digitalGREEN








VOICES FROM THE FIELD


Digital Green is an international not-for-profit organization, which uses an innovative digital platform for community engagement to improve lives of rural communities across the globe.

We have reached more than a million individuals across Asia and Africa producing over 4,000 localized videos in over 20 languages.

This is a compilation of stories of some of the many lives we have touched over our journey. These stories have been made possible through the collective efforts of Digital Green staff and our partners, and most importantly, the communities with whom we engage.

VISION

A world where all individuals live a life of dignity

MISSION

To integrate innovative technology with global development efforts to improve human well being

VALUES

Humility
Excellence
Accountability
Empathy
Integrity

CONTENTS

TOWARDS A HAPPIER, HEALTHIER FUTURE

Safiya Yakubu, 28, lives with her husband in Jikata, Niger, since they got married in 2004. They are both farmers and have four children. Their eldest child is a 11-year-old boy named Naziru and their youngest is Youssoufa who is just 3 months old.

Safiya is proud to share that her two eldest children Naziru and Rahina attend primary school. A curious and energetic person herself, Safiya could not go to school since her family was poor, with little access to basic social amenities.

"Digital Green videos are my formal school classes now," she shares. "I feel empowered every time I watch a Digital Green video because I learn something new that is vital to my own and my family's health," she adds.

Digital Green is reaching more than 1,600 households in 20 villages of Guidan Roumdji and Aguie communes of Maradi region to spread awareness about Maternal Infant and Young Child Nutrition (MIYCN) practices since the beginning of 2015 as part of a one year pilot project supported by USAID's Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING).

Sitting happily in her arms is her fourth child Youssoufa who at 3 months displays the signs of a healthy baby. "The luckiest among my children is Youssoufa as I started watching the videos in March 2015, few month before I delivered Youssoufa. She is also the happiest and healthiest," says Safiya. "I delivered my first three children in darkness, with no knowledge about hygiene, health and nutrition," she adds.

Since March 2015 and until November the

same year Safiya had watched videos on importance of first 1000 days, hand washing, responsive feeding, exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding, need for good nutrition for women and prevention and treatment of diarrhea.

"Digital Green videos are my formal school classes now. I feel empowered every time I watch a Digital Green video because I learn something new that is vital to my own and my family's health."
- Safiya Yakubu

Since there was no health centre in their village, after watching the message about consulting health workers during pregnancy in one of the videos, Safiya convinced her husband to go to the neighboring village called Guidan Daweye, 9 kms away, to consult a health worker for the first time in her life. Though the journey was on a cart through difficult desert terrain and very tiring, Safiya was excited. "I got some medicines and advice from the health worker on my first visit to a health center," she shared. Safiya went back the second time to Guidan Daweye for a safe institutional delivery of Youssoufa.

The second Digital Green video Safiya watched was on hand washing. She adopted this practice immediately by installing a tippy tap near her toilet. "I never cared about washing hands, but after watching this video, I changed my behavior."

Safiya noticed some positive change in her life after adopting this practice, such as less frequent stomach problems. "My children too don't suffer from diarrhea like in the past," she adds.

The video on 'Exclusive Breastfeeding' was also a hit with Safiya. Youssoufa, her newborn is the first to be exclusively breastfed among all her children. "In our tradition, we have to wait for an old woman, usually the grandmother from the husband's side to come test the breast milk to see whether it is in good condition or spoiled. They test it by pouring a little on a

very hot metal object," she shares. This was the reason why her first three children could not benefit from the colostrum.

"Fortunately, for Youssoufa, I watched the videos on exclusive breastfeeding before I delivered him. I gave him the colostrum as I had learnt in the video that it is the first vaccination for a child," shares Safiya. "Youssoufa is looking healthy and happy, he does not need to be encouraged to smile, he smiles very often and his smiles make me happy," adds the proud mother. "I understand that mothers milk does not spoil and does not need to be tested before giving it to a child based on the video I watched," she adds. Safiya promises to continue exclusive breastfeeding for Youssoufa until he is 6 months old.

Safiya also watched the video on 'Complementary Feeding and dietary diversity' where she learnt how to prepare a varied diet for her family. "This has helped in bringing about a positive change in my family's life as well. My family eats better now and have more appetite than before," she adds.

Yakubu, Safiya's husband happily shares that "Before Safiya watched the video on complementary feeding and dietary diversity, she used to prepare only cereals, but now after having watched the video on complementary feeding, our meals have become more nutritious and we have more appetite and feel healthier."

A MAN WITH A DREAM

Ulatu village in Namkum block of Ranchi district in the Indian state of Jharkhand paints an idyllic picture, nestled in a verdant and mountainous setting, tucked away from the hustle-bustle of urban life.

Its scenic beauty notwithstanding, Ulatu is a poor village with majority of the population comprising low-literate smallholder farmers. The tiny village owes a lot to 32-year-old Gomeshri Munda for the progress it has seen in terms of community mobilization and microfinance.

Gomeshri belongs to the Munda tribal community, one of the major Adivasi (tribal) groups of Jharkhand. The oldest of three brothers and educated till 10th grade, he always nurtured a desire to help his community. Around eight years ago, while sitting under an old tamarind tree, watching women from his village carrying firewood which they would sell in the local markets to splurge on alcohol, Gomeshri was struck by a desire to motivate them to save at least INR 5 every week and plan for their future. During his visits to the neighboring village, Nichetoli, he would watch a team from NGO, PRADAN, mobilizing self-help groups and learnt about bookkeeping. In 2007, without any external guidance or support, he mobilized the women into groups and linked them with banks. Years later, Gomeshri's groups continue to operate and he continues to function as their bookkeeper. From INR 5 every week, the women farmers today save INR 10 each per week, with an individual saving of around INR 2,500 till date. The community refers to Gomeshri with respect as 'Master ji' or 'dada' for his relentless efforts toward community development.

In 2013, the Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) started their

operations and formed women self-help groups (SHGs) across the state. In 2014, JSLPS included the groups formed by Gomeshri into its fold. Gomeshri was also the unanimous choice of the SHGs to be an Aajeevika Krishak Mitra (AKM) or community-level agriculture extension agent. Gomeshri was trained on providing extension services and disseminating information on preparing Nadep compost, ghanjeevamrit and other community-managed sustainable agricultural practices by the JSLPS team. Gomeshri received agricultural and non-agricultural trainings from JSLPS, such as system of rice intensification, system of crop intensification, non-pesticidal management and integrated nutrient management. He was also formally trained on bookkeeping.

To strengthen their extension services and increase reach and uptake of best practices, JSLPS collaborated with Digital Green to use the latter's video-enabled behavior change communication approach. Gomeshri, like the other AKMs, was also trained on disseminating best practices through videos to SHGs. "Through the videos, I find it easier to explain best practices to the women," he shared. Gomeshri makes an effort to translate and explain each point in case some video is not in the local language, Mundari.

Some of the best practices that the women in his SHGs have adopted after attending his video screenings include preparing organic compost through the Nadep method (using locally available resources), treating seeds with an organic solution and not spending their meagre savings on costly inputs like commercially sold fertilizers or pesticides.

"We made this compost as instructed by Gomeshri dada. We saw the video and learnt how to make this compost. This compost helps loosen the soil and increases its fertility, which leads to greater productivity."

- Dasmi Devi, Dasauli Self-Help Group, Ulatu village

"We met in self-help groups. Gomeshri taught us about self-help groups and we also learnt about these practices by watching the videos he screened. Earlier, we used to transplant 30-day seedlings but now we transplant 10-15 day seedlings as part of the recommended system of rice intensification. This practice is beneficial to us."

- Purungi Devi Dasauli Self-Help Group, Ulatu village

As an AKM, Gomeshri has facilitated the creation of 11 Nadep pits in the village, where all the farmers followed the same procedure as shown in the video, thus ensuring quality. Gomeshri's wife, Nagi Devi, 30, married to him for a decade, is his greatest supporter and is proud of the work he does and the respect and goodwill he enjoys within their village. The villagers tell her that Gomeshri is helping them overcome poverty. She herself is an active member of the local SHG and travels to different places for the meetings. "All the women think that SHGs are good for us. We now regularly try new and improved farming methods which have resulted in increased and better quality yield."

Nagi Devi and Gomeshri use their savings from farming to educate their three children, Basanti, their oldest daughter and two sons, Suman Lal and Pagua Munda. Gomeshri wants to educate his kids further and although they might not get government jobs, they can at least aspire for lucrative farming and livelihood practices like commercial goat rearing and poultry and earn more than their parents do. Gomeshri and Nagi Devi hope that their children will make their family and village proud one day.

With excessive use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, the land in his village had become fallow. Now with the community adopting practices like preparing and using organic compost and fertilizers, the land's fertility is getting restored. Over the next five years, Gomeshri wants to completely eliminate the use of commercially sold chemical pesticides and fertilizers in his village. "I hope my community progresses both socially and economically," shares Gomeshri.

"These days we use organic compost that we make ourselves using Nadep pits. Earlier we used to apply commercially available urea and DAP on our lands. The cost of these products has been increasing every year from INR 20 to INR 30 to INR 40, hence, these cost us a lot. Due to these reasons, we started preparing NADEP compost. Why should we spend our money on purchasing fertilizer? Dada gave information on these best practices to us through videos."

- Jedauli Devi, Dasauli Self-Help Group, Ulatu village

LEVERAGING MODEL FARMERS TO PROMOTE BETTER NUTRITIONAL PRACTICES

Fetanich Mekonnen, a 47 year-old widowed mother of five children, is a model farmer in her kebele of Mankusa in Jabi, Tehnan woreda, Amhara, Ethiopia. As a model farmer, she assists government extension workers known as Development Agents (DAs) promote best practices and new technologies among farmers in her community. Model farmers are selected by DAs based on their record as early adopters of new agricultural techniques promoted by the government and are typically well-known and respected members of their communities. Fetanich is currently working with DAs in her woreda with support from Digital Green and Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA), to promote Quality Protein Maize (QPM), a form of hybrid corn with high levels of amino acids. QPM is an important alternative source of protein for farming families who suffer from malnutrition and stunted growth due to insufficient protein consumption. In her role as a model farmer, Fetanich raises awareness regarding the benefits of QPM in her community and teaches women farmers how to incorporate it in their food.

In addition to teaching farmers about best practices, Fetanich also serves as an important source of information regarding her kebele for DAs. Through her role as a model farmer and leader of her development group, Fetanich stays abreast of farmers' feedback and concerns regarding QPM practices and

often relays this feedback to DAs at the woreda office. For example, she explains that there have been a few misconceptions about QPM in the community that she has tried to correct through her group meetings. Some farmers have asked Fetanich if eating QPM during "fasting days" violates the rules prescribed by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to avoid eating meat on certain religious days. Fetanich says that some farmers believe that because QPM is high in protein like traditional meat sources, it should also be avoided on fasting days. She has been able to correct this misconception and has convinced the women in her development group that it is acceptable to eat QPM at any time. Fetanich has also raised this concern with DAs in her kebele. DAs now discuss this issue during QPM food video disseminations so as to preemptively correct any misunderstandings that may arise. In this way, Fetanich functions as the eyes and ears on the ground for woreda level government officials and plays a critical part in ensuring that the technologies promoted by the government are aligned with farmer interests and needs.

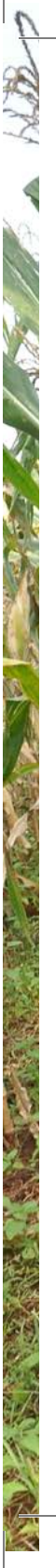
Moreover, Fetanich feels that the video-based approach has helped her to be more effective in her role as a model farmer. "Before the videos, I used to meet with my development groups to discuss agriculture and nutrition practices promoted by the government. However, the discussions were not concrete," she shares. "In contrast, after the videos, my weekly meetings have become much more fruitful and interesting," she adds. She states, "the videos show women how to follow all of the steps needed to implement a new practice, which makes them much more likely to adopt a QPM food recipe than before." Indeed, she explains that since the videos explain the fundamentals of cooking with QPM, she is able to utilize her discussion groups to answer more specific

" The videos show women how to follow all of the steps needed to implement a new practice, which makes them much more likely to adopt a QPM food recipe than before."
- Fetanich Mekonnen

questions, such as the concern about eating QPM on fasting days.

This is a sentiment that other model farmers have echoed. For example, Dena, a young mother and model farmer in Jabi Tehnan woreda notes that the videos have enabled her to mediate 1:5 group meetings successfully. "Before the videos, I discussed the agricultural and nutritional benefits of QPM with my group, but farmers were not convinced to adopt QPM because the information was too theoretical," says Dena. "Now with the videos, the women in my group understand all of the details needed to use QPM. For example, the videos show them exactly the right amounts of salt and oil to use in order to make healthy food with QPM. Now, I feel that I am more effective in my role, since women are being convinced to use QPM," she adds.

By leveraging model farmers to promote videos on innovative agriculture and nutrition practices, Digital Green is slowly embedding the video-based approach into the existing government extension system. This is critical for sustaining the video-based approach in the long run. With regards to QPM specifically, model farmers such as Fetanich illustrate the importance of involving women in promoting the broader goals of food security and improved nutrition in the region. As a respected and influential woman in her kebele, Fetanich plays an important role in convincing other women like her to adopt improved nutritional practices and cook with QPM to feed their families. In Amhara, where 60 percent of children under the age of five suffer from stunting, convincing women to cook with alternative protein sources such as QPM is of utmost importance. However, more remains to be done. Fetanich notes that although she has had a lot of success raising awareness of QPM food in her kebele among women farmers, many of the men in her village do not yet know of the benefits of QPM. In the future, she suggests that QPM recipe videos should also be screened to male development groups also. Dena agrees and explains that in order to cook with QPM, women farmers usually need to first convince their husbands to buy QPM seed and plant it on their land. She has found that within her development group, families are more likely to adopt QPM when both the husband and wife have seen the videos. Along these lines, during future video disseminations, Dena suggests that it would be helpful for DAs to talk about the importance of integration between husbands and wives in performing both home and field related duties. The challenge of integrating both men and women in planting and cooking with QPM will be explored further as Digital Green and SAA scale-up their intervention to neighboring villages in Amhara.



"The videos show them exactly the right amounts of salt and oil to use in order to make healthy food with QPM. I feel that I am more effective in my role, since women are being convinced to use QPM." – Fetanich Mekonnen

A YOUNG GIRL'S JOURNEY TO EMPOWERMENT

In 2004, when Kunjarani Mahanta, an adolescent girl from Kumulabahali village of Keonjhar district in Odisha, India, joined a self-help group (SHG), she could hardly imagine that one day she would be the face of empowerment in her community.

Kunjarani or Kunja as she is fondly called still remembers when she was moving door to door on a bicycle mobilizing the women in her community and conducting group meetings as a part of her SHG level routine activities. A major milestone of her life was in 2005, when she was elected secretary of her own SHG, and later went on to become secretary of the Gram Panchayat level federation of SHGs, surpassing many other older women in the group. She attributes this success to her dedication and commitment to her work. With her family's unwavering support and encouragement, Kunjarani started actively participating in various community-level activities, simultaneously playing a critical role in her SHG adopting income generation activities such as brick-making, participation in Mid-Day Meal Scheme, taking village pond on lease for fish farming, setting up grain banks etc. She soon got associated with VARRAT, a state-level non-governmental organization, a move that increased her linkage with the community, helped her acquire community mobilization skills and

learn group strengthening processes. In 2010, VARRAT collaborated with Digital Green to use localized videos to disseminate information on best practices within rural community groups. Kunjarani was trained on video dissemination, learning how to operate a battery-operated pico projector to screen videos and effectively facilitate an interactive screening. Kunjarani relished this new challenge of educating women in her community on best practices through this innovative learning approach.

She began the initiative by screening videos on agricultural practices to SHGs in three villages including her own village. With a smile on her face, she recollects the happy faces of the group members who benefited from the videos in terms of improved yield and increased income. "It gives me immense satisfaction and happiness when I observe that my video screenings have such a positive impact. I also feel proud that I am able to use my free time towards enhancing the lives and livelihoods of these families," she shared.

Over the years, screening agriculture videos almost 22 days in a month, Kunjarani's own knowledge on agricultural topics improved and she became the 'agriculture point person' for the three villages. People fondly started calling her 'agriculture video didi (sister)'. Kunjarani can never forget the day she received a formal invitation from the block level office of Department of Agriculture, Government of Odisha, to participate as a resource person at one of its events to motivate farmers to adopt a new practice by sharing her own knowledge on agriculture as well as the experience of other farmers while adopting the practice. It was just the beginning of Kunjarani's transformation into a recognized community change agent.

In 2013, Kunjarani started disseminating health and nutrition videos, as part of the USAID-funded Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project-Digital Green-VARRAT collaboration, to test the feasibility of using the video-enabled behavior change communication approach to improve maternal and child health in Keonjhar district. The SPRING team trained her on maternal, infant and young child nutrition (MIYCN) practices, which helped her to respond to the queries of the viewers during screening. Incidentally, Kunjarani was pregnant while

disseminating these videos. She applied the promoted MIYCN practices in her own life and delivered a healthy baby at the end of her second pregnancy. Adopting the featured practices was a life-changing experience for her as she had tragically lost her first child. Watching videos on the necessity of taking iron and folic acid tablets and maternal workload during pregnancy and importance of the first 1,000 days of a child's life helped her immensely. Videos on postnatal care practices like exclusive breastfeeding and breastfeeding for working mothers were useful for her as a lactating mother.

> "It gives me immense satisfaction and happiness when I observe that my video screenings have such a positive impact. I also feel proud that I am able to use my free time towards enhancing the lives and livelihoods of these families." - Kunjarani Mahanta

Kunjarani also felt more connected to the people while discussing maternal and child health and nutrition issues. Her designation in the community changed from 'agriculture video didi' to 'health video didi' and she became the focal point for diffusion of health and nutrition messages. Ahalya Mahanta of Maa Jagatjanani SHG group from Kumudabahali village of Patna block harvested twice the amount of rice she was harvesting earlier, after watching a video promoting the system of rice intensification (an improved paddy cultivation practice) that was disseminated by Kunja in 2012. Encouraged by the impressive yield, Ahalya still continues to practice the system of rice intensification. Laxmipriya Mahanta of Jai Maa Banaduraga SHG of the same village saw a video on exclusive breastfeeding in 2013 screened by Kunja just a month before she delivered her second child. Convinced with the message in the video, Laxmipriya continued exclusive breastfeeding for six months and feels that her baby is quite healthy in comparison to her first child who was born when she didn't have such information.

Frontline workers like Anganwadi Workers and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) started referring to Kunja for health and nutrition related technical information. She became a permanent invitee to Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHNDs) held

every month. While disseminating these videos, interacting with the community on the same topic again and again, and participating in different training programs increased Kunja's confidence in her ability to share information. Her confidence reflects in her voice; she is articulate and assertive while speaking, citing examples and success stories. Her ability to motivate and convince has earned her recognition as a resource person for the government extension services.

Today, she is considered as a knowledge resource not only by her community, but also by her family who look up to her with respect. She has had the complete support of her family since the beginning of her journey, before and after her marriage. During pregnancy and after delivery, the entire family stood by her, which is why she could continue working without compromising on the attention and care she had to give to her now two year old daughter, Jharana Mahanta, her only child. Her mother, Jayamani Mahanta, says, "People in my village and in nearby villages know me as Kunja's mother which makes me feel proud of my daughter." Apart from social empowerment, Kunjarani feels that economic empowerment of women is also crucial for increasing their role in decision-making at the household and community level. She is grateful to her family members including her husband, Yudhisthira Mahanta, who have been very supportive all through her journey from being an ordinary rural woman to a community knowledge resource. Yudhisthira is especially proud of his wife's achievement, "People know me as Kunja's husband and I feel happy about it. Kunja's involvement with this project has not only helped us become parents of a healthy baby, but also get better yield from our family farm by trying new improved techniques."

TEAMING UP TO COMBAT MALNUTRITION

Chronic food insecurity and malnutrition are major concerns in Ethiopia, where two in five children are stunted due to lack of essential nutrients in the first five years of their life. In fact, Ethiopia loses about 16.5 percent of its GDP each year due to the long-term effects of child malnutrition as shared in UN World Food Programme's report, The Cost of Hunger in Ethiopia.

Digital Green, in partnership with Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA), is addressing the need for improved nutrition and food security among resource-poor farmers by providing instructional videos on quality protein maize (QPM) to households in the Amhara region. QPM is a type of maize developed through conventional breeding that has increased levels of amino acids. It provides an important source of protein to children dependent on maize as a staple food who have inadequate access to other protein sources. Digital Green and SAA are working with government extension agents to produce videos on QPM food recipes and QPM-related agronomic practices. Development agents (DAs) and health extension agents then screen these videos to local farmers. Ultimately, the program aims to leverage the video-based approach to improve household nutrition and food security through the adoption of QPM crop management and food preparation practices.

The pilot phase of this program was initiated in 2012. During the pilot, Digital Green and

SAA provided capacity building support to government extension agents in order to better embed the video-based approach into the existing agriculture and health extension systems. An important part of this process involved establishing and training a team of government extension agents to produce videos relating to QPM.

One such extension worker is Mulugeta Belew, Subject Matter Specialist (SMS) in agronomy, Mulugeta was appointed as the focal person for the video production team in Dembecha woreda, in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. "Ideas for topics come from the local community," shared Mulugeta, adding that a needs assessment was conducted at the start of the pilot program identifying Dembecha as a high maize potential woreda. After speaking with local farmers regarding their needs and interests, videos concerning row planting and urea application for QPM were proposed. These topics were also identified by woreda SMS' as important techniques to increase yield both for conventional and QPM maize. Similarly, on the nutrition side, QPM food recipes to be featured in the videos were selected based on foods that were commonly consumed in the area, such as injera, porridge and grits. The recipes selected for the videos simply substituted QPM for traditional ingredients such as teff, wheat or conventional maize.

"Much of our success is due to a shift in perspective among our supervisors on the importance of the video-based approach."
- Mulugeta Belew

Once a topic was selected, SMS' at the woreda office were responsible for writing a storyboard for the video. For example, storyboards for videos concerning agricultural techniques were typically written by agriculture SMS' while storyboards for QPM-food recipes were written by health extension agents with nutrition expertise. SAA staff based in Addis Ababa approved the storyboard. The video production team would then shoot the video and handle the technical aspects of production and editing. However, Mulugeta notes that the process of

writing a storyboard during the pilot was often slow due to the heavy workloads of extension agents and that "it would have been better for the video production team to write the storyboard ourselves." Another member of the video production team, Abebe Adamu, an ICT specialist, agrees with Mulugeta. Abebe adds that this storyboard approval process was too slow, often taking a week or more to receive approval. After raising the issue of these bottlenecks with their supervisors in the agricultural extension office, the video production team was allowed to write a few of their own storyboards during the pilot project. Mulugeta and Abebe explain that this helped them produce videos at a faster pace than before.

Their success in writing storyboards did not go unnoticed. In the scale-up phase of the project, which began in May 2015, Mulugeta's video production team was given the responsibility of writing all of the storyboards for videos disseminated in Demebecha. Digital Green, in collaboration with SAA and government extension agents, also selected a new video production team based on performance during the pilot. Both Mulugeta and Abebe remain on the team, as agriculture and ICT experts, respectively. In addition, the team consists of three new members: Hayalu, a health extension agent and nutrition focal person, Dhanyacho, a veterinarian and livestock SMS and representative of the women's affairs office. Mulugeta explains that the range of technical expertise in the video production team enables them to work together effectively to write their own storyboards on a variety of topics. "Compared to the pilot, they are now able to produce videos in a much more efficient manner. This is underscored by the fact that they have already produced three new videos during the scale-up, more than any other woreda. "Much of our success is due to a shift in perspective among our supervisors on the importance of the video-based approach," shared Mulugeta. "During the pilot, our bosses weren't as familiar with the videos or their advantages and thus preferred for us to focus on other assignments rather than video production. This has changed now. We meet with our supervisors at the woreda office every three months to evaluate our progress towards project targets," he added. Through these meetings, woreda level officials have come to see that the videos are a useful tool in helping them achieve the broader goals of the government's agriculture and nutrition packages. "Now, our bosses have managed our workloads so that we can prioritize working on the videos more. This helps us produce videos more efficiently," shared Mulugeta.

In addition to increased efficiency, improved quality assurance measures for the videos were implemented during the scale-up. For instance, a Woreda Storyboard Approval Committee was created, consisting of SMS' with expertise in various fields relating to agriculture and nutrition. Abebe notes that

the creation of this committee has greatly reduced the time it requires for storyboards to be approved, from about one week to just one day. Just as importantly, Mulugeta and Abebe add that the committee plays an important role in quality assurance, by ensuring that storyboards are aligned with the priorities and content outlined in the government's agriculture and nutrition extension packages. In addition to approving the storyboard, this committee also screens each completed video for content quality. After a review of the video by woreda staff, SAA conducts a technical review to ensure that the sound quality, lighting and shooting of the video is up to Digital Green standards. Once the video production team has made any requested changes, the final video is once again screened to the committee for approval before being disseminated.

Along with improvements in efficiency and quality assurance in the scale-up, shifting the task of storyboard approval from SAA to the woreda itself helps embed the video-based approach into the existing government extension system, thus contributing to the approach's long-term sustainability. Significantly, the videos produced by the Dembecha video production team also promote the government's goal of agriculture and nutrition convergence. This is a critical goal given that malnutrition cannot be resolved without first addressing food production and the lack of access to nutritious food among vulnerable populations. As a group of experts with varied backgrounds across agriculture and nutrition, the creation of the video production team itself is an example of the convergence of agriculture and nutrition at the woreda level. Through their efforts to produce videos on QPM, Mulugeta and his team are playing an important role in solving the broader problems of food insecurity and malnutrition in the country today.

FROM CHILD BRIDE TO COMMUNITY LEADER

"I was nine when I was married off. I may not have the ability to inspire others but my story will serve as an inspiration for my children, who I hope will have a better life than me," said Manti Devi, 26 years old, resident of village Gazipur, Nalanda district, Bihar, India.

Manti Devi was married into a poor Dalit family with little land and a mud house hardly big enough for a family of seven. Life was hard for the large family living on what they grew on their small patch of land, which was hardly sufficient. Manti Devi's husband worked as daily wage labor in neighboring fields to provide for the family.

"My husband used to migrate to Jharkhand to make bricks and I would also make a living through daily wage labor on others' agricultural land," shared Manti Devi.

In 2008, a wave of change came with the introduction of JEEViKA, a poverty alleviation initiative of the Government of Bihar. It

introduced concepts such as petty savings to the rural poor and gave loans, especially to women from the economically weaker families, particularly the scheduled castes by creating small collectives. Three self-help groups were created in Manti Devi's village, one of which she joined.

"For poor farmers like us, with little land, it was not easy to increase the production on our small farms," she shared. With the growing savings and institutional support from project JEEViKA of BRLPS (Bihar Rural Livelihood Promotion Society) and government banks, they organized trainings and exposure visits to understand new initiatives such as intensive agriculture and farm-based interventions, that helped Manti Devi and others like her to get some technical expertise in agriculture. But, as is common in the traditional rural Indian society, the dependence on the men folk hindered motivation and progress. With the help of JEEViKA, Manti Devi developed confidence and a motivation to change the circumstances for herself and her family.

With help from staff of JEEViKA, Manti devi formed a collective of women from 52 households of the village called 'Sankar Jeevika Krishi Uttpadak Samuh' in 2009, which encouraged the members to introduce modern cultivation practices. In July 2012 she saw a Digital Green video for the first time, which demonstrated complex techniques like System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and Wheat Intensification (SWI), vegetable cropping, sack farming, seed bed preparation, seed treatment, line sowing etc. very simply, that helped them improve yield.

Earlier Manti devi and her family used to cultivate a few vegetables and paddy, wheat and maize only for household consumption in their 1 bigha or 20 katha of agricultural land (1 acre is 22 katthas), but now introduction of new techniques like seed treatment and line sowing helped them produce more, which

"No longer do I have to depend on others for food. I feel happy to see I have enough grains to last my family the entire year."
– Manti Devi

they could sell in the local markets. They have now started cultivating channa, rai and moong also.

By adopting these methods, Manti devi's family and other nearly landless families were able to experience food security and increased nutrition. Remembering earlier times Manti devi says "No longer do I have to depend on others for food. I feel happy to see I have enough grains to last my family the entire year."

Later that year (2014), Manti devi heard about selection of a video production team in Nalanda district by JEEViKA and Digital Green. She applied for a place on the team despite the mockery she faced from her community since she was not literate. Manti devi was selected and she proved her talent with the first video produced on "How to Open a Bank Account".

However, this still did not make it any easier for Manti devi to earn the respect of her family and community. Being conventional, the community she belonged to did not like the fact that Manti devi was appearing in videos herself. Her husband and mother-in-law abused and hit her, hoping she would stop acting in the videos. But Manti devi did not give up. She was hopeful that her hard work would pay off someday and continued shooting with the Digital Green-JEEViKA video production team.

When the video-based agricultural intervention led by Digital Green started screening the video featuring her in her own village, people understood the messages conveyed through the videos and all of them celebrated her. "By the time the second video was being produced, my husband started supporting me and neighbouring farmers appreciated the videos and they started adopting the practices and benefitting from them," she shared with pride.

Manti Devi is now studying at the nearest government school along with her children aged seven to eleven.

In May, 2015, she had cleared the 10th standard board exam with a second division. The entire village of Gazipur is now proud of her and her family is encouraging her to study further.

Manti Devi is now also a Village Resource Person (VRP) and leads a team of 52 women from her village, which helps ensure better yield, economic robustness and sufficiency and trying to break the viscous cycle of poverty.

"This is my story, whatever happened, has been possible due to the interventions of JEEViKA and if my work is in limelight that's because of Digital Green's support." – Manti Devi

LEADING INNOVATION THROUGH BETTER AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

A visit to Waktola Mulata's farm will reveal rows upon rows of tidily planted crops and well-weeded land. Aside from row planting, which is a new practice that the extension system is trying to pass on to farmers, Waktola's land is also memorable because it has potato plants, a crop that is not traditionally seen in his woreda of Becho in the Oromia region of Ethiopia. Innovative and entrepreneurial, Waktola has consistently taken calculated risks in terms of his farming practice to support his family of eight children. He is a model farmer in his kebele (the smallest administrative unit of Ethiopia similar to a ward, neighborhood or a localized and delimited group of people), Awash Bune.

Waktola credits much of his current success to the video-based learning approach promoted by Digital Green. Digital Green has been working with the extension system in Becho since 2014 in order to promote better agricultural practices through the use of short, instructional videos.

Waktola first heard about the video-based learning approach pioneered by Digital Green on the radio and then later from his Development Agent (DA) – a government extension service worker tasked with teaching farmers about best agricultural practices and participated in his first video dissemination in 2014. Since then, he has

seen four videos, on maize, teff, wheat and potato planting respectively, and has successfully implemented new practices from all the videos. "I was interested in the videos because I wanted to further supplement the information I had gained from the traditional oral teaching method used by the DAs," shared Waktola. Prior to the video-based method, DAs went door-to-door to teach farmers about best practices. "In addition, I also attended lectures held by DAs at the local Farmer Training Center (FTC). During these lectures, DAs would instruct us on topics such as seed bed preparation and water management for staple crops," he added.

"I was interested in the videos because I wanted to further supplement the information I had gained from the traditional oral teaching method used by the DAs."
– Wakotla Mulata

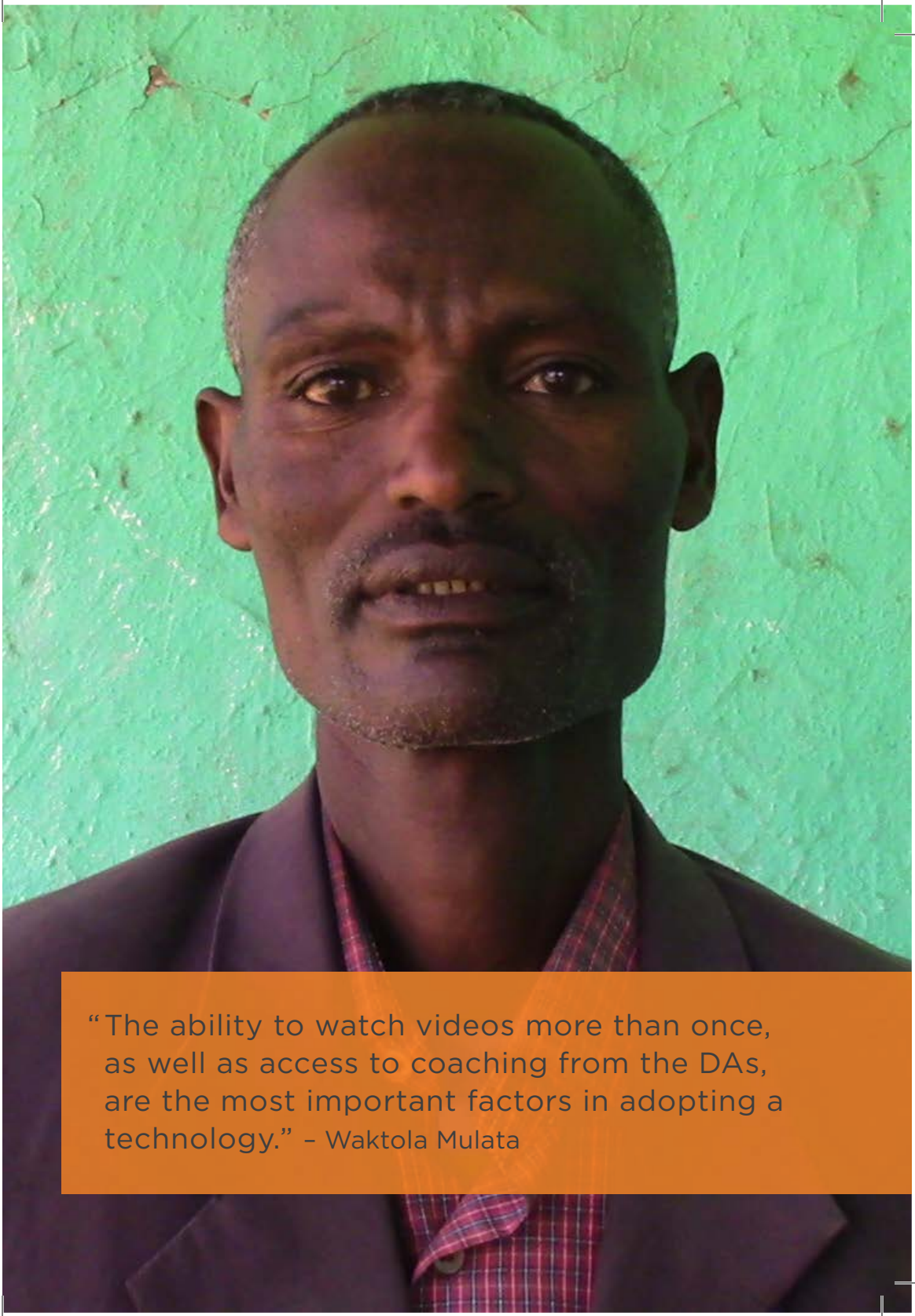
Compared to the traditional method, Waktola notes that the video-based approach is beneficial as it allows him to "see and not just hear" about the techniques the DAs are recommending. Although he had some background knowledge on the topics covered in disseminations from prior lectures at the FTC, he notes that the majority of information presented in the videos has been new to him. Moreover, he stresses that the combination of audio and visual learning supported by the video disseminations enables him to remember information better than he could with the traditional oral teaching method. Waktola also remarked that, "Prior to the use of the videos, most of the farmers attending extension service trainings were male. I've noticed that now women farmers are increasingly showing interest in the videos and participating in video disseminations," a change he sees as a positive outcome of the video-based approach.

Elaborating further on the benefits of the videos, Waktola notes that "I would never have started growing potatoes without the information I gained through the video disseminations." The crops featured in videos are determined based on collaboration between DAs and the district level Subject Matter Specialists (SMS). Although potatoes

were not traditionally grown in the area, district level experts decided to promote the crop in videos after determining that it would be able to thrive in the ecological climate of Becho. Waktola explains that he decided to try planting potatoes after hearing from his DA that it could grow well in his area and watching a video that detailed the required planting techniques. Still wanting to do his own research, however, Waktola performed a trial run of the crop using a very small plot of land. On his own initiative, Waktola also met with an SMS and was able to obtain the required potato seeds based on the expert's advice. Following a successful trial, Waktola dedicated more land to growing potatoes and was able to gain a high yield from the crop. He is thankful that he could use the potato crops to help feed his family.

For Waktola, the ability to watch videos more than once, as well as access to coaching from the DAs, are the most important factors in adopting a technology. Indeed, data shows that farmers across the district generally watch a video at least twice before deciding to implement a new practice. Expanding on this, Waktola stresses that maintaining a strong relationship with the DAs in his woreda has been critical to implementing new practices. He notes that even before the video-based approach, "The DAs were always with us, from assisting with land preparation to planting to weeding. Our livelihoods have improved a lot because of the help of the DAs." Now with the new approach, he still relies heavily on the DAs to ensure that he is executing each of the adoption points explained in a video in the proper manner. Indeed, embedding of the video-based approach into the existing extension system of DAs has been essential to assisting farmers like Waktola. Nonetheless, given that the DAs often have busy schedules and many farmers to reach, Waktola believes that the approach could be further improved if farmers had greater access to the videos. For example, he suggests setting up a facility where farmers can pay a small fee to watch videos of interest on their own schedule.

For now, however, he is looking forward to more videos, particularly related to cultivating other crops that are new to the area's farmers, so that he can further bolster the success he had last cropping season.



"The ability to watch videos more than once, as well as access to coaching from the DAs, are the most important factors in adopting a technology." – Waktola Mulata

CHANGE BEGINS WITH SELF

"My husband, two sons and I used to work on two acres of land and grow tomatoes, brinjals, chillies and watermelons," shared Keshamma, 50 year old subsistence farmer from Kothakota village of Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh, India.

"As subsistence farmers, it was always difficult for us to buy inputs for farming, which forced us to consider traditional practices and ditch the use of commercially available chemical fertilizers and pesticides," she said. During instances of severe pest infestation in their farm, they would often manually pick and throw the pests out. "My awareness of non-pesticide management (NPM) agricultural techniques was quite limited at that time," she shared.

In 2008, officials from the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) visited Keshamma's village. They conducted awareness camps on the importance of NPM farming techniques and how these could prove beneficial for both her farm and her family. Keshamma developed a keen interest in the topic and joined a local self-help group (SHG). Later, along with other members of her SHG, she had the opportunity to participate in multiple trainings and workshops. They gradually learnt more about NPM practices and how to apply these in their farms.

With time, the SHGs in Keshamma's village elected her as the president of the village organization (a federation of SHGs) and also appointed her as NPM subcommittee member at the block level (a local administrative unit at village). "My role is to promote, monitor and support NPM activities in a cluster of five villages neighboring my village. Women farmers from these villages had started realizing the importance of NPM and few of them had also started practicing NPM farming," she shared with pride. The transition to NPM from conventional farming practices is, however, not easy. Multiple factors like lack of understanding of the concept, the need for and belief in the process, as well as the fact that it is difficult to prepare organic extracts like kashayams (medicinal mixtures) essential for NPM-based farming led to disinterest in the community. "It was difficult for me and other subcommittee members to convince the farmers to try this method of farming. We also tried to create awareness on NPM practices through exposure visits, trainings, workshops, demonstrations and home visits," she added.

In 2012, SERP introduced a unique approach led by Digital Green to strengthen and scale up NPM activities in our area by motivating the farmers using community videos. As part of this project, frontline workers like the village

"Before the videos, the farmers were reluctant to believe what we said."
– Keshamma

activist (VA)/ cluster activist (CA) screened videos on NPM best practices. "As an NPM subcommittee member, I participated with the CAs and VAs in Digital Green's training program on how to effectively screen videos to increase awareness on these best practices among the farming communities," shared Keshamma. Local videos were produced on plant and soil nutrient management as well as pest and disease management. Fellow progressive farmers from neighboring villages featured in the videos. "Through these video screenings, it has become easy for local farmers to relate themselves to the 'actors', and thus, to the message of the video. Information on each practice and its practical application are always presented within the local context," she added.

"In the early days, before the videos, the farmers were reluctant to believe what we said. Now, after watching the practices on video, their interest to try new techniques has increased. Videos are screened once every fortnight based on when and where the SHG meeting takes place, either in colonies or the village organization hall. I visit villages along with CAs/VAs to support and motivate them during their screenings as well as to meet the SHG members," shared Keshamma. While earlier, Keshamma and her colleagues could reach just a handful of farmers on a single day, now with the help of the community video screenings, they are able to reach several farmers at a time. These video screenings helped the SHG members in understanding the practices and were scheduled at a time chosen by the women to ensure greater participation.

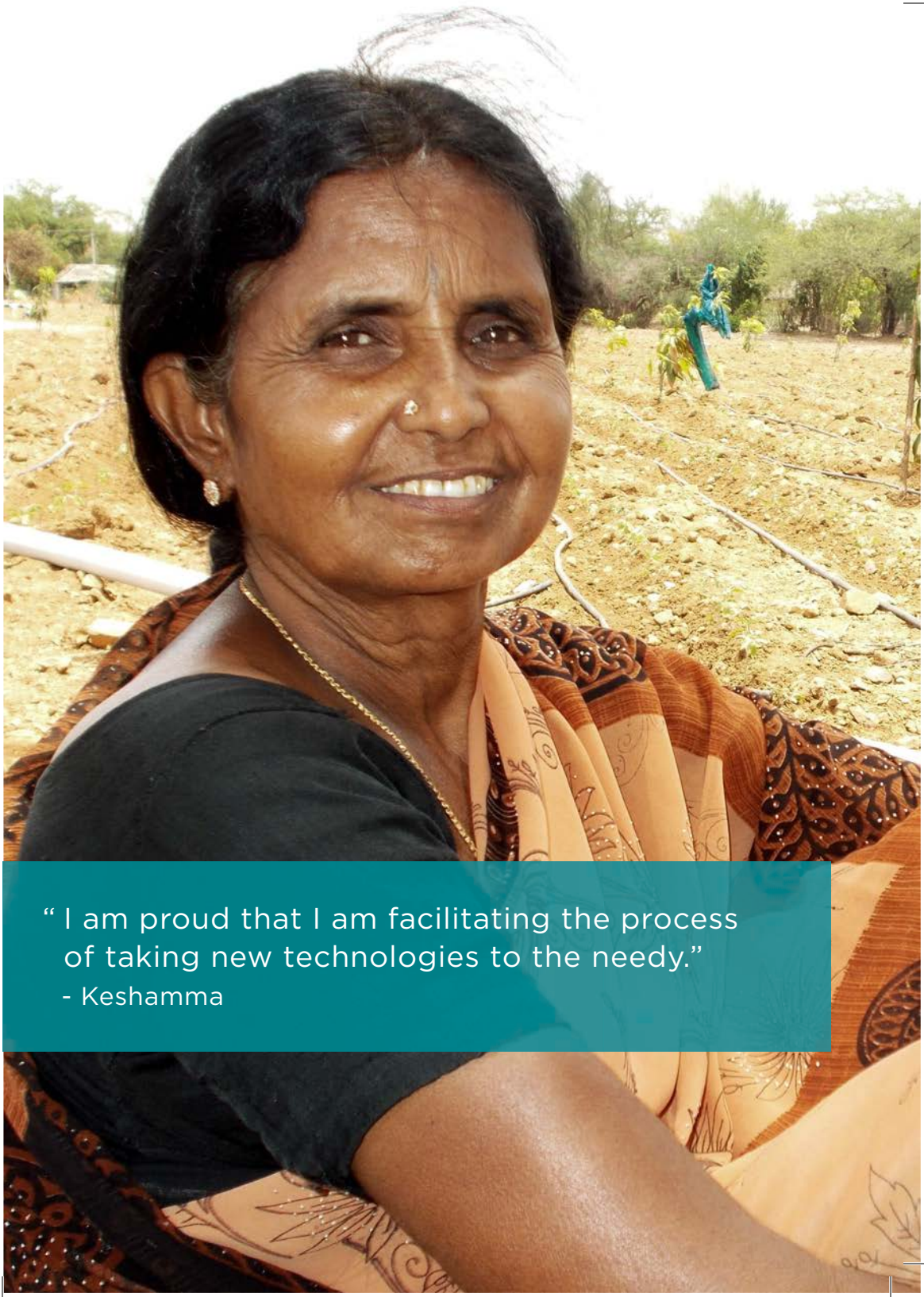
Around this time, Keshamma lost her husband due to illness. Her children moved out taking their share of the land, and she was left alone with less than an acre of land. She started spending more time on the farm as it was her only source of income. "I continued supporting the CA/VA in facilitating video screenings and also adopted many NPM practices on my own piece of land. I prepared kashayams for pest and disease management

and organic fertilizers like NADEP compost and ghanajeevamrutham for plant and soil nutrient management," she recalled.

"Now, I harvest two crops every year and sell the produce in the nearby market at Papili. In our village, all of us smallholder farmers jointly hire an auto-rickshaw to transport the produce to the market," she adds. Vegetables and fruits grown organically have a greater demand in the market now due to the awareness among the consumers about their benefits.

From one acre of land, Keshamma earns approximately INR 70, 000 annually, which is 40% more than what she used to earn before NPM farming. In addition to greater productivity, she has also reduced input cost by preparing organic extracts with locally available natural resources. "Now, I am happy to see earthworms in the soil, an evidence of improved soil fertility," she noted happily.

"Back when I started working as an NPM subcommittee member, I faced resistance from my family members. I would always be questioned on "why are you working if you are not getting any monetary benefit out of it?" I'm not answerable to anyone anymore," "Meeting people and interacting with them and learning new things are part of my routine now. I enjoy learning about new things and am proud that I am facilitating the process of taking new technologies to the needy. Work is my passion and companion. I help people in understanding improved technologies through videos and also use the opportunity to adopt the practices on my own piece of land. I dream of the day my community adopts improved practices on their own for their own benefit and not because someone else asked them to. When I question myself what I am getting out of all this, I answer, "I am mad but am happy that I did something different".



" I am proud that I am facilitating the process of taking new technologies to the needy."
- Keshamma











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