

## When our farmers can't feed themselves

(During 2021 about 7 farmers in Maharashtra woke up daily and decided they were worth more dead than alive to their family.)

### Urja Foundation, Wardha (Maharashtra)

For the past several years, Urja Foundation, under the leadership of Nootan Malvi, has worked with women farmers, mostly widows of farmers who have committed suicide as well as with divorced and deserted women in the rural areas of Wardha district. The work primarily involves helping them secure aid through various Govt. schemes such as Niradhar Yojana, National Food Security Act, and Mahatma Phule Arogya Yojana. In addition, Urja also invests in empowering younger widows and younger women below the poverty line through vocational training. They believe in finding solutions that will have long reaching impact: their approach includes raising awareness among the farmers about alternatives to suicide and organizing them to advocate for better agrarian policies.

As Urja's activities have become better known in the area, many more women are approaching them for help. Their work is based on: -

1. Help in securing aid through Govt. schemes for farmers' widows
2. Help in obtaining Ration cards
3. Education
4. Housing
5. Health

For 2022, the 2nd year of IFA involvement, IFA increased monthly support to Rs 50k from Rs 25k (in 2021). Urja now employs 5 social workers and is active in 79 villages (from 3 workers and 30 villages in 2021). In 2021, Urja's goal was to help 20 women per month. With the doubling of funding in 2022, Nootan believes Urja are more than doubling the number of women helped per month, which is now at 60 women per month.

Urja's social workers work around 20 days per month. **They hold meetings in villages** with about 10-15 attendees, with about 40% of attendees willing to accept assistance. Gathering information, filling out forms, sometimes accompanying the applicant to various centers is a very slow, inefficient process. Urja also provides travel assistance, if necessary. They also held masonry and organic farming training sessions and assisted villagers with bank accounts, savings schemes, education scholarships and Aadhar card applications.

**The table below shows the number of people** who received benefits under various schemes with IFA's support. The lower numbers for 2022 are due to the fact that a lot of approvals were granted during December 2021 due to the impending elections! Many of these benefits actually materialized in 2023.

Period	Pension	House	Job card	Health	Ration Cards	Bal Sangopan
Jan-Dec 2021	83	127	283	317	106	92
Jan-Dec 2022	120	135	127	222	53	66



**Just the housing alone (Rs.90,000 each) generates a significant benefit by leveraging our support at over \$20 for \$1 support provided.**

-- IFA Liaison: Mrudula and Prashant Joshi

~ Compliments of Swaroop Mishra and colleagues at T-Mobile (Bellevue, WA) ~