

SoLAR-India researchers supervise the roll-out of farmers' training sessions on the Suryashakti Kisan Yojana (SKY) in Gujarat's Porbandar district

From September 11 to 18, 2022, SoLAR India Country Lead, Deepak Varshney, and a team of researchers visited two feeders in the Porbandar district to monitor the roll-out of a state-wide training of 2000 SKY scheme farmers in Gujarat during 2022-23. The Gujarat Energy Research and Management Institute (GERMI), Gandhinagar, in collaboration with the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and the Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Limited (GUVNL), is rolling out the state-wide farmer training programs on the financial modality of the state government's SKY scheme. The training focuses on the SKY mobile application, the metering, and billing systems under the scheme, among other things.

IWMI team's visits were purposed for pre-testing and finalizing a monitoring protocol that will be executed throughout the entire phase of the state-wide training to understand the role of such training for the scheme's effectiveness. Researchers could gain important insights into the farmers' pre-training level of awareness about the SKY scheme. Such information will be crucial for an impact evaluation of training or capacity building for making large-scale energy transition programs like SKY a success.

The participation rate of the SKY farmers was around 80% at the Kranti feeder training session and over 60% at the Devgam feeder. The IWMI team's discussions with the farmers and their assessment of the GUVNL data indicated that 95% of all SKY farmers in the Kranti feeder and 64% of all SKY farmers in the Devgam feeder are successfully able to earn a net positive income even after accounting for the electricity used for their consumption and the loan payment. At the Kranti feeder, the farmers with a five-hp contracted load could earn a net positive income of INR 10,822 annually, while farmers with a ten-hp contracted load earned INR 20,800. This initial assessment suggests that farmers who had invested INR 15,600 for procuring a 5hp solar pump had recovered 70% of the investment in the first year. Consequently, farmers who earned positive net incomes are willing to increase their contracted load and are enthusiastic about the scheme. The training sessions aim to address the concerns of those who did not make a net positive gain. Among other things, these training sessions explain the SKY app's role in monitoring the systems' performance regularly.

The team also visited the PGVCL (Pashchim Gujarat Vij Company Limited) and GUVNL corporate offices in Rajkot and Vadodara districts to meet the project officials to discuss strategies to improve the training, initiating a key informant survey of the feeder level officials to obtain their experiences on the SKY scheme, and seeking the monthly energy accounting data and pre-SKY pumping data at the utility-level.