



Policy Brief **6**

Water Series

Translating Practice into Policy Change

Cultivation Practices for Improved Tankfed Agriculture



Vayalagam Agriculture Development Centre Activity

Executive Summary

Tamil Nadu is a State with a large number of tanks. In many areas, tank is the only water source to harness rainwater. Tanks supply water to crops during their growing season supplementing the rainfall and stabilise crop production. Tank-based agriculture provides close to one-third of total household income for poor households. Poor households, much more than the non-poor, use tanks for other livelihood needs such as fuel wood, grazing and water for livestock.

DHAN Foundation is involved in implementation of tank development through its "Vayalagam" programme. It organises farmers into Tank Farmers' Associations (TFAs). These associations undertake tank rehabilitation works along with a package of practices comprising appropriate agriculture development and water management practices to improve small and marginal farmers' livelihood in Tankfed Agriculture. DHAN provides the much-needed techno-managerial support to the TFAs by enhancing people's awareness of the benefits of tank rehabilitation. On the basis of local context, a set of best practices is recommended under this Vayalagam Tankfed Agriculture Programme.

TFAs play an important role in deciding the best practices based on their felt needs and priorities.

During scanty or deficit rainfall years or during the years of delayed onset of monsoon or early withdrawal, farmers in tank command at times face difficulties in cultivating crops. Vayalagam programme provides community wells wherever needed in the tank command, so that the farmers can supplement well water and practise conjunctive use. Farm ponds are constructed to help the beneficiaries to utilise the harvested water. Alternate cropping pattern or crop diversification is evolved in a number of tankfed areas by shifting from high water requiring crops such as paddy to low water requiring crops like pulses, chillies and minor millets. This enables farmers to plan their cropping pattern based on water availability in tank.

To highlight the benefits of the Tankfed Agriculture, a policy seminar titled "Cultivation Practices for Improved Tankfed Agriculture", was organised in which Farmers, Government Officials, Academicians, Research scholars, Eminent Scientists, NGOs and DHAN Foundation executives involved in water resources management took part