

Farm Women Leaders: The Torch Bearer to Change

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ABSTRACT

Leadership alongwith technology among rural women leads to empowerment of women. Keeping this in view, the scientists of ICAR-CIWA intervened mushroom technology with the women of Nimapara block under Puri district of Odisha by following the group approach. Gradually, the scientists identified the women leaders from WSHGs / WFPC and developed leadership qualities among them through various capacity building programmes. It was observed that, leadership impacted on improved access of women to homestead land, suitable technologies, research organizations, financial agencies, input dealers, government schemes, market, etc. Women were found to have better knowledge, communication skill, group cohesiveness, nutritional security, economic stability, mobility and productivity. A strong linkage was also established with different stakeholders for easy availability of inputs and marketing. Hence, leadership development is indispensable to enable farm women to take valuable decisions for an equitable society.

INTRODUCTION

Background Information: Smt Gauripriya Mohapatra (50), a farm woman who lives in Nuagaon village under Balanga Panchayat of Nimapara block in Puri district of Odisha. She is a graduate and

belongs to General Caste category. Her family consists of only two members including husband. Due to some major health issue, her husband was advised for bed



rest and cannot work for earning. So, she being childless placed all the family burdens on her head. At this juncture, Smt. Gauripriya was very much disheartened and searching for a source of income.

Intervention: In the meanwhile, Smt. Mohapatra got a chance to visit ICAR-CIWA on the occasion of Scientists-Farmers Interface programme in 2019. She explored the available technologies in ICAR-CIWA premises. Through interaction, she expressed her hardship before institute scientists and requested to extent helping hand for earning. The scientists discussed with Gauripriya and highlighted the importance of mushroom technology in livelihood improvement. Bijla & Sharma, (2023) found that, mushroom cultivation presents a profitable agribusiness opportunity that addresses several key issues, including resource utilization, circular economy, job creation, sustainability, and nutritional security, while also mitigating the impacts of unpredictable weather. With this information, she showed her keen interest towards mushroom technology. Accordingly, her capacity was built through training, demonstration, exposure visit, literature support, etc. in the field of mushroom cultivation. She



adopted the technology in a small scale and met her family expenditure with a great difficulty. Simultaneously, the scientists made regular follow-up and developed a strong relation with Smt. Mohapatra.

Developed Leadership: Under the institute project of ICAR-CIWA, Smt. Mohapatra was identified as a Key Person in 2020 to pass on problems of farm women to the scientists and

solutions from scientists to the farm women. She assisted in recognizing the women needs. Gradually the scientist team motivated Smt. Gauripriya to expand her mushroom farm and also encouraged other women of the village to adopt mushroom technology for family economic and nutritional security. Step by step, through regular participatory monitoring, the scientists developed the leadership with Smt. Mohapatra. As a result, her attitude was changed with increased skill and knowledge. The research done by Rao, V. (2022) revealed that, village councils with women in reserved leadership positions allocated greater resources to improve infrastructure for drinking water, sanitation, roads, school maintenance, health centre upkeep, and irrigation facilities.

Subsequently, under the guidance of ICAR-CIWA scientists, Smt. Mogapatra formulated women collectives (WSHG / Federation / WFPC) and disseminated the mushroom technology among women. She assisted the scientists in organizing capacity building programmes on mushroom production, its value addition, record keeping, etc. in the locality. She played the role of a bridge between the researchers and the end users. She created gender sensitization among farm families of her community to get support from the men counterparts. Gradually Smt. Gauripriya turned empowered with enhanced access, mobility, knowledge and communication skill. She became able to contact various agencies such as research institutes, input dealers, markets, financial organizations, etc. to solve the gender issues in the area. A study done by Soledad (2021) has shown that involvement in SHGs has a significant impact on women's political participation since it provides them with larger networks and the capacity for collective action, and helps develop their civic skills.

Formulated Women-led FPC: Smt. Gauripriya was convinced with the benefits of Farmers Producer Organization. So, she cooperated the scientists in organizing a series of awareness and motivational programmes in her region to sensitize the farm women to formulate a women Farmers Producer Company. Lastly, it was successful in July, 2023 to formulate a women-led company in the name of 'CIWANI Women Farmers Producer Company Ltd'. in Balanga Panchayat, Nimapara, Puri. As Secretary, Smt. Gauripriya strengthened CIWANI Company by involving more than 160 SHGs (1600 women members) from three blocks covering 30 Panchayats of Puri district in Odisha to work together.

Developed Linkage: Under the leadership of Smt. Gauripriya, a strong linkage was developed with local ICAR Institutes (CIWA, CIFA, IIWM & CRRI), KVKs (Khordha & Puri), IRRI, Bhubaneswar, Input Dealers, Central Coconut Board, NGOs (LOPE & VJSS), Banks (Bank of Baroda & SBI), OUAT, APICOL, Government Departments and other stakeholders to avail the support of inputs, technology, credit, market, etc. Simultaneously, she facilitated CIWANI company to avail FSSAI license for creating more market demand and easy sale of their products through e-platform.

Impact of Women Leadership:

- The leadership of Smt. Mohapatra facilitated about 120 WSHGs to avail bank loan under MKUY (Avg.6 lakh/ group) with 50% subsidy for six years to cultivate mushroom. The company availed >Rs.7.2 crore for development of women-led mushroom enterprise.
- Majority of the groups grew mushroom in the net house (75ft x 35ft) with three tier system where 1200 beds were raised with 1200 kg yield of mushroom (1kg/bed) in a

month. As a result, they invested only Rs 0.87 lakh and got Rs 2.40 lakh (Rs 200/kg) with a profit of



Rs1.53 lakh within a month. According to Gupta *et al.* (2022), despite constraints in production, mushrooms offer an economical and environmentally friendly approach to utilizing agricultural and forest wastes, suggesting significant potential for sustainable farming practices globally.

- There was improved access of women members to credit, leased homestead land, information, extension, inputs, decision making and institutions.
- Women were observed to have enhanced leadership, participation, knowledge, skill, mobility, nutritional security, purchasing power and group cohesiveness. According to Dey *et al.*, (2020), adoption of mushroom farming apart from solving malnutrition problem in rural masses also lead to rural development by increasing income and self-employment particularly among women folk who constitute 70% of total women's population.
- As Master Trainer, the WSHG members imparted training to other interested women in the area on mushroom cultivation, it's value addition, packaging and marketing and earned some money under Mudra Yojana. Chompa (2022) said that becoming skilled helps people become financially independent.
- The FPO/SHG members of adjoining villages contacted Smt. Gauripriya who showed path as a **Torch Bearer** and guided for their success.

- CIWANI Company formed the assets like doubled storey rented office building, two Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs), women friendly tools/ equipments (spice grinder, rice pulverizer, power weeder, power tiller, chaff cutter, battery sprayer, puffed rice maker, oil extractor, *dal* mill, *badi* making grinder, coconut dehusker) for income generation by farm women.
- The mushroom women growers were well recognized by the villagers and other stakeholders. Even OUAT, Bhubaneswar recognized CIWANI Company as the Best Women FPO / FPC in 2023.
- Most of the women members were skilled enough to use smart phones, take photographs with geo-tagging location, search google, recording, videography, online money transaction, etc.
- As a whole, a gender sensitive social climate was developed in the community.

CONCLUSION:

Leadership enables the farm women to take effective decisions for more long-term farm productivity, economic stability and equitable society. The farm women's leadership helps in efficient and sustainable management of resources to benefit the whole rural community. Therefore, leadership development with farm women is essential to show path to other women for mitigating the

challenges for sustainability of livelihoods of farm families.

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