Turning brewery waste into women’s wealth

Brewery waste boosts incomes for rural women in drought-hit drylands of India

More extreme weather events and shifting seasons is expected as a result of global warming, according to a 2009 Food Policy Report by the IFPRI. Rainfed farmers in developing countries are particularly exposed to climate change. In India, while wealthier farmers have access to irrigation, most smallholder farmers rely on monsoon rains to get a good harvest, often succumbing to despair when rains fail. To improve their climate resilience, diversifying their farming and non-farming activities is important.

Thousands of farmers in the dryland region of Telangana in India used to depend solely on rainfed agriculture and their few cows and buffaloes for income. During drought years, their crop yield would diminish and so would the milk supply from their cattle due to lack of sufficient fodder. So the erratic and insufficient rainfall cut down both their income and food security. In December 2011, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and leading brewery ABInBev started a sustainable development initiative, along with the non-governmental organisation Rural Education and Agriculture Development (READ), targeting some villages in Telangana, in India. One of its aims was to provide new income-generating activities for vulnerable families.

TURNING WASTE TO WORTH

The project looked at the spent malt, a byproduct of the beer manufacturing process, produced at the brewery. It is considered as a waste; however it is far from that. Spent malt (also known as brewers’ spent grain) has been used as cattle feed since ancient times. It is rich in moisture, cellulose, proteins, minerals and lipids, and is also a good source of dietary fiber. It is known to help milk production in cattle. Read more.