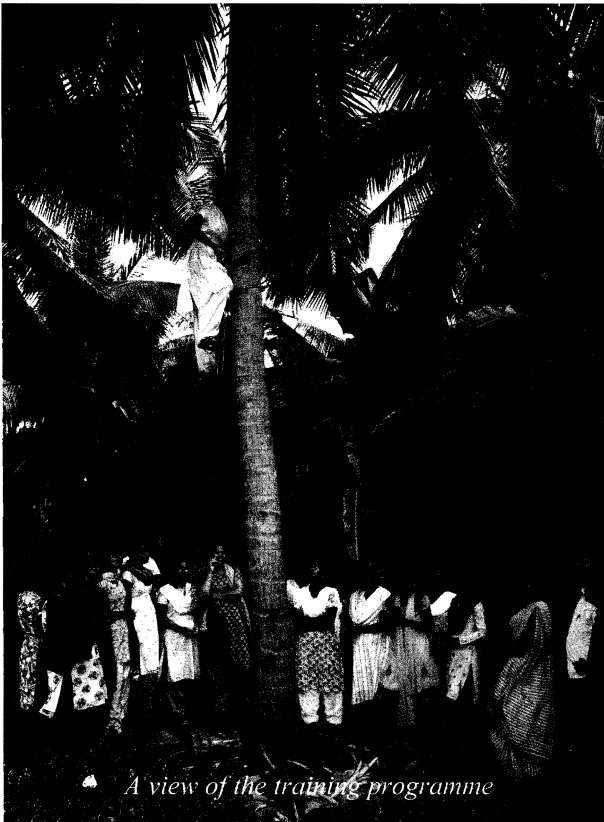


# Women empowerment in agriculture- a Kasargodan model

S Leena, M P Jayasree and T S Manojkumar



*A view of the training programme*

Coconut has always been an integral part of the culture of Kerala. Of late the coconut sector of the state is facing a major problem with less availability of traditional coconut climbers as the younger generation is keeping away from this profession. The non availability of labour is all the more crucial in coconut cultivation since the harvest of nuts has to be followed in a regular pattern. More over it is a skilled labour too. As a solution to this issue, the Coconut Development Board, introduced the 'Friends of Coconut Tree' training programme which is implemented in Kerala, Karnataka and also in Maharashtra.

In Kasargod district in Kerala, the training was conducted by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) functioning under the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute. The project was inaugurated on the farmers day and till now 200 youths have been trained in ten batches. The course is a six day residential training. In Kasargod the project has set a role model for women empowerment also. The 5<sup>th</sup> batch of the trainees of KVK Kasargod were all women who have by now stamped their presence in the field and are much sought after for their valuable service. They fetch the same wages as men thus setting a long way in mainstreaming the gender concerns in agriculture.

The long list of youths seeking enrolment in the future batches of the project at KVK, Kasargod reveals the impact of the project. The Board is giving the training free of cost. Board is trying to make the training a pleasant experience for the beneficiaries. Every day begins with a physical fitness package comprising of yoga, breathing exercises, jogging etc. This will enhance the physical and mental strength of the participants. The Board also provides each participant a coconut climbing machine and also insurance coverage.

Though the main agenda of the training is machine aided coconut palm climbing the trainees are also made well versed in all management and plant protection aspect of coconut palm so that once they are into the field, they will be masters in coconut cultivation and not mere labourers. They are acquainted with everything related to scientific cultivation of coconut right from seed to value added products. In addition to these, sessions are held on improving their communication skills, leadership qualities, decision making power, action plan preparation, banking operation etc. Practical sessions on the above said topics helps to the reinforcement of knowledge.

About 65 % of the men who have completed training here have taken up this as their career earning Rs. 300 to 900 per day. Their feedback reveals that apart from being a good source of income this has also helped to raise their self esteem. They are also attempting group approaches to diversify their field of activities in their locality. Some have started up



*The training*



*Training in preparing snow ball tender coconut*

with enterprises like tender nut parlour, snow ball tender nut units etc.

The fifth batch was the first women batch and gained the attention of the media. Ladies from all walks of life- housewives, panchayath members, representatives of voluntary organisations and students took part in the training programme. Smt. Valsamma Appachan, the eldest of the group said that her achievement of climbing coconut palm of



*Reena, a trainee*

16 meter height and cleaning the crown of the palm was beyond her dreams. Smt. Reena, a participant may be the first women ever to climb up a coconut tree and to do artificial pollination. She is an entrepreneur having a tender nut parlour in Nileshwaram and is now hopefully looking forward to incorporate all what she has imbibed from the Friends of Coconut tree training programme of the Board to boost up her enterprise. She is now harvesting tender coconut of her own for selling in the parlour. Babitha and Bijitha, who have taken up this as a part time job were honoured by INFARM

unit of Ballal panchayath for their services in popularizing coconut palm climbing as a women friendly venture. Latha and Usha, two other participants are into snow ball tender nut making. All the women participants opines that machine aided palm climbing requires less effort and is women friendly and safer. It is worth being taken up as a career by women. Now they have a lot to talk about their better experiences in life brought about by the Friends of Coconut Tree training. Apart from being financially secure and self dependent, they have gained a great deal of self confidence and self esteem. They are now capable of making projects with prior planning and communicating the same with the other members of the group. They could even attract more women to their groups.

A Coconut Olympiad is conducted as part of the training on the concluding day of the training. Praseetha Chandran bagged the first prize in the training conducted for ladies. Babitha and Soumyasree were the first runner ups and Reena was the second runner up. The KVK and CPCRI is working in unison for the successful conduct of the FoCT training at Kasargod. Jenson and Johnson from Kozhikode were the master trainers. They put their body and soul together to train the ladies batch. They have made the ladies confident that ladies are not behind men in accomplishing any task.

The Kasargod model of women empowerment facilitated through the Friends of Coconut Tree may gain more momentum in the coming days. These trained ladies with the climbing devices will be a task force in the district finding a solution to the need of the labour shortage in the coconut cultivation sector.

\* SMS, KVK, CPCRI Kasargod