

Rushikulya Rayat Mahasabha (RRM)

Back drop:

Rushikulya Rayat Mahasabha a non-political union of farmers was formed in the year 1991 soon after the flash flood in Ganjam district, Orissa. The office of the organisation is located at Chatrapur, the district headquarters town of Ganjam district. RRM has been working with the small and marginal farmers, share croppers and agricultural wage earners for improving their livelihood to ensure food security and ensuring their rights through collective efforts. It has established linkage with like minded people's organizations and mass movements at state and national level. In view of the increased chemical farming and its evil effects on land and water and economy of farmers the organisation work to educate farmers to restore the soil condition through organic farming, preserve traditional seeds and farming practice. It also organizes campaigns through its block level farmers unions to influence Government to adopt farmer friendly policy to ensure their food security and sustainable increased productivity.

Vision:

To create an enabling environment for the farming community particularly small and marginal farmers, share croppers, agricultural labourers with emphasis on women farmers to lead a dignified life through collective efforts to sustain agriculture, independent of input supply, conservation of soil fertility, water resource and farmer friendly market and raise voice against any policy and programs of Government that are detrimental to their life.

Mission:

- Improve socio-economic and livelihood status of farming and farm dependant community.
- Farmers accessing to information, knowledge and skill to sustain agriculture there by food security ensured.
- Ensuring equal right and dignity for women farmers and farm dependants.
- Recognition of share croppers and provision of equal right at par with land owners.

Goal:

Organize the unorganized small and marginal farmers, share croppers and agricultural labourers with a special focus on women farmers of Ganjam district to get their due right and provide them a platform where they can able to share and learn from each other to make agriculture economically viable and sustainable.

Objective:

- To bring focus farmers and farm dependants to one platform to raise their voice.
- To develop capacity of focus farmers and farm dependants to identify their problems and make strategies to sort out the problems to lead a meaningful life.
- To influence government to prepare sustainable agriculture policy and schemes to reduce migration.
- To initiate collective pressure by farmers to own rights over water resources.
- Organize share croppers to get benefits on par with the land owners.
- Educate agriculture labourers to demand statutory wages and women farmers at par with men.
- Sensitize farming community to practice sustainable agriculture, ensure soil fertility and judicious use of underground water resources.
- Influence government to make farmer friendly market system.

Management:

General Body:

General Body of RRM constitutes of 44 representatives both male and female from 22 block level farmers' bodies. The general body of the organisation meets once a year to review and plan activities of the organisation. It takes policy decisions concerning the interest of farmers. The general body elects 11-member Governing Body once in 3 years.

Governing Body:

The elected representatives of the general body elect the office bearers from among themselves. It meets 4 times a year to take stock of the activities initiated by the organisation under the leadership of its Secretary. It suggests any change required in the strategy and process for effective implementation of the activities.

Membership:

A person earning her/his livelihood from farm activity can become a member of the organisation. But she/he has to be recommended by the village farmers committee. To become a member one has to apply to the village farmers committee and should pay a membership enrollment fee of Rs. 10/-. The annual membership fee for a member is Rs. 5/-.

Involvement for the development of Agriculture and Agrarian community, organic farming and SRI process:

The founders of the UAA in 60s mobilized farmers and farming community to protect their crops from contamination of soil, water and air by mercury and chlorine. They campaigned against the evil effects of residual mercury and chlorine gas discharged by a medium scale industry with the participation of local. More than a decade long struggle forced the Govt. to impose pressure on the industry to take remedial measures. Since then the campaign continues to protect agriculture and human health in the locality.

During '80s, the works of the organization centered around improvement of irrigation by digging wells, renovation of silted tanks, construction of cross bonds and check dams, improving channels for better water management in remote areas of Ganjam habited by backward and dalit communities. Improved irrigation led to increased income through crop diversification and high production.

After a devastating flood occurred in 1990 in Ganjam district UAA carried out relief and rehabilitation program for flood affected people. This enabled to bring farmers of the district together and Rushikulya Rayat Mahasabha (RRM), a district farmers' federation emerged which is active in the area of lobbying and advocacy with the Government to protect interest of farmers in the district. During 1999 when super cyclone devastated Ganjam district UAA extended its support for emergency relief and rehabilitation of cyclone affected coastal, dalit and indigenous communities with support of RRM and other civil society organizations. The assets like community pond, land reclamation, developing irrigation channels etc. created through implementation of cash for work program increased food security of the cyclone victims.

Now UAA in close association with the farmers' federation RRM, tribal peoples' federation Ganjam Zila Adibasi Manch, dalit women network SWOSTI & Anwesa and district NGO network is working relentlessly to propagate organic farming for sustainable agriculture in the nook and corners of the district.

The District:

Ganjam is one of the districts in Orissa comprising Community Development blocks with 3 Sub-Divisions and 14 Tahasils. The population of the district is 31.37 lakh (as per 2001 Census) of which males constitute 50.003% and females 49.997%. The rural and urban components of the population constitute 87% and 13% respectively of the total population. The number of females for 1000 male population is 1000 according to 2001 census as against 972 in the State. SC/ST population of the district constitute about one fifth of the total population. 80 per cent of the population in the district depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

Agriculture and Economy:

Agriculture is the major contributor to district's economy. The principal crops of the district are Paddy, Ragi, Green gram, Black gram, Ground Nut, Horse gram, Sugarcane and Chilli. Paddy is the staple food crop followed by Ragi. Ganjam is popularly known as food bowl of Orissa. More than 80% of the district population are depend on agriculture.

Land use pattern and holding:

Out of the total geographical area, net area sown constitutes 327.88 thousand Ha, 32.06 thousand Ha. are fallow, 64.60 thousand Ha are put to non-agricultural use and 39.62 thousand Ha are barren and rocky lands. If one consider on net area sown in the district, then average land holding per family comes out 0.47 cents. This gives a clear indication that most of the families in the district depend on subsistence farming.

Rainfall and Irrigation:

The southeastern portion of the district is very fertile and abounds in extensive multi-cropped areas well served by many irrigation projects. Since rainfall is normally from June to September, during remaining months, water requirements are met from ground or surface water resources. The annual

normal rainfall of Ganjam District is 1295.60 mm. and 75% of the annual precipitation is received during June to Sept. The wells, tube wells, canals and a good no. of irrigation projects namely the Rushikulya system, Bahuda project, Ghodahada project, Ramanadi project and Harabahangi project form the chief source of irrigation. Relative humidity is high enough recording 75% through out the year. **The district has a rain-shadow zone spreading over 6 out of the 22 Blocks.** It is proposed to continue the project in 2 rain-shadow blocks.

Nature & composition of Soil:

The district has mainly four varieties of soils i.e. saline soil along the coast, vast area of alluvial soil behind the saline strip, laterite soil in the eastern and northern part and black soil in the central part.

Farmer, their practices & problems:

It is observed that farmers of Ganjam district, though widely known as hard workers, are losing interest in agriculture. They are not getting remunerative price for their crops. On the other hand, the input cost is gradually increasing while the productivity is decreasing. Owing to media propaganda, lobbying by fertilizer industries, pressure from the line department and being motivated by the traders farmers are increasingly and indiscriminately using the chemical fertilizer and synthetic pesticides, which has changed the soil chemistry. It has resulted either stagnation in productivity or comparatively low yield than the previous years. Frequent visit of the natural calamities like cyclone, flood and drought, the farmers find it difficult to support themselves. Hence, they migrate to other states in search of employment in order to repay the debt incurred mainly to meet the input cost. .

Status of sharecroppers:

Condition of sharecroppers is equally bad. As the sharecroppers are not the owner of the land they cultivate and the tenancy is not acknowledged by the land owners, they heavily depend on local moneylenders to meet the input cost. Either due to crop failure and/or distress sale they are not able to repay the loan, which they borrowed at exorbitant rate of interest. The landowners are not giving their land to tenants for further farming, as the latter fail to pay the pre-fixed share to the farmer. The bankers and cooperatives are not giving any loan to tenants, as the latter do not have legal recognition over the farmland. This has worsened the condition of sharecroppers.

Crop rotation:

The traditional seeds are under extinction. Barring a few inaccessible area, the farmers are using the high yielding seeds supplied by the agriculture department. The traditional knowledge and practice of preserving the seeds, protecting the crops from the harmful pests are gradually disappearing. The rotation of crops i.e. from paddy to green gram and black gram or groundnut is practiced in a few selected patches.

Subsistence vs. commercial agriculture:

The farmers are switching over to cash crops from the subsistence crops. Owing to heavy input cost on the cash crops they are indebted to the village societies, banks and moneylenders. Though the news of farmers committing suicide have not yet been reported, but it is everybody's apprehension that the news may break at any time.

Market dynamics and hapless farmers:

For the last few years the market is not farmer-friendly. A few years back the market rate of rice was higher than the Government rate. But now the situation has changed. The Government rate has remained higher than the market rate due to huge supply of food grains under Central Government assisted food for work program, which finds way to the market instead of going to the wage - labourers. So, neither the businessmen, nor the millers purchase the paddy from farmers at the Government rate. Hence, distress sale of paddy has been experienced in villages. The farmers and sharecroppers are eagerly looking forward to bail out themselves from the vicious circle of debt-low yield – high input cost – less return and debt.

Our initiative:

To popularize the concept of the Sustainable Agriculture through SRI and organic farming practice among farmers of Ganjam district with an objective of bringing some change in the above mentioned situation.

Brought in transformations like:

Change of farmers' attitude on bio farming.

- ♣ About 700 farmers have practiced organic farming particularly cereals and vegetables in their fields.
- ♣ Hundreds of farmers used bio insecticide and saved their crop from pest attack.
- ♣ With the support of UAA, 131 farmers cultivated paddy in 9 acres of land and the result has encouraged others to adopt SRI practice.
- ♣ A good percentage of consumers (consumer sample survey- 2005 by UAA) have shown interest to pay an extra 10% to 20% cost for organic products.
- ♣ Efforts have been made to establish linkage between the consumers and producers through village meetings, exhibitions, individual contact and home delivery.
- ♣ Mass education through publication of series of articles on bio-farming in a local largely circulated vernacular daily. Mobilised All India Radio to broadcast experiences of organic farmers and SRI practitioners. Till now a total number of 28 farmers and 9 facilitators shared their experiences.
- ♣ The learning materials developed by the project have been well accepted by the farmers. Quarterly Newsletter were published and distributed among organic farmers, CBOs & NGOs. Farmers found the information provided in the literature useful and demonstrated the same in their fields.
- ♣ A poets' & '2 writers' workshop was organised successfully. Consequently, an audio-cassette on organic farming was produced in the year 2005-06.
- ♣ Vermi compost, mulching, green manuring and organic pest control methods have been demonstrated at the Resource Centre.
- ♣ Farmers have started learning from each other's experience.
- ♣ Agriculture department is now showing interest and invite the project staff as resource persons in the Training Programme organized by the department.
- ♣ Agriculture Department has felicitated the project staff for their good work on organic farming.
- ♣ Regional daily news papers have highlighted the training programs and project-related events.
- ♣ Regional centre for organic farming, Govt. of India in collaboration with the project staff has conducted farmers' Training and distributed incentives to 9 farmers @ 5000/- each for demonstration of organic farming and Horticulture mission of the State Government provided different seeds to encourage farmers to produce organic crops.
- ♣ The Agriculture department is deputing their field workers to visit regional resource center and demonstration sites developed by the project.
- ♣ Agriculture department has included organic farming in its training curriculum.
- ♣ Mobilised watershed project run by fisheries department in the district train the user groups on organic farming. They deputed 30 farmers from watershed user groups to undertake training in the regional resource centre of the organisation.
- ♣ A state level network of organic farmers and propagating NGOs, CBOs and academics was established which is at its infant stage to advocate for organic product and farmers benefit.

But there is need to give a campaigning mode to the program for wider dissemination of relevant information on SRI and organic farming processes.

Contact persons:

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