

# More farmers, fishermen to tap information on monsoon and markets over mobiles

## MSSRF launches second phase of 'Knowledge Connectivity Programme,' FM station

Special Correspondent

**CHENNAI:** The M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has launched the second phase of its successful IT-driven rural empowerment initiative to help more farmers and fishermen in Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts.

Ever since it was rolled out in 2011-12, the 'Knowledge Connectivity Programme' supported by MARG Karaikal Port has benefited about 20,000 farmers, fishermen and women entrepreneurs of

self-help groups in 34 villages by providing relevant inputs through advisories over mobile phone, helpline and phone-in facilities.

The second phase of the project will see the benefits of leveraging mobile phone penetration spread to a larger number of beneficiaries and the launch of a community FM station to disseminate information to fishermen who have found that they are unable to receive inputs on their phones once they enter the deep seas beyond 12 nautical miles.

A cluster approach to promote cultivation of paddy, groundnut, vegetables and coconut and developing a base of 60 Master Trainers from the communities to impart knowledge to others are also proposed.

M.S. Swaminathan, who launched a compendium of success stories of the project, said the initiative had been successful in equipping farmers with information relating to monsoon and markets.

The project has touched the lives of these people and raised their productivity lev-

els by increasing confidence through acquiring new knowledge and skills, updating existing skill sets and blending science with traditional knowledge.

Farmers have benefited from inputs on wind direction and speed, warnings and market information.

For Sivasankaran, a beneficiary, the GPS on mobile phones has become indispensable for fishermen. The project did not confine itself to dissemination of useful inputs, but involved interventions such as career guidance

for the children of fishermen, he said. Kalai Selvi, member of a SHG in Akkirampettai, explained how access to information on animal husbandry aspects helped her cure the fractured leg of a neighbour's goat.

The woman entrepreneur, who had undergone several training sessions at MSSRF on preparation of soap oil, frankincense powder and flower wash, plans to improve the quality of her products "so that they are better than those available in the market."