



Gender mainstreaming and agricultural sustainability through PPP model

Vermi-composting has the potential to transform the farmwomen as environmental conservationists. The unfelt needs in understanding the innate benefits of using vermin-compost in the fields were unfelt in Jorhat District of Assam through Public Private Partnership (PPP) approach. The farmers especially farmwomen are in forefront in practicing and propagating the production and utilization of vermin-compost among the fellow farmwomen in their area of surroundings.



Public Private Partnership

Directorate of Research on Women in Agriculture (DRWA) has taken up a project on Public Private Partnership for gender mainstreaming in agriculture on network mode with six partners spanning over entire country. Assam Agricultural University (AAU) undertook an action model of PPP for producing vermin-compost involving both public and private players. Department of Home Science Extension under AAU implemented the model on Promotion of organic farming through PPP mode in 20 villages of four blocks in Jorhat district during 2011 – 2012. The project team of AAU led by Dr. Manju Dutta Das, P & H of Home Science Extension identified both public & private partners, conducted stakeholders meeting and finalised the model.

Background

In Jorhat region, application of chemical fertilizers was perceived to result in poor quality of farm produce especially in small tea gardens. Alternatively, organic method of crop cultivation was suggested to overcome the constraints of small scale farmers by researchers and extension agents. However, there was no initiative from any of the agencies to motivate the large number of small producers to go for organic method of cultivation.

Initiation of the Project

The network partner viz Department of Home Science Extension identified partners of the project based on their continuous field activities in Jorhat district. The department conducted a stakeholders meeting in March, 2011 in which the public partners such as College of Home Science, District Rural Development Agency and private partners such as District Level Rural Development Society (NGO) and farmers groups participated and actively engaged in interaction. Later, the felt needs of farmers groups were identified based on which series of training were organized on vermicompost production for groups of farm men and women.

Process of building partnership

The farmers groups comprising 100 farm households were first sensitized about dangers of undue usage of chemical fertilizers resulting in deterioration of soil and water quality and fetching of lower price due to poor quality farm produce. This was made possible due to continuous field visit of NGO private partner. The existing SHGs were used for gender mainstreaming efforts wherein both men and women were fully trained on vermicompost production. In addition, DRDA of state government was mobilized for providing subsidies to produce the vermicompost.

Production and marketing

Each household started the vermicompost unit in the backyard. The unit size varied from farmer to farmer. They mostly used bamboo as a container for preparing the vermicompost. Plastic sheets were used as bed and raw materials such as cow dung and other farm wastes were used. The earthworms were given by NGO partner to each trained farmer. Initially farmers thought of selling the vermicompost to private parties as there was an estimated demand of 4000 tonnes

vermicompost in Jorhat district. Later, on seeing the benefits of vermicompost in a small plot of their land and crops, most of them decided to use the vermicompost on their own farms and to sell the surplus to others. Initially farmers were facilitated to sell their product in the farmer's fairs and exhibitions duly supported by AAU and DRDA with help of NGO. Each farmer produced 2 to 5 quintals of vermicompost. The selling price ranged from Rs. 8 to 10 /kg.

Materials required for vermin-composting (10 m² plot)

- Organic wastes : 700-800 kg
- Earthworms : 10000
- Decomposed farmyard manure : 300-400 kg
- Dry organic matter : 200-300 kg
- Ready availability of water

Perceived advantages of vermin-compost by farm women

1. Low cost to produce
2. Easy to use
3. Healthy soil and bumper crop growth
4. Additional source of income
5. Higher yield
6. Environment friendly practice

Gender Mainstreaming

The impact of gender mainstreaming of the project was evaluated by undertaking a field study in Jorhat district of Assam. Even though, there was no hurdle in approaching the development agencies for acquiring the required knowledge, more efforts are required in bringing forth the unmet needs of farming community. PPP project seized the opportunity first to motivate both the men and women about the technology and then mobilized them based on their involvement in SHGs through the NGO partner. Most of the respondents said that they could see the visible benefits of applying vermicompost in tea gardens, ridge gourd plots in terms of higher yield, reduction in pest and diseases, substantial reduction of cost towards chemical fertilizers and pesticides and disease free healthier life. The technology was adopted by respondents with slight modification based on the perception and available resources. Farmers produced 200 to 500 kg per cycle (3 to 4 months). They spent about Rs. 1000/- towards bamboo sticks, earthworms and plastic sheet. Farmers perceived that they could see 10-15 per cent increase in yield and get returns for their produce. The leaders of SHGs have opened the bank account due to DRDA routine activities. Although PPP project was not directly responsible for better access to credit in institutional finance sources, it has indirectly motivated the beneficiaries for thrift and savings. Local market demand has been created in villages and their neighbourhood. However, the project has facilitated the surplus produce selling through fairs and exhibitions. Each farm family learnt to pack vermicompost in appropriate quantities and understood the enormous value of organic produce. There is no hurdle in accessing and utilizing the local resources like water and other common properties. Women felt the enhanced access to services provided by panchayat.

