

GOOD PRACTICES 70: June 2025



Women-Led Farm Mechanisation in Tribal Gujarat



In this Good Practices note, Krithika Sundaram, BharatSinh Gohil, and Alka Dadheech share the key strategies and lessons that enabled the successful introduction and scaling of women-led Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) in the tribal regions of Gujarat.

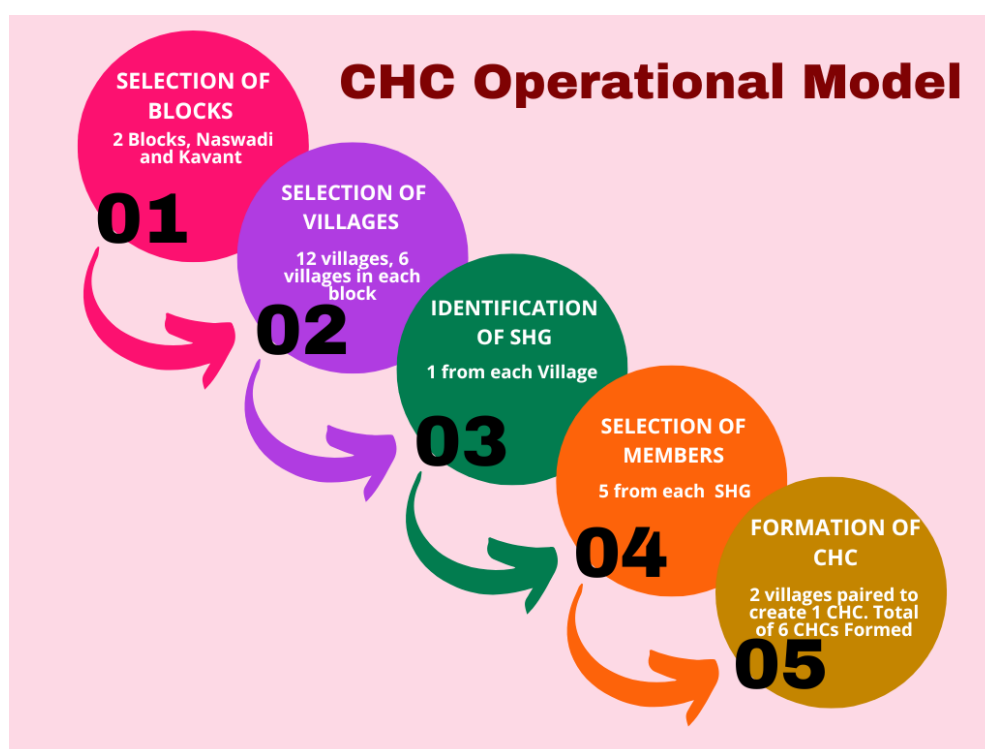
CONTEXT

In the tribal belt of Chhotaudepur in Gujarat, India—characterized by erratic rainfall and small landholdings—women have traditionally played a major role in agriculture and farm operations. During lean agricultural periods, men from these households often migrate to cities in search of work, leaving women to shoulder dual responsibilities of household chores and farm operations. Their inability to afford high-cost farming equipment further increases their drudgery.

To address these challenges, Shroffs Foundation Trust (SFT), with the support of the Gujarat Livelihood Promotion Company (GLPC) and Gujarat Gas Limited (GGL), launched a pilot Custom Hiring Centre (CHC) initiative in two villages in Chhotaudepur. The programme aims to enhance local employment, profitability, and the agency of women farmers through a community-owned, collective CHC model.

COMMUNITY-OWNED CUSTOM HIRING CENTRES (CHC)

This CHC model was designed to promote grassroots-level farm mechanisation while simultaneously empowering women through enterprise development. By mobilising women into Self Help Groups (SHGs), the initiative enabled them to operate and manage CHCs, creating local livelihoods and fostering leadership among tribal women.



The 5-step participatory approach towards women-led mechanisation

Launched on 28th March 2024, the project runs for three years and is expected to benefit 1,000–1,400 small and marginal farmers across 31 villages. A total of 120 SHGs will participate. Six CHCs have been established; five are currently operational, and one is nearing operational status. The total project outlay is ₹1.2 crore.

GOOD PRACTICES: COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Cluster Identification and Grouping of Villages

Clusters in Chhotaudepur district were identified based on traditional farming practices and seasonal migration patterns by the GLPC. Two main blocks, —Kavant and Naswadi—were selected based on the Aspirational Development Program. Within the selected blocks, clusters were identified, comprising 12 villages grouped by proximity and socio-economic profiles. Grouping ensured efficient resource use and smooth implementation.

Identifying CHC Locations

Sites near farmlands were chosen to minimise travel time and costs. Land owned by SHG members was preferred to enhance accessibility and long-term ownership.

Community Mobilisation and SHG Engagement

Through 40 meetings in 12 villages, over 26 SHGs were sensitised to the programme's goals. Local leaders and village panchayats helped identify one SHG per village. Five active women members from each SHG were selected to run the CHC. Continuous engagement built community trust and participation.



Community mobilisation and capacity building of tribal women SHGs to set up CHCs

Capacity Building

Two rounds of training were conducted, covering:

- CHC roles and responsibilities
- Record-keeping (e.g., logbooks, registers)
- Diesel use, cost-sharing, and pricing
- Equipment handling and booking systems
- Hands-on field sessions

Support from family members was encouraged, especially for documentation. Regular training ensured familiarity with machinery and business operations.

GOOD PRACTICES: OPERATIONALISING THE MODEL

Formal Registration – Formation of CHCs

CHCs were formed by SFT under the names Jay Johar, Shri Ganesh, Jay Yogeshwar, Bapa Sitaram, and Jay Mataji. Legal documentation was completed, and agreements were signed to provide operational autonomy and instil accountability.

CHC Committee Formation

A village-level committee, comprising SHG representatives, CRPs, and field staff, was established to oversee daily operations and promote community engagement.

Needs Assessment and Feasibility Analysis

Surveys were conducted to identify crop types, equipment needs, and operational readiness, ensuring alignment with ground-level realities.

Development of Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs)

SoPs outlined inventory handling, booking systems, pricing, grievance redressal, and record formats. Highlights include:

- Seasonal usage plans and rental rates
- Equipment procurement and maintenance guidelines
- Profit-sharing model: 75% to SHG members, 25% for CHC upkeep
- Priority for local farmers and advance registration with deposits
- Designation of Setu NGO as the monitoring agency

Record Format and Equipment Rates

| Equipment | Rental Rate (INR) | Criteria |
|------------|-------------------|---|
| Trolley | 400 | Per round (within village), distance-based for others |
| Cultivator | 800 | Per hour |
| Plough | TBD | Under finalisation |
| Rotavator | 1050 | Per hour |



Opening of bank accounts for CHC members to enable smooth financial transactions

Finance Mobilisation

Each CHC contributed ₹60,000 to promote ownership. Dedicated bank accounts were opened for transparent transactions.

Procurement and Distribution

Tractors and implements (cultivator, rotavator, plough, trolley) were procured and distributed. Drivers were hired; women managed rents and record-keeping.



Handing over tractors to CHC members

BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES

- Five CHCs are operational with women-led management
- 60+ women trained in CHC operations
- Income generation: These CHCs have generated Rs 4.07 lakh in gross income and Rs 2.6 lakh in net income within five months (Jan to May 2025)
- Enhanced financial independence and socio-economic status
- Proven, replicable enterprise model

“Running the CHC has been a learning experience for us. We are learning to manage finance and negotiate with farmers. This enterprise model has made us financially independent.”

— Kokilaben Rathwa, President, Jay Yogeshwar CHC

KEY CHALLENGES

- **Cultural Barriers:** Resistance to women operating machinery was addressed through awareness efforts and local role models.
- **Low Confidence Among SHG Members:** Lack of prior exposure was mitigated through persistent training and field support.
- **Machinery Maintenance:** Delays occurred due to limited local mechanics.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALING UP

Plans are underway to replicate the model in additional blocks, with a continued focus on facilitation, capacity building, and local governance. The model showcases tribal women as entrepreneurs and offers a scalable path to inclusive farm mechanisation.



CHC members of Tava and Vantada villages of Kavant block

LESSONS LEARNT

- **Affordable Mechanisation + Enterprise = Viability**
With proper training and resources, the CHC model transitions women from labourers to entrepreneurs.
- **Community Buy-in is Critical**
Participatory planning and local ownership ensured strong adoption.
- **Mechanisation Can Be Inclusive**
Equipment pricing, profit-sharing, and decision-making were all led by women, making it a gender-inclusive model.

WAY FORWARD

To diversify income sources, linkages will be established with large farmers and private equipment owners. Solar-powered irrigation and other technologies will be introduced to expand opportunities and enhance the CHC ecosystem.

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