

Promoting Better Cotton Farming Practices in Maharashtra:
Better Cotton Sustainability and Value Addition in the Cotton Economy

Sowing the Seeds of Gender Empowerment in Cotton Value Chains of Maharashtra

Jangudevi Self-Help Group, Chandrapur

Women in the Jiwati block of Chandrapur district perform the majority of cotton cultivation tasks (such as sowing, weeding, picking, fertiliser application). However, in terms of major financial decisions, such as purchase of inputs, and sale of crops - women were notably absent. When women are solely consigned to more intensive and manual tasks in cotton cultivation it adversely affects their cotton-based incomes. Describing [its contribution to SDG 5](#), BCI acknowledges that “gender discrimination remains one of the greatest challenges to workplace equality in the cotton sector, partly because of pre-existing social attitudes and beliefs about gender roles.”

Ambuja Cement Foundation (ACF) appointed female field facilitators to engage women from cotton grower households. Over time, these field facilitators were able to build a rapport with other members of the household and earn their goodwill. This pragmatic approach made it easier to secure the implicit approval of men in the community to allow for the sustained participation of women in BCI project activities. These female field facilitators assisted with the crucial transition of women farmers into women’s ‘Self-Help Groups’.

When the idea of collective cotton procurement for onward sale – acting as intermediary traders in other words - was proposed to the groups, a few came forward and expressed their interest. However, when the time came to translate this enthusiasm into real action, the lack of working capital was a hurdle. To deal with this issue, the ACF team approached the local office of the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihood Mission and explained the plan of collective cotton procurement and sales through the groups. Following this, exposure visits were conducted by participating groups to Indira Ginnery in Sonurli village of Chandrapur district. Interactions with the staff of the ginning mill helped the cotton growers to clarify their doubts and to gain a first-hand understanding of the intricacies associated with post-harvest handling processing and transportation of cotton. Armed with a basic understanding, thirty-three Self-Help Groups of women cotton growers were able to access seed capital and carry out collective cotton purchasing which could then be traded onwards.

Jangudevi Women Self-Help Group from Bhari village stood out as an exemplar group. They demonstrated the ability to manage cotton trading as well as generating attractive economic returns for its members. During the two-to-three-month period of collective cotton procurement and sales, the group was able to earn a surplus of around INR 1.13 lakh rupees (1250 Euros). Out of this profit, it spent a small amount on educational materials for school children. They also purchased sanitary napkins which were distributed at a residential school nearby.



Members of Jangudevi Women SHG, Chandrapur

Kamlabai Kotnake, Secretary of Jangudevi Women Self-Help Group said: *“By accessing institutional credit at affordable interest rates, our group has freed some farmers from the exploitative practices of local moneylenders. The producer-friendly processes such as proper weighing, fair quality assessment and timely payments have forced competing middlemen to mend their ways. Our work has encouraged other women Self-Help Groups in the tribal communities to believe in the role of producer institutions to achieving entrepreneurial action themselves.”*

