



Jaipal

Farmer in Lakhori village in
Uttar Pradesh, India

Meet Jaipal. Aged around 27 years, he cultivates crops such as sugar cane, potatoes, mustard and wheat. Because his livelihood is entirely dependent on his crops doing well, he values his ability to keep them safe and help them thrive tremendously. "To start with, good pesticides are essential", he says, "to ensure that what I'm growing isn't consumed by insects". He used to rely on elder farmers' knowledge for such things, assuming that they had learned what they know through years of experience. Indeed, his father taught him what he had learned in turn from his own forefathers about soil fertility, pumping water for irrigation and so on. "I always used to assume their information was accurate", he concedes; "that it had stood the test of time".





Jaipal learned from a man named Ravi (pictured with him here) that there is another, more accurate and reliable, way to get farming-related information: *mKisan* (which means 'mFarmer'), available through his mobile phone. "At that time, I had only recently started using my mobile", he recalls. "It had been quite an expensive investment, though both handsets and calls are very cheap now". After subscribing to the service, Jaipal quickly began finding it really useful, and it has become the main thing he uses his mobile phone for. "It's really helped me", he says with conviction. "Though I trusted my elders before, they weren't right 100% of the time. Thanks to *mKisan*, I can be a lot more certain about which pesticide I should use when insects and other pests affect my crops".



After Jaipal had harvested his crops, a trader used to come to his farm to buy them. “He would quote his price, and sometimes we farmers would negotiate as best we could”, he recalls. This system, in which the trader had a clear upper hand, has changed since *mKisan*. “Before we transact, we can now do quick research to find out what the going rate is for what we’re selling”, Jaipal explains. “We weren’t as well-informed before we started using our phones”.



mKisan also helps Jaipal learn about new seeds that are coming onto the market. "There is a new kind of wheat called PBW-502", he says, citing one example. "In one *bhiga*", a traditional unit for measuring area, "this gives us 5 quintals of wheat. With the variety we used to plant, we'd typically get only 3 to 3.5 quintals". He also recently learned about Kufri Chipsona-3, a new variety of potato that can yield up to 50% more than the type he used to grow. "*mKisan* has definitely changed my life for the better", Jaipal asserts. "Now, I'm far more knowledgeable about farming than I used to be, and I feel good about that". Though they're poor, he observes that most of the farmers he knows are using mobiles these days. At one rupee a day, he feels that *mKisan* represents good value for money for them.



Having a mobile has also brought changes in Jaipal's life in a more personal sense. "For instance, when I go somewhere, I might get delayed for some reason", he explains. "My family might get worried. Now they can call me, or I can call and tell them I'm safe and sound". Nowadays, he uses his phone for calling people and sending SMSs far more than he used to, both for personal purposes and to share farming-related information with others. He hopes his next phone will also be able to access the Internet. Once, he had to use his mobile in an emergency, as his father was very sick. An ambulance arrived in 1.5 hours and took him to the hospital in nearby Sambhal. "If I'd not had a mobile, I'd have had to arrange my own ride", he says, "and this could have been difficult".

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