



A Journey of  
**Social Transformation,  
Migrant Labourer to  
Entrepreneur**

**act:onaid**

ActionAid Association (India)

# A Journey of **Social Transformation, Migrant Labourer to Entrepreneur**

First Published October, 2023




Some rights reserved






This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Provided they acknowledge the source, users of this content are allowed to remix, tweak, build upon and share for non-commercial purposes under the same original license terms.


**act:onaid**

ActionAid Association (India)

 [www.actionaidindia.org](http://www.actionaidindia.org)   @actionaidindia

 actionaidcomms  @company/actionaidindia  actionaid\_india

F-5 (First Floor), Kailash Colony, New Delhi -110048.

 +911-11-40640500



## Contents

Foreword	5
Sri Kuwar's Transformative Journey: Empowering Rural Woman Through Nutritional Gardening and Agricultural Support	7
Overcoming Discrimination through Poultry Farming	9
Journey of Ramkumari and Jeevan Lal: Multi-Layer Farming	11
Sahariya Women's Collective Efforts in Goat Rearing	13
Rani's Inspiring Journey from Migration to Empowerment	15
Cultivating Prosperity: Horticulture Enterprise Support	17
Siviya's Story: Poultry Farming Transforms a Sahariya Village	18
A Dream Came True	20
Deva's Journey to Natural Farming Success	21
Path to Independence: Strengthening Marginalised Women in Bundelkhand	23





## Foreword

For the past three decades, ActionAid Association has been actively involved in the Bundelkhand region, addressing the pressing issues faced by the local communities. The organization has implemented a wide range of programs and initiatives aimed at empowering the people of Bundelkhand and improving their overall quality of life. There is acute poverty in the region due to lack of opportunities and employment coupled with social discrimination, leading to large scale migration of the local population.

The region has a total population of 18.3 million and is chronically prone to droughts. According to the 2011 Census, around 79.1 per cent of Bundelkhand's population is living in rural areas, with more than one-third of these rural households enlisted in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category.

In the absence of alternate and skilled employment, seasonal migration is a common feature of the region. Migration provides an escape from the regional stagnation and social discrimination that prevails in Bundelkhand, and comes as a respite from economic and social bondage.

Major problems in the regions at various ecological levels have led to several environmental challenges including an increasingly acute water crisis, loss of green cover, soil degradation due to excessive use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, and threats to livelihoods. Studies have shown that the increasing variability of weather and the higher frequency and intensity of climate events has impacted agricultural produce and livestock in the region.

Another challenge is the unequal social and economic order as Bundelkhand carries a very strong feudal society wherein the of upper castes and the land-owning families hold power, with little room for any change in the social order. These land-owning families exercise undue influence over vulnerable communities, so much so that they even forcibly reduce the wages of daily wagers.

A Journey of Social Transformation: Women's livelihood promotion initiative in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh is a set of Stories that has emerged and

recorded under the Work4Progress program since 2020, which leverages social innovation to create sustainable, local level employment among women and young people in India, Mozambique and Peru. The Work4Progress program has been initiated by “La Caixa” Foundation, Spain, engaged in social investment to further the interests of society at large, especially education, culture and science. Working in collaboration with Alianza por la Solidaridad, a fellow member of the ActionAid International Federation, ActionAid Association is leading the program across 55 villages in Jhansi, Mahoba and Lalitpur districts of the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh.

The project has laid a strong foundation for social and economic transformation by co-creating livelihood opportunities best suited for landless, small and marginal farmers, encouraging women’s leadership and an entrepreneurial spirit. This collection of Social Transformation journeys’ highlight the advances achieved made by rural women entrepreneurs. Today, more than 3000 such women entrepreneurs have been developed and are supported by the all women Basant Farmers Producer Organisation.

In solidarity,

**Khalid Chaudhry**

*Associate Director*

ActionAid Association



## Sri Kuwar's Transformative Journey: Empowering Rural Woman Through Nutritional Gardening and Agricultural Support

**Sri Kuwar**, a 60-year-old woman, resides in the remote village of Khujraha Bujurg in Jhansi, India. She belongs to the Other Backward Class (OBC) community, which has historically faced socioeconomic challenges and discrimination. Sri Kuwar's life was marked by years of hardship, financial dependence, and limited opportunities. Her husband, the primary breadwinner of the family, worked tirelessly as an agricultural labourer while she grappled with a lack of agency in her life.

### Challenges Faced:

- » **Economic Dependency:** Sri Kuwar was financially dependent on her husband, with no source of income or control over household finances.
- » **Limited Nutritional Access:** The family's diet primarily consisted of staples, lacking essential nutrients, leading to health issues.
- » **Lack of Education:** Sri Kuwar had limited education, which hindered her ability to explore alternative opportunities.

Sri Kuwar's transformative journey began when La Caixa and ActionAid Association identified her as one of the beneficiaries during their listening process. Through their support and guidance, she began a path of nutritional gardening, receiving training and assistance in establishing a nutritional garden on her family's small piece of land. Here, she learned



how to grow a variety of vegetables and herbs that could supplement her family's diet with essential nutrients. Recognizing the importance of Sri Kuwar's contribution to the family's income, her husband actively involved her in their agricultural work. This inclusion not only allowed her to gain valuable skills but also granted her financial independence.

The Transformation: Sri Kuwar's life began to change in profound and uplifting ways:

- Improved Nutrition: The nutritional garden yielded a diverse range of fresh produce, enriching the family's diet. This led to better health and food security.
- » Economic Empowerment: Sri Kuwar's active participation in agricultural work substantially increased the family's income. Her husband, recognizing her efforts and understanding the importance of her contribution, began entrusting her with the money he earned from selling vegetables in the market, granting her financial independence for the first time in her 40 years of marriage.
- » Self-Confidence: As Sri Kuwar mastered the skills needed for farming and gardening, her self-confidence soared. She began actively participating in community discussions and decision-making processes and emerged a role model for other women in the community, demonstrating that at 60 years, age should not be a barrier to hard work and empowerment.
- » Positive Family Dynamics: The family's dynamics improved significantly as both husband and wife collaborated in agricultural work, fostering mutual respect and a sense of shared responsibility.
- » Impact on the Community: Sri Kuwar's journey of empowerment did not remain confined to her household. Her success inspired other women in the village to embark on similar paths of self-sufficiency. They began to replicate her nutritional gardening practices and sought active involvement in agricultural activities.

Sri Kuwar's transformation from a marginalized, dependent woman to an empowered, entrepreneur is a testament to the power of targeted interventions and community support. Through nutritional gardening, active involvement in agricultural work, and the collaborative efforts between La Caixa and ActionAid Association, Sri Kuwar's life has undergone a remarkable positive change. Her husband's newfound support and trust in her abilities have not only improved their family's well-being but also set an example for the entire community.



## Overcoming Discrimination through Poultry Farming

**Mrs. Santoshi**, a landless resident of Khajraha Bujurg in Jhansi, hails from the Scheduled Caste (SC) community, which has long endured discrimination and social exclusion in Indian society. Her husband worked as a labourer, which meant they had a precarious financial situation. Her family faced numerous challenges, including caste discrimination, which limited their access to opportunities and resources; financial struggles, with no reliable source of income, making it challenging to meet their basic needs; and a lack of assets, as they do not own land that could generate a sustainable income.

The turning point in Mrs. Santoshi's life came when the La Caixa Foundation, in collaboration with ActionAid Association, initiated a program to empower marginalized individuals like her. The program aimed to provide sustainable livelihood opportunities and training for skill development on poultry farming. Mrs. Santoshi was provided a cage and 50 baby chicks as part of the poultry farming initiative. She received comprehensive training and guidance on poultry care and management. Additionally, her husband received support through her poultry venture to open a small general store where they could sell eggs and other essential items such as pulses and spices.

This initiative had far-reaching impact on Mrs Santoshi and her family's life, particularly in terms of economic empowerment, community leadership and skill sharing. Santoshi's dedication and hard work paid off when her poultry farm began to thrive. She generated a revenue of INR 10,000 by selling eggs and an additional ₹20,000 by selling chickens. This newfound income significantly improved their financial stability. Santoshi's success story made her a role model not only within her community but also in neighbouring villages. Realizing the potential of poultry farming as a sustainable livelihood option, Santoshi began providing training to fellow community members, encouraging them to adopt this model. This not only uplifted her community but also fostered a sense of unity and self-reliance.

Mrs. Santoshi's journey from a life marked by caste discrimination, social exclusion, and financial instability to one of economic empowerment and community leadership has set an example within her community. With the help of the La Caixa Foundation and ActionAid Association, she was able to overcome the hurdles she faced and create a sustainable source of income through poultry farming. Santoshi's transformation has not only improved her family's living standards but has also inspired others in her community and nearby villages to pursue similar paths of empowerment.






## Journey of Ramkumari and Jeevan Lal: Multi-Layer Farming

**Ramkumari** and **Jeevan Lal**, a married couple and residents of the village of Chitaiya, belong to the Kushwaha community, classified as Other Backward Class (OBC) in the Indian caste system. Their life was marked by relentless struggle and constant migration to different cities and states in pursuit of livelihood opportunities. Their situation is typical of many families in Mahoba District, Uttar Pradesh.

Ramkumari and Jeevan Lal faced perpetual financial instability due to irregular employment and meagre incomes. Their children also had limited access to quality education due to their family's financial constraints. The stress of financial difficulties often led to domestic violence, straining their relationship.

Ramkumari and Jeevan Lal's lives began to change when La Caixa Foundation and ActionAid Association identified Ramkumari as a beneficiary as part of their economic prototype model - multi-layer farming - to enhance agricultural productivity and sustainable income of struggling families from marginalised communities in the region. The couple received training and support in implementing multi-layer farming, which involved growing a variety of crops and vegetables in layers, and utilising limited land space effectively. The multi-layer farming model included the cultivation of crops



like maize and wheat on the ground, followed by vegetables like tomatoes, chilies, and spinach on raised beds. Additionally, they raised poultry for eggs and meat.

The adoption of multi-layer farming had a transformational impact on the lives of Ramkumari and Jeevan Lal. Within just eight months, they generated a substantial income of ₹100,000 by selling a variety of crops and vegetables. This success elevated their social status within the community. With the improved income, they were able to send their children to a private English-medium school. The newfound financial stability removed the stressors that had led to domestic violence, and their relationship improved. Their neighbours were inspired by this achievements and adopted multi-layer farming as part of their agricultural practices, leading to improved economic conditions and social cohesion within the community.

The transformative journey of Ramkumari and Jeevan Lal, from a life of perpetual hardship and migration to one of financial stability, improved social status, and domestic harmony, highlights the power of targeted interventions and community support.



## Sahariya Women's Collective Efforts in Goat Rearing

During the Covid-19 lockdown, a group of seven women, ranging in ages from 26 to 50 years and hailing from Bamuhri Kala village, travelled on foot with their families to return to their villages. These women had previously worked in factories in a big city. All of them belonged to the Sahariya community, a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) and one of the most marginalized social groups in Lalitpur district, Uttar Pradesh. They chose to return as the lockdown disrupted their city-based employment. They returned to poor conditions, where they had no food and land. Moreover, no jobs were available for them. Despite the harsh circumstances they faced upon returning to their homes, they were determined not to return to the city they had just left. Yet, they did not know how they could survive in Lalitpur as they were all landless. Only two of the women had attended school, and could read and write.

As community members interacted with the project team in the village, the women expressed an interest in the goat rearing model as potential means of generating an income. However, the model was originally designed as a single-family based unit. Through discussions among themselves, these seven determined women gave fruit to an idea that could benefit them all - a goat rearing model that could also be adopted at a community level. The community model would enable every member of the collective to take full responsibility for tasks involving calf care, including feeding and

cleaning the calves, while others could continue to go out for their daily wage work. This collaborative approach would ensure that everyone could contribute to both responsibilities and share the rewards. Therefore, these seven Sahariya women came together to set up a collective goat model. As Janki Devi has shared: "We agreed that we will have joint ownership in this model. If we earn profit or incur loss, that will be shared/ borne by all seven members."

The process helped the women to emerge as an enabling group, supporting each other and empowering themselves to take economic decisions. The W4P program supported the group with 21 goats and one buck. These in turn gave birth to 11 goats and nine bucks, who are still very young and not ready for sale. These goats give around 1.5 litres of milk, which is used by these seven women to feed their children. They are also collecting goat dung to make vermi compost. As they have decided to not to migrate to cities, they have enrolled their children in the village school, ensuring a brighter future for the next generation.





## Rani's Inspiring Journey from Migration to Empowerment

**Rani** and **Lalji**, along with their two children, lived in Baidora, Babina of Jhansi district, Uttar Pradesh and depended primarily on agriculture for their livelihood. Their past experiences included migrating to Punjab and Delhi in search of work opportunities, where they faced exploitation and violence. These hardships left them with a sense of fear and insecurity. The couple's fear and insecurity during their migration had a significant impact on their well-being and family life.

Rani and Lalji's life changed for the better when they were selected to receive support from the La Caixa Foundation and ActionAid Association. The intervention was the Nutrition Garden initiative, aimed at promoting organic farming and economic stability. Rani and Lalji received training and support to establish a nutrition garden on their land. They learned organic farming techniques, including growing vegetables without the use of harmful chemicals. The initiative aimed to improve their nutritional intake and generate income through the sale of surplus produce.

The adoption of the Nutrition Garden initiative had a profound impact on Rani and Lalji's life. It enabled them to produce a substantial quantity of vegetables, which they sold directly in the market, eliminating the need for middlemen and ultimately increasing their income. With their newfound





financial stability, Rani and Lalji were able to send their children to English medium schools, providing them with a better future. Rani not only bought a gold ring for herself but also began saving for her daughter's wedding and for emergencies. This newfound financial security brought peace of mind to their family. Rani's personal transformation was remarkable. She gained confidence and began sharing her story proudly in community meetings, inspiring other women to take positive steps forward and not be afraid of change.

Rani has also joined the processing unit to work during her free time, so that she can earn extra income and learn new skills to realize her dream of opening a solar based processing unit in her own village. Rani and Lalji are now planning to expand their organic farming model to the remaining land they have. Additionally, they aspire to open a shop in the market to sell their vegetables in a more organized manner. Rani and Lalji's journey from a life of fear, uncertainty, and exploitation as migrant laborers to one of economic stability, has become the impactful experiences of numerous other families in similar predicaments who have joined the Nutrition Garden initiative, supported by the La Caixa Foundation and ActionAid Association.



## Cultivating Prosperity: Horticulture Enterprise Support

**Fulvati**, married to Baldev, lived in the village of Bara, Mahoba District, where she faced the challenges associated with limited education and resources.

Fulvati's only studied until 5th grade, limiting her access to various employment opportunities. In search of a sustainable livelihood, Fulvati and her family were inspired by the opportunities offered by the La Caixa Foundation and ActionAid Association. Through this initiative, Fulvati and her family decided to explore horticulture as an alternative livelihood option. They received training and crucial resources to initiate their horticulture venture. As part of the project support, Fulvati and her family were provided with 200 fruit plants. They meticulously cared for these plants, cultivating them alongside moong beans in the available spaces.

This dual approach to farming proved to be successful. The family cultivated moong beans in between the fruit plants, resulting in a production of 80 kg in their field. This not only added to their income but also diversified their agricultural activities. The fruit plants they nurtured showed promise for future income generation, marking a significant step toward financial stability for them and their family.



## Siviya's Story: Poultry Farming Transforms a Sahariya Village

Sarwa village, close to a protected forest area and regulated by rules of the nearby Indian Army cantonment, once thrived on the resources of the nearby woods. The Sahariya community, the village's backbone, traditionally depended on the forest for wood and other produce to sustain their livelihoods. However, after the declaration of the forest as a protected area, the longstanding way of life of the community was disrupted, and they were not able to continue their traditional occupation. Apart from some degree of minor forest produce collection, the Sahariya community, faced with limited opportunities, became involved in production of country-made liquor or casual labour work.

Despite the challenges, the Sahariya community harboured resistance to exploring alternatives to their traditional occupations. Through sustained interactions, ActionAid Association with the support of La Caixa program was able to instill confidence in the community, fostering a new interest in poultry activities.

In light of this, **Siviya**, a 45-yr-old Sahariya woman, set up a poultry unit with the support of seven members of her family.

Siviya had learnt the basics of poultry farming as part of her upbringing at her parents' home and held a deep desire to establish her own poultry farm. With the support provided through the program, including 50 chicks of the crawler breed and a 3-layer cage, Siviya ventured into making her dream a reality.

Siviya's poultry venture led to positive outcomes. She successfully sold chickens worth ₹20,000. Today, her regular income from egg production and the remaining poultry sustains her home's everyday expenses and also allowed for savings. She aspires to become an entrepreneur and joined the Basant Farmer Producer Company as a member.

As the program was strengthening her financially, she also encouraged other women from her community to be part of the program.





## A Dream Came True

**Ms. Anita** resides in Dharmapura village, block Jakhaura, Lalitpur. Her family, consisting of five members, relies primarily on agriculture and vegetable cultivation for their livelihood. Alongside farming, Anita is also involved in animal husbandry, a key part of her family's income.

Anita's journey began when she encountered a Sahiwal cow at a relative's house some time ago. The sight of this breed planted a seed in her mind – the dream of owning a Sahiwal cow of her own. However, her modest financial situation posed a significant obstacle to realizing this dream.

Her fortunes began to change when Anita became part of the program supported by La Caixa and ActionAid Association, through which she began a multilayer farming unit. Anita recalls, "With the scaffolding method, I increased my production and I earned ₹80000 in the following year. With the money earned, I bought a Sahiwal cow worth ₹31,000. This cow is now owned by me. I have started getting 12 to 13 liters of milk per day from this cow, due to which my family has started earning around an extra ₹800 per day. One person in the family has also received employment in selling the milk.

Anita's inspiring journey is a testament to her determination and the transformative power of sustainable farming practices on the lives of individuals and their communities.



## Deva's Journey to Natural Farming Success

In the heart of the Budelkahnd region in India (Jhansi, Lalitpur, and Mahoba districts), the Work4Progress programme is making remarkable progress in empowering women and creating sustainable livelihoods. The programme focuses on helping women and youth establish self-employment opportunities, access government schemes, and raise awareness about these opportunities. The first phase of the project introduced various innovative farming models, such as poultry farming, vermicomposting, nutrition gardens, seed production, multi-layer farming, goat rearing, and fruit cultivation. ActionAid Association, in collaboration with the government's Agriculture Science Centre, has introduced natural farming practices that rely on using farm and animal waste, thereby reducing dependence on chemical-based fertilisers and pesticides, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

**Deva**, hailing from Khajraha village in Jhansi district, has become an inspiring example of the positive impact of natural farming adoption. With the support of the project team, she created a thriving farm ecosystem using her own resources, such as dung from her goats and cows, to create a vermicompost unit. Gradually expanding her farming portfolio she ventured into cultivating 36 different types of vegetables, including spices like coriander, turmeric, and red chilies, Deva now enjoys a continuous stream of produce for nine months each year. She now generates a revenue

of ₹24,000 every month; recently with a hike in prices of vegetables, her monthly earnings have crossed ₹40,000. The transformation in Deva's life is evident. Previously, her youngest son struggled to provide for the family with a meagre monthly salary. However, with the success of Deva's vegetable farming, the entire family now works together and leads a better life.

Deva's newfound financial stability has also brought about significant improvements in her health. She can now afford regular treatment for her epilepsy thanks to the income from her farming venture. Deva's success story has also brought about a positive change in her husband's perspective, as he is now committed to providing her with better medical care. Her dedication, eagerness to learn, and innovation serve as an inspiration for others in the community, demonstrating that with determination and sustainable farming practices, it is possible to create a brighter future for oneself and one's family.

*Note: The Natural farming model, that is based on using farm and animal waste, has been developed by Action Aid Association, KVK (Krishi Vigyan Kendra) of the agriculture department and local partners with a vision to make marginalised farmers self-reliant.*



## Path to Independence: Strengthening Marginalised Women in Bundelkhand

In the villages touched by the La Caixa supported Work4Progress programme, a transformation is underway – one that echoes the voices of communities yearning for livelihood models that have already proven successful in Phase 1 villages. These models have significantly curbed the need for families to migrate in search of work. In fact, women farmers have completely stopped migrating, and many husbands have also followed suit. Some farmers, inspired by these models, now migrate seasonally as needed.

One exceptional example of the programme's success is the story of **Usha** of Basora village, Kabrai district, in Mahoba, who faced the harsh reality of becoming a widow during COVID. Left without any land or financial support, she continued to live with her in-laws in a separate room. The biggest crisis in front of her was to feed her two small children. She had to resort to taking odd work as a labourer in the village to make ends meet.

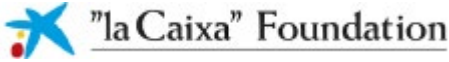
When ActionAid Association team facilitated the village level meetings as part of the listening process of the La Caixa W4P programme, the village community identified Usha as one of the beneficiaries to be linked to any enterprise as she was in great need of employment. Usha, eager to improve her circumstances, explored various co-created prototypes and



decided to venture into goat rearing. She was provide two female goats and a male got as part of the program. She grazed her goats in the forest and even took charge of other villagers' goats for grazing, thus earning ₹100 per goat per month for grazing. When her goats became big, she sold them for ₹14,000. With the money she has now opened a new venture – a small grocery shop.

Usha says that, "something is now right in my life, I work in the shop in the morning till evenings while I go to graze goats in the afternoon. My dream is to make my shop bigger. Now I have confidence that my children's will be well taken care."





The “la Caixa” Foundation of Spain, the third Largest foundation in the world, promotes diverse social, economic, cultural and ecological initiatives to foster sustainable development across the globe. “La Caixa” has worked for more than 110 years in contributing to the advancement of society and the progress of individuals, with a special emphasis on those who need it most. Its main strategic objective is to provide opportunities and fight inequalities in Africa, Asia and Latin America through programs that contribute to the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Alianza por la Solidaridad | **act:onaid**

**Alianza por la Solidaridad** is a nongovernmental Spanish organization that currently channels the effort and support of more than 50,000 people, amongst them members, volunteers, supporters and workers in order to fight against inequalities and contribute to protecting Human Rights in more than 19 countries in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. It is member of ActionAid.

**act:onaid**



**ActionAid Association (India)**


**ActionAid Association(India)** is an organization working for social and ecological justice. ActionAid has been engaged with the most marginalized communities in India since 1972. In 2006, ActionAid Association was registered as an Indian organization, governed by an independent General Assembly and a Governing Board. Together with supporters, communities, institutions and governments, we strive for equality, fraternity and Liberty for all. ActionAid Association works in 24 states and two union territories, with several partners and allied organizations. ActionAid Association is part of a global federation and a full affiliate of ActionAid International, that has presence in over 40 countries worldwide.


# act:onaid

ActionAid Association (India)

 [www.actionaidindia.org](http://www.actionaidindia.org)

  @actionaidindia

 actionaid\_india


 actionaidcomms

 @company/actionaidindia

Actionaid Association

F-5 (First Floor)

Kailash Colony, New Delhi -110048.

 +91 11-40640500