

Technological transformation, gender and labouring bodies: Exploring socio-technical interactions in System of Rice Intensification (SRI) taking cases from Odisha, India

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Abstract

System of Rice Intensification (SRI), a recently introduced rice-growing technology promising higher yield with lesser inputs, recommends managing rice cultivation differently than conventional. Change in management practices transform material milieu and the work pattern within institutionalised social norms which requires engaging labouring bodies differently. This paper tries to explore what happens to the labouring bodies because of introduction of SRI and how bodily experiences of men and women shape SRI which has been neglected by mainstream impact assessment studies in agriculture technologies that discuss labour mainly from techno-economic perspective. Three villages, having diverse agro-ecology, social characteristics, and rice-growing practices were selected for the study. Tools like Focus Group Discussions by gender, Rapid Comparative Pain Assessment, storytelling, participatory observations, photography, filming, interviews, measuring weights of materials and hour of work with technographic approach were used to understand the issue. Bodies of men and women negotiated differently for new skills in nursery raising, handling lesser and younger seedlings lighter in weight, transplanting fewer seedlings at wider spacing, weeding using a weeder and change in work environment and hours of work. Though technological prescriptions were same, but experiences were different for men and women of different ages as households, societies and physical environments and extension architecture were diverse. Bodily experiences of men and women shaped SRI and or components of SRI having diverse ramifications. This study hopes to add to the literature on agriculture with an STS perspective and contribute to gender studies on technology that have had agriculture in developing countries underrepresented.