

A Case Study: Force of Nature -Trinity Saioo

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Abstract

The extraordinary journey of Mrs. Trinity Saioo, a visionary leader from Mulieh village in West Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya, is highlighted in this case study. She transformed turmeric cultivation in the area, concentrating on the high-curcumin Lakadong turmeric. In 2003, Saioo, who had previously worked as a schoolteacher and part-time farmer, started growing Lakadong turmeric, which is renowned for being of higher quality than the native Lachein turmeric. Her work with the Spices Board of India and her attempts to spread knowledge about this variety changed the village's economic situation by increasing farmer incomes and the demand for turmeric on the market. She founded the Life Spice Federation of Self-Help Groups and the Ieng Skhem Spice Producer Industrial Co-operative Society, which were instrumental in the processing, promotion, and export of Lakadong turmeric by empowering women and encouraging teamwork. Saioo's unselfish leadership and commitment to sustainable agricultural practices earned her the Padma Shri award in 2020, and her efforts have had a far-reaching influence, helping to establish Lakadong turmeric as one of the best in the world.

Keywords- Community-based agriculture, Women's empowerment, Environmental stewardship

Introduction

In Meghalaya, India's West Jaintia Hills District, the agricultural landscape has undergone a tremendous transformation thanks to Trinity Saioo, a name linked with Lakadong turmeric. From a school teacher and part-time farmer to a prominent figure in the global agricultural community, Saioo's journey exemplifies the strength of tenacity, leadership, and creativity. She was awarded the Padma Shri in 2020 for her exceptional service in agriculture. Her emphasis on the production of Lakadong turmeric—a cultivar recognized for its high curcumin content—has helped the fortunes of her village's farmers and gained this native spice international prominence. She has set an example for organic and sustainable farming methods and empowered hundreds of women via her work.

Background: The Lakadong Turmeric

Due to its exceptionally high curcumin content of over 7%, as opposed to 2-3% in other varieties, Lakadong turmeric—which is mainly farmed in Meghalaya's Jaintia Hills—is among the most significant types of turmeric in the world. Because of its culinary and therapeutic qualities, it is, therefore, a highly valued spice that is sought after by global markets. The high value of turmeric has dramatically increased farmers' incomes in the area, and its exceptional quality has given it a niche in the global market.

Beginning: From Part-time Farmer to Turmeric Advocate

The story of Trinity Saioo began in 2003 when she began growing the Lakadong kind of turmeric in her fields in Mulieh village, West Jaintia Hills. Previously, the Lachein variety, which had a lower curcumin content and didn't sell well, was the main variety the villagers grew. Saioo, a teacher and part-time farmer, started growing Lakadong turmeric to support her family, but she

soon learned it was more profitable. Compared to farming the Lachein type, she could make twice as much money. Acknowledging the potential of this valuable crop, Saioo decided to inform her fellow villagers about the advantages of growing Lakadong turmeric. Despite the initial problem of high seed tuber costs, she sought assistance from the Spices Board of India and other agricultural organizations to subsidize seed purchases and provide technical support.

Transforming the Community: Empowering Women through Farming

Saioo's efforts immediately gained traction as other farmers realized the economic advantages of converting to Lakadong turmeric. About 25 farmers had joined Saioo's program by 2004, changing the agricultural landscape of the village. As word spread, more neighboring villages in the Jaintia Hills joined the movement, and Saioo soon found herself leading a growing community of turmeric farmers. Saioo's emphasis on empowering women was what transformed her approach. To collaborate on the production, processing, and marketing of Lakadong turmeric, she established women's self-help groups (SHGs). From sorting and drying the rhizomes to packing the finished product, these teams took part in every step of the turmeric cultivation process. Saioo's dedication to organic farming principles was also crucial in her success. She worked with farmers to implement sustainable farming practices that minimized chemical fertilizers and pesticides. By promoting organic certification and educating farmers about the long-term benefits of such practices, Saioo ensured that the farmers' produce was of the highest quality and safe for consumption.

Process of Lakadong Turmeric Cultivation

Culturing Lakadong turmeric is a methodical procedure that needs close attention at every stage. The turmeric plants are harvested after nine months of growth, usually between December and February. To prevent harm to the rhizomes, harvesting is done by hand. Following harvest, the rhizomes undergo sorting, cleaning, and drying procedures to maintain their high curcumin concentration. The rhizomes are dried, cut into thin powder, packaged, and branded for retail sale. From planting to packaging, every step of the process adheres to stringent cleanliness guidelines and food safety laws, guaranteeing the best caliber of the finished product.

Organizing the Supply Chain and Market Linkages

As the production of Lakadong turmeric in the region grew, so did the need for organized processing and market linkages. Saioo recognized that to increase the profitability of turmeric farming, farmers needed to work together to process the turmeric in bulk, add value to it, and establish direct connections with markets. In 2013, she helped establish the Ieng Skhem Spice Producer Industrial Cooperative Society, which organized more than 800 farmers in the area. This cooperative facilitated the collective marketing and processing of turmeric. Additionally, Saioo connected these farmers to national and international markets, ensuring better prices for their products. The Meghalaya state government started Mission Lakadong in 2018 to expand Lakadong turmeric output and enhance its international recognition. The project, led by Saioo, aimed to enhance the supply chain, including distribution, testing, and quality control, and increase production to 50,000 metric tons by 2023. Additionally, Saioo contributed to creating the Life Spice Federation of Self-Help Groups, which currently assists more than 100 SHGs throughout the area. Farmers have received training courses, funding, and technical support through this network to enhance their farming methods further.

Sustained Growth and Recognition

Due to Trinity Saioo's unwavering efforts, the standard of living for farmers in her area has significantly improved. The area's turmeric is now regarded as some of the best in the nation, and farmers have reported a threefold increase in their revenue. Saioo has received widespread recognition for his work both domestically and abroad. On Women's Farmers Day in 2018, the Ministry of Agriculture presented her with the Excellence in Horticulture Award. She received the esteemed Padma Shri in 2020 in recognition of her outstanding contributions to agriculture, especially her involvement in revolutionizing Meghalaya's turmeric farming industry. Other accolades, such as the Social Work Excellence Award (2021) and North Eastern Hill University recognition for her community service, have also been given to celebrate her leadership.

Future Outlook and Legacy

As a result of Trinity Saioo's work, a sustainable agricultural model has been established, empowering thousands of farmers in the area, especially women. Her leadership has laid the foundation for a flourishing and constantly growing turmeric sector. Farmers nationwide are now members of the Life Spice Federation, and its goods are being sold in significant Indian and international marketplaces. One of Saioo's long-term objectives is to bring Lakadong turmeric to more international markets, especially in the US and Europe. She is still dedicated to teaching farmers excellent methods and highlighting the benefits of organic farming for sustainable economic and environmental policies.

Conclusion

Trinity Saioo's journey from a small-time farmer to a trailblazing agricultural leader exemplifies how one person's perseverance can transform a whole community. She has developed an economically and environmentally sound strategy by emphasizing sustainable agricultural techniques, organic farming, and women's empowerment. Her work with Lakadong Turmeric is a testament to the ability of grassroots leadership to propel social and economic development and be a success story of agricultural transformation. Something is to be said about likening a human being to a 'force of Nature.' Such a person is inexorable, determined, and powerful enough to change the ecosystem around them. One such force of Nature is Trinity Saioo.

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