

A discussion on “Women Empowerment and Agricultural Innovations” was organized by ChandraprabhaSaikiani Centre for Women’s Studies, Tezpur University, on account of International Women’s Day, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2020 which is organized as a part of the event observed for a week long programme, International Women’s Week 2020.

Dr. Madhurima Goswami, Head ChandraprabhaSaikiani Centre for Women’s Studies, Tezpur University, gave the welcome address and welcomed the speaker of the programme, Hema Das. The resource person, Hema Das is a multi-disciplinary community worker and has contributed a lot in the grassroots level.

Dr. Goswami addressed the gathering about women and agriculture and its reality and also women not being designated as farmers. Women are not being acknowledged as preservers of seed stock. In agriculture, there is no equity nor equality. The attempt is to try to see where the centre is moving and what is the work that can be followed.

A short presentation on “Rural Women and Agriculture” was delivered by Dr. Ivy Daimary, Research Associate, CSCWS, Tezpur University. The presentation is a part of an ongoing project entitled “Women in Economic Sector: Assam” sponsored by CWDS, Delhi. Dr. Daimary presented on how the rural women have empowered themselves through agriculture with their traditional method of cultivation. Women are actively involved in agriculture right from the seed preserving to cultivating and selling the food products to the market thereby contributing to the family and the society.

Prof. Robin Deka, Head Sociology Department Tezpur University appreciates and thanks the centre for initiating such programme on rural women and agriculture. Prof. Deka says that the society is based on agriculture and historically, men and women have equally contributed in agriculture. In some societies, women’s role is more active. In rural societies, women contribute very significantly in the day to day activities and in the economic activities of the family. The society has not acknowledged this due to structural location. Women’s right to property and women land ownership is very rare. This is an important issue. In rural social structure there are different categories of women who work and some of them work as daily wage labours.

The resource person, Hema Das continues with the discussions on “Rural Women and Agriculture”. She starts her talk with the importance of farming and that farming sector

should be included in the syllabus for it leads to growing of food. She rhetorically asks about the condition of producers, their economic status. Women are the preserver of seeds and do all sorts of rituals before farming. Women are always in a subordinate position in every sectors of farming. They do not have any say on the status of the land or into the decision making of their lands. Seed is no longer been a property of a community. The seeds and fertilizers are being provided by multinational companies and ultimately leading to seeds becoming a commodity. The one who sells or deals or deals in seeds don't have any relation to agriculture. Farming has become a critical system. It is not in the hands of the community who are the masters of agriculture. Women are more marginalized in this condition. The scenario has become very critical and both men and women have become dependent to some other companies. The idea has been shifted from fertilizer farming to organic farming. Organic farming requires a certificate and the product is quite expensive. The concept of inheriting farming has become so difficult. The young generations show least interest in farming because the reality is very harsh. The rice which we eat are imported. The farmers don't have proper places to store and sell their crops. The farming community is itself in the receiving end. They go for protests but the government has given no ear. That is why it has become a challenge for farmers. Borrowing of land, money takes lives of many farmers. They lack the idea of organizing themselves into groups and stand up for their own causes. To be with those who are marginalized, as a concerned citizen should talk affectively. Hema Das has organized many advocacy programmes at the grass root level regarding farming issues but according to her there should be certain rules which the local crops should be procured.

Even being healthy, the food corporations are not interested in purchasing locally produced rice in Assam rather rice is being imported from other states of India to Assam. The speaker encouraged that chemical farming should be replaced by traditional method of farming. Chemical farming even contaminates water. But the system in the higher levels are very tricky. The corporations are not ready to buy the local rice and not ready to give minimum support price to the farmers.

Women are involved in the entire chain of food from sowing, harvesting to cooking but as they do not own lands they even cannot take loans from banks. They cannot compete with the products that comes from outside and hence agricultural income is negligible. The speaker thinks it is an urgent requirement to bring the farming community as a

whole, to make them aware of the tricks that obstructs them in this trade. The technological methods of farming serve no purpose for it is not sustainable. It only destroys the micro-organisms while doing so. Organic farming produces food which are nutritious.

At the end Hema Das responded to many queries by the students and faculty members. Dr Goswami acknowledged about the farming lands that are converted to industry. The speaker replied that farmers have to protest for their rights. Farmers were never made recognized about their rights. The new generation must come forward to make the farmers recognize and provide them their rights. There will always be a question on how we can organize the farmers so that they can get their rights. Farmers curse themselves as poor and unlucky but the youth must voluntarily make them recognize of their will and rights. Dr.Mousumi Mahanta put a question on how women are taking the advantages provided by the government and whether they are benefitted or not. The speaker replied that even though women are producing, but they are not sustainable because there is no availability of market. There must be an advocacy in the local communities. Since our agricultural system is not highly innovative government must get involved in it and provide markets where the production can be sold. While interacting with students, Hema Das mentioned that now it has grown easy for farmers to get loan from the banks but it has not made the life of the farmers easy rather they are unsecured. Farming is still in a poor condition. Even though women are involved in the whole chain of production of food but her recognition in the chain is very less. The earning from cultivation is negligible which compels the youth to move to metropolitan cities. Middlemen corrupt the poor farmers so government must also look up to this matter. The gap between the farmers and government must be removed. Traditional practice of farming is the ultimate sustainable way of production rather than technological method.

Hema Das concludes that small scale production should be encouraged. Women are powerful and has the capability to do every sort of things, so women should be encouraged.

At the end Dr.Mousumi Mahanta summarized that organic farming should be encouraged because it is a mode of ultimate benefit and women should be recognized in each and every field.