

## HOW TO CREATE AND SUSTAIN FARMER FIELD SCHOOLS FOR RURAL WOMEN?

Looking back I can see how far I have come. The Ajeevika Paathshala is a space to learn and reflect under guidance - a community of peers to gain support and accountability. This is an institution of credibility and trust.

**-Quote by A Farmer from Ghat village,  
Lachhmangarh, Alwar, Rajasthan**





## What need does the playbook address?

Farmers, and particularly women farmers, do not have access to information that can help increase farm yields or provide new avenues for livelihood and incomes. Farmers are also distant from subject matter experts: with few having access to experts that could act as guides or mentors when taking up new methods of cultivation, livestock rearing or income generation activities.

### About the area and problem

Ibtada works with farmers from marginalised backgrounds whose income levels are below Rs. 1-1.5 Lakh per annum. Changing climatic conditions and unavailability of continuous water supply, especially during the farming seasons, calls for adoption of high-tech irrigation techniques in cultivation. Access to such information in the community is low.



This playbook is designed using the expertise of **Ibtada**, which has formed an extensive network of grassroots workers and farmer field schools called "**Aajeevika Pathshala**" to increase livelihoods and incomes in rural Rajasthan.

## Introduction

### Farmer Field Schools

Training of women farmers in more efficient means of cultivation, rearing livestock and allied livelihood activities is a solution to this. Forming "field schools" and organising monthly meetings in villages where ideas and new techniques can be discussed will help address the issues of information access.

### What are the benefits to women farmers?



Access to information that could help farm yields through new cultivation methods, integrated disease/pest management, seasonal training and crop based advisory.



Consistent mentorship and guidance when it comes to new livelihood opportunities or activities to increase income, and information on Government schemes.



An informal network of women farmers in a village is created that can provide support, encouragement and motivation.



Practical learning and demonstrations on field.





# 01/Creation of 'Sakhi' network

Organisations can't go to everyone's homes in villages and tell them about scientific ways of farming. Self-Help Groups have different interests and projects and it becomes difficult to conduct programmes about agriculture, entrepreneurship or animal rearing. Sakhis conducting Farmer Field Schools become the perfect solution for this.

## Who is a 'Sakhi':



Sakhis are a **cadre of women** in villages who are **chosen, trained, and mentored** to work towards the socio-economic development of the village.



Sakhis are made **familiar** with various **livelihood programs** undertaken by the organization.



Sakhis are given an **honorarium every month**.



## Enrollment

### SHG in Village



**Identify villages** based on the presence of SHGs or where organizations' project participants are present.



### Village - level Programmes



Conduct a village level orientation programme where the idea of 'Sakhi' is explained clearly.



### Volunteers



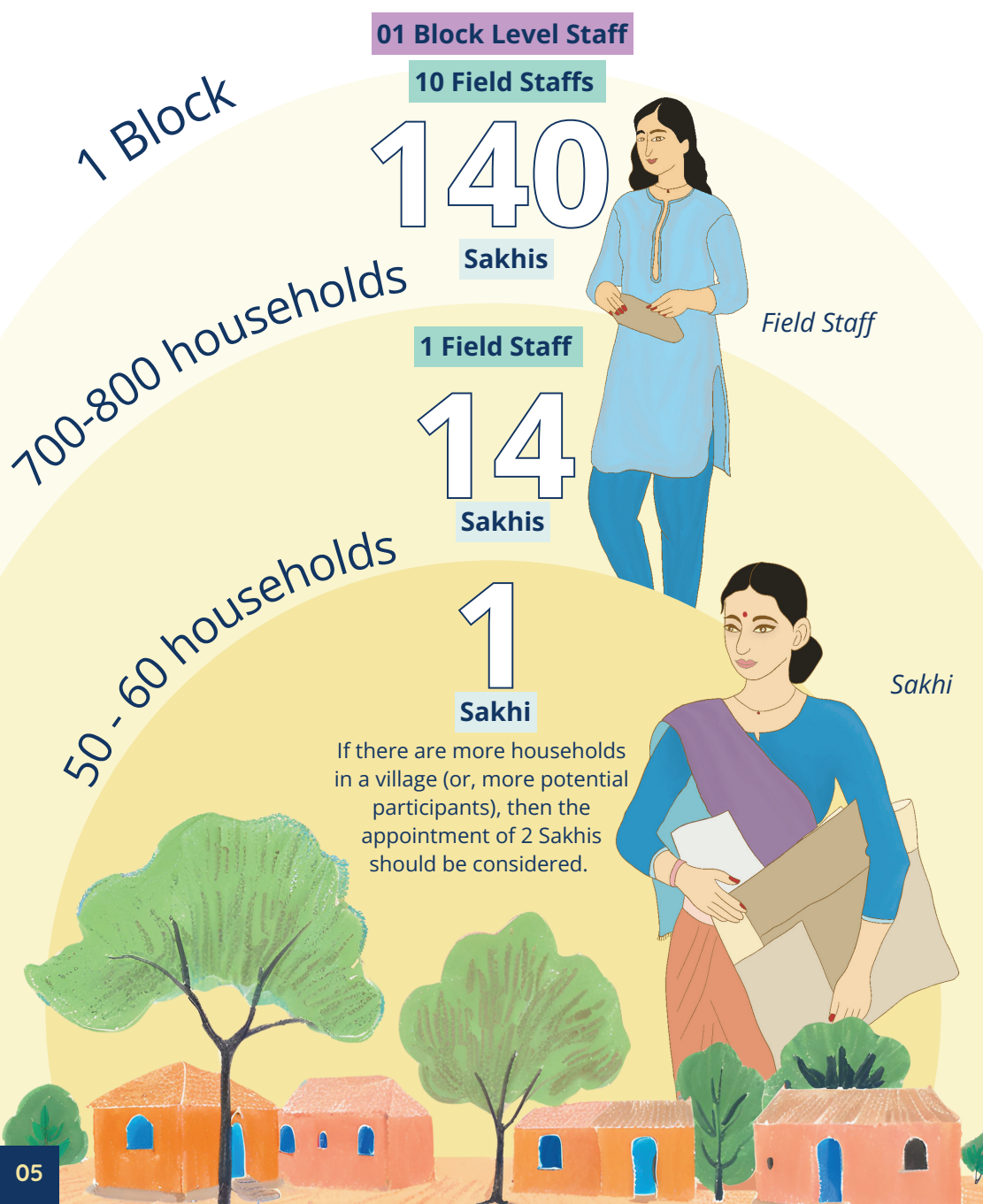
**Volunteers** are sought from these meetings. Names are proposed by the SHG or from the pool of interested beneficiaries.







## Ideal structure for establishing a Sakhi network



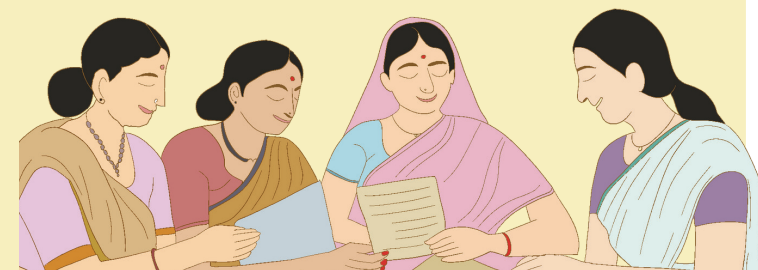
## Criteria for selection



Sakhis are given time to consult with families to make their final decision.

- ☐ Able to read and write in the local language.
- ☐ Minimum educational qualification: Middle school (8th standard).
- ☐ Older than 25 years.
- ☐ Part of the local or government SHG federations, or an active participants of previous programmes. This is necessary because potential Sakhis can easily understand the benefits of such programmes.
- ☐ She is not from a large landholding family or has large farm holdings. This is to avoid a disconnect with small and marginal farmers for whom the programmes are designed.
- ☐ She is secular and unbiased.
- ☐ The Sakhi is able to understand and grasp new concepts well and should be able to demonstrate them at a personal capacity.
- ☐ Sakhi's family agrees and encourages the Sakhi to work in the village or attend training at the block and district levels.
- ☐ Sakhi is confident about balancing work and responsibility at home.
- ☐ She is comfortable using a phone.

### Interview



Candidates are called to a field office or block office for an interview. All responsibilities and possible work are explained clearly. Key skills to look out for are **communication skills**, the **ability to understand the work**.



### Orientation Training

05

Days

Five days of residential training and orientation. **Sakhis are expected to stay at the head office.**

Communication material/booklets are distributed about various livestock and agriculture-related programmes (for instance, Package of Practices on the cultivation of various crops; identification of diseases, pests and Government Schemes).

### Refresher Training

03

Days

Every 6 months, a 3-day training at the block level is conducted as refresher training.

### Regular Training

Regular training on new programmes and topics is conducted. Seasonal/Crop based training happens every month.



### 01 Baseline Survey

Sakhi to participate in a baseline survey of agriculture and livestock activities in the village and the income source for women farmers, which is conducted by field staff.



### 02 Identification of Beneficiaries

Sakhi to identify current beneficiaries of programmes and identify future beneficiaries

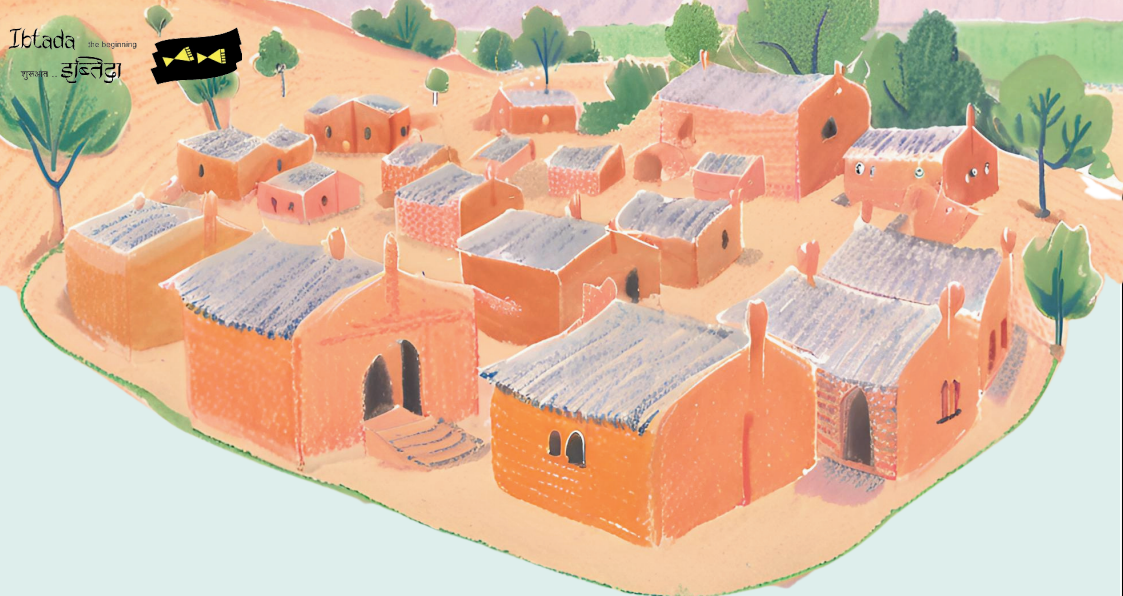


### 03 Explaining Field School

Sakhi to approach SHG members or beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries in person, explaining the concept of farmer field schools and their benefits.







## Identification of place

to conduct Farmer Field schools:



Big enough to seat **at least 30-40 people** (courtyard of a house; or, panchayat hall) with good ventilation and shelter from direct sunlight or rain.

Availability of **drinking water**



Located at the centre of the village where women can sit confidently and comfortably.

Space to hang **boards, flex and posters.**



**One place** in the village should be selected and fixed for all field school meetings.

## Fixing date and time

A Date and time in the month should be fixed for the meeting: say 16th of the month, between 11:00 Am and 02:00 PM



Remember.. it should be based on people's convenience, so that it does not clash with agriculture work or other work.

**Advice:** First 2-3 months, the Sakhi will have to follow up and remind attendees of the meeting date and time. This can be done over the phone or in person. Sakhis can also follow up with those who did not attend the meeting. It will take some time and follow-ups for the meetings to become a habit in the village.



## Deciding Agenda

- 01 The topic for the meeting is to be decided at the organization's **head-office level** & communicated to **individual blocks to maintain uniformity.**
- 02 **Sakhis** are **called** to a **block-level meeting** (which is held monthly) & informed about the agenda.

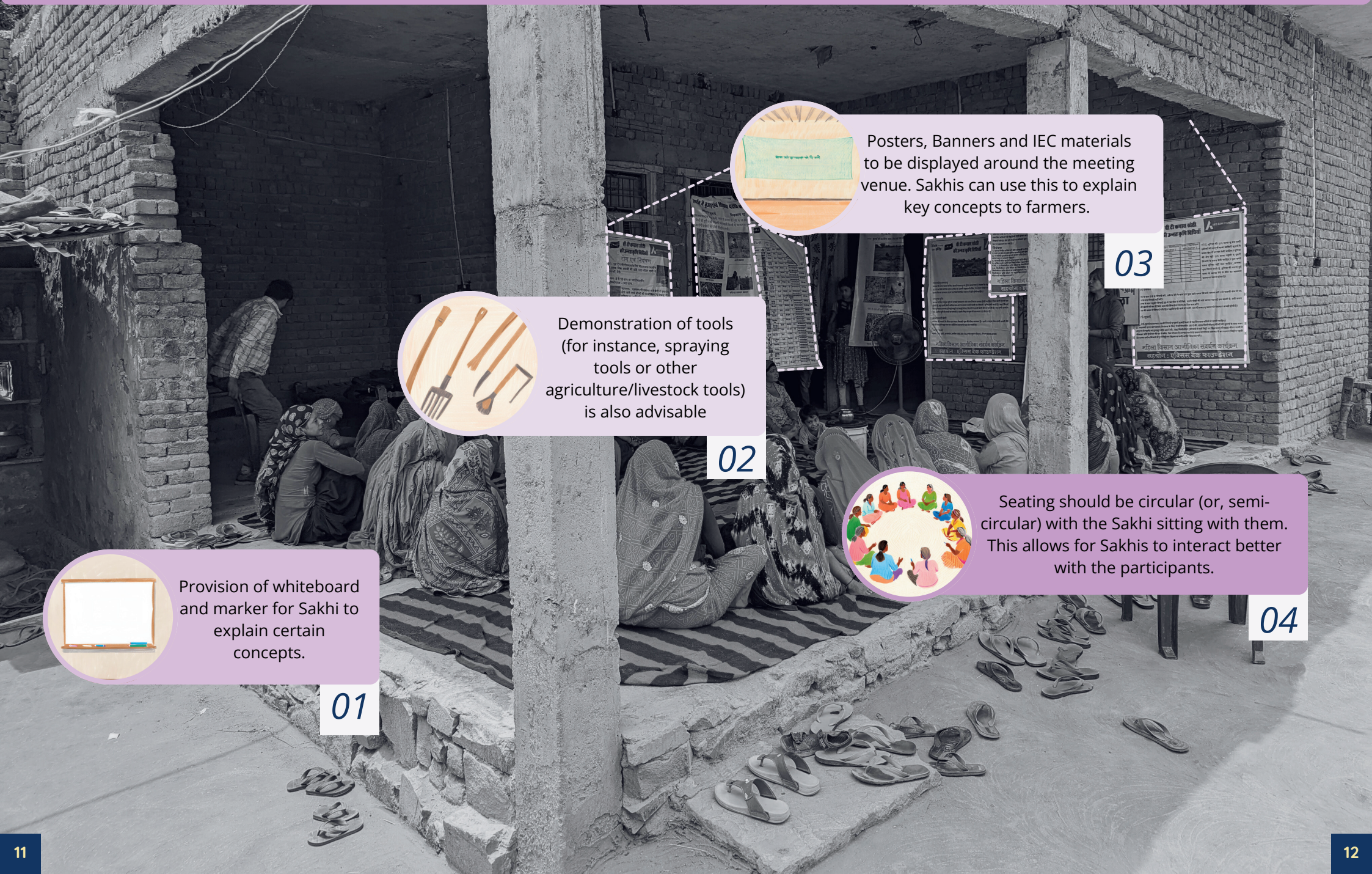

The agenda is decided based on inputs from the field.



For instance, topics of pest management will be taken up during flowering period of crop, etc.



## 03/Effective running of Field Schools

Provision of whiteboard and marker for Sakhi to explain certain concepts.

01



Demonstration of tools (for instance, spraying tools or other agriculture/livestock tools) is also advisable

02



Posters, Banners and IEC materials to be displayed around the meeting venue. Sakhis can use this to explain key concepts to farmers.

03



Seating should be circular (or, semi-circular) with the Sakhi sitting with them. This allows for Sakhis to interact better with the participants.

04





01

### Consistent Attendance and Monitoring



In the initial months (or, even 2-3 years), it is imperative for **field staff** or **thematic experts** to **be present** in the field Schools. Their role is to **guide and mentor new Sakhis** on ways to conduct the meeting, give feedback and interact with participants to see how the sessions can be made better.

02

### Confidence and Participatory



Sakhi has to learn to be **confident**. The key to engagement is to have a **strong, confident voice**. Sakhi should walk around the space while explaining, ensure that they look at every participant to get their attention. They should be animated while talking to engage the audience.

03

### Interactive for participants



It is important to make the programme **interactive, and invite participants** into a discussion about their crop and their problems.

04

### Exchange of experiences

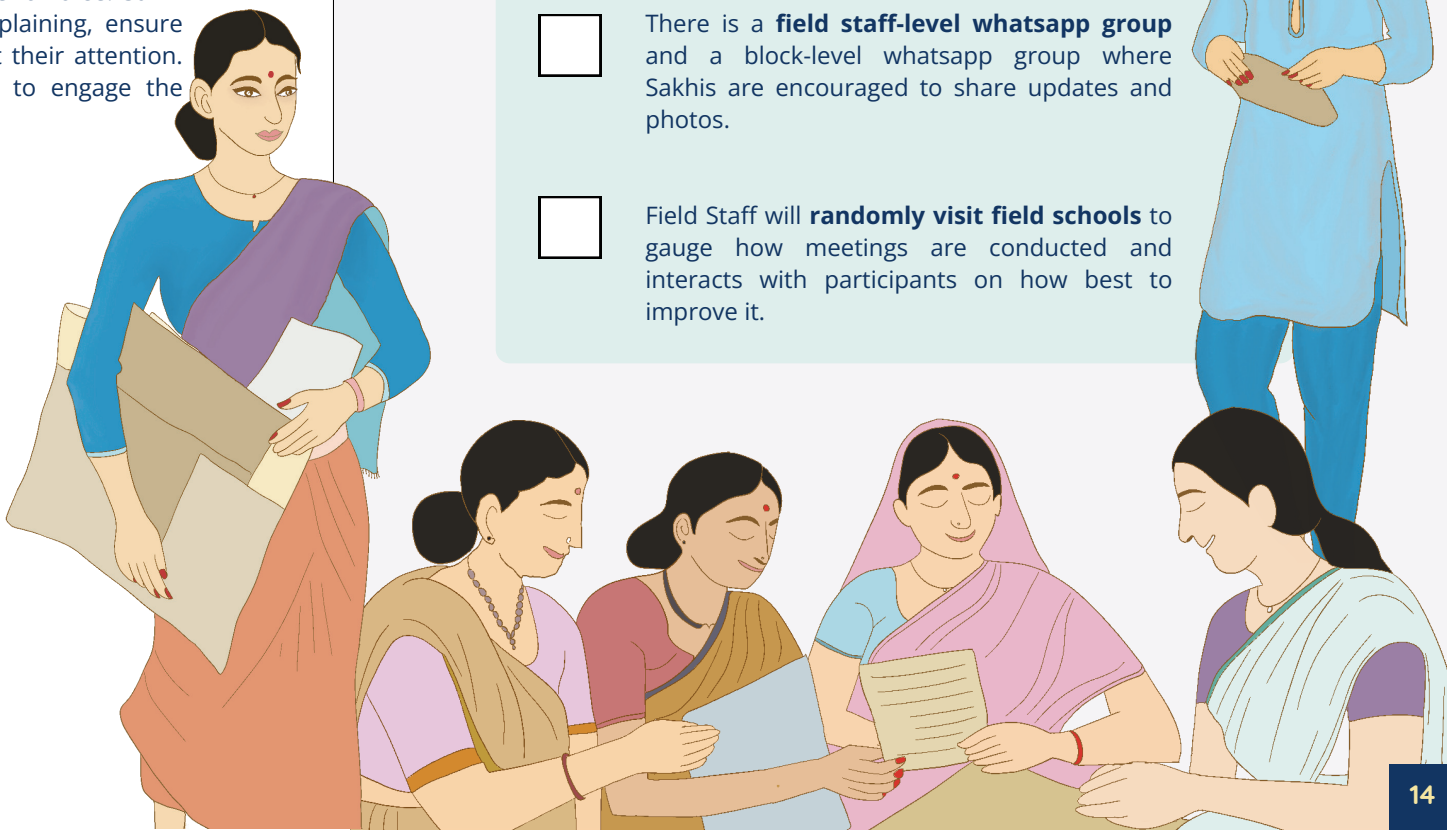
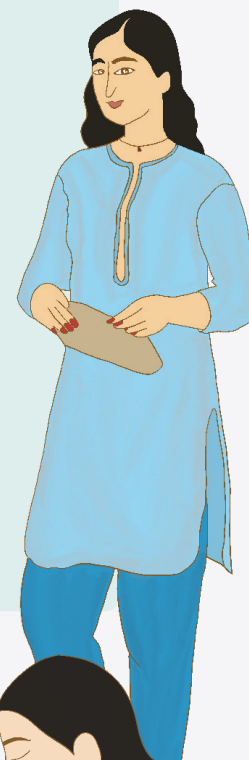


Sakhi should encourage the farmers to share their thoughts and experiences gained through demo plots and exposure visits.

## Monitoring the functioning of field schools



- ☐ Attendance is marked through a **register**.
- ☐ Sakhi also takes **minutes of the meeting** and documents the discussions held
- ☐ Sakhis are called for a **monthly block-level meeting** where they discuss progress of various programmes and interests of beneficiaries.
- ☐ There is a **field staff-level whatsapp group** and a block-level whatsapp group where Sakhis are encouraged to share updates and photos.
- ☐ Field Staff will **randomly visit field schools** to gauge how meetings are conducted and interacts with participants on how best to improve it.





01



Attendance of **70-80%** participants in these field schools is a good benchmark to keep. It is impossible to get every beneficiary to these schools all the time.

02



**20-22%** of the chosen Sakhis may drop out. There are a lot of reasons for this:

- Increased responsibilities at home or with family prevent them from undertaking this work.
- Educated Sakhis may get better employment prospects or enrol in other government programmes that pay them a better honorarium
- Sakhis may also find this work overwhelming and leave. In rare cases, it may be imperative to replace a non-performing Sakhi.
- Migration to cities along with their families.

03

It takes **1-2 months** to replace a Sakhi. Until then, field staff must ensure all field schools are conducted and discussions on programs continues with a break.

Interactive and confident participants of the field school can be invited to apply for the role of Sakhi and offered an honorarium upon selection.

04

An honorarium of **Rs. 1,500 per month** may serve well. The honorarium can be decided based on the organisation's guidelines and performance of the Sakhi.

₹ 1500

