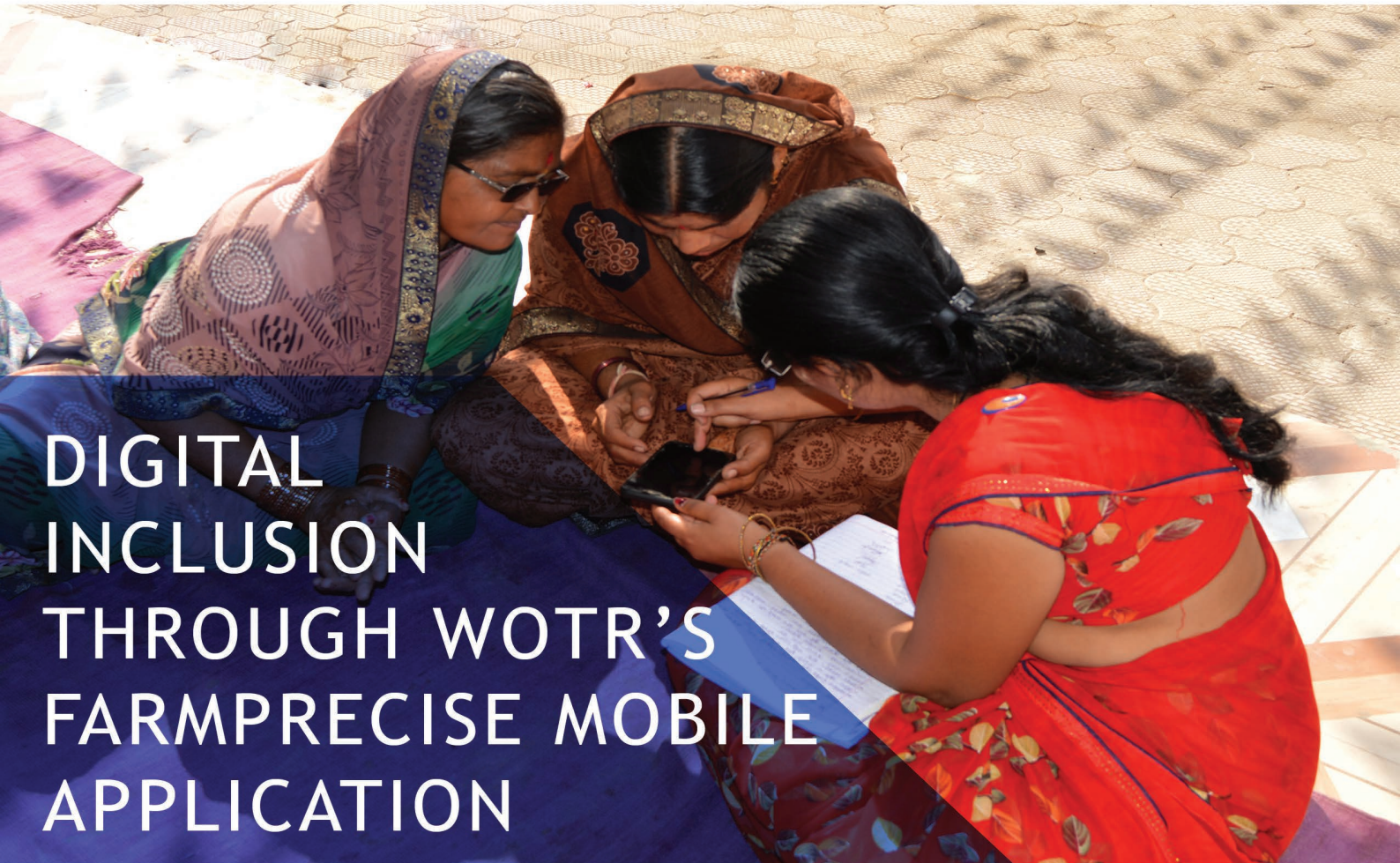




INITIATIVE ON
Digital Innovation



DIGITAL INCLUSION THROUGH WOTR'S FARMPRECISE MOBILE APPLICATION

SUMMARY

The majority of smallholder farmers in developing countries lack access to location-specific science-based information. Although digital advisory tools can potentially help such farmers in accessing information, often blanket recommendations and obsolete content shared through these digital tools discourage farmers from using them. Farmers need relevant information and knowledge which they can adopt in their specific situations, which can thus help them enhance their productivity and income from farming. Keeping these in view the Watershed Organization Trust (WOTR) developed FarmPrecise Application in 2019 with the support of Qualcomm Wireless Reach programme. WOTR adopted a holistic approach to digital tool deployment, especially for reaching women who often face barriers in digital access and proficiency. This comprehensive approach involved capacity building of women by providing digital skill trainings, building social capital to reach more women, and instilling a sense of empowerment among them by enhancing their participation in decision making. In this Good Practice Note, we highlight how FarmPrecise, an innovative digital solution developed by WOTR, is ensuring digital inclusion of women farmers and empowering them to overcome the barriers of gender digital divide.

The CGIAR Digital Innovation Initiative accelerates the transformation towards sustainable and inclusive agrifood systems by generating research-based evidence and innovative digital solutions. It is one of 32 initiatives of CGIAR, a global research partnership for a food-secure future, dedicated to transforming food, land, and water systems in a climate crisis.

CONTEXT

The past two decades have witnessed several efforts at digitalisation of agriculture and emergence of digital agro-advisories to support farmers with information. But the impact and reach of these digital tools and services have not been uniform. Women, in particular, have encountered several challenges in accessing these digital agro-advisories. These include gender disparities in access, coupled with factors such as unequal access to education, digital skills, asset ownership, etc. Consequently, women are side-lined in the digital era, and they face huge informational disparity when compared to their male counterparts.

In this context, the Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR) developed FarmPrecise Application in 2019 with the support of Qualcomm Wireless Reach programme to address several challenges faced by farmers. These challenges relate to climate change and increasing weather uncertainty, rising costs of agricultural inputs, low and declining productivity, market volatility, low returns and environmental degradation arising from excessive water and chemical inputs in farming. The FarmPrecise app provides farmers a weather-based, dynamic decision support system customized to specific crops and farm resources across key agricultural operations. This app uses real-time information based on data and analytics to help farmers make informed decisions about their farming practices; it provides daily weather forecasts, information on pest and disease management, irrigation management, nutrient management, and market prices. The app also has an interactive forum for personalized advisory, and other features such as Farm Diary, Farm News, and connects with FPOs. Digital inclusion, especially focused on women farmers has been a key focus of FarmPrecise. WOTR tried to overcome the challenges faced by women farmers in accessing information and advice on farming through FarmPrecise by adopting a gender-sensitive approach, and this is discussed in detail in this Good Practice Note.

Watershed Organization Trust (WOTR)

Established in 1993, WOTR is an internationally recognized non-profit organization and think tank that engages at the intersection of practice, knowledge and policy across scales and in collaboration with various stakeholders across sectors. WOTR's goal is to ensure water and food availability, along with livelihoods and income security - to support the sustainable growth and well-being of vulnerable and disadvantaged communities in rural India.

WOTR has been working with rural communities in India for three decades now. Sanjeevani Institute for Empowerment and Development and Sampada Trust are the sister organizations of the Watershed Organization Trust and Water (WOTR) group who implement developmental work at the field level. As of September 2023, it has touched the lives of over 6.93 million across 7124 villages in 10 states of India - Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Karnataka. It has included participants from 63 countries in training and exposure programmes. On the ground over 2.64 million hectares of degraded landscapes/watersheds have been regenerated, over 158 billion litres of potential water harvesting capacity has been created, and agricultural productivity has increased significantly with a 121% increase in area under triple cropping. Farm incomes in most project villages are two to four times more than those in control villages. Moreover, it has facilitated over 21,500 SHGs involving 2,52,829 women.

EVOLUTION OF FARMPRECISE

WOTR started its journey of delivering advisories to farmers in the year 2010-11 by delivering agromet advisories from IMD to farmers. But during that time, they were using conventional modes such as preparing a weekly advisory chart based on the weather forecast from IMD, and announcing these advisories through loudspeakers

in villages. In 2013 they started to send advisories as SMS to mobile phones. In 2015, WOTR partnered with IMD for the Gramin Krishi Mausam Sewa initiative, aiming to automate advisory generation. Consequently, they developed an IT-enabled Agrimet Decision Support System (Agrimet-DSS) for delivering block-level advisories. Agrimet-DSS excels in its approach by automating the creation of crop-specific agricultural advisories using weather data, customized to various geographic scales. Operating on a web platform, it processes diverse data streams through statistical analysis, incorporating scientific insights on crop growth and behaviour. This system facilitates the production of dynamic, weather-based advisories specific to crops and locations, delivered in local languages. The application has been transferred to IMD for integration into their core system.



But WOTR aimed to deliver more customized and precise advisories. So, when they got an invitation to participate in the Qualcomm Wireless Reach programme in 2017, which aims to bring advanced wireless technologies to underserved communities globally, they utilized the opportunity to develop the FarmPrecise mobile application. In August 2019, the first version of the application was launched which covered the main 7-8 crops in Maharashtra State. Currently the mobile application serves four states of India, including Maharashtra, Telangana, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. It provides advisories for 30 major crops including paddy, wheat, cotton, sorghum, finger millet, pigeon pea, chickpea, black gram, green gram, pomegranate, brinjal, onion, tomato, okra, capsicum, potato, soyabean, sunflower, groundnut, cauliflower, cabbage, chilly, ginger, turmeric, and flower crops such as chrysanthemum and marigold in five languages viz., English, Hindi, Telugu, Odia and Marathi.



The FarmPrecise content is curated by a dedicated team of agricultural experts, specializing in agronomy, entomology, meteorology, soil science, plant pathology, and more. Additionally, the content is sourced and verified by various ICAR institutes, state agricultural universities, and IMD, facilitated by WOTR's formal MoU with these

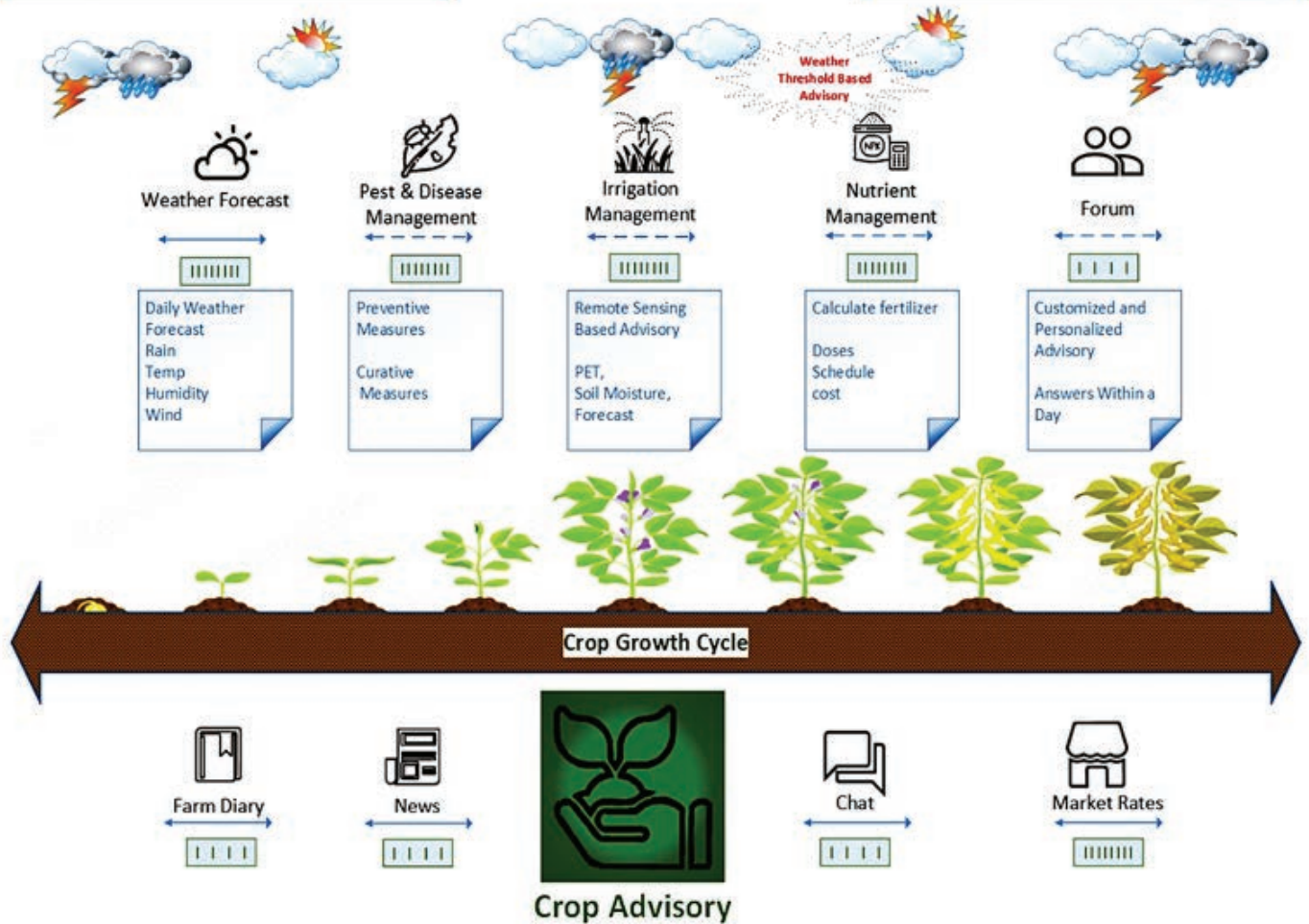
institutions for knowledge and data support. Comprising experts in remote sensing and IT, the technical team has devised algorithms to produce advisories tailored to specific crops, sowing dates, weather conditions (both observed and forecasted), soil types, soil moisture levels, and other relevant factors. The application also uses a gender-inclusive language and design. For instance, in the onboarding process for users, apart from options of male and female, there is an option for users not to disclose their gender. However, persons of any gender can use the information in the App, which is provided in regional languages and could be scaled up to any state of India. The agro-advisories in the App are also available in audio format. Wherever possible, the App has also provided multimedia content with appropriate photographs and videos. The app was pilot tested with both male and female farmers, and recently they have got gender specific requests from women to add advisories on livestock management and kitchen gardening, which they are working on now. Hence, from designing to delivery, the FarmPrecise team has been gender responsive. From 2021 till 2024 February, the FarmPrecise app has had 94900 downloads out of which 7658 are by women. Since women mostly access the service through the devices of their male family members, it can be said confidently that the usage is much more than the recorded numbers.



The technical team pilot testing the FarmPrecise app with a woman farmer

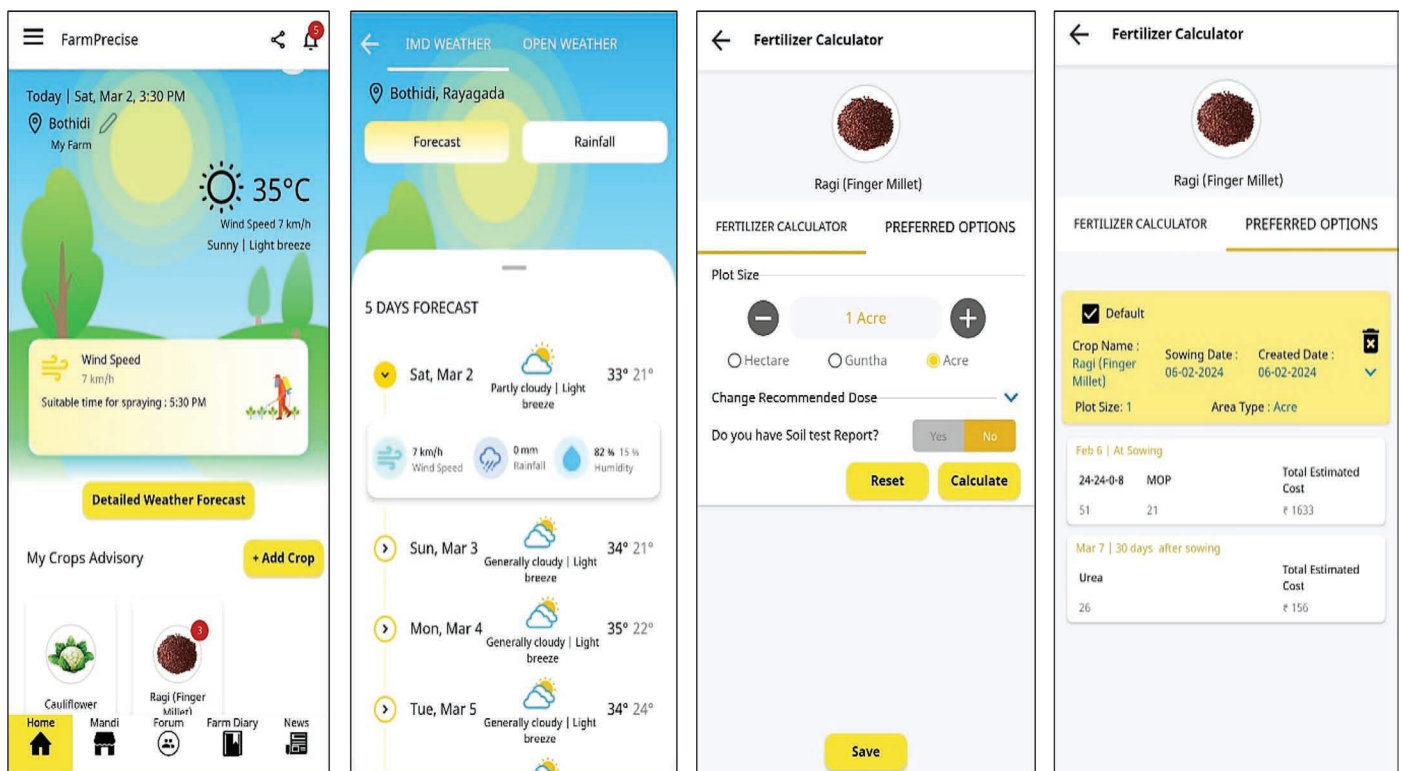
Legends: Need of Information:-
 1) Continuous 
 2) Occasional 

Legends: Utility of Information :-
 1) More Frequent 
 2) Less Frequent 



Overview of FarmPrecise mobile application

FEATURES OF FARMPRECISE



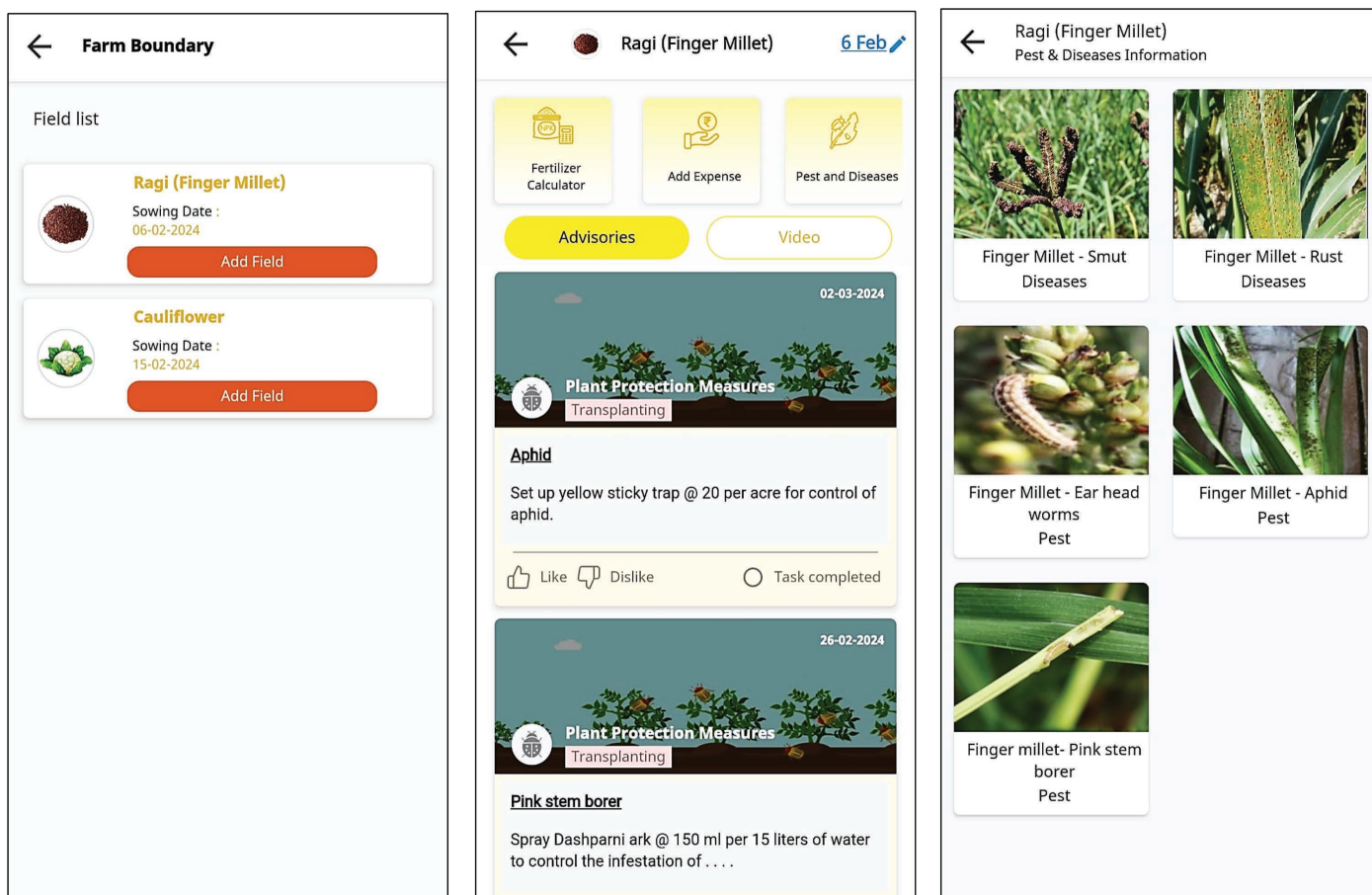
Screen captures of weather and nutrient management advisories

Weather Information

The application provides both real time weather information and five-day weather forecast on humidity, temperature, rainfall, windspeed and direction. The weather information is collated from both IMD and Open Weather Services so that farmers can compare the weather information from both services and make appropriate farm management decisions. The application also suggests proper spraying time in a day according to the wind and rain.

Nutrient Management

The app has a fertilizer calculator which gives fertilizer recommendations based on the crop and plot size. If the farmer has done soil test, the app gives precise fertilizer requirement based on soil test results. If the soil test report details are not available with the farmer, the app suggests various combinations based on optimum quantity along with the estimated cost of fertilizer required for their crop. Based on budget and availability of the fertilizer, the farmer can choose the best suitable option.



Screen captures of irrigation, pest, and disease management advisories

Irrigation Management Advisories

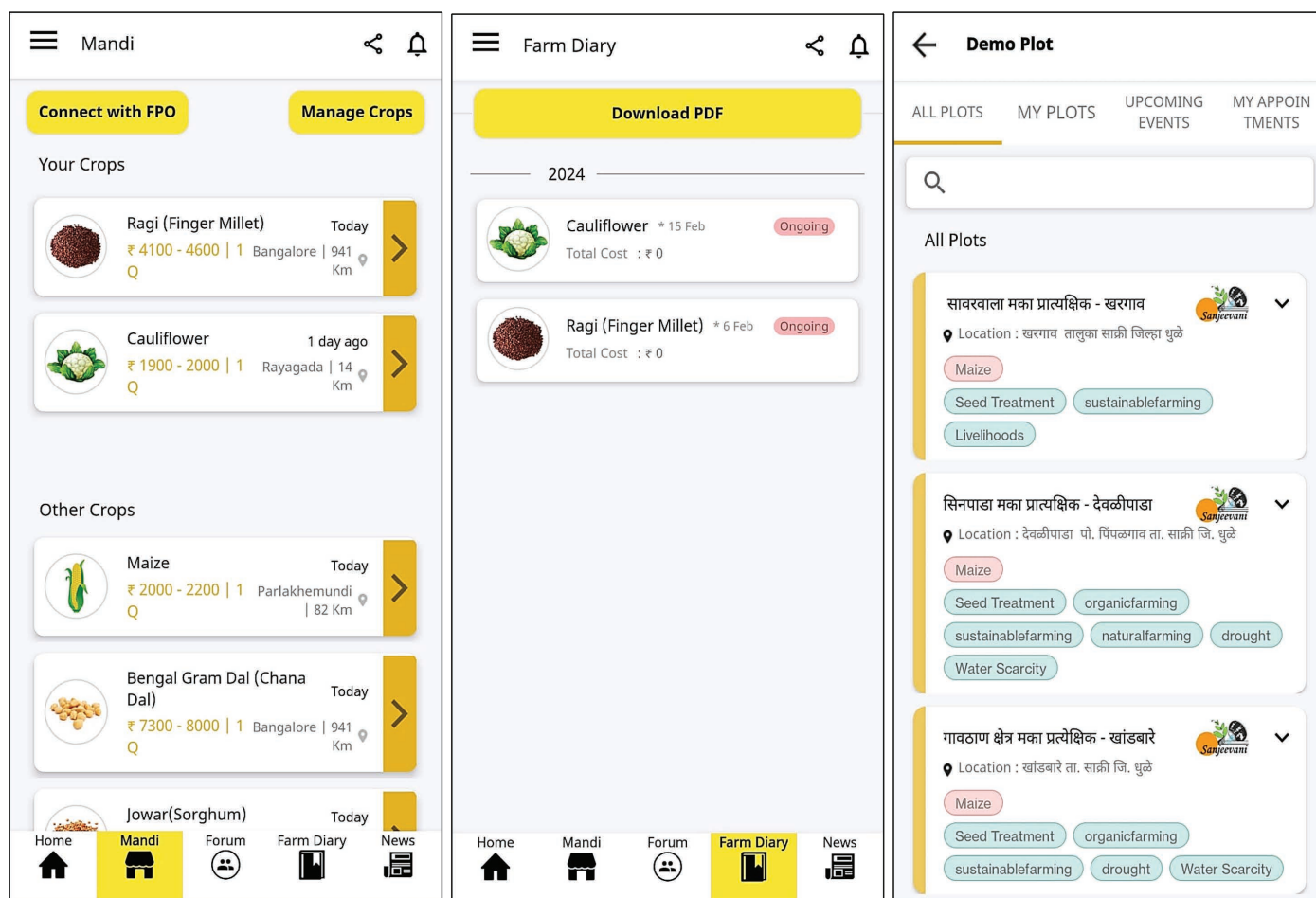
The application provides timely advisory notifications for field irrigation, taking into account weather information and recommended irrigation frequencies. The inclusion of the farm boundary feature enhances the precision of irrigation management advisories by incorporating moisture data collected through remote sensing.

Pest and Disease Management

The app includes a comprehensive list of common pests with images, symptoms of pest attacks, and both preventive and control measures against these pests. Farmers can choose their specific crop and easily identify pests from the provided list. In case the pest is not listed, users can visit the interactive forum to upload pictures of the pest from their field. Within 24 hours, agricultural experts from the WOTR team will provide assistance

in the form of messages under the picture uploaded or through a phone call. Fellow farmers knowledgeable about the pest and its control can also share their recommendations on the forum. Furthermore, farmers can see the photos of pest and disease uploaded by other farmers and can provide guidance to them. This also serves as a reference resource for other farmers who can become aware of potential pests and diseases and thus not rely

exclusively on the expert for advice. Farmers also upload pictures of their crops after adopting the recommendation to show the improvement in plant health. This also helps in motivating and strengthening the trust of fellow farmers in the advisories generated by the application. Hence the forum (Krishi Manch) is a rich resource base of crowd-sourced information.



Screen captures of market, farm diary and demo plot features

Market Price Information

The application offers the price for preferred crops in nearby mandis. Farmers can sort mandis based on both price and distance, allowing them to make informed decisions on selling their produce in the nearest market with the highest price.

Farm Diary

Farm Diary is a valuable tool for keeping track of expenses, income, and other financial transactions in a farm, and it helps farmers manage their finances effectively. The farmer can put up

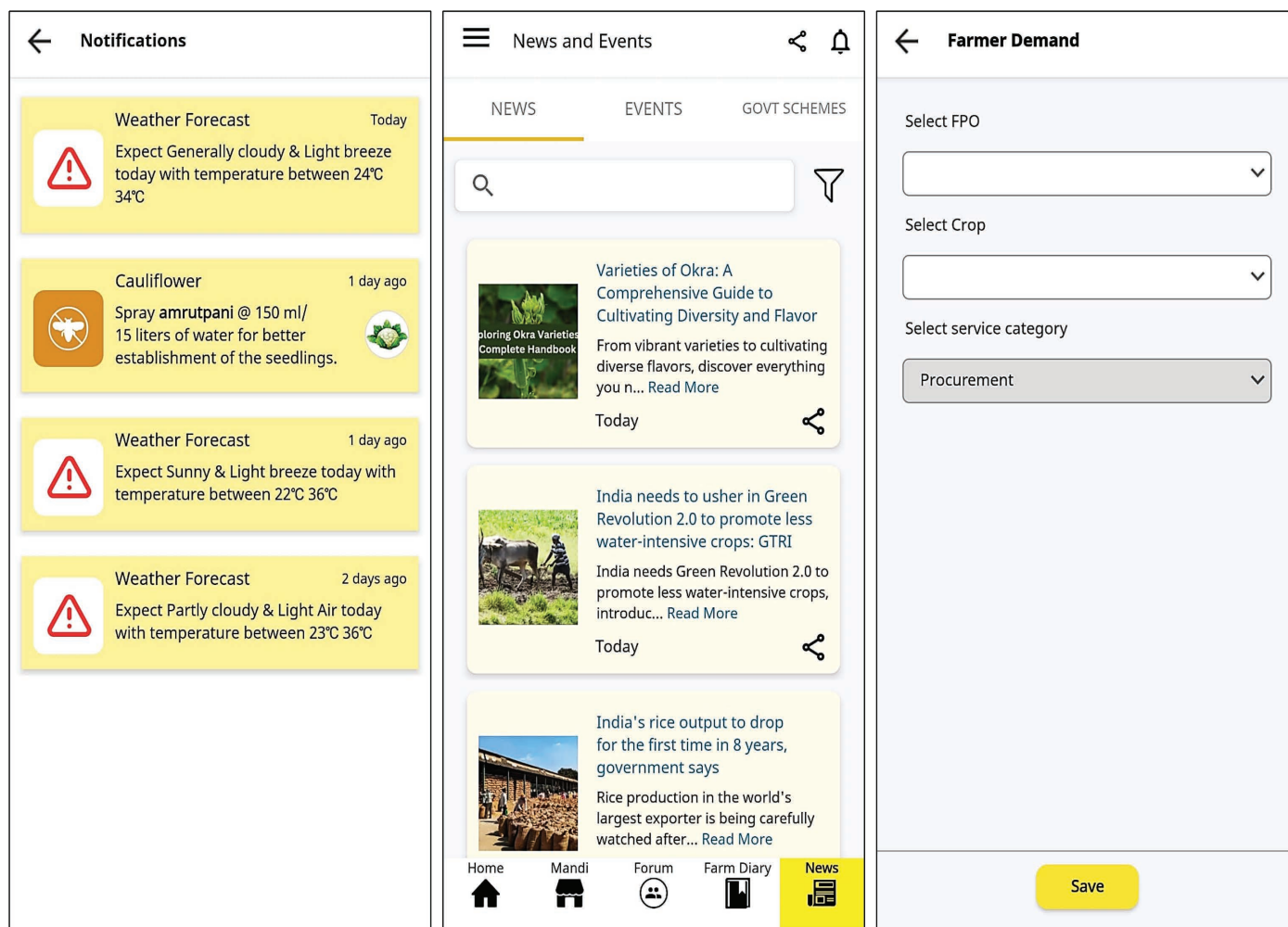
the expenses incurred under each of the crop management activities, such as land preparation, sowing, intercultural operation, and also add the income gained throughout the season. This feature has an option to even download the farm diary in pdf format.

Demo Plot

The Demo Plot feature compiles information on nearby demonstration plots, offering details on the plot's location, demonstrated technology, benefits derived from the technology, and information about the implementing agency. This allows

farmers to observe the outcomes of adopting the technology or advisory recommended by the app without the need for personal visits to the demo plots. This not only enhances trust among farmers

but also saves their valuable time. Additionally, farmers keen on exploring further can easily identify nearby plots and choose to visit the demo plots in person.



Screen captures of custom notifications, news & events, and FPO connect features

Customized Advisories

FarmPrecise delivers tailored advisories to farmers by sending notifications on intercultural operations, plant protection measures, and other crop management advice, all based on the farmer's specified date of sowing. This personalized approach ensures that farmers receive timely guidance throughout the season, aligning with their individual sowing dates as well as local weather conditions. In contrast to other applications that assume a uniform sowing date for all farmers, FarmPrecise acknowledges and accommodates the diversity in planting schedules. Farmers have the option to provide feedback by liking or disliking the advisory, and they can also mark tasks as done if they have implemented the advice in their fields.

News and Events

The application's news section provides timely updates on recent agricultural developments, including new field advancements and government agricultural strategies. Additionally, the events section keeps users informed about upcoming agricultural events such as field days, melas, and other district- and block-level activities. A dedicated section is also available to offer insights into various government schemes for farmers. Consequently, farmers can leverage the news and events features to stay updated on social events and avail themselves of the associated benefits.

Connect with FPOs

This feature enables farmers to access a list of nearby Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). Farmers can list their expected prices, and

FPOs may purchase the products if the proposed prices align with their criteria. FPOs can also put up their requirements and the prices they can offer. Consequently, the app establishes a digital platform for fair price negotiations. Additionally, farmers have the option to purchase inputs such as solar-based yellow sticky traps and fertilizers from FPOs. This application is being further developed to provide facilities to FPOs to sell agricultural

inputs at subsidised costs to farmers, and on the other hand farmers can order the inputs through the app which will notify the concerned FPO and deliver the same. In time the WOTR will be accommodating various customised services that FPOs are offering to farmers, including but not limited to custom agricultural equipment hiring centres, scheduling of cold storage facilities, etc.



Digital literacy training for women farmers

DIGITAL INCLUSION OF WOMEN

WOTR has placed significant emphasis on the inclusion of women in the digital services provided through FarmPrecise. This commitment is reflected in their efforts across three core areas: expanding outreach, improving the digital skills of women, and fostering increased participation of women.

Expanding Outreach

WOTR is expanding the outreach of FarmPrecise among women farmers by employing women field workers called Mahila Pravartaks (translated as ‘women promoters’) and Cluster Level Promoters (CLPs). These field staff serve as resource persons at the village level.

CLPs oversee approximately 10 villages per block and are predominantly women, chosen

by WOTR based on their broader influence and acceptance among women farmers. Essential criteria for CLP selection include basic digital skills and mobilization expertise. WOTR staff provide induction training for CLPs upon recruitment, and field officers conduct periodic refresher training sessions covering various aspects.

WOTR staff organize cluster-level training sessions for women farmers in collaboration with Mahila Pravartaks in villages, focusing on FarmPrecise and other technology promotion initiatives by WOTR. The women appointed as CLPs are themselves empowered digitally by WOTR and they are also supported in their education. This clearly shows the gender focus of the WOTR team. Mahila Pravartaks, identified by WOTR field officers based on their proficiency in using smartphones and their

influence among fellow farmers in the village, play a crucial role in ensuring digital inclusion. They follow up with women farmers after digital literacy training, assisting them with challenges in using the FarmPrecise app. Mahila Pravartaks have targets to encourage women to download the mobile application, and for those without smartphones, assistance is provided to install the app on devices belonging to husbands or other family members. They make frequent visits to the villages and are available only a call away, to the farmers in the village. They are the contact points in the villages and women farmers find it more comfortable to talk to Mahila Pravartaks, very different from talking to male officers. The Mahila Pravartaks who perform well are also promoted to CLPs. A closed WhatsApp group has been created and maintained by the CLPs and Mahila Pravartaks for women to share updates and support.

Improving Digital Skills

WOTR has organized two training sessions for women farmers, one on digital literacy and

another specifically focused on FarmPrecise. Instead of targeting individual farmers, these trainings are directed towards women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to ensure broader coverage. The digital literacy training covered a range of topics, including creating email accounts, using various mobile phone features such as Google Voice and fintech apps, and navigating social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube.

FarmPrecise training was aimed at familiarizing women with the app's features while also covering fundamental aspects of digital literacy. WOTR has developed a comprehensive training module that provides detailed instructions and graphics on using mobile phones, creating social media accounts, and utilizing FarmPrecise. The field team of CLPs and Mahila Pravartaks conducts monthly training sessions to address any challenges farmers may encounter with mobile phone usage and FarmPrecise. As a result of these efforts, women have gained better confidence in using FarmPrecise.



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WOTR's training module for promoting digital literacy

Ensuring Participation by Women Farmers

The working hours of women farmers are different from that of male farmers considering that women have to handle both farm work as well as household chores. This causes poor attendance of women farmers in meetings and trainings as most of these events are organised by government agencies at timings inconvenient for women. However, CLPs schedule cluster and village level meetings at both convenient times and places for women farmers so as to ensure their participation.

Another step taken by WOTR to increase the participation of women farmers in their digital initiative is to mobilize women to form farmer producer committees with an all women Board of Directors (BOD). The shareholders of the FPC are women SHG groups. For the FPCs to sell and buy produce from the shareholder women farmers, WOTR has created another mobile application called 'FarmPrecise FPO'. The application is exclusively developed for BOD members of the FPCs. The shareholder women farmers can place their buying or selling request through the Connect with FPO feature of the FarmPrecise application. The BOD members are given user credentials for the FarmPrecise FPO App, and they can manage all the activities of the FPC through this app.

CHALLENGES IN DIGITAL INCLUSION OF WOMEN

The major challenges faced by WOTR in ensuring digital inclusion of women stem from limited access to mobile devices and persistent gender barriers. Most of the women in villages do not possess their own mobile phones, and if they do, these devices are often not smartphones. Typically, women rely on their husbands' or sons' phones. Acquiring a smartphone for themselves is often deemed an unnecessary expense by men, exacerbated by women's limited control over finances, making it difficult for them to purchase phones or recharge them. Consequently, women usually have access to phones for only one to two hours in a day when their husbands are at home and their chores are completed. The lack of

ownership creates worry, as women fear making mistakes during the learning process, which may result in reprimands from their husbands. Additionally, some men disapprove of women using phones, viewing it as a threat to their control. This problem has led to a few Mahila Pravartaks discontinuing their services due to objections from husbands or elders in their households regarding women going out and using phones. WOTR is, therefore, actively addressing these challenges to broaden the reach of their digital services to more women.

IMPACTS AND BENEFITS OF DIGITAL INCLUSION OF WOMEN

1. Improved digital skills

The digital skills training provided by WOTR has significantly improved the digital skills of women, empowering them to explore various applications and digital platforms.

One such example is Shoba, a farmer, who shared her experience:

“During the early stages of my wheat crop, unexpected heavy rain caused the crop to turn completely yellow. Villagers deemed it unsavable, and my husband decided to plough it back.”



Shoba in her Wheat field

However, thanks to the digital training program by WOTR, Shoba utilized her newfound digital skills to conduct a voice search on YouTube. She discovered a similar experience shared by another farmer who successfully rescued their crop under similar circumstances. Following the advice from the video, Shoba implemented the recommended steps and managed to save her crop. Presently, she anticipates a yield of 70% compared to a normal crop.

Another woman farmer shared,

“I don’t have my own smartphone, but my husband does. Prior to attending the digital skill training, I was apprehensive about even touching the phone, fearing I might accidentally press the wrong button. However, after the training, I gained confidence in using the phone. Now, whenever my husband is at home, I borrow his phone to check notifications from FarmPrecise and tell him about the personalised recommendations that have come as notifications. I also watch recipes on YouTube and video call my family members.”

Women also acquired proficiency in conducting online financial transactions through Fintech apps because of participating in the digital literacy training. This initiative results in enhancing financial literacy among women and creating awareness of their husbands’ financial transactions. For example, one woman farmer said,

“My husband is not familiar with using PhonePe (a Fintech App), so whenever he needs money transferred to the petrol pump, he relies on me. This became possible only because of the skills I acquired during the digital training. Now, I feel more respected and am able to monitor my husband’s expenses.”

In short, women farmers are using their intelligence, and they and their families are benefiting from it.

2. Improved knowledge and awareness about farm management activities

The utilization of FarmPrecise has significantly increased the knowledge and awareness of women farmers in managing farm activities. Given that women often spend more time in the fields than their male counterparts, they are quick to observe instances of pests or diseases. Previously, they had to rely on their husbands or male peers to make decisions on addressing these issues. However, with FarmPrecise, women can promptly check for advisories when they notice a pest or disease on the crops. Further, FarmPrecise recommends both organic and non-organic methods in pest and disease management and nutrient management. The instructional videos providing step-by-step guidance on preparing biopesticides and introducing them to the benefits of biofertilizers have played a pivotal role in enhancing women’s proficiency and skills in making biopesticides like Amritpani. Also, women were totally unaware of the chemicals brought by their husbands to apply on the fields, as application of chemicals and fertilizers are considered as men’s job. So, women didn’t know exactly what is applied or how much cost is incurred. But now with FarmPrecise they know different kinds of inputs, their use and cost.

A woman farmer said,

“Earlier I didn’t know about bio-fertilizers like Trichoderma. It was new information to both me and my husband when we got recommendation to apply Trichoderma from FarmPrecise. Earlier my husband used to buy larger quantities of chemical fertilizers than needed as suggested by input dealers. Now I show my husband the recommendations given in FarmPecise and he buys lesser inputs than earlier, according to the App’s recommendations, which has reduced our expenditure on inputs.”

Another woman farmer noted,

“I saw the video on how to make Amritpani in the App. Now I make Amritpani¹ by myself and even taught my sister-in-law how to make it.”

.....
¹Amritpani is an organic fertilizer that is also used for seed treatment. The main ingredients are cow dung, water, ghee and jaggery/honey.

3. Enhanced participation in decision making and control over finances

The increase in digital skills in general, and access to FarmPrecise application in particular, has boosted the participation of women in the decision-making process. Now as women are also seeing the advisories, they are part of the decision making in farm management activities from input buying to selling of the produce. For instance, a woman farmer said,

“Our maize crop had pest infestation and my husband sprayed a pesticide worth 2000 rupees to no avail. Then, I suggested that he follow the FarmPrecise recommendation to spray another pesticide costing just 500 rupees. He was reluctant at first saying that he doesn’t think a less costly pesticide would help. But anyhow at my insistence he applied the pesticide recommended by FarmPrecise and the pest got controlled in a week. Now my husband asks me for recommendations from FarmPrecise.”

The App’s market price information and farm diary feature have empowered women with greater control over finances than ever before. They now inquire about expenses to update the farm diary or check the diary entries made by their husbands to stay informed on financial matters. In the past, women were unaware of the amounts spent on inputs or labour, as well as the selling prices of the produce. Presently, women actively seek market price information for various commodities, ensuring they are well-informed when selling their produce and making purchases for household use, thus safeguarding them from potential exploitation.

A woman farmer noted,

“I am the one who checks FarmPrecise app in my home as my father is a bit reluctant with using mobile phone. So, when it was harvesting time of our tomato crop, I started following the market price of tomato crop. I told my father to wait till the prices went up and within a week the price went from Rs. 70 per crate to Rs. 120 per crate. We sold our crate at the highest price and my

father was surprised and asked me how you know all these things. Now I am trying to teach my father to use FarmPrecise.”

Another woman farmer recounted her experience, *“I went to buy bajra in bulk for my household use. Before going to the market, I had seen the market price of bajra, and it was 2500/qt. But the seller told me it was 3000 Rs/qt. I showed him the price shown in the app and he reduced the price for me. I felt so proud and confident at that moment.”*

LESSONS LEARNED

The FarmPrecise case is a great lesson for different stakeholders in the digital realm, on how to enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of digital initiatives for women in agriculture. It underscores the fact that digital tools cannot be an effective solution in itself, unless the demand side is equally strengthened as the supply side. The FarmPrecise narrative emphasizes the importance of adopting a holistic approach to digital tool deployment, especially for reaching women who often face barriers in digital access and proficiency. This comprehensive approach involves capacity building of women by developing a digital skills training module; by providing digital skill trainings, and reaching out to more women by targeting all women SHGs; mobilizing women into Farmer producer committees, building social capital to reach more women by employing Mahila Pravartaks and female cluster level promoters. Together all these can instil a sense of ownership and empowerment among women and thus increase the participation of women in decision making. They are kept informed about financial transactions through Farm Diary that also provides a platform for fair price negotiations - all these earlier used to be exclusively a man’s business. Moreover, WOTR’s strong gender focus as an organization has significantly contributed to enhancing the gender inclusivity of the FarmPrecise App. From involving women farmers in the co-design process to establishing gender-sensitive teams in the field, WOTR serves as a remarkable example for other digital-focused organizations. This model

showcases practices that can be replicated to ensure gender inclusivity and effectiveness in digital interventions.

ENDNOTE

WOTR aims to expand the scale and outreach of FarmPrecise to include more women. Despite WOTR being an organization with a strong gender focus, they acknowledge that the gender strategy in the deployment of FarmPrecise needs further reinforcement. Consequently, they are planning to intensify the gender inclusion aspect of FarmPrecise by implementing gender sensitization training sessions for men. Recognizing

the influential role men play in shaping women's access to digital tools and mobiles, WOTR is taking steps to conduct targeted training sessions for both men and women farmers. This approach aims to establish a collaborative learning environment that contributes to the overall advancement of digital inclusion. The gender sensitization training sessions seek to deepen understanding regarding the positive impact of technology on women's lives and dismantle gender barriers that impede women's access to these tools. Through these efforts, WOTR is committed to fostering a more equitable and supportive ecosystem where both men and women actively participate in, and benefit from, the digital landscape.

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