

scaling up. Organising community lunches in the fields of women farmers who have adopted some of the best practices advocated under sustainable agriculture and organising relevant exposure trips for women farmers have helped promote cross learning. Setting up model plots in women farmers' fields and model kitchen gardens have helped replication.

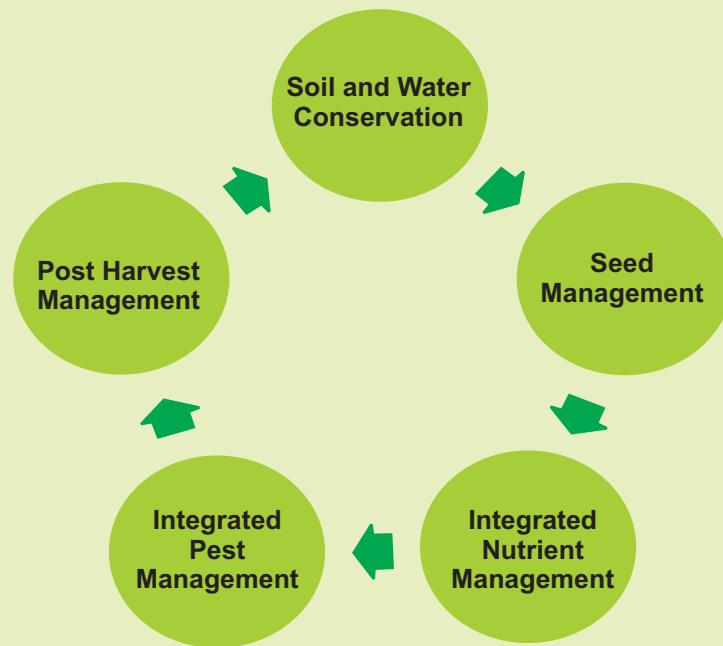
A strategy for scaling up and sustainability of MKSP is to identify resource persons among member women farmers, in each village. They are best practitioners and function as barefoot extension workers in promoting the objectives of MKSP among the community. These Community Resource Persons act as catalysts of change and are highly motivated, enterprising women farmers. They receive intensive training in areas related to institution building, sustainable agriculture and food security. At present, 130 community resource persons are engaged in spreading the message of MKSP in Vidarbha.



Women farmers' groups shall be organised into a federation at the cluster level. While MSSRF will support the growth and development of the federation for the next few years, as well as facilitate their access to Government

and other support facilities, it is aimed to gradually withdraw once the federations are able to operate independently. Federation members will be enabled and empowered to receive and manage funds in their own right. The programme is designed and being implemented in a manner that it becomes self-replicating and self-sustaining. In this way, a small government programme can become a mass movement within a few years.

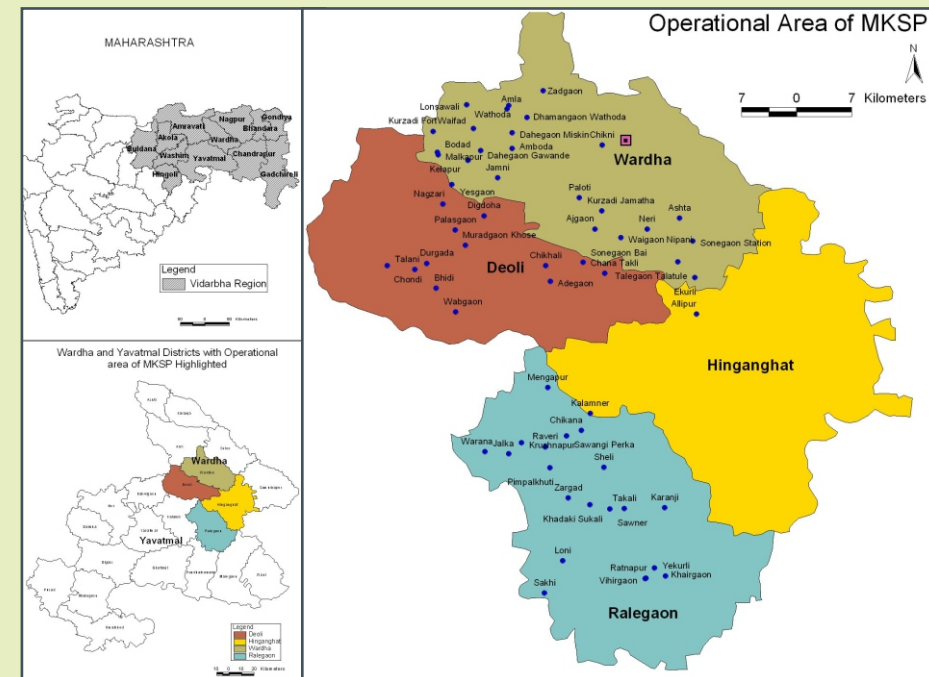
MSSRF has received funding from the Ministry of Rural Development, GoI and MSRLM, GoM, for a three year period, since December 2011 for strengthening and expanding MKSP in Vidarbha.



MKSP - supported by Ministry of Rural Development, GoI
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MAHILA KISAN SASHAKTIKARAN PARIYOJANA VIDARBHA



M S SWAMINATHAN RESEARCH FOUNDATION

The M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) is a registered non-profit trust for sustainable rural development, headquartered in Chennai and currently operating in six States across the country. MSSRF launched a few initiatives in Vidarbha in 2006, following the visit of Prof. M S Swaminathan to this region in his capacity as Chairman of the National Commission on Farmers, with the primary focus of spreading a message of hope among the farm families in the region.

Vidarbha, the hot spot of agrarian crisis, has an unenviable record of suicides by farmers, in the recent decades. While the widows of the farmers who have committed suicide are particularly vulnerable,



'women farmers' in general are an unorganized group without any recognition as 'farmers' despite being engaged in farming and farm-related activities for sustenance. MSSRF initiated the *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana* (MKSP – Programme for the Empowerment of Women Farmers), for empowering women farmers, including the widows of farmers who had committed suicide, in Wardha and Yavatmal districts of Vidarbha region, in 2007.

The seed sown by MSSRF in 2007 is now a National Programme, with the Finance Minister, Government of

India, announcing the *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana* to meet the specific needs of women farmers and allocating Rs.100 crores in the Central Budget of 2010-11. MKSP has been launched by the Government of India as a



sub component of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) in 2010-11 and the programme is being implemented in more than 10 states. In Vidarbha, the MKSP is a membership-based programme with a two-tier structure: women farmers' groups at the village level; and federation at the district level. Basic criteria for a

woman to become a member in the group are that she should be a resident of the village and be actively engaged in agriculture, operating own or family land or labouring for wages. Priority for membership in the programme is for women farmers who are widowed or single, who have small and marginal landholdings and who are from the disadvantaged castes. In forming the women engaged in agriculture into groups, the programme reinforces their status as 'farmers'. MKSP, by privileging women's farming activity, transcends the boundary of identifying women groups as mere savings and credit groups.

As of January 2014, there are 215 women farmers' groups with a membership of over 3000 women farmers, spread across 60 villages in the districts of Wardha and Yavatmal. Nearly 14 percent of the members are either widowed or single; 20 percent belong to Scheduled Tribes and 21 percent are from Scheduled Castes; 9 percent are landless and 83 percent are farmers with less than 10 acres.

The concept of women's empowerment in MKSP has two major elements: woman as a farmer and woman as a person. The former entails a focus on the livelihood component of the woman farmer while the latter emphasises on her personal development. A range of issues such as formation and management of groups and federation; skills for engaging with officials and effecting linkages with line departments and other institutions; awareness on different socio-political issues and rights including local self governance are covered to build the capacities of women farmers for grassroots institution building. On sustainable agriculture, trainings cover major dimensions ranging from soil and water conservation, land preparation, seed management, Integrated Nutrient Management, Integrated Pest Management, harvesting and post harvest handling of



produce, mixed cropping, self sustainability of farmers for bio-inputs and collective purchase of inputs and collective sale of produce. To promote household food security, awareness creation sessions on nutrition, health and hygiene are held for women farmers followed by facilitation for establishing kitchen gardens and cultivation of food grains. Facilitating access to eligible entitlements from the government is a cross cutting activity across the three focal themes.



Reaching scientific advice to women farmers through ICT to enable them to take timely and weather based decisions on cropping is an important component of MKSP. Agro-advisories are disseminated through mobile phones. Public address system, audio conferencing, film shows and DVDs are used effectively in addition to print material. Setting up of Common Facility Centres in two villages to facilitate easy access and timely availability of agricultural implements for small farmers is a unique component in the programme. So is the approach of developing and providing 'Entitlement Cards' pertaining to all Government schemes.



Organising *Mahila Melawas* where women farmers across villages interact with one another and share their experiences and monthly meetings of women farmers' groups within villages help in exchange of ideas and