



UNTAPPING THE POTENTIAL OF THE SUGARCANE SECTOR IN INDIA

HOW TRAINING AND TECHNOLOGY
CAN EMPOWER WOMEN IN
CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE

GENDER-SMART SOLUTIONS TO UNTAP THE POTENTIAL OF THE SUGARCANE INDUSTRY

Women are key in the sugarcane industry and have an untapped potential to contribute to the growth of the sector. IFC MAS Advisory worked with DCM Shriram and Olam India to narrow the gap in access to training for sustainable climate practices and support farmers—men and women—in water management, soil health, and climate resilient agriculture practices.

The companies are ideal partners considering their potential to scale the initiative. DCM Shriram Sugar Mills runs four sugar mills located in Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh, one of the poorest and most disadvantaged districts in the country. It covers more than 100,000 Ha and employs 200,000 farmers. Olam India, a leading food and agribusiness, runs two sugar mills in Bharwani (Madhya Pradesh) and Rajgoli (Maharashtra) covering more than 20,000 Ha and employing 57,000 farmers.

As part of the project, a group of women farmers and farm laborers were identified and selected to participate in a training on seed nursery management and receive the machinery and agricultural inputs at no cost to establish their own sugarcane seed nurseries.

The selected women were first generation entrepreneurs with limited access to income generating opportunities. Also, while most of them have bank

THE SUGARCANE INDUSTRY IN INDIA

India is the second largest sugarcane producer globally. Representing 1.1 percent of its GDP, sugarcane is the most important cash crop in India.¹ Most sugarcane farmers face various challenges, including energy and labor shortages, poor quality crops, low yields and profitability, and low market rates for sugarcane.

The sugarcane sector is not an exception to the wide gender gap in India, which ranks 135 in gender inequality among 146 countries². Women play a significant role in the sugarcane industry, however, they are generally excluded from training opportunities and rarely see the economic benefits of working the land. Women mostly do the planting, weeding, and fertilizing, but it is the men who control the assets and keep the income generated from farming.

accounts, the income from sugarcane sales is usually deposited in the account of the male members of the household. The goal of the project was to provide them with an avenue for economic independence by enabling a more active role for them in the sugarcane value chain. As a result, the clients and sugarcane farmers would see an increase in yield, the quality and health of the sugarcane crop har-

vested—including crops' resistance to diseases—and household incomes.

The training was a comprehensive in-person deep dive into sugarcane farming knowledge and business management that allowed women entrepreneurs to upgrade their skills and adopt cost-effec-

tive climate-smart farming practices. They learned about seed nursery development and irrigation methods, seedling management after nursery transplantation, and use of fertilizers. The training also included financial literacy, and supply chain and water management.

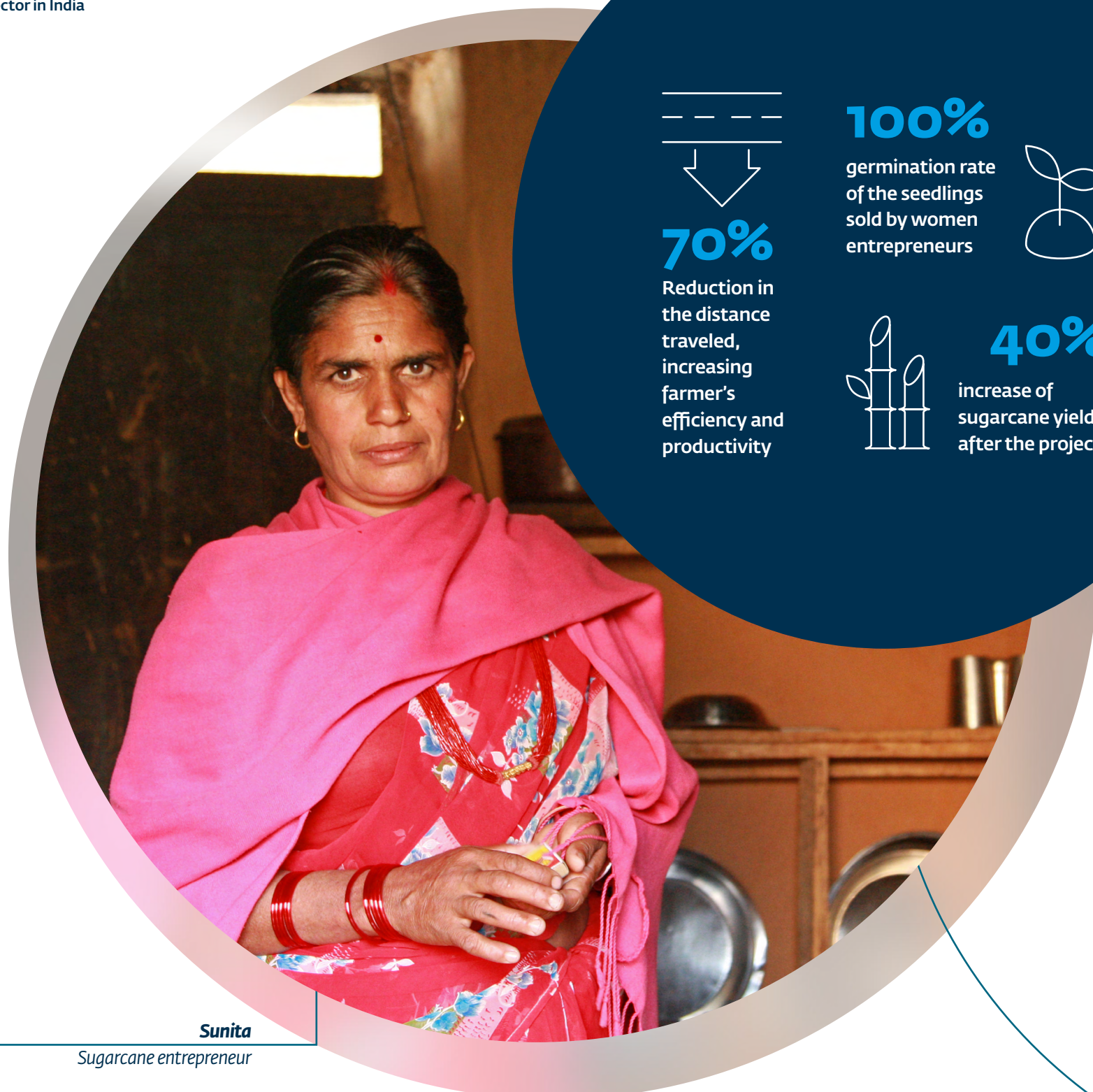


OPPORTUNITIES ARISE FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

The initiative allowed women entrepreneurs to grow financial independence, professionalism, and gain decision-making power over their lives and incomes.

Sunita, one of the entrepreneurs who works in the family's sugarcane farms with her husband, upgraded her farming methods and developed the capacity to run her own business. She also got her soil evaluated and advised on ways to enhance it. She procured 833 seed nursery trays and developed 50,000 high-quality seedlings, of which she sold 35,000 seedlings across six farmers covering 4.5 acres of land.

“My family and I used to buy seedlings from middlemen at a high price. Now we sell them directly to the farmers and they are better quality. I would like to grow more seedlings and build my business”



Sunita
Sugarcane entrepreneur



70%

Reduction in the distance traveled, increasing farmer's efficiency and productivity

100%

germination rate of the seedlings sold by women entrepreneurs



40%

increase of sugarcane yield after the project

The project not only brought important benefits for the seed nursery women entrepreneurs, but also for the sugarcane farmers and the clients. The seedlings sold by women entrepreneurs were higher quality with a germination rate of 100 percent and a reduced need for pest control. When surveyed about the production, sugarcane farmers reported an increase of more than 40 percent in the sugarcane yield after the initiative was launched and an almost four-time reduction in the number of seeds needed per acre.

Moreover, as the women entrepreneurs grew their seedling nurseries, sugarcane farmers—men and women—no longer had to travel long distances to buy the seedlings, as it was now the women in the community that sold them. Farmers reported a 70 percent reduction in the distance traveled, increasing their efficiency and productivity.

Training and resources for the women entrepreneurs and better seedlings for the farmers have translated into benefits for the clients. They now benefit from higher yields and sugarcane quality, leading to a consistent and higher quality raw sugarcane supply to the client.

ENDNOTES

1. Solomon, S. 2016. Sugarcane Production and Development of Sugar Industry in India. Sugar Tech., 18(6): 588-602.
2. World Economic Forum. Global Gender Gap Report 2022. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>



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