

## A study of mushroom cultivation and growers in tribal watershed development in Orissa

ANCHAL DASS\* AND S. SUDHISHRI<sup>1</sup>

Department of Agronomy, Central Soil and Water Conservation Res. & Training Insti., KORAPUT (ORISSA) INDIA

### ABSTRACT

Equity and gender neutrality are among the major objectives of integrated watershed approach, but usually get overlooked resulting into disparities in terms of benefits among the diverse social groups in the watershed villages. The landless/ marginal farmers and the women who either own no or own marginal land on slopes remain devoid of or get least benefits of watershed development. An attempt was made to address the problems of these vulnerable groups and to win villagers' faith through introduction of oyster mushroom in Kokriguda model watershed in addition to many other developmental activities, as the climate of Eastern Ghat High Land (EGHL) Zone of Orissa is highly suitable for its cultivation through out the year. This activity was started with the involvement of 14 women, but within 3 years period, number of mushroom growers multiplied to 28. Yearly total production of oyster mushroom in the village increased from 150 kg in 2000 to 300 kg in 2002 with corresponding returns of Rs. 9000 and Rs. 14000, respectively. Two self help groups (SHGs) of women have been formed who have contributed substantial amount of their earning from mushroom to the common fund.

**Key words :** Equity, Gender neutrality, Kokriguda watershed, Oyster mushroom, EGHL zone.

### INTRODUCTION

Integrated watershed approach is an ideal mean for holistic and sustainable development of rural people. Though equity and gender neutrality is one of the major objectives of this approach, the issues related to it usually get overlooked resulting into disparities in terms of benefits among the diverse social groups in the villages. The priority given to investment for farm-based livelihood in watershed program tends to marginalize the landless while extending the potential productivity base of the land- holders, thus widening the gap between them. The landless/ marginal farmers have no or marginal agricultural land on slopes, which remain devoid of or get lesser benefits of watershed development. As their reliance on common property resources (CPRs) is high, the denial of open access to CPRs, in initial years as a part of biomass regeneration strategy in watershed program puts them in hardships. It has been proved in various strategies that landless/ marginal farmers find it cumbersome to broaden their livelihood source base, since investment in terms of capital linkages to input sources and marketing are heavily biased towards agriculture (Rajora, 1998). Besides the landless

families, farm-women and unemployed youth are the other two important vulnerable social groups, which need to be provided with reliable life support systems. Thus, it invokes for creating options for livelihood in non-land related areas to rehabilitate and empower these groups. Mushroom cultivation is one such important non-land based activity, which can offer these deprived groups an effective and viable alternate source of employment, income and livelihood. Higher net profit in a very short period (about 30 days) further increases its relevance for tribal watersheds, as tribals believe more in short-term gains. Moreover, it could be a potential tool for purposefully recycling of agricultural by products. In fact this has lent industry a bright future in the country chiefly because of abundance of agro by-products generated and a conducive humid climate.

Mushrooms are fruit bodies or reproductive structures emanating from the mycelium, which under natural conditions lie buried in the soil or in the substrate where conditions are conducive for their growth. There are more than 200 mushroom varieties grown over the World but only a few are grown commercially in India, which include: (1) White button mushroom (*Agaricus bisporus*), (2) Dhingri (Oyster) mushroom (*Pleurotus sp.*) and (3) Paddy straw mushroom (*Volvariella*

---

\* Author for correspondence.

<sup>1</sup> Division of Agronomy WTC, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, PUSA (NEW DELHI) INDIA