

## **SOCIAL IMPACT AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MUSSEL FARMING**

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Mussel farming has become a seasonal occupation along the southwest coast of India. The production, which was less than 2 tons in 1996, increased greatly over the years, and, in 2006, the production of farmed mussel in the country has been estimated at 10,500 tonnes. During 2004 to 2006, a socio economic impact survey was conducted in the major mussel production areas of Kerala viz Kasargod, Kozhikode and Malappuram, and the reasons for the continued increase in adoption rate and the impact of this technology adoption in the country was assessed.

The survey indicated that training alone was not sufficient to motivate villagers to adopt a new technology, but that visual observations of the success of the technology were essential in removing the common 'risk aversion' attitude and for propagating new technologies in rural areas. In the beginning, demonstrations and participatory technology diffusion processes by technology developers and promoters motivated a few villagers to adopt this novel technology. Subsequently, motivation through successful harvests by the early adopters promoted women to form Self Help Groups and adopt mussel farming as their main income generating occupation. Among the three types of farm ownership, namely, individually owned, family owned and group owned farms, women were the leaders mainly in family and group owned farms. Ninety of the women farmers of North Kerala were over 30 years old. Flexibility of working hours, nearness of the farm site to the homestead, easy adoptability, low risk and reasonably good profit were the main factors motivating more women to start new farms each year.

This industry has supported the development of direct and supportive industries which were mainly beneficial to women. During the year 2005-06 in North Kerala, part time employment opportunities of 12,627 labour days were created exclusively for seeding. This work was worth about Rs.6.3 lakhs (1 lakh = 100,000) and more than 50% of the beneficiaries were women.

One of the impacts was horizontal expansion of the mussel market. A continuous flow of farmed mussels into the market has resulted in new opportunities in the post harvest section for women. Shucking of harvested mussel meat for hoteliers has become a new avenue for income generation in regions away from the mussel farming sites. More than 2,000 women have become owners of mussel farms and the overall impact was improvement in leadership and managerial skills of women and emergence of team spirit within villages.