

## Farming goes hi-tech in tribal hamlet

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The people of the Kairaly tribal hamlet at Mukkil Peedika in the Moopainadu grama panchayat of the district have set up a 400-sq m polyhouse for vegetable cultivation on the slope of a hillock with the financial support of the State Tribes Development Department.

There are 80 families in the colony – 70 per cent of them Paniyas, a vulnerable tribal group.

They erected the polyhouse as part of the Integrated Tribal Development Initiative of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) at a cost of Rs.10 lakh on a 15-cent plot provided by Seeta Balan, a primary stakeholder of the project.

The project was first of its kind in the State, said N. Anilkumar, director, MSSRF. Setting up the state-of-the-art facility in this remote village was a formidable task owing to absence proper roads and power connection, said C.S. Chandrika, principal social scientist, MSSRF, and principal investigator of the project.

“In the initial phase we trained four tribesmen. They planted 956 salad cucumber plants in the polyhouse,” she said.

“We planted the crop 80 days ago and got nearly 60 kg of cucumber in the first harvest itself. When the sixth harvest was completed on Wednesday, we got 300 kg of cucumber worth Rs.10,545,” Sheeja and Unnikrishnan, a tribal couple engaged in farming, said.

### **Rs.35 a kg**

They harvest on alternate days and from each harvest, get around 60 to 80 kg of produce. The tribesmen could avoid exploitation by middlemen as they were directly selling the produce, at Rs.35 a kg, at an outlet of the Wayanad Institute of Medical Science at Rippon near Mepadi, said P.C. Babu, a field coordinator of the project.

Training in polyhouse farming would be extended to more tribespeople in phases, Dr. Chandrika said.