

New driver of economic growth: Lakshadweep turns to seaweed farming

Large-scale farming of indigenous seaweeds launched in Lakshadweep. The island territory has a potential of producing 30000 tons of dry seaweed worth INR 75 cr. per year, says a CMFRI study.

Kochi: After fisheries, coconut and tourism, the Lakshadweep administration has prioritized seaweed farming as the next major development driver of the islands. A massive demonstration farming of seaweed was launched in nine inhabited islands of Lakshadweep with the technical support of the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI).

The large-scale initiative is in line with a CMFRI study that revealed immense potential for production of quality seaweeds in serene and pollution free lagoons of Lakshadweep for high-end utilization like the pharmaceuticals, food and nutraceuticals. The indigenous red algae, *Gracilaria edulis* and *Acanthophora spicifera* are the species being farmed in nearly 2500 bamboo rafts benefitting 100 families belonging to 10 women self-help groups in different islands.

“Known for its unique tuna fisheries and myriads of beautiful corals, reef fishes and other creatures, now the marine sphere of the islands are more likely to be known as the seaweed farming hub of India soon”, said Dr K. Mohammed Koya, Scientist of CMFRI.

CMFRI study: Recent studies by the CMFRI revealed an unprecedented growth performance of indigenous seaweed species in various lagoons of Lakshadweep with nearly 60-folds growth in 45 days for the species *Gracilaria edulis*. Following the early success story, the Lakshadweep Administration joined hands with the CMFRI for multi-locational trial farming and capacity building of stakeholders. Thus, experimental-scale trial farming was conducted in the islands of Kiltan, Chetlah Kadmath, Agatti and Kavaratti during 2020-21 with promising results.

“The studies revealed that the island territory has a potential of producing nearly 30,000tons of dry seaweed per year worth Rs 75 cr by farming only 1% (200ha) of its 21,290 ha of lagoon area (inhabited islands only) at the rate of a modest 150 ton per hectare”, Dr Mohammed Koya said.

Climate Smart: Terming it as a climate-smart initiative, he further said: “The sea being the major sink of carbon and the seaweeds well known for its carbon sequestration properties, the farming of seaweed at such a scale would sequester nearly 6500t carbon dioxide per day adding a huge carbon credit to the nation while providing a climate resilient livelihood to the islanders”.

Led by coordinated efforts of various Departments of the administration such as Fisheries, Environment & Forests and Rural Development as well as the CMFRI, the demonstration focuses on popularization of seaweed farming in the islands, capacity building of stakeholders and pre-feasibility and impact assessment of seaweed farming for a planned development of seaweed farming enterprise in the islands.

Providing a sound scientific basis for a sustainable seaweed farming enterprise, the CMFRI and the Lakshadweep Krishi Vigyan Kendra of the institute is at further studies for assessing the carrying capacity of the lagoons, spatial mapping of suitable farming sites, standardizing farming methods for year-round farming in deeper areas and means to ensure quality seeding materials of indigenous seaweed species jointly with the Lakshadweep administration.

