

Application of SRF by a farmer on her rice field (H.PG.T.N. Kualasinghe)

# Recycling rice husks in Sri Lanka as a biochar-based slow-release urea fertilizer (Sri

Lanka)

"anguru kata" pohora

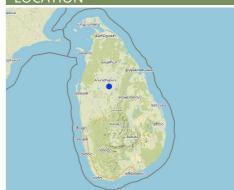
# DESCRIPTION

Rice husks, a waste product generated in rice mills, can release its carbon as a greenhouse gas (GHG) to the atmosphere through burning or decomposition. Converting it into biochar and intercalating (filled) with urea can produce a slowrelease nitrogen (N) fertiliser that improves N-use efficiency while minimizing GHG emissions

Rice husks are often considered as a waste, and its carbon is released to the atmosphere as Rice husks are often considered as a waste, and its carbon is released to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide (CO2) which is a greenhouse gas (GHG) through either decomposition or burning as a biofuel. However, rice husks can be converted into biochar – where its carbon is stable - with a large number of micro and sub-micron size pores in a honeycomb-like structure. Rice husk biochar was produced using an improved batch pyrolizer, "Kunthaniya", at a temperature of between 450°C and 650°C. Pore spaces in rice husk biochar can be intercalated (filled) with urea and then, slow-release fertilizer (SRF) pellets can be produced through the use of a suitable biodegradable binder. This SRF has found to be more efficient in improving the Nuse efficiency, being the process of the produced through the use of a suitable biodegradable binder. This SRF has found to be more efficient in improving the Nuse efficiency. improving the N-use efficiency, hence the urea requirement of paddy fields in Sri Lanka can be reduced by about 25%, further contributing to environment sustainability. It has been well documented that biochar can improve soil physical, chemical and biological properties in a documented that biochar can improve soil physical, chemical and biological properties in a sustainable manner. This process is a contribution to creative recycling of agricultural waste. The SRF technology was evaluated against current farmer practice in rice cultivated area in Mahakanumulla village, Anuradhapura district, Sri Lanka. The area belongs to the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka (mean annual rainfall <1750mm). Rice is cultivated during two seasons, yala (May-September) and maha (December – February): the yala season is generally drier. Farmers rely on irrigation water supplied from a small village tank. The SRF was transported to farmers' fields and applied at 2 weeks (@ 100 kg/ha), at 4 weeks (@ 170 kg/ha) and 7 weeks (@ 145 kg/ha) after direct seeding. Farmers indicated that the granule size was large and light, hence they had some concerns about even distribution of fertilizer. They perceive that plants receive N slowly compared to granular urea - suggesting the slow releasing nature of the new technology. They did not observe any yield difference. Obtaining rice husks in large quantities from rice mills to produce biochar can sometimes be difficult in some areas of the country due to competition for use in the poultry industry. Some farmers may be discouraged to implement this technology due to lack of knowledge: this can be overcome through extension officers operating at field level.

operating at field level.

This new technology qualifies as a sustainable land management practice in number of ways. First it increases N-use efficiency in paddy fields, second it reduces the urea requirement by 25% while sustaining productivity, third it recycles agricultural wastes in paddy fields, fourth, repeated application of SRF improves soil fertility through rice husk biochar, and finally it reduces GHG emissions.



**Location:** Mahakanumulla village, Thirappane, North Central Province, Sri Lanka

#### No. of Technology sites analysed: 2-10 sites

- Geo-reference of selected sites

  80.49616, 8.18388
  80.49579, 8.18284
  80.49861, 8.18453
  80.49601, 48300

- 80.49605, 8.18309

Spread of the Technology: applied at specific points/ concentrated on a small area

# In a permanently protected area?: Nee

# Date of implementation: 2021

# Type of introduction

- through land users' innovation as part of a traditional system (> 50 years)
- during experiments/ research
- through projects/ external interventions



Comparison of slow-release fertilizer (SRF) applied in rice fields with conventional fertilizer (H.PG.T.N. Kualasinghe)

# CLASSIFICATION OF THE TECHNOLOGY

# Main purpose

improve production
 reduce, prevent, restore land degradation

 conserve ecosystem
 protect a watershed/ downstream areas – in combination with
 other Technologies
 preserve/ improve biodiversity
 reduce risk of disasters
 adapt to climate change/ extremes and its impacts
 mitigate climate change and its impacts
 create beneficial economic impact
 create beneficial social impact

# Purpose related to land degradation

- prevent land degradation
- reduce land degradation restore/ rehabilitate severely degraded land
- adapt to land degradation not applicable
- \_\_\_\_\_

# SLM group

- integrated soil fertility management
- waste management/ waste water management

# **TECHNICAL DRAWING**

**Technical specifications** 



Application of SRF by a farmer in her rice field (H.PG.T.N. Kualasinghe)

# Land use

Land use mixed within the same land unit: Nee

# Cropland

 Annual cropping: cereals - rice (wetland). Cropping system: Continuous wetland rice

Number of growing seasons per year: 2 Is intercropping practiced? Nee Is crop rotation practiced? Nee

# Water supply

rainfedmixed rainfed-irrigatedfull irrigation

# Degradation addressed



**chemical soil deterioration** - Cn: fertility decline and reduced organic matter content (not caused by erosion), Cp: soil pollution

water degradation - Hp: decline of surface water quality, Hq: decline of groundwater quality

#### SLM measures



**agronomic measures** - A2: Organic matter/ soil fertility, A3: Soil surface treatment (A 3.3: Full tillage (< 30% soil cover)), A6: Residue management (A 6.4: retained) Production of SRF: Rice husks were pyrolyzed using a locally modified "Kunthaniya" (a batch pyrolyser) to produce rice husk biochar. The temperature of the pyrolyser was around 450°C to 600°C with a heating rate of less than 20°C per hour. Pore structures were saturated using a urea solution through capillary action. The urea-intercalated rice husk biochar is then mixed with a biodegradable organic substance and pelletized using a medium scale pelletizer and dried to increase its mechanical properties such as resistance to disintegration and shear forces.

Field Experiment : Five paddy farmers were randomly selected from the command area of a small tank in the Mahakanumulla Village Tank Cascade System in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka. The produced SRF was applied at a rate of 75% of recommended N in three split applications. Yields in SRF applied areas were compared against the current farmer practice. Experimental evidence showed that there is no yield reduction despite the reduction of nitrogen input into their fields.



Calculation of inputs and costs
Costs are calculated: per Technology area (size and area unit: 1ha)

# Most important factors affecting the costs

Labour availability and finding raw materials are the major factors that affect the cost.

- Currency used for cost calculation: **LKR**
- Exchange rate (to USD): 1 USD = 275.0 LKR
- Average wage cost of hired labour per day: 1500

### Establishment activities

1. Collection of paddy husk from rice milling stations (Timing/ frequency: 2 months before cultivation)

ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE: ACTIVITIES, INPUTS AND COSTS

- 2. Pyrolyzing of paddy husk using a pyrolizer or a kunthani (Timing/ frequency: 6 weeks before cultivation)
- 3. Mixing with urea, ERP and other ingredients and pelletizing (Timing/ frequency: 4 weeks before cultivation)
- 4. Drying the pellets (SRF) (Timing/ frequency: 2 weeks before cultivation)
- 5. Packing and transporting SRF to the rice fields (Timing/ frequency: 1 week before cultivation)

# Establishment inputs and costs (per 1ha)

Specify input	Unit	Quantity	Costs per Unit (LKR)	Total costs per input (LKR)	% of costs borne by land users
Labour					
Manufacturing SRF	Labour days	2.5	1500.0	3750.0	
Fertilizers and biocides					
Urea	kg	200.0	270.0	54000.0	
Construction material					
Binding materials 1	kg	10.0	25.0	250.0	
Binding materials 2	kg	10.0	250.0	2500.0	
Rice husk biochar	kg	200.0	50.0	10000.0	
Total costs for establishment of the Technology				70'500.0	
Total costs for establishment of the Technology in USD				256.36	

# Maintenance activities

1. Application of first dose of SRF (Timing/ frequency: 2 weeks after direct seeding of rice)

2. Application of second dose of SRF (Timing/ frequency: 4 weeks after direct seeding of rice)

3. Application of third dose of SRF (Timing/ frequency: 7 weeks after direct seeding of rice)

# Maintenance inputs and costs (per 1ha)

Specify input	Unit	Quantity	Costs per Unit (LKR)	Total costs per input (LKR)	% of costs borne by land users
Labour					
Labour for SRF application	Labour days	3.0	1500.0	4500.0	100.0
Total costs for maintenance of the Technology					
Total costs for maintenance of the Technology in USD					

# NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

# Average annual rainfall

< 250 mm</li>
 251-500 mm
 501-750 mm
 751-1,000 mm
 1,001-1,500 mm
 2,001-2,000 mm
 2,001-3,000 mm
 3,001-4,000 mm
 > 4,000 mm

Agro-climatic zone humid sub-humid ✓ semi-arid arid

### Specifications on climate

Average annual rainfall in mm: 1400.0

The Mahakanumulla area receives monsoon rainfall during two distinct seasons, namely yala (May – September) and maha (December – February), hence a bimodal rainfall pattern can be observed. The highest amount of rainfall is received during the maha season, in which most of the rainfall comes from the North-eastern monsoonal rains. Lesser rainfall is received from the South-west monsoonal rains, during the yala season. Hence prolonged dry

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periods are observed during the yala season. Other than that, this area receives rainfall from two inter-monsoonal rains (March-April and October-November).

Name of the meteorological station: Mahailuppallama, Anuradhapura

Recorded minimum and maximum temperatures in the area are 20.8°C and 29.5°C respectively

Slope flat (0-2%) gentle (3-5%) moderate (6-10%) rolling (11-15%) hilly (16-30%) steep (31-60%) very steep (>60%)	Landforms <ul> <li>plateau/plains</li> <li>ridges</li> <li>mountain slopes</li> <li>hill slopes</li> <li>footslopes</li> <li>valley floors</li> </ul>	Altitude 0-100 m a.s.l. ✓ 101-500 m a.s.l. 501-1,000 m a.s.l. 1,001-1,500 m a.s.l. 1,501-2,000 m a.s.l. 2,001-2,500 m a.s.l. 2,501-3,000 m a.s.l. 3,001-4,000 m a.s.l. > 4,000 m a.s.l.	Technology is applied in convex situations concave situations ✓ not relevant
Soil depth very shallow (0-20 cm) shallow (21-50 cm) ✓ moderately deep (51-80 cm) deep (81-120 cm) very deep (> 120 cm)	Soil texture (topsoil) <ul> <li>coarse/ light (sandy)</li> <li>medium (loamy, silty)</li> <li>fine/ heavy (clay)</li> </ul>	Soil texture (> 20 cm below surface) coarse/ light (sandy) ✓ medium (loamy, silty) fine/ heavy (clay)	Topsoil organic matter content high (>3%) ✓ medium (1-3%) low (<1%)
Groundwater table on surface ✓ < 5 m 5-50 m > 50 m	Availability of surface water excess good medium poor/ none	<ul> <li>Water quality (untreated)</li> <li>good drinking water</li> <li>poor drinking water</li> <li>(treatment required)</li> <li>✓ for agricultural use only (irrigation)</li> <li>unusable</li> <li>Water quality refers to: both ground and surface water</li> </ul>	Is salinity a problem? Ja ✓ Nee Occurrence of flooding Ja ✓ Nee
Species diversity	Habitat diversity		
high medium low	high medium Iow		
CHARACTERISTICS OF L/	AND USERS APPLYING THE	TECHNOLOGY	
Market orientation subsistence (self-supply) mixed (subsistence/ commercial) commercial/ market	Off-farm income less than 10% of all income ✓ 10-50% of all income > 50% of all income	Relative level of wealth very poor poor average rich very rich	<ul> <li>Level of mechanization</li> <li>manual work         <ul> <li>animal traction</li> <li>mechanized/ motorized</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Sedentary or nomadic ✓ Sedentary Semi-nomadic Nomadic	Individuals or groups individual/ household groups/ community cooperative employee (company, government)	Gender ✓ women ✓ men	Age children youth ✓ middle-aged elderly
Area used per household < 0.5 ha ✓ 0.5-1 ha 1-2 ha ✓ 2-5 ha 5-15 ha 15-50 ha 50-100 ha 100-500 ha 500-1,000 ha 1,000-10,000 ha > 10,000 ha	Scale small-scale medium-scale large-scale	Land ownership state company communal/ village group individual, not titled individual, titled	Land use rights open access (unorganized) communal (organized) leased ✓ individual Water use rights open access (unorganized) ✓ communal (organized) leased individual
Access to services and infrastrue	cture	Comments	
health education technical assistance employment (e.g. off-farm) markets energy	poor 2 good poor 2 good poor 2 good poor 2 good poor 2 good poor 2 good poor 2 good	The villagers of Mahaknumulla ha like infrastructure and energy/ele villagers/landusers complain abo agricultural practices, finding ma	out technical assistant/support for

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poor			~	good
poor	1			good
poor		1		good

shops to buy day-to-day needs, but they have to go to the town, which is 8-10km away, for other services such as health and financial services.

# IMPACTS

# Socio-economic impacts Crop production

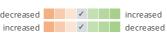
decreased		1		increased

crop quality
risk of production failure
product diversity
production area (new land under
cultivation/ use)
land management
drinking water availability
drinking water quality
water availability for livestock
water quality for livestock
irrigation water availability
irrigation water quality
demand for irrigation water
expenses on agricultural inputs

decreased	1	increased
increased	1	decreased
decreased	1	increased
decreased	1	increased
hindered	1	simplified
decreased	1	increased
increased	1	decreased

increased 🖌 🖌 decreased





sed

reduced improved

farm income

workload	increased	1	decrease
economic disparities	increased	J	decrease
diversity of income sources	decreased	✓ <b>✓</b>	increase

food security/ self-sufficiency

health situation
land use/ water rights
cultural opportunities (eg spiritual,
aesthetic, others)
recreational opportunities
community institutions
national institutions
SLM/ land degradation knowledge

conflict mitigation situation of socially and economically disadvantaged groups (gender, age, status, ehtnicity etc.)

# **Ecological impacts** water quantity water quality

harvesting/ collection of water (runoff, dew, snow, etc) Wocat SLM Technologies





N accumulation in water bodies is reducing due to lower N losses of SRF

Quantity before SLM: 6.5 t/ha (two seasons) Quantity after SLM: 6.9 t/ha (two seasons) Although farmers could not observe a yield increase, experimental evidence suggests upto10% yield increase compared to farmer fertilizer management. A decrease in yield however not observed by farmers despite 25% reduction in N input. The above figures are for average of five farmers over two seasons.

Quantity before SLM: LKR 60,750.00/ha for urea Quantity after SLM: LKR 70,500/ha for SRF LKR 270/kg urea and LKR 167/kg of SRF. Expenses were calculated assuming all other costs are constants under two situations

Quantity before SLM: LKR 520,000/ha Quantity after SLM: LKR 552,000/ha LKR 80/kg of paddy. Average yields mentioned above was used to calculate the farm income. Therefore, farm income is expected to be increased more than the expenses in SRF applied fields.

Although a longer time is required for SRF application because of higher bulk volume (175kg more), this application cost is negligible

Expected improvements in productivity due to SRF application could strengthen the food security

Farmers gain awareness through extension programmes when implementing the SRF technology

surface runoff excess water drainage groundwater table/ aquifer evaporation soil moisture

increased	1	decreased
reduced	1	improved
lowered	1	recharge
increased	1	decreased

decreased / increased

reduced / improved

SOIL	cover

soil loss
soil accumulation
soil crusting/ sealing
soil compaction
nutrient cycling/ recharge

increased		1		decreased
decreased		1		increased
increased		1		reduced
increased		1		reduced
decreased			1	increased

increased		/		decreased

decreased increased

increased 🖌 🖌 reduced

decreased / increased

decreased / increased

soil organic matter/ below ground C

acidity

salinity

vegetation cover

biomass/ above ground C

plant diversity
invasive alien species
animal diversity
beneficial species (predators,
earthworms, pollinators)
habitat diversity
pest/ disease control
flood impacts
landslides/ debris flows
drought impacts
impacts of cyclones, rain storms
emission of carbon and greenhouse
gases
fire risk
wind velocity
micro-climate

decreased	1	increased
increased	1	reduced
decreased	1	increased
increased	1	decreased

worsened improved

It is expected to have a better moisture content as a result of accumulation of biochar with repeated application of SRF

Experimental evidence suggests that soil cover is more with rice plants that grow better and tiller more due to better N utilization for crop growth

Quantity before SLM: N uptake: 167 kg of N/ha Quantity after SLM: N uptake: 219 kg of N/ha Higher uptake of N by rice plants due to SRF application, nutrient recycling is expected to be improved. The above values were obtained from 5 farmer fields in the year 2021.

Quantity before SLM: Electrical Conductivity : 0.11 dS/m Quantity after SLM: Electrical Conductivity : 0.09 dS/m The above values were obtained from 5 farmer fields in the year 2021.

SRF contains biochar which is a good source to improve the soil C.

Quantity before SLM: pH : 7.42 Quantity after SLM: pH : 7.38 The above values were obtained from 5 farmer fields in the year 2021.

Efficient uptake of N cause to improve the crop growth, thereby vegetation cover

Quantity before SLM: 5.2 t/ha (straw) + 8.1 (grain) Quantity after SLM: 6.0 t/ha (straw) + 8.7 t/ha (grain) Higher crop growth results higher biomass production. The above values were obtained from 5 farmer fields in the year 2021.

Because of the better growth of the rice plants micro climate in the paddy fields is expected to be improved.

# Off-site impacts

water availability (groundwater, springs) reliable and stable stream flows in dry season (incl. low flows) downstream flooding (undesired) downstream siltation groundwater/ river pollution

buffering/ filtering capacity (by soil, vegetation, wetlands) wind transported sediments

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decreased increased increased reduced reduced reduced increased reduced increased reduced increased reduced increased increase

N accumulation in water bodies is expected to be reduced due to lower N losses from  $\ensuremath{\mathsf{SRF}}$ 

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damage on neighbours' fields	increased reduced
damage on public/ private	increased reduced
infrastructure	
impact of greenhouse gases	increased reduced
COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS	
Benefits compared with establish	
Short-term returns	very negative
Long-term returns	very negative
Benefits compared with maintena	ince costs
Short-term returns	very negative very positive
Long-term returns	very negative very positive
CLIMATE CHANGE	
Gradual climate change	
annual temperature increase	not well at all very well Answer: not known
annual rainfall decrease	not well at all very well Answer: not known
ADOPTION AND ADAPTAT	ION
Percentage of land users in the ar	ea who have adopted the Of all those who have adopted the Technology, how many have
Technology	done so without receiving material incentives?
single cases/ experimental	0-10%
1-10%	11-50%
11-50%	51-90%
> 50%	91-100%
Number of households and/ or an 5 farmers/households	rea covered
Has the Technology been modifie	d recently to adapt to changing
Has the Technology been modified	

conditions?

Nee

# To which changing conditions?

- climatic change/ extremes
- changing markets
- labour availability (e.g. due to migration)

# CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

# Strengths: land user's view

- This technology uses less chemical fertilizer and therefore it is good for their health and environment
- This technology gives better crop growth and slightly higher yield
- Biochar could improve the fertility of the soil

# Strengths: compiler's or other key resource person's view

- SRF reduces the N losses from the soil and allows the rice crop to uptake N effectively from soil at required growth stages. Efficient N uptake promotes the crop growth and increase the productivity.
- Reduced N losses of SRF directly influence the water quality by reducing the losses of N through surface runoff and leaching and avoid accumulation in water bodies at the lower positions of the landscape.
- Rice husks, which is are good source of C, are utilized for SRF production; hence it promotes C sequestration as it is added back to the soil as biochar. It improves the soil organic carbon pool and promotes carbon sequestration in soil.
- Utilizing rice husks by returning back to the rice fields is an effective solution for rice waste management.
- If the SRF production technology can be transferred to farmers, their societies can produce the SRF by themselves from the wastes generated in small scale rice mills.

# Weaknesses/ disadvantages/ risks: land user's viewhow to overcome

- Additional cost despite reduced chemical fertilizer increased crop yields can partially compensate this. They can produce their own SRF if the production technology is transferred to them
- Uneven distribution of nitrogen in the field Changing the water management practices that have been currently adopted by farmers

# Weaknesses/ disadvantages/ risks: compiler's or other key resource person's viewhow to overcome

• The raw materials need to be formulated accurately to get the benefits of the technology. Hence, technical knowledge and experience is required when preparing SRF. Proper guidance and technical support from the beginning to the end of the process is essential. This can be achieved through educating and training extension officers to teach and disseminate knowledge for farmers.

# REFERENCES

**Compiler** Head Soil Science Editors

**Reviewer** William Critchley Rima Mekdaschi Studer

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### **Resource persons**

Lakmini Dissanayaka - SLM specialist Renuka Senarathna - land user Lekam Ralalage Nandasena - land user Vimalawathi Kirihamige - land user Saman Dharmakeerthi - co-compiler Tharindu Kulasinghe - co-compiler

# Full description in the WOCAT database

https://qcat.wocat.net/af/wocat/technologies/view/technologies\_6184/

Linked SLM data

n.a.

# Documentation was faciliated by

Institution

- Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka (AGRI.PDN) Sri Lanka
- Project
- n.a.

# Key references

- Preparation of Biochar as a Soil Amendment from Rice Husk and Corn Cob by Slow Pyrolysis Process, S.T. Munasinghe, R.S. Dharmakeerthi, P. Weerasinghe and L.G.S. Madusanka, ISSN 0041-3224: Tropical Agriculturist Journal
- Changes in Structural and Chemical Properties of Rice Husk Biochar Co-pyrolysed with Eppawala Rock Phosphate under Different Temperatures, D.K.R.P.L. Dissanayake, R.S. Dharmakeerthi, A.K. Karunarathna and W.S. Dandeniya, ISSN: 2706-0233: Tropical Agricultural Research Journal
- Biochar Based Slow-Release Urea Fertilizer: Production and Assessing the Effects on Growth of Lowland Rice and Nitrogen Dynamics in an Alfisol, M.K.N.W. Jayarathna, R.S. Dharmakeerthi and W.M.U.K. Rathnayaka, ISSN: 2706-0233: Tropical Agricultural Research Journal

# Links to relevant information which is available online

- Changes in Structural and Chemical Properties of Rice Husk Biochar Co-pyrolysed with Eppawala Rock Phosphate under Different Temperatures: http://192.248.43.153/bitstream/1/3160/2/PGIATAR\_30\_1\_19.pdf
- Biochar Based Slow-Release Urea Fertilizer: Production and Assessing the Effects on Growth of Lowland Rice and Nitrogen Dynamics in an Alfisol: https://tar.sljol.info/articles/abstract/10.4038/tar.v32i2.8464/

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