

## SCRIPT - FEMINISATION OF FARMING

### **The women farmers in Maharashtra who are fighting for their right to own land**

VO1: The women of Bawi village, in eastern Maharashtra are singing songs of prayer for a good harvest this year - and weeding out the bad luck they've had to face in the last decade.

VO2: The Marathwada region - which Bawi is part of - is one of the harshest places in India to be a farmer - ridden with crop failure, severe groundwater depletion, food insecurity and uncertain cash flow. It's drought-prone districts record an increasing number of farmer suicides every year. In 2018, the number stood at 947.

VO3: Despair, and the promise of guaranteed returns had forced farmers like Sunit Kulkarni to cultivate only cash crops like sugarcane and soybean. The money he earned was always put back into the farm for the next season. This meant there was little to feed his family.

VO4: His wife, Shubhangi, was determined to break this cycle.

#### **SOT1: Shubhangi Kulkarni, Farmer**

*When a man works on the farm, he only thinks about money and other big decisions that need to be taken. But a woman's approach is very different. She thinks about the home and the needs of her family, the food and the money required for survival.*

VO5: Three years ago, Shubhangi insisted that her husband set aside 1000 sq feet (1 acre) of farm land to grow fruits, vegetables and grains to ensure the food security of her family. Not only that - she insisted that the land - where she would decide what to grow - be transferred to her name legally.

VO6: For a woman to make this demand was not only rare, but revolutionary.

VO 7: In India, 83% of farm land is inherited and owned by male members of the family - while women counterparts inherit and own less than 2%.

#### **SOT2: Godavari, Swayam Shikshan Prayog**

*Women have always had to work as farm labour. 70% of women farmers today do 80% of all the work in the farm - not as decision makers, but as helpers. But now they work as owners.*

VO8: Godavari heads the local wing of Swayam Shikshan Prayog - a women's empowerment organisation that has helped many like Shubhangi come in to their own.

VO9: The idea to empower Bawi's women came after a startling revelation in 2009. Most of them were severely malnourished.

#### **SOT3: Godavari, Swayam Shikshan Prayog**

*When we conducted a medical camp to test for the level of haemoglobin in the women's blood, we realised how low it was. The doctor then told us, 'You have to eat pulses, leafy vegetables and tubers, among other foods.' One of the women present there said that in rural joint families like theirs, women*

*first serve the men and then eat whatever remains of the food prepared or sometimes nothing at all. That's why they are malnourished.*

VO10: The 'one-acre-model' of women-led climate resilient farming was started to combat this food insecurity among women.

VO11: Swayam Shikshan Prayog trains women farmers to preserve seeds and grow 35 different types of nutrient-rich vegetables, grains and tubers on their patch of land using organic farming techniques with the least amount of water - so that they don't have to depend on store-bought produce. They are also trained in alternate sources of livelihood like goat rearing, poultry farming and dairy produce - to make them more climate resilient.

**SOT4: Shubhangi Kulkarni, Farmer**

*Earlier, women never went to the farm. In our patriarchal system of society, only men went to the farm to work. But now, women work in the fields, they have an income, and some of them are even owners of land. There's also the income from the produce they sell. The women are now enlightened. They are confident about their abilities, and they are taking the initiative to go further.*

VO11: With the 'one-acre-model' Archana - like Shubhangi - has been repositioned as a knowledge-bearer within her family and community.

**SOT5: Archana Okulmane, Farmer**

*I didn't even know how to cook for my family earlier. But when I trained at Swayam Shikshan Prayog, my family was happy with my work - because, more money started coming in, we were able to save more, and the atmosphere at home was full of joy. Up until we don't try to prove our worth to ourselves, even family members don't quite believe in our abilities. Now that I am successful.*

**SOT6: Naseem, Associate Program Director, Swayam Shikshan Praoyog**

*When I started working with these women almost 25 years ago, they were unable to save even 10 rupees. And today, these women are able to save up to 500 rupees. This is one big difference. The second is that they spend most of their income on their children's education. They are not dependent on anyone.*

VO12: More than 41,000 women farmers practice the 'one acre model' in the drought-prone Marathwada region today.

VO13: The region - a hub of sugarcane production in India - has succumbed to monoculture - greatly affecting its soil chemistry because of excessive dependence on chemical fertilisers.

VO14: The 'one-acre-model' is taking small steps to reverse this - all at a nearly zero budget.

**SOT7: Archana Okulmane, Farmer**

*This is a zero-budget model, because everything that we require to make our bio-fertiliser is available in and around our farm. We make fertiliser sprays from weeds that animals don't eat.*

VO15: With an emphasis on organically farming a diversity of crops, the women farmers of Bawi have seen a 25% increase in crop yield since they started with a pilot plan in 2009.

VO16: Many of them are able to sell their excess produce - giving them annual savings of up to \$497 per household.

**SOT8: Shubhangi Kulkarni, Farmer**

*I was a housewife earlier. I knew nothing about agriculture. But my husband taught me all about it, and encouraged me to come into my own at every step. Today, I'm a changed person when it comes to my lifestyle, in the way I talk, in the way I interact with my family. I earn money, so people respect me. People in society know me now, and respect me a lot.*

VO17: The fight for rights however is far from over. In a deeply patriarchal society, Archana and Shubhangi are only among the 10% of women farmers who own the one-acre farm land they work on. But it is a start urgently needed to begin to solve the many problems that plague the region of Marathwada.