



Asha Devi: Vermicompost Enterprise

Asha Devi, a middle aged woman entrepreneur from Dhannipatti village in Uttar Pradesh, chose a path away from the traditional tailoring or beauty parlour enterprise and decided to get her hand dirty in something else. Asha, who has never “worked” professionally in her life before, set-up a vermi-composting unit in June 2017.

From what started as a humble beginning in her backyard, she has now scaled her business to a level where she now aggregates vermi-compost from other units in her village and sells it at almost double the price.

Just in a period of nine months she has been able to double her income using a simple yet powerful technique – improved packaging. She packages her produce in jute bags and supplies it to nurseries in urban areas, that fetches her a higher price of Rs. 25 as compared to Rs. 8 per kg for vermi-compost sold in loose packets.

Asha as part of the la Caixa Work 4 Progress (W4P) programme, first got introduced to the idea of a vermi-composting business during a peer to peer learning session where she received hands on training and exposure by a successful vermi-composting entrepreneur in Bundelkhand. The peer to peer format, she believes influenced her in ways that a normal one to one session or document would never have. It gave her the confidence to start producing and selling products from what was already available to her in abundance – cow dung. Following this training, she engaged in the co-creation sessions with the W4P team to build and refine her business plan.

As a part of the ecosystem building activities in Mirzapur under the W4P programme, partnerships that continue to add value to our entrepreneur’s lives have organically emerged. One such example was the synergies identified with a Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) called Vindhya Beej and Sabji Bhandar. The FPO supported Asha Devi with two vermi beds worth INR 1500 each, along with two kilograms of earthworms, worth INR 1200, to kick start her business. She already had four cows, which made the raw material easily available. Within four months Asha Devi was successfully in paying back this amount to the FPO. Not only is her enterprise debt-free, but is also picking up, with an average monthly profit of Rs.3500.

While things are good now, it wasn’t always the case. During her first business cycle the high quality worms she received were stolen. To make sure this never happens again, Asha Devi famously put up security cameras to keep an eye on her vermi-beds at all time. She has also employed two other women to help her with the enterprise. The villagers now know her as the lady with the security camera.