

Improving Income through Tassar cultivation

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Written specially for Vikalp Sangam

One has to understand the bounties of nature in order to harness it to improve their lives. Sunderpahari block in Godda district is one of the most backward blocks in the state. Home to Pahariya tribes, who like their name, reside on hill slopes, away from mainstream populations and live by clearing small patches of forest for agriculture during the rains. In other times, the forest provides with the necessary goods that can be sold locally and also food. The hill slopes have good tree cover which provided fuelwood and fodder for the animals. Tribal communities collect non-timber products like sal leaves, mahua flowers, kokum, honey etc. and sell them in the local markets to earn some cash income.

Chandi Pahariya of Tamaligoda, Dumarpalam tola under Kairasol Gram Panchayat is an ordinary Pahariya woman and has a family of seven members. They depended on shifting cultivation and whenever the rains were poor, the family had to move out in search of wage labour. This year also, with low rains, Chandi feared whether they will have something to eat from the crops planted. Representatives of [Badlao Foundation](#) were discussing ways to improve livelihoods in the village meeting in Tamaligoda. In this process, they also discussed non-farm means like animal husbandry, processing of non-timber forest products and tassars cultivation. Chandi had seen some farmers take up Tassar farming in other villages. Later she discussed about Tassar farming with other members of her community. One day she along with three other members - Suraj Pahariya, Kumre Pahariya and Jamia Pahariya approached the Project Coordinator, KKS and requested him to introduce them to PRADAN, an organisation promoting tassars based livelihoods. The members thereafter underwent training at PRADAN and brought back 4 kgs of eggs for rearing.

The very next day, Chandi went and selected the host trees - Asan and Arjun in the forest and cleared the neighbouring area of shrubs and weeds. Thereafter the eggs were put on the trees and Chandi took care to protect the eggs from insects and birds. Mosquito nets were put on the trees to protect the eggs. After some days the eggs hatched and the worms came out. This step also required great care as the worms are likely to be eaten by birds and other animals. Chandi used to wake up early in the morning and go to the forest to take care of the trees and the worms. She used local pest control tools like humming a loud drum to control the predators. After three months, the worms grew in size by feeding on the leaves. After this, they went into the cocoon stage. Tassar is basically the saliva excreted out of the worms to make the cocoon.



Tassar Silk Cocoons - photo Badlao Foundation

Luck and weather favoured her finally the tassars were ready to be harvested. With help of her family members, they lopped the branches and collected the tassars cocoons. Chandi sold the tassars cocoons to the local vendor at a good price and earned Rs. 17,800 as income in three months. Her efforts bore fruit and the family was happy to make a savings deposit from the income earned.

[Badlao Foundation](#) staff are motivated to promote tassars farming in the region so that more farmers can improve their livelihoods by using nature's bounty.

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