SRI Village: A New Identity of Gacherigaon village in Kandhamal district of Odisha

About the village: Gacherigaon village is located in Mundigarh grampanchayat, in Tumudibandh block, in Kandhamal district, of Odisha. Total population of the village is 156 from 26 households (Hhs) in the village, all Hhs belongs to Panga Kondh community. Historically, Kondh community depends on agriculture and forest for subsistence and livelihood. They practice millets-based, bio-diverse farming, pulses, and paddy cultivation in the low lands. Traditionally, the community cultivates pulses of rice bean, pigeon pea, country beans, along with mustard seeds. Majority of the inhabitants of the village are small and marginal farmers and practice traditional agriculture. In the year 2012, Nirman a grassroots NGO intervened in the region with an aim to improve livelihoods of the Kondh community through transfer of sustainable agriculture technology and women empowerment. The project was supported by CWS and Bfdw.

A village level meeting was conducted at the village to discuss the economic status of residents of the village. During the meeting a village level farmer's group, Gacherigaon Jaibiko Krushak Sangha, has been convened for promotion of sustainable agriculture in the village. The village level farmer's group was formed as more people can be reached through a group than individual farmers. The village level training programme on system of rice intensification (SRI) and kitchen garden have been conducted; in addition indigenous heirloom and weeders have been supported to residents of the village under the project support. It was decided to promote SRI at the village for the first time; a training programme was conducted for farmers of the village. Following the training programme, only 8 farmers of the village agreed to adopt SRI for paddy cultivation that year. One of the eight persons has started also producing and using liquid manure (also known locally as magic compost).

Nursery beds were developed for raising the nursery and seedlings were transferred on to the main field after 12 – 14 days (8-10 days is recommended). The seedlings were planted in 10 x

10 inch spacing on the main field to promote the production of more tillers. As a result each plant produced around 40-55 tillers. To increase fertility of the land the residue collected from washing the cattle-shed (a mixture of cow dung, cow urine and water) was applied to the main field. Farmers observed that increase in spacing although enable growth of weeds (which can be removed easily with help of the weeder) during the initial days, however, incidence of pest and diseases were found almost nothing. Paddy cultivated under the conventional method suffers from pest outbreaks and frequent disease infections. Farmers noticed that paddy yield has not only doubled under the SRI method but also the quality of seed has improved significantly.

The success of 8 farmers drew attention of the other farmers of the village and 5 more farmers of the village adopted SRI method for paddy cultivation the next crop season. The success of SRI during the following crop season attracted more farmers and eventually the entire village adopted the SRI method of paddy cultivation. Now all the 28 Hhs of the village not only practices SRI but also earned the reputation of "the SRI village" in the region.

During the discussion one of the women farmers says that "*I will never give up on SRI*". When inquired, if SRI is laborious and demanding in terms of labour, she responds, "*no, my daughters-in-law and I do all the work, as you can see we are weeding using the weeder, we do not have to hire labour*". Another farmer, Shri. Sada Majhi, shares that he had mixed feeling after attending the training programme on SRI, "*I was excited and interested in the new technique, but simultaneously, I had doubts also about the efficiency of the method as the seedlings are planted wide and far a part*". He further shares that "*half-way through the transplantation my wife picked up an argument with me, she was not convinced that this method would work, it took a lot of explanation to convince her, and to finish transplantation. After a month we observed that our neighbour's crop turned pale and yellow but the crop in my field was lush and green, thanks to the magic manure*."

It is interesting to see that women proactively do almost all the work related to paddy cultivation under SRI. Shri. Majhi, says that we could produce rice just enough to support our family for only 9 months and we used to depend on market for the rest. The situation has changed completely since adoption of SRI, now we produce enough rice to support our family for the entire year. Traditionally, our community cultivates millets and pulses under millets-based mixed farming, and usually keeps millets for domestic consumption. Now with increase in the productivity of paddy under the SRI method, rice is also available for families for the entire year. The availability of millets and rice has not only secured food availability of farmers but also reduced their dependency on markets.

Gacherigaon village has earned a new identity in the entire block, the village is now known as "the SRI village" in the region. All the farmers of this village have become master trainers now and Shri. Majhi, is frequently invited by the government agriculture department, as the resource person to educate other farmers on SRI method. A village in the adjacent Khalahandi district initiated SRI at their village after visiting Gacherigaon. The village also received participatory guarantee scheme (PGS) certificate, for production of organic agriculture products in the village. Two farmers, Shri. Khestro Majhi and Shri. Sada Majhi, have been conserving two indigenous paddy varieties, preserving the fast disappearing indigenous crop biodiversity.