

# Harvesting Gold

With some grit, determination, and a lot of hard work, tribal women of Laxmiposi village changed the face of agricultural traditions. Laxmiposi is located in the midst of hills in Keonjhar district, about 246 kms from state capital Bhubaneswar. The village has a population of about 300 and most people are occupied in agriculture.



Laxmi Munda applying yellow card from insects

Ideal Development Agency (IDA) stepped into Laxmiposi along with Bharat Rural Livelihood Foundation (BRLF) with one objective: to double the agricultural income of the villagers. Their focus was small and marginal women farmers. Farmers with smaller agricultural lands at their disposal need better infrastructure to make the best of their produce. IDA and BRLF staff members introduced Agricultural Production Cluster (APC) projects, and within a year, the yields changed. However, this change came about after much intervention. The focus of this ambitious

project was women, and they knew their land like the back of their hands. To tell them that someone else had better ideas on how to cultivate their land was bold in itself. But, it started with baby steps. Producer Group (PG) was formed. They held meetings. The staff was able to bring 129 members together, all tribal women farmers. The PG was named Maa Grama Thakurani.

The project was about finding new crops, introducing Non-Pesticide Method (NPM) and eventually boosting incomes of the members. The farmers, however, had no interest in planting vegetables. Irrigation was not appropriate for vegetables. The uplands in the village were at the base of the hills. They thought they did not have enough land to cultivate vegetables. The farmers were absolutely reluctant to try vegetables in their fields. The project staff kept pushing for Brinjal cultivation. They were told that in Kharif season, they wouldn't need irrigation. As the situation became more

demanding, another organisation, Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) came forward. A solar powered bore-well was installed. The project slowly gained motion.



Laxmi Munda collecting brinjals from the field for marketing



Laxmi Munda, a tribal farmer was part of Maa Grama Thakurani PG. A 34 year old, mother of two, Laxmi, was also being encouraged to take up brinjal cultivation. She had a 80 decimal block of barren land. She would have never taken up brinjal cultivation. She needed the fertile part of her 1.7 acres land throughout the year. After all, her whole family depended on the farm income. Laxmi had received training on vegetable cultivation at the PG, all she needed was a little push. This push came finally, as ITDA introduced the 'Mission Jeebika' programme. Laxmi joined the mission. She took up brinjal cultivation in her barren patch of land. The kharif season came and her family put all hands to work. Laxmi was a leader as

#### Brinjal collected by farmer for selling

well. She took up brinjal and set an example. She encouraged other women to follow suit. Soon enough, twenty-eight women joined hands with her. Now a total of 40 acres of land was being cultivated for brinjal, and through NPM! The IDA was of course there. IDA provided all kinds of advice and support for the women. ITDA came forward and helped the women with seeds and organic manure.