

Village knowledge centres come to the aid of farmers

The region of Sivasagar in the state of Assam is a flood-hit area; most farmers here go for Rabi cultivation after the floods end. The area needs irrigation during the rabi season although a flood hit area, but it lacks this, making it difficult for farmers during the season. There is a population of around 1000 people and about 250 households who need the irrigation facility.

POMPI DUTTA, MADHURYA MOHAN KHANIKAR, JAYASHREE B.

Over the years, the Assam Government provided farmers with various subsidies. The services are accessed through various existing schemes. However, sometimes, they do not get the benefit of these schemes because of lack of awareness. In this context, the team from the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) facilitated a meeting with Agriculture, Fishery, Irrigation and Veterinary Departments to bridge the gap between farmers and government departments.

The farmers during face-to-face interaction with officers during the meeting discussed different schemes. These were to be popularised with all relevant details through the village knowledge centre (VKC). One specific impact was when a farmer from Ujoni Bhorolua, Indreswar Dahotia, interacted with the Agriculture Department and through the assistance of the VKC, set up a solar pump with 85 per cent subsidy. The pump was set up under the Rural Infrastructural Development Programme.

Following Dahotia, more farmers in the area applied for

the scheme. Ajit Kalita has successfully set up the pump this year and about 10 more are in progress. The pump has been a great help in providing irrigation during the rabi season. The solar pump is very cost effective and needs very less maintenance. Moreover, one hour use of the pump is enough to supply water for one hectare area for irrigation.

Says Dahotia: "I have been cultivating rabi vegetables for a long time now, but irrigation has always been a problem. I pay a lot for pumps and it becomes very costly. After the solar pump was set up, we are getting water regularly without any problem. It is very effective and we can use the same thing for many years with low investment."

Ujjal Sharma, an agriculture extension worker in the area, says: "There are a lot of schemes that the government provides but farmers are not aware of it. We find it difficult to contact people personally because we reach out to a huge population. With the VKC we can carry out the process and farmers get benefitted. We plan to carry out such activities in future also."



Photo: MSSRF

Although a flood-hit area, the fields here need to be irrigated during the rabi season. However, lack of irrigation makes it difficult for farmers.

Thanks to the awareness provided by the VKC, farmers here were able to access the benefits of the government scheme, carry out their farming activities in a better and more profitable way.

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Assam Agricultural University, Indian Council of Agricultural Research - National Rice Research Institute, MSSRF and International Water Management Institute, and co-ordinated by the Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research.

(Courtesy: MSSRF)

Facing challenges caused by rice hispa

There has been an increase of rice hispa infestation after the floods in Assam, year after year. Last year there were huge crop losses in Sivasagar District due to the infestation. This year, however, after three floods in the month of July, post-flood rice hispa infestation was drastically reduced thanks to timely action by the Resilience Project staff of the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and the Assam Agricultural University.

The concept of a plant clinic was initiated by MSSRF to find the causes of diseases in fields with the help of resource persons in a short period. Even during the lockdown, plant clinics were held. They helped early detection of rice hispa; necessary pesticides were applied and other measures were taken to bring rice hispa infestation under control.

Says Hireen Dutta, a farmer from Sivasagar, "We have been facing the problem of hispa for quite some time. Few farmers got very low returns due to losses because of this. This year, however, the project staff helped us by

informing that just after the flood there will be hispa attack so we could prepare before time. They also provide necessary pesticides for us. So only after one - two days after infestation we applied the pesticides as suggested and got rid of the pests."

Adds Gargee Baruah, development associate, MSSRF, "Hispa attack is very common during post-flood situation; during Kharif 2019 also we encountered the same problem. Based on previous experience and with expert help, we disseminated information prior to the infestation. Our lead farmers informed us at the initial stages so we took immediate measures and successfully controlled infestation."

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(Courtesy: MSSRF)



Photo: MSSRF

Samples of rice hispa infestation.

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