

## SPREADING THE WORD ON NEW FARMING PRACTICES



**SUREKHA THAKARE** (Maharashtra)

**Surekha Thakare, her husband, and two children live in Valaipada, Zari in Maharashtra and are small-time farmers.**

Surekha had already been a part of the Umeed cadre of the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihood Mission. **She was absorbed into the United Nations Development Programme Uddyam programme as a community resource person and has seen tremendous benefits. With a multi-pronged focus on agriculture, the Uddyam project tries to cover agricultural issues from crop techniques to training to marketing.**

Cadres of Community Resource Person (CRP) are given training according to seasons. After that, the Community Resource Person (CRP) spread that information to the farmers on the ground, including providing demonstrations.

As farmers, they have learned better ways to grow their crops. Understanding the weather, crop cycle and seasonal rotations have been useful in increasing yield. They are also taught different fertiliser techniques and agri-marketing. They have diversified the types of vegetables they grow. Production has increased and this has led to an increase in earnings.

**“** Surekha has also become the Secretary of the Savitribai Phule Producer Group, one of 42 such producer groups that have been set up in the region. Each producer group has about 15-20 farmers in it.

For women farmers who do not have access to water or other resources, they collectively take farmland on rent and grow vegetables there. This in turn is sold collectively in the markets, thus reducing the burden of rent and leading to better pricing of their crops.

Surekha is also actively involved in the Procurement Centre at Patilpada Zari. The centres are a central hub for farmers to gather and assess their crops. There are about 16 procurement centres around the region that have been set up under the UNDP Uddyam project. They are equipped with weighing machines, rate cards and registers. Daily rates of seasonal vegetables are written on the board. Farmers can bring their vegetables to be weighed and packed in gunny bags with their name and grade of vegetable. Such grading systems for the vegetables are an important element to be able to get a better price at the market.

The centre also helps new farmers know more about efficient farming, procure seeds, and learn from peers. About 50 farmers come to the centre for training purposes every month.

Surekha has been instrumental in identifying farmers to take up these new technologies and practices. Not only has farming improved, but she's gained confidence and created an identity of her own as an effective trainer. Surekha says,



**“** By word of mouth, my centre's activities have been spreading in the community and other groups/villages. Community People are keen to know about how they can participate in the Centre's activities and benefit from the programme.