

DIVERSIFYING THE LIVELIHOODS OF TRIBAL WOMEN SELF HELP GROUPS THROUGH ADOPTION OF BRACKISHWATER AQUACULTURE INTEGRATED WITH AGRO-BASED TECHNOLOGIES

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The *Irular*, are a nomadic tribal community that lives in and around the remote villages of Tiruvalur, Kancheepuram and Cuddalore districts of Tamil Nadu, India. Being a hunter-gatherer community, they often are displaced of their traditional livelihood due to urbanization and associated habitat modification. Owing to their poor life skills and depletion of natural resources and low fish catch, they have remained as a marginalized community and suffer from social and economic discrimination. There is a need for alternate livelihood options for their development and aquaculture offers a good option, especially for women. Brackishwater aquaculture technologies developed by Central Institute of Brackishwater Aquaculture (ICAR-CIBA) were transferred to the Women Self Help Groups (WSHG) who were affected by 2004 tsunami. A programme was initiated among these tribes to utilize the brackishwater areas like lagoons, estuaries, creeks and other infrastructure available in their area to take up diversified livelihoods through adoption of brackishwater aquaculture and agro-based technologies, as an option for the sustainable development. Efforts were also taken to create awareness. The brackishwater aquaculture technologies integrated with agro-based technologies viz; crab aquaculture (in tide fed ponds), *hapa* based nursery rearing of Asian seabass *Lates calcarifer*, farm made fish feed development, ornamental fish farming and mushroom farming were demonstrated to a total of 100 tribal WSHG members from Tiruvallur and Kancheepuram districts during the period 2012-14. The availability of opportunities for training and demonstrations, suitability of aquaculture for tribal women followed by positive growth in status and recognition, were cited as the primary reasons for adoption of aquaculture technologies by the beneficiaries. If these technologies were adopted by the tribal SHG members in other parts of the country, it could be a viable enterprise for their livelihood improvement and will help generate additional income and savings, which will increase the level of self- confidence among the tribal SHG members to become successful entrepreneurs in the future.