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Coastal research centre to come up at Killai

A.V.Ragunathan

Will function under the auspices of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation

Agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan at a function held at Killai near Cuddalore on Monday when handbooks for fishermen were released.

Agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan laid the foundation for the establishment of the Coastal Systems Research and Training Centre at Killai, to function under the purview of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), near here on Monday.

The Foundation initially earmarked a sum of Rs 40 lakh to create the facility and the investment would be scaled up to Rs 10 crore in a phased manner. The centre is being set up with the objective of providing sustainable livelihood, without harming the ecology, to the farming and fishing communities in the coastal areas.

V.Selvam, Director, Coastal Research System, (a wing of the MSSRF), told *The Hindu* that once established the centre would become the fulcrum for carrying out coastal research all along the east coast.

Besides undertaking research, the centre would also impart training among the residents of 10 fishing villages and 10 farming villages in the vicinity on proper utilisation of the natural resources such as land, water, forest and fishing.

The centre would initiate the farming community in the technique of raising halophytes, highly saline resistant crops, for commercial exploitation. For instance, salicornia, a halophyte, was being grown in Gujarat for obtaining bio-salt, rich in potassium. Its consumption was recommended for those with heart problems.

In Saudi Arabia too the halophytes were being cultivated on a vast stretch of land. Mr Selvam said that edible oil could also be extracted from the halophytes.

He further said that it had been proposed to popularise the integrated fish farming among the fishermen community.

Fish farming

Under the programme, the target groups would be provided with mangroves and halophytes to be grown at the fish ponds. Even the abandoned prawn farms could be revived for the purpose. According to an estimate, there must at least be 10,000-12,000 ha of revenue poromboke land that had come under prawn culture. Therefore, there was a vast scope for the centre to work with the Fisheries Department to promote integrated fish farming in those areas.

With application of appropriate technology, a two-hectare fish farm could yield a revenue of Rs 40,000-Rs 50,000 a year and therefore it would be highly beneficial to the fishing community.

Mr. Selvam further noted that the mangrove leaves were rich in iodine, and therefore ideal fodder for the milch animals to get enhanced milk yield. Moreover, under the integrated fish farming system the withering mangrove leaves would provide the organic fodder to fishes.

Later, Dr. Swaminathan visited the government school at M.G.R. Nagar (he was instrumental in setting up the school a decade ago for the benefit of the Irula students and which was later taken over by the government) and appreciated the progress it made.

On the occasion Dr. Swaminathan released handbooks on usage of the GPS (global positioning system), government welfare schemes and how to rectify diesel engine faults for the benefit of fishermen.

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