

PM's idea on neem coating changes women's lives

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AHMEDABAD, 14 JUNE

An idea can change your life, goes the popular adage. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's idea of 100 per cent 'neem-coating' of urea, uttered during his Independence Day speech in 2015, has not only changed the agriculture scenario but has also changed the lives of lakhs of rural women in more ways than one.

Since subsidised urea for farmers is much cheaper than its market prices, much of it is diverted to chemical factories where it is being used as raw material for producing formaldehyde that helps in manufacture of many plastic products like laminates and car dash boards.

The PM's idea of 'neem-coating' of urea, rendered it useless for any other purpose than agriculture, but simultaneously immensely increased the demand for neem oil by the fertiliser companies producing urea.



With about 800 grams of neem oil required for coating one tonne of urea, demand for this oil by India's urea producing plants immediately touched 26,000 tonnes, a quantum that can be extracted from as much as four lakh tonnes of neem seeds.

The rural women of Gujarat stepped in to bridge the huge demand and supply gap created by the Prime Minister's idea of 100 per cent neem coating of urea. With just 45 days before the monsoon being the time for ripened neem seeds to drop, women in about 4,000 villages have turned the need of urea producers into their own for-

tunes.

Women's self-help groups (SHGs), milk cooperatives, NGOs and other rural networks quickly set up 2,200 village level collection centres for neem seeds during these 45 days of the year.

Though these women's collection of neem seeds was primarily to meet the sudden increased requirement of the Gujarat Narmada Valley Fertilisers & Chemicals Ltd. (GNFC), there is now enough inflow for supplying to other urea manufacturers as well.

In less than two years, nearly two lakh women of 4,000 villages in 22 districts of Gujarat have generated a total extra income of about Rs 25 crores, just by working in the morning hours of those 45 days before monsoon arrives.

It is not that women were not collecting neem seeds earlier. They did, but for the middle men who paid them only 75 paise to one rupee per kilogram while the GNFC pays them Rs five per kg.