

# Daal Mill improves nutritional security in Mentapalli

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**M**entapalli in Mahabubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh is like any other village of the semiarid India. It gets around 650 mm rainfall that is distributed erratically from mid June to September. The village is dominated by small and marginal farmers who cultivate their parched lands for a single season. During the dry periods, farmers migrate to far off places, in search of employment.

Pigeonpea is an important crop in this area, along with sorghum and maize. Bacterial wilt of pigeonpea is a serious soil-borne disease resulting in severe crop loss. With the interventions of the livelihoods program by ICRISAT (International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics), farmers are now able to reap some harvests by growing wilt-tolerant pigeonpea variety *Asha*. It tolerates wilt to a great extent and yields 20 to 30 per cent than the local variety.

The traditional practice after harvesting pigeonpea, was to split the produce by hand operated grinding stones. This operation was generally done by men. Ever since the men started migrating from the village, this practice almost ceased to continue. On the contrary, this tiny village producing a lot of pigeonpea, started selling it in the market for a paltry Rs 12-14 a kg and bought *daal* for a higher price at Rs 22 a kg., for domestic consumption.

The ICRISAT Watershed Team decided to break the typical 'selling cheap and buying costly' syndrome in Mentapalli and had discussions with the villagers. The villagers agreed to the proposal of processing the pigeonpea within the village to make enough *daal*, at least, for the domestic consumption. The Society for Development of Drought Prone Areas (SDDPA), an NGO implementing the program in Mentapalli watershed,

motivated and mobilized the women's self help group. Accordingly, a simple *daal* mill was installed in the village. Following installation, farmers were trained in handling the machine.

The SHG mobilised money to pay towards power consumption. It fixed the cost of milling a kilogram of *daal*. Thus, the villagers could get their pigeonpea milled at a reasonable cost besides getting grain husk as nutritive fodder.

However, the *daal* milled in the village could not fetch good price in the market, as it did not have the shine and the color. Therefore, the milled *daal* had to be used for domestic consumption only. As *Asha* was known for its better cooking quality and bold grains, it was the preferred option, particularly by the women.

Now the mill is working in full swing turning the Mentapalli pigeonpea in to *daal* (with almost 90% recovery) and bringing smiles on villagers' faces. The women are happy as they are able to cook and taste what their family cultivates. They expressed that now they have access to increased nutrition at a lesser price, as *daal* is the cheapest source of protein.

## Success and spread

Three factors have been responsible for the success of the daal-mill. Firstly, the operation of the mill was very simple and was similar to that of handling a typical floor mill, seen in any village. Secondly, the method of splitting pigeonpea was compatible to the villagers' indigenous practice of soaking the pigeonpea overnight and sun-drying for 2-3 days before milling. Lastly, the simple *daal* mill operated on single-phase power supply, suitable for Mentapalli which has no three-phase power supply.

The success of the daal-mill has spread to the neighbouring villages. People from other villages are getting their pigeonpea milled in Mentapalli.

Now the SHG in Mentapalli is planning to buy one Mill for the village, as the project installed daal mill is to be shifted to other villages of the project. Enthused by the outcome at Mentapalli, the idea is being successfully tried out in other places of Kurnool district, where pigeonpea is grown abundantly.

Villagers operating the Daal mill



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