural workforce in the area – have often proven to be the most open to adopting new ideas. With the added information and help they are receiving, women are increasingly the ones making decisions on the farms. GEAG provides women farmers with weather forecasts and alerts via text message as well as giving them climate-resilient seeds. At GEAG-organised trainings, women have also learned about retaining moisture in the soil to protect their potato crops from the cold.

They have begun to add vegetables to their crop cycles and have started storing their onion and potato harvest in storerooms made of bamboo and mud, to protect them from rotting. The women have also cut down on pesticides and started using cow dung as an organic fertiliser. These measures have lowered farming costs, improved yields and resulted in better earnings. In a handful of households,



Women farmers using Cycle Weeder – a locally made innovative tool to reduce women’s drudgery in weeding crops. Photo: GEAG

the extra income has meant that men no longer need to migrate seasonally for work. In a state where over 60% of the population depends on agriculture, most people are struggling smallholder farmers, and climate shifts have hit the main crops of rice and pigeon peas hard. These new climate-smart changes, however, are making a positive difference. Adding vegetables to farms, for instance, has helped keep earnings up and ensure “farmers are able to earn through the year even if they own a small farm”, according to Ramadhar Yadav, an agriculture officer working in the area.

A strategy of encouraging female leadership

GEAG intentionally addresses gender relations during the process of building people’s climate-smart agricultural and economic skills. This approach has several aspects:

- GEAG strategically works with groups of women, which gives women collective strength and voice. For example, they work with women who are already members of Self Help Groups or other women-organised activities at the village and block levels.

- GEAG’s other strategy is to involve women and men equally in training activities, which is important for maintaining transparency and co-ownership between women and men within families.

“When planting, we used to simply sprinkle gram on the soil. Now we sow it in a line. It was a simple change, but the yield improved. My husband started listening to me.

” Shanti Devi, trainee

- Women have come to the forefront of leading community-based agricultural institutions in the GEAG project areas. These institutions include Farmer Field Schools, where farmers meet monthly to discuss agriculture-, horticulture- and animal husbandry-related challenges and experts are invited to suggest eco-friendly solutions. They also include Agro Service Centres, which are community-based centres that sell and rent ecological inputs such as bio-manure, bio-fertilisers and agriculture equipment. Women also work as Master Trainers to deliver trainings on eco-friendly agriculture.

Women's improved earnings and leadership roles in the programme have helped to boost women's confidence. There is anecdotal evidence that these positive changes, in turn, are encouraging the next generation of young women – the daughters – to put off early marriage and pursue further years of education. Women's assumption of leadership roles in climate-smart agriculture also seems to be reducing the incidence of domestic violence, according to anecdotal observations from the GEAG projects. The explicit effort to empower women has yielded positive results beyond the fields and into homes and communities.

“
Before, nobody considered women as farmers. There was no term like ‘women farmers’, despite their doing most of the work.

” Ajay Singh, GEAG



Farmer – Ms Shanti Devi – tending her crops. Photo: GEAG

Recommendations

For NGOs

Based on GEAG's experiences training rural north Indian communities in climate-smart agriculture, recommendations for NGOs working in similar situations to promote climate resilience are:

1. Invest in building the capacities of women in a planned and systematic manner. Women are natural brokers of learning around resilience and climate change adaptation. They offer very high value for the money invested in resilience planning. Women demonstrably build trust in collective resilience actions, which is essential to move towards climate compatible development.
2. Design capacity-building programmes to bring women into lead roles and position them at the forefront of decision-making. For instance, community institutions set up by GEAG, such as Agro Service Centres, Farmer Field Schools or courses to become Master Trainers are coordinated or led by women. Merely being at the 'receiving end' of such initiatives is less effective, but giving women leadership roles brings about more transformational forms of positive, local change.
3. Link women directly with government programmes to access trainings and information, and access subsidies and support for agriculture inputs, etc.



Farmer – Ms Shanti Devi – preparing bio-compost for her crops.
Photo: GEAG

For government

Recommendations for government stakeholders, including local government, are:

1. Recognise women as legitimate farmers. This means that women farmers should be given land rights, access to available loans and provided with other agriculture-related inputs.
2. Enact female representation in local government in practice, not merely on paper (female representation is proposed to be at least 33% under India's Women's Reservation Bill). Only when women are involved, motivated and brought to the forefront can they assert their powers, which remain symbolic in too many cases.
3. Make local government development programmes, especially agriculture extension programmes, more women-friendly and encouraging of women's participation.
4. Reach out proactively to engage women as beneficiaries of government programmes, such as access to loans, the Government of India's market subsidy scheme for providing Minimum Support Price to farmers for their goods, etc. Women's legal recognition is important in capacitating them to contribute to and benefit from climate resilience programmes.



There is only about a 25% change in the attitudes (of men) towards women. But women are more fearless now.



Pankaj Yadav, head of Janakpur village

Endnotes

- 1 The authors also gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, whose article proved the inspiration for this CDKN Essential: India's grandmothers harvest new status from climate-smart farming. <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-india-women-climate-change-farming-tr-idUSKBN20J2HJ>



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