

# How drip irrigation is turning Odisha's tribal farmers into 'lakhpatis'

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There is no pucca road nor electricity in the tribal village of Tangiriapal in this district but drip irrigation has reached the small and marginal farmers here, helping them to harvest round the year and get better returns.

In fact, tribal farmers in 68 villages of Harichandanpur block, who were highly dependent on monsoon and were harvesting hardly one crop a year, are taking advantage of drip irrigation and growing crops for commercial purposes.

Drip irrigation is a method of controlled irrigation in which water is slowly delivered to plants, which results in efficient use of water and fertiliser.

Many tribes who were selling their crops in a local haat at lower rates have started marketing their produce at higher prices in a nearby

mandi for the first time ever in their lives and becoming 'lakhpati kisans'

"I have 4 acres of land. I have cultivated chilli using drip irrigation on less than half acre. The chilli crop is fetching me good returns," said Babla Hasda from Tangiriapal village.

So far, Hasda has sold about 35 quintals of chilli for around ₹1,05,000 at an average rate of ₹3,000 per quintal. "I have saved ₹25,000 after spending on crop inputs, repaying loan and other expenses. I have liquid money from the chilli crop now," he said.

## A new experience

For Hasda, a visit to the nearby mandi for the first time was a mind-altering experience where he learnt how the agri-produce was weighed accurately on a digital weighing machine and sold instantly to traders at a

higher rate. "Earlier, we were scared to grow crops in bulk as we were unaware of any mandi nearby. About 11 farmers have grown chilli for the first time using drip irrigation on 3 acres of land. We are getting a better price," Hasda said.

According to Tangiriapal Village Association Secretary Sumitra Kudu, the transformation in the village was possible because of the training and handholding support from the Collectives for Integrated Livelihood Initiative (CINI), an associated organisation of Tata Trusts.

After learning about drip irrigation technique from an exposure visit organised by CINI, 11 families adopted drip irrigation on three acres of farm land in Kotagati hamlet (comprising 53 households) of Tangiriapal. The cost of drip irrigation for one acre was ₹1 lakh, of which CINI paid 50 per cent, while the

rest was borne by the farmers, Kudu said.

## More joining

Stating that 24 more farmers are now keen to try drip irrigation this year, Kudu said: "More farmers are encouraged after seeing 16 farmers becoming lakhpatis in our hamlet. These farmers are saving ₹1 lakh a year after spending on crop inputs and other expenses."

Similar success was seen in Gaduan and Nipania villages in Harichandanpur block.

Interestingly, women tribal farmers are taking the lead in all 68 villages where CINI is operating directly and indirectly through local NGOs.

"We focused on empowering one woman in each family as we realised they work the most, both at home and in farm fields. Once women are trained, they will bring change in their families," CINI

spokesperson Ganesh Neelam said.

Since many of 68 villages did not have electricity, diesel and solar based systems were used to operate the drip for which partial funding was provided by CINI, he added.

"As a result, about 1,000 families out of 6,500 families in 68 villages of Harichandanpur block are earning minimum ₹1,00,000

a year, becoming lakhpati kisans," Neelam said.

Earlier, the average income of these farmers was ₹35,000-40,000 a year. In some places, the income was as meagre as ₹15,000 a year, he added.

Sharing her success story, a woman farmer Binija Singh said: "We were mostly engaged as labour in farm fields. Men in the family used

to decide what crop to grow. My husband made fun of me when I started getting actively involved in farming."

She took the challenge and opted for drip and mulching on one tenth of an acre and earned ₹40,000, proving to her husband that she too was a capable farmer.

"I have enough saving. I don't give my bank passbook to my husband. I travel 10 km to visit a bank," she said.

In neighbouring Nipania village, Sidhu Munda and his wife Parbhathi Munda have not only chosen drip irrigation but also set up a plant nursery in a protected green house after an exposure visit to an Indo-Israel unit in Karnal, Haryana.

Stating that there is visible transformation in the 68 villages, the CINI spokesperson said, "Our aim is to ensure the tribal farmers are able to manage without our help. We plan to phase out from these

villages in the next two years."

In some villages, farmers are still dependent on CINI for crop inputs and other linkages. Efforts are being made to make the tribal farmers strong so that they can carry forward the activities on their own, he added.

## Still powerless

While many tribal farmers in these villages are emerging as 'lakhpati kisans', their grudge, however, is against the government, which has not only failed to provide pucca roads and electricity but also not implemented welfare schemes in the hinterland.

"The electric poles have been installed but there is no electricity. We are told we will get electricity after election. We are not going to vote this time," said a senior tribal farmer ahead of assembly and general polls.



A cabbage farm where tribal farmers have adopted drip irrigation, at Gaduan village, in Keonjhar district, Odisha