

# Female Empowerment



## Profile: All Female Farmer Group

**The Rani Laxmibai Shendriya S. Gat Farmer Group is in the village of Bhilapur in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. The group of 18 women collectively hold 100 acres of farmland and cultivate 58 acres of cotton.**

### Background

Women are increasingly working the land as their husbands migrate to the cities to find work, leaving them to take care of the family home as well as the farm. Female farmers are somewhat of an invisible statistic, some experts estimating that up to 85% of women in rural India are working on farms.

Not only do women have the same problems associated with smallholder farming as men - poor access to credit and services, inadequate infrastructure and limited market access - they also have constraints that specifically affect women. In addition to the strenuous manual labour involved with farming, women must combine this work with their domestic duties. They have difficulty owning property and therefore have poorer access to credit, labour, extension services and subsidised inputs.

Despite their growing number, female farmers remain disenfranchised. A key reason for their disempowerment is their lack of representation in producer organisations. Their voices may be heard at the grassroots, but female representation at higher levels is poor.

The epidemic of farmer suicides in the region has left many landless widows to care for their families unsupported. Lacking respect from the community and facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles, the plight of rural women is worse still than the terrible difficulties faced by male farmers.

## The Female Farmer Group's Story

Starting as a Self Help Group these women decided to set up their own all female Farmer Group and farm collectively, inspired by work being carried out by local Zameen members.

Through working together they have been able to increase their cotton cultivation by 35 acres over the previous harvest, replacing soya with cotton to make higher profit margins. The group agreed to work on each other's land at no charge to reduce labour costs and maximise their profits. With all the profits staying within the group, the women have also established a financial services cooperative. Each member pays 30 rupees a week into a communal savings account. They earned 500 rupees in interest on their first 6,000 rupees of savings. They are therefore able to offer their members loans for inputs at very low rates of 2-3%. Soon they will have enough saved to be able to take out a bank loan in addition to holding a savers account.

“We wanted to be work together as we are stronger as a group, especially a group of women. We want to work as a united group to solve the problems we have in common. Currently we don't have any labour costs, so we keep the money we earn ourselves.”

Group member

The women have many plans for their increased profits and Fairtrade premium money. After reinvesting in equipment and seeds for the next harvest, they plan to use the money for school uniforms and text books for their children's education and for healthcare costs. They plan to invest the Fairtrade premium in sinking a bore well to provide drinking water for the village. Currently water is only available for two hours in the morning and again in the evening, a bore well would provide a constant supply.

The group plans to spread its message to other women in the area to increase the number of all female Farmer Groups

