



RURAL FEMALE FARMERS OF EASTERN GANGETIC PLAINS  
IN  
CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE BASED SUSTAINABLE INTENSIFICATION

*Celebrating International Rural Women  
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# Feature Stories

## ACKNOWLEDGING RURAL WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN DECISION-MAKING



### **Building Future Together: Jahanara Bibi inspires.**

A single woman identifies her potential in Conservation Agriculture practices, musters up her courage to decide, lead and support her community.



### **Path to Success: Halima Bibi wins an award.**

A woman with a zeal whose timely decision to change to Conservation Agricultural practices helped her win national award.



### **Farmer to Service Provider: Sanju and Bhagiratha embracing change.**

Two women service providers decide to take up the challenge to excel in business.



### **Reviving Confidence: Babita sets an example**

A woman with limited knowledge on farming decides to take up Conservation Agriculture practices, earning an income and developing new skills.



### **Happy Farmers: Increase in productivity and profitability.**

Their decision-making ability sets them free from a double burden of farming and household and also the wrath of climate change. Rural women farmers of the EGP now enjoy increase in their produce, make profit and save resources with the help of Conservation Agriculture practices.



## ACKNOWLEDGING RURAL WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN DECISION-MAKING

Greatest number of rural populations in the world is concentrated in the Eastern Gangetic Plains of Bangladesh, India and Nepal. Among that population, rural women have been key contributors to agricultural production, food security and livelihood enhancement.

Although rural women's participation in farm activities is no less than men's, their contribution and effort are not acknowledged and usually their full potentials neglected. However, sustainable agricultural development is not possible unless women remain unable to make their own decisions independently of their male counterparts.

The key aim of CIMMYT-led SRFSI project is to increase the participation of women in decision-making about their farms as well as enable new employment opportunities for women. The decision-making experience of these featured women link them together and tell us the way to empower rural women is by helping them overcome obstacles in male-dominating society.

Promoting CASI based farming techniques targeting rural women farmers specifically in the scaling of this project, the results have shown that CASI practices improve productivity and increase profitability leading to better education, health and livelihood.

*"It is better because first of all water is preserved, we don't need as much water even if it is sown in dry conditions. Labor is not needed as much and we save five to seven thousand rupees per acre, the zero tiller is excellent" says Nutan Devi from Bihar, India.*

"Yes, earlier, we could not take decisions but now we do. We can even make our own decisions in the family. Say if there is a decision to be taken about farming then I can sit with my husband and discuss what must be done and what will give us more yield, or what will reduce our expenses. All these we decide ourselves now."

Nutan Devi, Bihar, India



Going through hardships of a rural single female farmer intensified by poverty, Jahanara Bibi came to know about CASI techniques and the use of Zero Till Machine.

Though it seemed like a far-fetched technique at first and no one to rely on for a true advice, Jahanara Bibi decided to gather all her courage and give it a try. Low cost, more produce, added income and time and energy saving- all these factors encouraged Jahanara Bibi to adopt this Zero Till Machine since 2013.

Today, she advocates CASI technology-based farming and has stood tall as an inspiration to all men and women.

## Building Future Together: Jahanara Bibi inspires

Men and women contribute equally when it comes to farming activities in the Eastern Gangetic Plains of India, Bangladesh and Nepal. But gender role differs according to location, crops grown and opportunities available to them. However, it is a prevalent male perception supported by culture, tradition and social biases that women cannot be household heads.

Passing of her husband was an unfortunate but inevitable incident in the life of Jahanara Bibi from Coochbehar, India which left her as a head of her household and sole guardian of her only son. Though a tragic event, Jahanara Bibi never gave up hope.

*"I feel happy when people come to me for advice. The same people who once thought I was good-for-nothing,"* said Jahanara Bibi with a pride.

With no regrets from life but grateful for all the support she received from her dear ones, she dreams of her future as a female agro-entrepreneur. Being a lead female farmer of her community, having a good contact with Agriculture Office and conducive connection with local service provider, she believes that her dream is completely achievable and can inspire many single rural female farmers like her encourage them to change the prevalent male perception.



## Path to Success: Halima Bibi wins an award

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Profitable maize farming is becoming a reality for many farmers in West Bengal who are adopting new CASI technologies to improve yield, so much so that they are being recognized both individually and as a state for maize production. All the hard work put into maize cultivation for Malda farmer Halima Bibi was well paid when the Government of India announced that she was awarded the Agriculture Minister's Krishi Karman Award for best maize production for the year 2017-2018.

Halima Bibi from Malda, West Bengal and her husband Zakir Hossain was following the crowd growing paddy in her 10 bigha (4 acres) land. After all, the principal food crop cultivated in West Bengal agriculture is rice and potatoes. But life was still a struggle for the couple with two children, trying to make ends meet.

Life took a turn for Halima and her family when she observed and realized the importance of no-till maize cultivation. She boldly decided to switch from growing paddy to maize and put all her effort to it. In 2015, she hired a Zero-Till multi-crop planter to plant maize in her land, and there was no looking back.

Halima said, "*When I learnt about the high demand for maize, we started cultivating the crop on half of our land but gradually shifted to growing maize across our entire 10 bighas. The agriculture department helped me a lot.*"

In 2017-18 crop season, Halima Bibi produced 168 quintals of maize from her 10 bigha land with her investment of INR 20,000 per acre which led to net profit of INR 150,000 in total.

Right and timely decision and a lot of zeal led Halima Bibi win progressive farmers award. Krishi Karman Awards are given to the best performer States for raising country's food grain production.

Introduction to CASI techniques led the farm to harvest more at low cost. But empowering Halima Bibi to take her own decision to switch from conventional farming to embracing CASI techniques helped her gain confidence and a national recognition for all the hard work.



*"Everyone is free to choose their own occupation, but no one should disrespect agriculture and farming. Agriculture is the source of food. We are children of land, and it is our responsibility to improve it through new technologies and tools."*

- Sanju Chaudhary

## Farmer to Service Provider: Sanju and Bhagiratha embracing change

Sanju Chaudhary from Sunsari, Nepal and Bhagiratha Pakurel from Jhapa, Nepal share similar stories and their struggle as a female agro-service provider.

Bhagiratha's interest in agriculture landed her as an office in-charge of an agriculture cooperative dedicated to serve smallholder farmers. While inability to get a decent job compelled Sanju to invest in farming that led her to become a President and lead farmer of another agriculture cooperative.

Both rural single female farmers supporting their families as service providers experience great struggles and challenges. *"A single woman in a male dominated society should not progress. She should feel the burn of her husband's death all her life,"* Bhagirath expressed her great grievances.

Overcoming obstacles of social biases in all forms, both women determined to bring convenience to smallholder farmers firmly decided to introduce CASI based agricultural equipment. Through their Custom Hiring Centers, both Bhagiratha and Sanju provided service to the farmers, helped in spreading knowledge on Conversation Agriculture and also adoption of Zero Till Machine, despite having to incur some losses in their business initially to gain trust of user farmers.

With an unfaltering belief that mechanization in agriculture is the only future of farming, the duo is certain that the CASI based machines help decrease the cost of production and increase productivity. And thus, seek their own future as CASI service providers.



## Reviving Confidence: Babita sets an example

Babita Mehta from Sunsari, Nepal was forced to quit her studies and a teaching career after she got married at the age of 20. The family she got married into required her to get involved in agriculture.

With very less knowledge on farming practices and limited aid, Babita had lost all her hopes for better future. But when Babita gained knowledge about the use of zero tillage machine and CASI farming technology, it revived her confidence and interest in farming.

Babita with her husband decided to use Zero Till Machine not only on their own farm to sow wheat but also provided service to around 200-250 farmers. They were immediately convinced that it is the future of farming.

*“Traditionally we had to take turns to sow seeds and then add fertilizers manually. And if could not find laborers on time, the whole planting period would get delayed. But with this zero-tillage machine, we can do all things together- sowing and adding fertilizer in such a short time and not worry about laborers”,* said Babita Mehta (Sunsari)

Now Babita and her husband are planning to save to buy their own zero till machine in near future. Babita believes that the machine will help them earn more because there will be the optimal use of their tractor and since her husband knows how to operate the machine, it will be an additional benefit.

With knowledge and experience, the couple has understood the benefit of zero-tillage machine. They believe using the machine, same production can be achieved in less expenses. Along with their ability to take their own decision and the couple’s continuous hard work and services, the lives of smallholder farmers in Sunsari are already improving.



## Happy Farmers: Increase in productivity and profitability

Climate change is occurring at much higher rate than many anticipated. More people are being affected by severe weather. And it is the smallholder farmers bearing the wrath of climate change topped up by the pressure of debt. Moreover, the rural female farmers also bear the responsibility of household along with farming.

Amidst such catastrophe, rural female farmers of the Eastern Gangetic Plains of Bangladesh, India and Nepal are enjoying increased productivity and increased profitability with high resource saving. Thanks to Conservation Agriculture based Sustainable Intensification.

Along with the knowledge of CASI, their decision-making ability to adopt CASI practices has set them free from a double burden of farming and household also the rage of climate change.

Rural women farmers of the EGP now enjoy increase in their produce, make profit and save resources with the help of Conservation Agriculture practices.



## Front Cover Photo

All Pictures: Conor Ashleigh/ Visual Storyteller and Communication for Development Consultant

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Picture 2: Uttar Bangla Krishi Vishwavidyalaya (UBKV), India

Picture 3: Manisha Shrestha/ CIMMYT Nepal

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Picture 5: Conor Ashleigh/ Visual Storyteller and Communication for Development Consultant

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## Back Cover

All Pictures: Conor Ashleigh/ Visual Storyteller and Communication for Development Consultant



**“Sustainable agricultural development cannot happen until women as equal partners can make choices.”**

**Professor Sucharita Sen  
Gender Specialist**

**Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, India**

