



Nicobar tribals with the distributed inputs during demonstration of coconut climbing devices in the coconut garden at Harminder Bay, Little Andaman

Coconut Climbing Devices and Dehuskers Drudgery Reducing tools for the Nicobarese Tribal Farmers of Bay Islands

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Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal are a group of 572 tropical islands and isles. The islands have diversified plant genetic resources of economic and ecological significance, of which coconut is the most important commercial crop occupying more than half of the cultivated area in the islands. It is cultivated in about 22,000 ha out of 46,000 ha of land under Agriculture in Andaman and Nicobar islands. In Nicobar group of islands alone, coconut is cultivated in about 14,500 ha area. Coconut is an indispensable part of day to day life of Nicobarese tribe of these islands. The community is the main inhabitant of the Nicobar groups of islands, while few settlements in the Andaman group of islands do exist.

Coconut plantations in Nicobar group of islands are very dense as the fallen nuts often are allowed to regenerate giving rise to natural groves of coconut. These groves and plantations are generally the property of Nicobarese community. Systematic coconut farming is rarely adopted by the tribal communities. Mostly only the fallen nuts are collected, which are either used for own purpose or are sent for processing into various products. Except for occasional harvesting of nuts from the palms, no intercultural operations are generally adopted by the community. Nicobarese pigs, which are the symbol of prosperity among the Nicobarese tribals, are also found to relish coconuts here. The tribal people also



Distribution of coconut dehuskers to Nicobarese tribal women

use coconuts to feed the pigs. Coconut kernel and oil are mainly used in several culinary preparations of tribal people. Tender coconut is also relished by most people.

In the recent past, coconut based industries are being promoted in the islands and few industries including coconut oil, virgin coconut oil, rope and coir based products etc. are being operated. However, like other parts of the country, there is shortage of skilled manpower for carrying out various operations. Considering the opportunities for creating livelihood security of these tribal farmers, skill development and provision of suitable inputs is of great importance.

For facilitation of skill development among the youth, field demonstrations of these devices were carried out since 2016 under the ICAR- All India Coordinated Research Project on Palms, which have been well received by the native aborigines of these islands. Three field demonstrations on coconut climbing devices and two demonstrations on use of coconut dehuskers have been conducted, which was attended by 145 Nicobarese including 52 female participants. Local youth including women actively participated in demonstrations and tried on these devices.

The tribal people named the climbing device as chaklaak considering the sound the device produces while climbing. They opined that the climbing devices are very useful for them as they reduce their drudgery while harvesting the nuts. They also indicated that fixing the device on palm before climbing takes some time but they generally work in groups in which one person helps in fixing the devices on each palm, while two climbers operate the devices on the palms. Interactions with the participants of various training programmes suggested that they could climb about 25-30 palms in a day. Though few individuals claimed that they used to climb palms without using these

devices, they experienced that use of these devices had reduced their labour. Coconut dehusking is generally undertaken by tribal men using crow bar and women are rarely involved in this activity. However, the manually operated dehuskers were liked by the women farmers, which were handy and easy to operate. Therefore, a number of farm women have started involving themselves in the dehusking operation.

In order to reduce the drudgery involved in harvesting and postharvest handling of coconut, ICAR-CIARI has been distributing palm climbing devices and coconut dehuskers to the Nicobarese farmers since the past three years under Scheduled Tribe Component (erstwhile Tribal Sub Plan). So far, 75 palm climbing devices and 70 manual dehuskers have been distributed to the Nicobarese tribals of Harminder Bay village of Little Andaman island. The events were attended by First Captains Shri. Fred Levi (former) and Smti. Kitty Hilton (present), Shri. Yoseph Yencis, Third Captain of the village and Shri. Festus Nathaniel, Secretary, Tribal Council, who lauded the initiative of carrying out demonstrations and narrated the utility of these devices to the community. To recognize the efforts of the Institute in providing appropriate technical know-how and inputs to the tribal farmers, the Tribal Council has given Appreciation Certificates to the scientists involved, which clearly indicate the usefulness of this initiative.

Though the devices are small interventions, they have been instrumental in reducing the drudgery involved in harvesting and postharvest handling of coconut. This not only help them in harvesting the produce for self-consumption, but also facilitating them in marketing of coconut produce, thereby generating livelihood in the remote parts of the country.

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