

{ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY }

Drone Didis: Empowering women, harbingers of agri tech

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VARANASI : Standing at the boundary of a wheat farm in Mehendi Ganj area of Rajatalab, around 15 km from Varanasi, Neetu Singh, a mother of three and a housewife, is spraying nano urea on the crop with a little flying machine: a drone equipped to carry the solution.

It's a sight that is common now, but it wasn't once so. There was suspicion, speculation and much hesitation among farmers to the deployment of this technology over their standing crops. It took a lot of convincing but they gave it a try in the end.

This started an agricultural revolution of sorts, saving time and money, while getting the woman drone operator cash to supplement the family income.

Neetu controls the drone with efficiency and covers an acre of crop in just 10 minutes, whereas manual spraying to cover the

same area takes two to four hours.

Asha Devi, a housewife from Harahua, too, operates a drone with confidence. Neetu and Asha are among the nine women from villages of Varanasi, who in March 2024, underwent a fortnight's training in operating drones in Prayagraj, under the Namo Drone Didi scheme by the centre that empowers women-led self-help groups (SHGs) by equipping them with drone know-how as applied to agriculture.

The training introduced them to drones and the technology associated with it, and how to fly a drone. Experts trained them in operating drones, especially spraying nano urea solution on crops.

Neetu says, "Each of us was given a drone for free. And we embarked on a new journey."

The beginning was quite challenging since farmers were not ready to get their crops sprayed



A training programme in March last year introduced women from SHGs to drones. The participants also learnt how to fly them.

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by a drone. But the women gradually convinced the farmers. And they started getting work.

"In the beginning, we had to convince the farmers... I flew drones just to demonstrate how the spraying of nano urea and pesticides on several acres would take place... it helped us convince farmers. Gradually farmers accepted it.... Now, the farmers contact me over the

THE SCHEME

Namo Drone Didi is a central sector scheme aiming to provide drones to 15,000 selected women SHG members during the period from 2024-25 to 2025-2026 for spraying of liquid fertilisers and pesticides. This initiative is expected to generate an additional income of at least Rs 1 lakh per year.

mobile phone to spray their crops using a drone. They call us Drone Didi. I get Rs 300 per acre for spraying nano urea by drone."

The per-beegha charge is Rs 200. Neetu says that the drone has transformed her life, while looking after her three children and family, she makes a living. It has infused fresh confidence into her. During this season, she sprayed 148 litres of nano urea and 58.6 litres of pesticides in 300 acres of farms and made Rs

75,000.

Asha Devi made an earning of Rs 20,000 in three to four months and covered 196 acres of farms using 52 liters of urea and 34 litres of pesticides while working as a Drone Didi.

She says that she could not earn better because in the Harahua area, there are not many big farmers. Small farmers don't get the spraying done by drone.

She suggests, "The government should launch a campaign to create awareness about the benefits of spraying through drones. It saves the time of farmers."

Manju Prasad of Chhapra, Sidhur of Badagaon, Urmila Devi of Kashi Vidyapeeth, Anita Devi of Pindara, Reena Devi and Sangeeta Devi of Sevapuri, Sunita Maurya of Harahua are the other women trained as Drone Didis, said Sravan Kumar Singh, district mission manager, National Mission of Rural Livelihoods, Varanasi.