

An experiment in unity: collective farming in T.N.



MADURAI, SEPTEMBER 16, 2018 22:06 IST
UPDATED: SEPTEMBER 16, 2018 22:06 IST

A



An experiment in collective farming, involving only women, is gaining momentum in Tamil Nadu with small groups engaged in raising minor millets and vegetables in 16 districts at a micro level.

The model, evolved by Tamil Nadu Women's Collective (TNWC) whose members are mostly widows, single women and Dalits, has improved the nutrition value of these marginalised families besides ensuring economic freedom for their women.

Organic farming

Groups of about 20 members, among whom about 10 actually work in the farm, take up organic farming in small tracts of land in villages. About 90 groups, working all over Tamil Nadu, also propagate the value of minor millets and organic farming, according to Ponnuthai of Vasudevanallur, State secretary of TNWC.

“We approach mainly absentee landowners. A majority of our groups work in rain-fed areas. One third of the yield is offered to the landowner,” explains K. Jothi, Madurai district coordinator, whose group raises millets in 32 cents of land at Chellampatti.

The TNWC was formed on July 4, 1994, with the objective of building a society that ensures equality and social justice.

At Chellayeeapuram, Kalanjiyam Women Farmers' Association, has been involved in farming since 2010. "This experiment ensures our right to food since we decide what to sow and eat," says G. Panchavanam of Uthapuram. "All our family members consume only millets, a habit that has kept the doctor away," says A. Subbulakshmi.

What enthuses them is the recognition as farmers. “Earlier, we were treated only as farm workers. Now we are called farmers. We are even offered a seat at the Collector’s office,” is how Ms. Subbulakshmi takes pride in her present status.

TNWC members participate in regular training programmes to hone their skills. Knowledge-sharing helps them in taking the right decision. Farm experts and scientists volunteer to solve issues like pest attack.

Excess yield is sold in the market directly by the members.

Neighbouring farmers help these women by sharing water from their wells when in need. All of them get paid for their toil in the farm.

During off-season, they get work under MGNREGS.