



Sehar Ki Duniya: A World of Resilience, Mobilization and Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Sehar Ki Duniya is a story of young farm woman entrepreneur, her remarkable accomplishment in mobilizing fellow farmers especially farm women, breaking their glass ceiling and showing them the way how self reliance can be achieved, sustainability can be brought in and empowerment can be attained. Today this young entrepreneur is amongst the recognized and prosperous farm women of the area, owning a *pucca* house with all basic amenities and taking care of all the needs of her three small daughters. Her progress over the last couple of years is a result of her hard work, persistence and her inquest desire to learn. She has now become a role model for her local community of farmers, proving that with a focused approach everything is impossible.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture in India is dominated by marginal and small farmers. National Sample Survey Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) conducted a Situation Assessment Survey (SAS) of Agricultural Households during NSS 77th round (January 2019- December 2019) with reference to the agricultural year July 2018- June 2019 in the rural areas of the country. As per the Survey, the percentage distribution of agricultural households owning less than two hectares of land is 89.4%. For a vast majority of the farming population in the country, agriculture is related to only growing food crops like wheat, paddy, maize, fodder crops like Barseem, Jowar, Bajra for animals and pulses if the land holding permits. The farmers have been carrying out this mono cultural legacy over the generations. In the present era, a lot of inputs from seed to chemical fertilizers to plant protection chemicals including pesticides are required for growing different crops, which increases cost of cultivation. The cost is further escalated by the labour and machinery charges incurred while performing different operations in the fields. Ultimately, it results in a situation where the cost of cultivation exceeds the output. This is basically the

reason why the farming is considered as a non-remunerative enterprise. The problems becomes more severe in case of small and marginal farmers who find it difficult to bear the brunt of increased cost escalation and are left with no option except to quit agriculture. The situation thus demands exploring other opportunities which are more remunerative, more environmental friendly and do not result in over-exploitation of natural resources. Of late, some of the farmers in the country have now understood and changed the course of agriculture with diversification.

Diversification *vis-a-vis* integrated farming system approach involve the farmer to take on other allied enterprises like floriculture, goatry, bee keeping, mushroom cultivation, poultry, vegetable and many others. It gives the farmer an advantage that the failure of one component to give desired results is compensated by other component. It also makes best and optimum use of the family labour, local resources and the output of one enterprise becomes the input of other enterprise. Integrated farming systems (IFS) can be described as a judicious mix and positive interaction between two or more components such as horticulture crops, livestock, aquaculture, poultry/ducks, apiculture, and

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Fig. 1: Marigold: Standing crop and flowers in boxes for marketing

mushroom cultivation. It uses the cardinal principles of minimum competition and maximum complimentary with advanced agronomic management tools. Its goal is to sustain an environmentally friendly farm income, family nutrition, and ecosystem services (CEEW, 2021). Among the various enterprises, Marigold cultivation is an income generating option that does not require farmers to incur much on input cost and on the other hand, monetary output far exceeds that of corresponding yield.

The present story depicts the successful journey of Ms. Mubina Akhtar who took to diversification through vegetables, fruits, marigold and poultry along with a mix of sustainable practices and become an example for others to follow. A young woman and a mother of four daughters, studied up to higher secondary level, Ms. Mubina hails from a village Boon Bari, located at a distance of about two kilometers from block Batote in Ramban District. Her husband is engaged in transport business The village Boon Bari represents a picturesque; a small hamlet located against the backdrop of Shivalik hills; far from the chaotic and congested city life. The village having a population of 1500-1700 represents unity in diversity. One can find mutual respect for human values and shared emotions, peoples are very much happy and contented with what they have. Womenfolk still carry on the cultural legacy, the tradition of 'purdah' system; hesitate to sit on chair in front of their elders. They do not see it as an infringement on their personal

liberty; but for them it is a sort of respect for their elders.

The area has a mountainous topography, farming is rainfed (ICAR-CRIDA), size of holding is very small, and fragmentation of holdings hinders farm mechanization operations. Despite the numerous challenges of living in a small village, Mubina committed to support her family through hard work and dedication. She took the lead in mobilizing her fellow farmers and farm women and establishing a collective association by the name of '*Sehar Ki Duniya*'; Sehar being the name of her smallest daughter.

With only 0.75 acres of agricultural land, she decided to do something different. Her quest for doing something new took a practical shape only after she came in contact with institutes and organizations working for the upliftment of agriculture in district. Those include Krishi Vigyan Kendra-Ramban, Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI) of State Bank of India, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (IIIM-Jammu), Department of Agricultural Production and Farmers' Welfare, Department of Horticulture and other allied in Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Through SBI-RSETI SBI, she got training on Mushroom cultivation. About 45 women of her area got this training. CSIR-IIIM upgraded her skills in Marigold cultivation and Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare provided her expertise and inputs, Horticulture planning and marketing department arranged for

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Fig. 1: Mubina in her Vegetable fields

the necessary marketing support for her produce.

KVK intervention

She learnt about natural farming and preparation of different components of natural farming like Jeevamrita, Beejamrita, AGNIASTRA, Brahmastra and various other microbial preparations. She prepares Jeevamrita and Beejamrita and applies them to her fields. On being asked about the difference in yield and soil health after application of Jeevamrita and Beejamrita, she replies in positive. Mubina has felt the difference in yields and quality of soil after adopting Natural Farming practices. She is promoting natural farming in the region by motivating other fellow members of her group by awareness and training sessions on preparation of different formulations under Natural Farming. Her services are also being utilized by KVK-Ramban, departments of agriculture and horticulture and others to educate other farmers on sustainable agricultural production practices.

Marigold cultivation

After getting the necessary expertise in cultivation of Marigold, she along with 120 others were provided hybrid Marigold seed (Variety: Mahavishnu Orange) by CSIR-IIIM Jammu under mission floriculture of the institute. She started cultivating Marigold from last year and has taken two crops of Marigold so far. In a year two crops of Marigold can be taken. From Marigold she has earned more than 10,000 in a year from a meagre 0.12 ha of land under marigold. Not only Mubina, but other members of her group who are



Fig. 2: Rearing of Chicks

cultivating Marigold are earning.

Mushroom production

She grew Mushroom in 20 bags and harvested 30 to 35 kilogram of mushroom which she sold in the market at rupees 200-250 per kilogram. This much produce fetched an income of rupees 7000.

Vegetable Production

Mubina very proudly says that she does not purchase vegetables from outside. She produces different types of vegetables in her own fields. The vegetables produced by her include Radish, Cucumber, Onion, Bottle gourd, Bitter gourd, Tomato, Potato, Beans, Spinach, Knolhol and others. Besides all this, she also purchases Potato from potato growers of her own and adjoining villages and sells them in market at higher price.

Fruit Production

Among the horticulture crops, she has Walnut, Peas and Persimmon or Japanese fruit locally called Amlook. Amlook is very rich in Fibre that helps lower the bad cholesterol level and also fuels the growth of good bacteria in our intestines. The high fibre content lowers the high blood sugar level and helps in smooth bowel movement. Mubina has about 15 walnut plants which are 20 years old and from which she harvested 2.5 qtls. of walnut this year. She sold the produce at the rate of 250-300 per kilogram to army personnels stationed in that area. This also gave her a gross income of rupees 40,000-50,000

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after deducting the expenses she incurs while hiring labor for plucking, sorting and grading. From 12 Amlook plants, she had about 2.8 quintals of fruit which she sold at the rate of rupees 35 per kilogram. Mubina further tells that she sells them in crates with each crate having 10 kilogram of fruit. This year she had 28 crates of Persimmon which also gave her a net income of rupees 7200 after deducting all the expenses of packaging boxes, labour, transport and miscellaneous charges. She also has pear plants which also are sold in the market or are sold when they ripen and are still on the plants. This year pear were sold worth an amount of rupees 15,000.

Poultry

She has also now started rearing chicks. In her Poultry unit are one month old about hundred chicks which she purchased at rupees hundred per chick. Mubina hopes to have good income from these poultry birds once they grew up and are sold in the market or start laying eggs.

On the whole she earns about one lakhs from a small piece of land without any external inputs. Her cost of cultivation is also very less.

Marketing Linkages

The young lady has developed appropriate market linkages both in the local market, district level market as well as outside her district for marketing of her produce and also for the produce which she procures from her fellow farmers and farm women. In contrast to her visits to market, now many people including vendors and army personnel come to her for purchase of fruits and vegetables and other products. In the local market, Marigold does not fetches her a good price, so she sends it to Jammu where it is in high demand due to temples, banquet halls, restaurants and other places where flowers are required in sufficient quantities. She also collects the Marigold produced by other members of 'Sehar ki Duniya' and after proper packaging the marigold so collected is sent to Jammu for sale. The members of the group who have given their produce to Mubina for sale are than paid according to their share in the total quantity collected and sold only after deducting the expenses incurred by Mubina on the purchase of boxes for packaging, transport

and other miscellaneous expenses. For marketing of potato, she has developed her own marketing linkages with local shopkeepers. She earns a profit by this. In the last season, she had purchased potato at the rate of rupees 20 per kilogram from the local producers and sold it at rupees 40-45 per kilogram.

Mobilization and empowerment through Sehar Ki Duniya

Ms. Mubina started the 'Sehar Ki Duniya' by mobilizing the farm women and farmers in her village and adjoining villages. Today her group has more than 350 members of which she has linked 70 members with Bank. These 70 members are linked with branch of Jammu and Kashmir Bank at Batote. The mobilization of farming community by Mubina under the banner of '*Sehar Ki Duniya*' is a remarkable achievement given the very static nature of our farming community. Her endeavour assumes significant because most of her group members are farm women. She has made all of them to work and utilize their time in some productive work which otherwise goes in gossips. At present most of the women of her area are busy in doing activities like marigold cultivation, mushroom production, vermicompost production, poultry or kitchen gardening. The women also make money by selling their products and this has led to empowerment of these women. At present about 70 members of her group are linked to Bank, but she plans to link all the members with the Bank and start financial transaction through creating some revolving fund. She also had plans to set up dairy processing and animal feed unit to cater to the animal feed requirements of livestock owners of her area. Her group meets at least once in every month with informal meetings among group members taking more frequently. The group activities include planning for agriculture, horticulture, livestock, arranging for inputs for group members, meetings with agriculture and line departments, assessing training needs of members, development of market linkages and linkages with banks.

Mubina along with her group members proactively takes part in various activities and programmes of Krishi Vigyan Kendra-Ramban, Department of Agriculture and allied sectors of

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Ramban district for her different needs related to good quality inputs like seeds, seedlings and planting material, awareness on latest agriculture related schemes, new practices and approaches in farming and other miscellaneous needs. Today Mubina continues to inspire many other young ladies in this Union Territory to come forward, take initiatives, lead from the front and set examples for others. She owes her success to all the agencies and institutes which helped her in one or other ways in becoming self reliance and empowered.

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