

# Towards Learning Alliances in Agroecology



Edited by: C Shambu Prasad and Deborah Dutta

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# Foreword

The latest Sustainable Development Goals tracker indicates that the world is seriously off track in meeting all the goals by 2030 and the environmental goals of climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation and water availability are quite far away from targets. In a massively interconnected and interdependent world operating within narrow frames of financial profit and productivity, the effects of droughts, war or floods in one part of the planet result in cascading effects somewhere else. Food systems offer a striking manifestation of an interconnected and interdependent world with the industrial agricultural model driven record yields of a few crops resulting in a large ecological footprint<sup>1,2</sup>. The imperative to rethink food systems in ways that respect the ecological interconnections and contribute to just, equitable livelihoods have never been greater. Complex problems require solutions that address problems systemically and require multiple stakeholders, not just the farmers, learning (and unlearning) together. The systemic entrenchment of current ideas, institutions and policies means a sudden transformation is neither feasible, nor advised. Transitions towards sustainability need to be fostered, facilitated and catalysed through collective experimentation in learning alliances. The Small Farm Incomes team at the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) has attempted to create such learning alliances under two broad themes of Managing Sustainable Transitions (MST) and reimagining producer organisations in India.

A planned and phased transition to sustainable food systems is needed that would simultaneously entail changing farming practices aligned with agroecological principles, reducing dependence on synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, directing markets to support organic produce and shorter-supply chains, orient consumer preferences and so on. Dodging the allure of some technological silver bullet, it is pertinent to build action-oriented platforms conducive to collaboration across stakeholders from grassroots groups, civil society organisations (CSOs), government, and scientific establishments. Through partnering with development professionals, champion farmers, and grassroots organisations, the project has explicitly articulated that there are different kinds of expertise beyond the conventional scientific that are required to be recognized, documented and dialogued with. A visible outcome of our efforts has manifested in 24 blogs, including six in Hindi, by 22 authors, discussing various aspects of sustainable transitions in food systems ranging from field experiences to policy-oriented commentaries. The authors, many writing for the first time, are from diverse backgrounds and age groups, ranging from university students, and CSO field staff to veterans working on agrarian issues. The perspectives shared by them offer interesting insights into ongoing efforts to scale agroecological practices through changes in educational systems, markets, natural resource management, governance and technology. Thematically, the articles delve into the theoretical framing of learning alliances for sustainable food systems, characterization of

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<sup>1</sup>Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Drumm, E. (2023). Implementing the SDG Stimulus. *Sustainable Development Report 2023*. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Conservation International. (2022). <https://www.conservation.org/roadmap> . Unsurprisingly, 80% of 2030 mitigation opportunity pertaining to climate change is tightly linked to food systems.

agroecological knowledge and practices, possibilities of innovative institutional arrangements to include alternate knowledge systems, youth engagement and grassroots initiatives.

To further the initiative of enabling knowledge dialogues among stakeholders and making sense of the diversity of field experiences that are often confusing with multiple terminologies and contestations, the international conference on managing sustainable transitions at IRMA in collaboration with the Network of Rural Agrarian Studies (NRAS) and IIT Delhi is an invitation to meet, deliberate, and envision critical possibilities for transition pathways in an equitable manner.

The current set of blogs is the third of a series following “Shifting Grounds” in 2022 and “Fields of Change” in 2021. Despite the challenges in physical interactions posed during the pandemic and its aftermath, we persisted in documenting field visits, thus creating a momentum that was picked up by the Verghese Kurien interns sharing their stories. The emphasis continued with the authors of the Farming Futures volume of case studies presenting their work in 2021 as part of the Kurien Centenary celebrations. The Centenary in November 2021 was an opportunity for partners from the National Coalition for Natural Farming (NCNF) to convene and learn from each other. The SFI team had engaged multiple stakeholders on opportunities to scale agroecology in Gujarat, discuss need for innovations in natural farming pedagogy and followed up through action research on the state of agroecology in Gujarat with many civil society organization (CSO) partners. Participation in events like the Wicked Sprint, or Food Systems Dialogue organized by Socrates and the Kisan Swaraj Mela led to collaborations through training on systems thinking and facilitating knowledge creation through writeshops with the Rajasthan Natural Farming Coalition (RNFC). The diversity of partners meant going vernacular with blogs in Hindi and Gujarati too. Of the 92 blogs that feature in <https://www.smallfarmincomes.in/blog> it is noteworthy that these have been authored by 76 guest authors and only 13 of them have been from IRMA. We have enjoyed the facilitation of many first-time blog writers, providing patient editorial support in enabling the conversion of their ideas and insights into articles that could be shared widely. There are many ways of working towards a learning alliance and this compendium is one such contribution where solutions are found through distributed actors and organisations spread across the country with a broad alignment towards agroecology and making producer organisations work.

We extend our gratitude to Prof Umakant Dash, our Director, and our dedicated colleagues at IRMA for fostering a conducive environment. Furthermore, we express our appreciation to the Ford Foundation for their support in championing unconventional ideas through the "Living Farm Incomes" project.

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*Building alliances to enable  
sustainable transitions*

# Building the Natural Farming Learning Alliance in Rajasthan

C Shambu Prasad, Abhishek Saxena and Shubha Khadke

*Rajasthan has a rich history of collaboration where the state has been proactive in working and with piloting and scaling innovations from civil society in education, health and natural resource management. The annual meeting of the 32 partners of the Rajasthan Natural Farming Coalition at Ajmer provided a strong base for co-creating a learning alliance that builds on contextual appreciation of the diverse ecologies of the region even as it was open to learn from other states.*

## Building organic networks



Government statistics indicate that Rajasthan is among the top five states in terms of organic farming area and in utilizing the organic clusters of the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana. In a state with several civil society organisations (CSOs), how can their innovations become integral to the movement towards

upscaling natural farming in Rajasthan? The second meeting of the network of partners of the Rajasthan Natural Farming Coalition (RNFC) at the beautiful campus of [Disha-RCDSSS](#) in Ajmer provided interesting insights on coalition building and participatory decision making.

As newer organizational forms, networks are characterized by free flow of ideas, an egalitarian work culture, collaboration across organisations and have greater chances of innovation and better outcome for the collaborators. The [Living Farm Incomes](#) team had an opportunity to be part of the emerging learning alliance through sharing our blogs on innovations from the field and insights from our ongoing work on [Farmer Producer Organisations](#).

RNFC is the state chapter of the National Coalition for Natural Farming (NCNF) and a coalition of 32 CSOs across 28 districts of Rajasthan, 22 of whom attended

with six new partners keen to join. This two-year-old network has a stronger presence in the predominantly tribal regions of Southern Rajasthan. 75% of the arid and semi-arid regions that dominate the landscape are low in soil organic carbon. While the Government of Rajasthan announced a state Organic Farming Policy in 2017, the momentum towards agroecological farming is more recent with the Jaivik Kheti Mission announced in 2022 with a budgetary allocation of Rs 600 crore for 3 years. The coalition supported CEEW in its [policy study on sustainable agriculture](#) and constituted five working groups in its first meeting in February 2022. These groups covered capacity building, research and advocacy, conflict resolution, resource mobilisation and communications.

The Coalition also seeks to identify and learn from the experiences of champion farmers and engage in research-based policy advocacy with the government at the state level. RNFC also engages with other stakeholders like academic institutions, publicly funded agricultural universities, research institutes and extension set ups like ATMA (Agricultural Technology Management Agency) and KVK (Krishi Vigyan Kendra), social enterprises and policy think tanks. The complexity and diversity of actors and the open architecture of the coalition presents both challenges and opportunities for a learning alliance on natural farming.



## Deliberative democracy in action



The Ajmer meeting began with brief introductions of the work on natural farming by the partners and reports of the various working groups over the last year. The open and deliberative nature of the conversations was a welcome departure from many multi-stakeholder meetings that are convened where several speakers share their expertise with little

dialogue or discussions. In contrast, the Ajmer meeting was not only well planned and facilitated but carried out in an atmosphere of mutual respect and learning where members were encouraged to disagree if they had reservations on the reports of the various working groups. The five-day session on Bio-input Resource Centres (BRCs) at Kota and the formal process for onboarding newer members were some of the salient features of the meeting. Another significant outcome, likely to become a unique feature of the coalition is the ongoing engagement with the Panchayati Raj department to closely work with panchayats on integrating natural farming-related activities in the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). Thirty-six pilots have been initiated with the 16 organisations in 14 districts of the state.

The Ajmer meeting had online participation and interaction with Rajenderji of the Rajasthan Organic Farming Mission, apart from receiving insights from Vijay Kumar T of APCNF and Archana from MAKAAAM. Archana spoke about the role of women farmers and encouraging partners to raise questions on the five Ps of Pehchaan (Identity), Parishram (effort), Pahunch (or access),



Pratibhagita (Participation) and Prapti (Attainment) in their work. The sessions on organic farming networks by Kapil Shah of Jatan Trust, state of FPOs in India by our team at IRMA and alternative approaches to organic farming markets by Ananthoo of [ReStore](#) were well received and created a demand from the group for detailed engagements to help partners work on faster learning in case they were to expand their work in these directions.

## **The Young networked non-profit**

A key attribute of networks is the complexities of governing and decision making at the Coalition level due to multiple members being part of the network or Coalition as well as the multiple stakeholders that the Coalition, as an entity interacts with. RNFC, since its inception, has evolved as an egalitarian set up where there is no “central” or “core” organisation. All the CBOs regardless of the size, area of operations, fund endowment and HR capacity are treated as equal partners. Within the Coalition, although there are some positions that are identified with a particular person for practical and operational purposes, there are no fixed verticals. Leading the coordination of the coalition as a [networked](#)

**non-profit** is Avisha Jain, the young and energetic coordinator of RNCF based at Udaipur and ably supported by Rohit Parakh stationed at the agricultural department cell in Jaipur and the Steering Group Member, Kavitha Kuruganti. There are “working groups” that are relatively flexible in nature and have representations from member CBOs. A member may be in more than one working group and attempts are made to include people with specific interests and specialisations while forming the working group. Some external members, from the broader ecosystem, can also be coopted to the working group for their knowledge, skills or experiences in a particular area.



If natural farming has to represent an alternative paradigm in agriculture, it is critical to have appropriate organizational forms that enable participation, embed diversity and navigate complexity. As RNCF builds its own internal capacities and expands each year with newer partners, it also needs to pro-actively prepare itself for engagement with the state and the agricultural university. A learning alliance where their input and participation are solicited, and small pilots are initiated seems to be the way forward in the coming months. Rooting natural farming in GPDP and involving the agriculture department can help in scaling up, with the initiative bolstered by the search for a few innovation champions within the government and agricultural universities.

*Scan to read the Hindi version of [this blog](#)*



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# Unearthing Authentic Narratives: Participatory Approaches for Effective Communication

**Aneesh Mohan, Shubha Khadke and Avisha Jain**

*A write-shop held by the Small Farm Incomes Team at Urmul Seemant Samiti, Bikaner, in collaboration with Rajasthan Natural Farming Coalition captured sustainable agriculture experiences from the field. The write-shop enabled grassroot workers to refine their insights that could feed into development and documentation processes.*

Communication of the impact and change through development interventions is increasingly important as multiple stakeholders need to appreciate and acknowledge what it takes to bring about rural transformation. While annual reports and project related documentations provides information, it is often the stories from the grassroots that need to be captured and shared more widely. During the [Rajasthan Natural Farming Coalition's \(RNFC\) General Body Meeting](#) held in March 2023, this need to harness the power of field coordinators in bringing about change was recognised. In the spirit of collaboration, the SFI team was requested to facilitate capturing their intimate understanding of ground realities and processes of rural transformation.



Field coordinators usually spend several days and months interacting with local communities, understanding their challenges, and witnessing their progress, and carry the many stories of sustainable agricultural transitions. Their first-hand accounts are troves of authentic experiences that outsiders are only able to glimpse at during the occasional field visit. There is thus an unmet need for innovative processes that could effectively document these for communication to a wider audience.

## **The Write-Shop Concept and Design**

Recognizing the potential, the idea of a "write-shop" was conceptualised by the SFI Team and RNFC. The write-shop served as a platform for these coordinators to enhance their communication skills and learn the art of story writing. Various communication technologies were discussed, including the possibility of video workshops, however, a write-shop was deemed the ideal starting point, fostering collaboration, critical thinking, and active participation.

The write-shop was designed to encourage active engagement. The schedule was intentionally malleable, adaptable to the participants' current understanding and capacity. It struck a balance between group activities and individual work. All sessions were kept participatory to draw out their reflections and structure them into narratives.



Before the write-shop commenced, a virtual session was organized on 10th June 2023. This session aimed to orient participants to the workshop's concept, introduce them to fellow participants, and acquaint them with the facilitators.

The participants were asked to prepare a first draft that they would later on develop further during the write-shop. To help them with this process, various themes with basic questions that could add structure to their write-up were provided to them. The orientation call set the tone for the write-shop.

The two-day write-shop unfolded on 14th June 2023 against the backdrop of warm hospitality provided by the host partner organisation, [Urmul Seemant Samiti](#). A total of 20 participants (15 men and 5 women), from 8 organizations ([Disha-RCDSS](#), [FES](#), [GRAVIS](#), [Bajaj Foundation](#), [PRADAN](#), [Seva Mandir](#), [Unnati](#), and [Urmul Seemant Samiti](#)), 2 interns, and 2 fellows from [Desert Resource Centre \(DRC\)](#) participated in the event

## **Learning and Refinement: A Journey Through Iteration**

Following an introductory session, participants were divided into four groups, each group was handed a distinct story to analyse. Ideas flowed freely, with participants delving into what resonated with them, what elements were missing, and how the structure could be enhanced. The chosen stories were intentionally diverse - some lengthy, some succinct in their titles, others laden with data, and some teeming with emotion. At the same time, there were common threads that gave structure to each story. This activity elicited a broad set of guidelines like flow between sub-topics, adding relevant titles, emotional connect with the reader, and more, that can be used to write effectively.

Day 2 of the workshop started with a recap of the lessons learned on the previous day. The significance of including these elements was reiterated. This was followed by a 'peer review' of the participants' stories. The feedback FROM participants TO participants served as a tool to develop critical observation, as well as grow their own understanding of what makes a good story.



This iterative process allowed collaborative improvement, where each layer of refinement brought the stories closer to their full potential. Participants experienced firsthand the evolution of their stories, and tangible feedback of their growth as storytellers.

## Paving the Path Forward: Stories in Bloom

As the workshop drew to a close, participants engaged in a reflective session. They shared their takeaways, thoughts, and feedback on the transformative two days. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with participants expressing newfound enthusiasm for writing and a deeper understanding of the nuances involved in crafting impactful narratives.

One participant shared, "From this workshop, I learned many things like how to structure the story and the difference between writing a report and a story. My favourite part was the peer-to-peer discussion and gaining feedback." Another noted, "Really liked the session of first reading different stories then writing our own. This gives more perspective to work."



The workshop was a stepping stone toward a larger objective – to uncover stories from those who intimately understand the field. The stories penned by these field coordinators will find their way onto platforms like on our website,

[www.smallfarmincomes.com/blog](http://www.smallfarmincomes.com/blog) and beyond. By nurturing their ability to tell compelling stories, the coordinators are bridging the gap between grassroots realities and the broader narrative of development. Reading their perspectives can help other development professionals, activists and academics understand the essence of their work and the communities they serve.

*A detailed report on the workshop is available [here](#).*

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# Re-envisioning agricultural education needs more than a new syllabus

Deborah Dutta and Shambu Prasad

*The recent move to introduce Natural Farming at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in agricultural education is a right step in enabling youngsters to learn and practice sustainable agriculture. However, effective integration and implementation of the proposed syllabus will need greater engagement with the rich history of agroecological initiatives and pedagogy that lie beyond formal educational institutions.*

In 2003, following a seminal decision by the supreme court, environmental education was made a compulsory subject at all levels of formal education. Since the ruling, a UNESCO study estimates that over 300 million Indian students in 1.3 million schools have been exposed to environmental education. Educators though have pointed out that mere exposure to information isn't enough to spur students to desired actions and initiatives. Higher awareness of environmental issues has not been matched with capacities to explore systemic interconnections and concerted efforts to participate in environmental governance, research and activism remain low. Mere changes in textbooks without processes to support teacher training or experiential learning means students are often left to navigate various concepts and activities on their own especially as they go into higher education. Curriculum in agricultural universities in India have rarely been in sync with rapid changes in the external environment, including the increasing ecological footprint of agriculture. How can these insights provide essential lessons for the proposed changes in agricultural universities?

## **The push for natural farming syllabus in Agri-universities**

Following the vocal call by the Centre to promote Natural Farming and the circular released in December 2021 to include zero-budget natural farming in the syllabus at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, concerted efforts were made by the education division of the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) to develop a curriculum. Within the next few months, a committee was set up to design a syllabus, and [a draft](#) was released recently. Comprehensive and exhaustive in terms of the content, the draft syllabus consists of 49 courses totalling 137 credits, spanning wide-ranging topics from ancient history and philosophy of farming to modern-day economics and practices. While these

earnest efforts to introduce Natural Farming present an exciting opportunity to scale sustainable agricultural practices, the history and institutional architecture of the agricultural universities can not be ignored.



*A training and demonstration session for preparing bio-inputs in AP (Photo credit: T Vijay Kumar)*

For decades, formal agricultural education institutions have been entrenched in the logic of yield maximisation. Indian agricultural educational institutions were modelled after the US-land grant colleges and imported much of the curricula prevalent in the 1960s, which was largely based on the knowledge of Green Revolution practices. The institutional arrangements emphasised technology transfer based on techniques developed by agricultural research institutions, aid agencies, and public organisations to incorporate them within farming communities. Uncritical adoption of these ideas displaced and invalidated much of the traditional knowledge systems leading to a gap between field experiences, complexities and institutional priorities. As a result, conventionally, the students of these institutions often have very little exposure to alternative paradigms even as various forms of agroecology-based practices have been advocated for a long time across various geographies by individual practitioners like, - Sripad Dabholkar's 'Prayog Pariwar' (Maharashtra), Natural farming methods practised by Bhaskar Save (Gujarat), Narayan Reddy (Karnataka) and G. Nammalvar (Tamil Nadu), Bharat Bhushan Tyagi (Uttar Pradesh), and Sabarmatee (Odisha) amongst others. A study by the Living Farm Incomes team as part of the Verghese Kurien internships examined 27 state university agricultural curricula of the four-year Bachelor of Agriculture revealed that there are low or no credits on organic farming in most schools, and the exposure at best is theoretical with no practical engagement or experiential learning. So, introducing an exclusive course on Natural Farming raises a few critical concerns that merit further thought – How

should the existing courses be viewed in relation to the new syllabus? How can existing field experts and organisations **operating outside the formal education paradigm** be included in the pedagogical design of the courses? What forms of support and training are being provided to teachers and scientists at the Agricultural Universities to teach the proposed courses, with mounting expectations to change the narrative after years of focus on industrial agriculture practices? What kinds of employment opportunities are being envisioned for youth graduating with a degree in Natural farming, given that employers predominantly come from large agri-companies in the current set-up?



*A KVK at Dang, Gujarat making various bioinputs for demonstration*

The proposed shift towards encouraging and researching Natural Farming practices also needs to engage with the sprawling institutional arrangements of agricultural education in India to better leverage existing resources. The agricultural education system in India comprises 75 Agricultural Universities (AUs) that integrate teaching, research, and extension. Additionally, 106 institutes within the ICAR, 721 Krishi Vigyan Kendras (Agriculture Science Centres), and 69 All India Coordinated Research Projects (AICRP) make India's National Agricultural Research and Education System (NARES) the largest in the world. Exploring the possible roles that could be played by KVKs, for instance, could lead to innovative exposure modules for the students while invigorating these institutions with youthful participation.

## Beyond knowledge – meaningful skilling for sustainability transitions

In anticipation of the curricula revision, the Living Farm Incomes team organised a panel discussion in 2022 with different practitioners to share their views regarding synchronising the current university curriculum and pedagogies to an interconnected and holistic domain of agroecology. They concurred that the process is a big challenge for the universities owing to the historical pressures of input-oriented agricultural knowledge. Overhauling the content needs to integrate meaningfully with field experience and exposure provided to the students. Suggestions included collaborations with existing farmers and CSOs engaged in agroecology, along with developing methodological rigour to map the effects of such practices. For instance, certificate courses with hands-on learning have been designed by Welthungerhilfe (WHH) in collaboration with Kerala and Kolkata universities. Thanal agroecology centre in Wayanad, Amrita Bhoomi Peasant Agroecology Centre, and the recently established Indo German Global Academy for Agroecology, Research and Learning (IGGAARL) in Pulivendula, Andhra Pradesh amongst others offer valuable avenues for collaboration. Dismantling older modes of knowledge will also require breaking the rigidities of learning methods and sources to incorporate innovative ideas and practices from the grassroots.



*An LFI intern from Lokbharti University interviewing and learning from a farmer*

Against the backdrop of a growing number of unemployed youth, and migration from rural areas, agroecology and a transition to sustainable agriculture provides

interesting opportunities for reskilling in agriculture. However, enabling this requires investments that recognise the historical baggage of institutional inertia and hierarchies in agriculture and deliberately open the space for the co-creation of relevant knowledge and practices. The fundamental need for dignified livelihoods can be made available through institutions like farmer-producer organisations that can and should be able to actively hire agricultural graduates. Based on principles of collectivisation, FPOs can help its members to overcome some of their disadvantages through access to a larger pool of finances and better market access because of supply aggregation. On the other hand, such enterprises in India have lacked commitment towards sustainable agriculture. Young people skilled in sustainable agricultural practices can play a significant role in rethinking the business model of these enterprises. This offers an opportunity for engaging rural youth in more sustainable, green employment while making inroads into agricultural production systems.

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# "जटिल समस्या - सामूहिक प्रयास" - स्थायी बदलाव के प्रबंधन के लिए सिस्टम्स थिंकिंग

शुभा खड़के

हाल के वर्षों में सिस्टम्स थिंकिंग जैसा दृष्टिकोण बहुत तेजी से बढ़ा है। सिस्टम्स थिंकिंग वास्तव में एक एप्रोच है, एक तरीका है, जटिल समस्याओं को समग्र रूप से समझने और सम्मिलित रूप से उसका हल खोजने का। इस एप्रोच के हिसाब से कोई भी तंत्र उसके सम्पूर्ण रूप में ही देखा जाना चाहिए, केवल उसके हिस्सों के जोड़ के रूप में नहीं। इसी सोच को भोजन या खाद्य प्रणाली में टिकाऊ बदलाव के परिपेक्ष्य में देखने के लिए इरमा और सौक्रेटस फाउंडेशन ने मिलकर तीन दिवसीय प्रबंधन कार्यक्रम का आयोजन 13 अक्टूबर से 15 अक्टूबर तक किया। इस कार्यक्रम में देश भर के विकास के क्षेत्र में काम करने वाले 20 प्रतिभागियों ने हिस्सा लिया।

## कार्यशाला का उद्देश्य - मैं से हम सभी तक का सफर

कार्यशाला का मुख्य उद्देश्य लोगों को सामूहिक रूप से सोचने के लिए प्रेरित करना था, जोकी प्रबंधन कार्यक्रम का विषयगत क्षेत्र, फूड सिस्टम यानी, खाद्य प्रणाली "लिविंग फार्म इनकम" में हमारी परियोजना के साथ निकटता से जुड़ा हुआ है। लिविंग फार्म इनकम टीम विभिन्न सामाजिक संगठनों और अनुसंधान संगठनों को एक साथ लाने और खाद्य प्रणाली में स्थायी बदलाव को आगे बढ़ाने के लिए प्रयासरत है। सही अर्थों में कार्यशाला की योजना तीन दिनों में 'I to We to Us (मैं से हम से हम सभी)' तक पहुंचना था, यानी व्यक्तिगत क्षमताओं को सामने लाने, अपनी सीखों को बड़े समूह के साथ साझा करना और अंत में उन्हें सामूहिक क्षमताओं के रूप में सामने लाना था।



## गंभीरा कोआपरेटिव - समस्या समाधान का सामूहिक प्रयास

सत्र की शुरुआत जटिल समस्याओं (wicked problems) पर चर्चा के साथ हुई। कई ऐसी जटिल समस्याएं हैं जिनके समाधान आसान नहीं हैं। उसके लिए सामूहिक ज्ञान/बुद्धि की

आवश्यकता है। इसी सन्दर्भ को केंद्र में रखकर एक खेल जो गंभीरा कोआपरेटिव पर आधारित है, खेला गया। इस खेल का सृजन **प्रोफेसर तुषार शाह** और **नीरज गर्ग** जी ने किया है। खेल वास्तव में रुचिकर था। इसमें प्रतिभागियों को गांव के २० किसानों में बाँटा गया, उनके परिवार, ज़मीन और मवेशियों के विवरण पहले से ही उन्हें दे दिए गए। इसके बाद खेल शुरू हुआ। खेल में ऋतु के अनुसार बीज, खाद और उत्पाद की अंतिम कीमत की घोषणा की गई। छोटे किसान ऋण के बोझ से दब गए, वही बड़े किसानों को मजदूर नहीं मिले। एक वर्ष के बाद दूसरे वर्ष की घोषणा के पहले सभी किसानों ने मिलकर संसाधनों का सामूहिक उपयोग किया और लाभ हुआ। यही खेल का सार भी था। कुछ जटिल समस्याओं के समाधान भी मिलकर ही खोजे जाते हैं।



इसके बाद कुछ मेन्टल मॉडल्स बताये गए। डिज़ाइन थिंकिंग , पावर मैप आदि की चर्चा भी की गई। मानसिक मॉडल वास्तव में दृष्टिकोण, विश्वास, नैतिकता, अपेक्षाएं और मूल्य हैं, जो समाज से और परिवारों से मिलते हैं। प्रत्येक व्यक्ति अपनी समस्याओं के समाधान के तरीके भी इनके आधार पर ही ढूँढता है, भले ही वे इन मॉडल से अभिन्न रूप से अवगत ना हो।

## देखकर और करके सीखना - भाई काका फार्म का दौरा

दूसरे दिन एक फ़िल्ड विज़िट श्री सर्वदमन पटेल जी के फार्म " **भाई काका कृषि केंद्र** " पर की गई। ४० एकड़ में फैले इस केंद्र में जैविक और **बायो डाइनामिक** तरीके से खेती की जाती है। बायोडायनामिक खेती वास्तव में रसायनों के उपयोग के बिना पोषक तत्वों से भरपूर खाद्य पदार्थों को उगाने के लिए धरती की जीवनी शक्ति के साथ खेती की जाती है। इसी पद्धति से भाई काका कृषि केंद्र में सब्जी , अनाज , फल आदि सभी उगाई जाती है। यहाँ खेती में रुचि रखने वाले लोगों को प्रशिक्षण भी दिया जाता है। यहाँ डेयरी फार्म भी है, और मवेशियों के लिए चारा भी यहीं उगाया जाता है।



## टिकाऊ खाद्य प्रणाली का परिचय और उस पर सघन रूप से कार्य करने की सम्भावनाओं पर चर्चा -

टिकाऊ खाद्य प्रणाली के परिचय का प्रोफसर शम्भू प्रसाद का सत्र रोचक रहा। उन्होंने मुख्यतः खाद्य प्रणाली के बारे में विचार करने पर जोर दिया और खाद्य प्रणाली से टिकाऊ खाद्य प्रणाली के बारे में चर्चा की। सत्र में उन्होंने बताया कि वर्तमान में व्यक्तिगत किसान से परे ज़मीन और संस्थानों के परिदृश्य तक देखने की ज़रूरत है। कृषि संकट बड़ा है अतः कर्ज़र्माफी या यूनिवर्सल एमएसपी से समाधान नहीं हो सकता। किसानों को भी उत्पादन के बाद प्रसंस्करण, विपणन, उपभोक्ता प्राथमिकताएं आदि को देखने की ज़रूरत है। वैश्विक आकड़ों के अनुसार भी वर्तमान खाद्य प्रणाली टिकाऊ नहीं है। अतः सस्टेनेबल फूड सिस्टम अर्थात् टिकाऊ खाद्य प्रणाली की आवश्यकता है, क्योंकि -

1. वर्तमान आधुनिक कृषि जलवायु परिवर्तन बढ़ा रही है।
2. हम पर्याप्त भोजन का उत्पादन करते हैं; परन्तु समान रूप से हम इसे वितरित नहीं करते हैं।
3. मोनोकल्चर जैव विविधता को मार रही हैं।
4. आजीविका के एक अच्छे स्रोत के रूप में कृषि को बढ़ावा देने में वर्तमान आर्थिक और सामाजिक व्यवस्थाएँ असमर्थ हैं।

खाद्य प्रणाली परस्पर जुड़ी प्रणालियों और प्रक्रियाओं का वर्णन करती है, जो पोषण, भोजन, स्वास्थ्य, सामुदायिक विकास और कृषि को प्रभावित करती है। वही सस्टेनेबल फूड सिस्टम (एसएफएस) सभी के लिए खाद्य सुरक्षा और पोषण इस तरह प्रदान करता है जिससे आर्थिक,

सामाजिक और पर्यावरणीय आधार पर भविष्य में आने वाली पीढ़ियों को खाद्य सुरक्षा और पोषण के लिए समझौता न करना पड़े।



संक्षेप में कहा जाए तो इन बिन्दुओं पर सरकार, सामाजिक संस्थाएं और समुदाय को मिलकर संवेदनशील तरीके से उपाय सोचने होंगे। कई राज्यों ने इस दिशा में काम करते हुए जैविक खेती को बढ़ावा देना शुरू कर दिया है।

कार्यशाला के अंत में प्रतिभागियों ने समूह चर्चा के माध्यम से अपने क्षेत्र की समस्याओं के समाधान के लिए सिस्टम्स थिंकिंग के विभिन्न तरीकों का उपयोग करके उनको प्रस्तुत किया। उपरोक्त कार्यशाला का विषय जटिल था, पर सिस्टम्स थिंकिंग एप्रोच पर प्रतिभागियों की समझ निश्चित रूप से बढ़ी। सिस्टम्स थिंकिंग स्वयं में थोड़ा कठिन है, परन्तु इसके उचित उपयोग से समस्याओं का समाधान खोजा जा सकता है।

लिविंग फार्म इनकम टीम मुख्यतः लर्निंग अलायन्स अर्थात सिखने के लिए गठबंधन को मजबूत करने के लिए प्रयासरत है। टीम के पास अनुभव भी है और डेटाबेस के रूप में खाद्य प्रणालियों के सम्बन्ध में ज्ञान भी। इसलिए निःसंदेह इस ज्ञान को ऐसे प्रारूपों में सरल करना महत्वपूर्ण हो जाता है जो लोगों के समझ में आए। इस दिशा में यह कार्यशाला एक सराहनीय कदम है। हालाँकि ये शुरुआत है और अभी बहुत सारा कार्य शेष है।

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*शुभा खड़के लिविंग फार्म इनकम प्रोजेक्ट, इरमा (IRMA) में प्रोग्राम और आउटरीच कन्सल्टन्ट हैं।*

# प्रशिक्षण से प्रगति की ओर बढ़ता प्राकृतिक खेती का कारवां

अंकित कुमार, शुभा खड़के और आदित्य मिन

प्राकृतिक खेती के राष्ट्रीय गठबंधन (NCNF) के गुजरात चैंप्टर एवं गुजरात नेचुरल फार्मिंग एंड आर्गेनिक एग्रीकल्चरल विश्वविद्यालय (वर्तमान में गुजरात प्राकृतिक कृषि विज्ञान यूनिवर्सिटी) ने प्राकृतिक खेती को गुजरात में जमीनी स्तर पर बढ़ावा देने व किसानों को जरूरी सहायता प्रदान करने हेतु एक समझौता जापन पर हस्ताक्षर किये। गठबंधन एवं विश्वविद्यालय के बीच यह समझौता अपनी तरह का पहला प्रयास है। इस समझौता जापन के अनुसार राज्य स्तर पर एक प्रशिक्षण का आयोजन किया जिसमें छः जिलों की 27 महिलाओं ने भाग लिया। कृषि क्षेत्र में महिलाओं की सक्रिय भागीदारी को सामने लाने हेतु NCNF की यह एक भविष्योन्मुखी पहल है। यह पहल न केवल सतत कृषि को बढ़ावा देने के लिए उन्मुख है बल्कि महिलाओं को मास्टर ट्रेनर के रूप में प्रशिक्षित कर उनकी भूमिका को पटल पर लाकर एक पहचान देने की ओर भी अग्रसर है।

कृषि में वर्तमान बहस धीरे-धीरे टिकाऊ कृषि पर ध्यान केंद्रित करने के लिए उपयुक्त कृषि मॉडल को अपनाने की ओर बढ़ रही है। इस क्षेत्र में सतत (टिकाऊ) कृषि होने का दावा करने वाले विभिन्न दृष्टिकोण हैं, जैसे शून्य बजट प्राकृतिक खेती (ZBNF) जिसे सुभाष पालेकर प्राकृतिक खेती के रूप में भी जाना जाता है। प्राकृतिक खेती की दिशा में अभ्यासकर्ताओं, नागरिक समाज संगठनों (CSO) के विभिन्न प्रयासों और ज्ञान को एकत्रित करने के लिए



जुलाई 2020 में प्राकृतिक खेती का एक राष्ट्रीय गठबंधन (एनसी एनएफ) बनाया गया। गठबंधन का उद्देश्य किसान समूहों, कृषि में काम करने वाले गैर सरकारी संगठनों और राज्य

एजेंसियों के बीच साझेदारी बनाना है। NCNF, गुजरात चेप्टर में राज्य के 33 संगठनों की भागीदारी है, जिनमें आगा खान ग्राम समर्थन कार्यक्रम (भारत), उत्थान ट्रस्ट, सज्जता संघ, ने अभी तक ने गठबंधन के कार्यालय की मेजबानी की। इस गठबंधन के पीछे का विचार कृषि पर नागरिक समाज संगठनों (CSO) के कार्यों को मैप करना था। साथ ही साथ यह भी ध्यान में रखा गया कि इससे किसान-से-किसान संपर्क बढ़ाने में सहायता मिलेगी और किसान एक पटल पर जुड़कर अपने अनुभव और सीख साझा कर सकते हैं।

वर्तमान कृषि पद्धति में रासायनिक उर्वरकों एवं कीटनाशकों के अतिशय मात्रा में प्रयोग से मिट्टी की उर्वरक क्षमता में कमी व मानव स्वास्थ्य पर दुष्प्रभाव को कई नागरिक सामाजिक संस्थानों ने संज्ञान में लिया है। इस समस्या के समाधान हेतु सतत कृषि पद्धतियों के विकास एवं अभ्यास की कई विद्वानों ने सिफारिश की है। इसके लिए विभिन्न संस्थाओं के सहयोग की आवश्यकता पर विशेष बल दिया गया है।

सतत (स्थायी) कृषि कार्यक्रम को लागू करने के लिए राज्य सरकार, नागरिक समाज संगठनों, कार्यकर्ता नेटवर्क और दाता संगठनों जैसी संस्थाओं को एकजुट होकर कार्य करने होंगे। किसानों



और अन्य संस्थानों का सामूहिक प्रयास सतत कृषि की दिशा में महत्वपूर्ण हो जाता है। गठबंधन की प्रारंभिक बैठकों में सम्बंधित संस्थाओं ने अपने अपने कार्यक्षेत्र अनुभवों के आधार पर प्राकृतिक खेती को बढ़ावा देने हेतु प्रशिक्षण की बुनियादी आवश्यकता पर जोर दिया। वर्ष २०२१ नवम्बर माह में डॉ वर्गीस कुरियन के जन्म शताब्दी के उपलक्ष्य में आयोजित कार्यशाला में गुजरात प्राकृतिक कृषि विज्ञान यूनिवर्सिटी, आनंद कृषि विश्वविद्यालय (AAU) एवं इंस्टिट्यूट ऑफ रूरल मैनेजमेंट आणंद (IRMA) के

प्रतिनिधियों ने प्राकृतिक कृषि को गुजरात में बढ़ावा देने के लिए विचार विमर्श किया। महिलाओं की उपेक्षित स्थिति को संज्ञान में लेते हुए कृषि क्षेत्र में उनकी सक्रिय भागीदारी व

उनकी भूमिका को पटल पर लाने हेतु गठबंधन ने प्रशिक्षण के लिए महिलाओं को वरीयता प्रदान की ।

## प्रशिक्षण :

वर्ष 2022, सितम्बर माह में NCNF ने महिला मास्टर किसानों का एक कैंडर बनाने की पहल की जो किसानों को आगे प्रशिक्षित कर सके और जमीनी स्तर पर सहायता प्रदान कर सके। यह कार्यक्रम 'मास्टर किसान प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम' के रूप में महिलाओं को प्रशिक्षण के लिए संगठित करता है। इसके लिए NCNF ने इस मिशन में महिलाओं को सक्रिय रूप से शामिल करने का विचार रखा, जो सतत कृषि के क्षेत्र में काम कर रही हैं। 'मास्टर फार्मर ट्रेनिंग प्रोग्राम' नामक प्रशिक्षण के लिए क्लस्टर स्तर पर महिला किसानों की पहचान की गई है। जो महिलाएं पहले से ही संगठनों के साथ काम कर रही थीं, उन्हें गुजरात के छह: जिलों, नर्मदा, जूनागढ़, दाहोद, महीसागर, अमरेली और भावनगर से NCNF के तहत चुना गया।

गठबंधन ने अन्य हितधारकों के साथ गुजरात प्राकृतिक और जैविक खेती विश्वविद्यालय के साथ मिलकर प्रशिक्षण मॉड्यूल डिजाइन किया। प्रशिक्षण सामग्री की डिजाइनिंग प्रक्रिया में सीएसओ के प्रतिनिधि और विश्वविद्यालय से विषय विशेषज्ञ शामिल हुए। पहले इस महिला प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम को लागू करने के लिए वित्तीय समस्याओं का सामना करना पड़ा, लेकिन बाद में गठबंधन ने इस प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम की रूपरेखा बनाने और कार्यान्वित करने के लिए गुजरात प्राकृतिक कृषि विज्ञान यूनिवर्सिटी के साथ एक समझौता ज्ञापन पर हस्ताक्षर किए। प्रशिक्षण आनंद कृषि विश्वविद्यालय के परिसर में आयोजित किया गया एवं कार्यक्रम का अधिकांश खर्च गुजरात प्राकृतिक कृषि विज्ञान यूनिवर्सिटी, आगा खान ग्राम समर्थन कार्यक्रम (भारत) एवं NCNF द्वारा वहन किया गया।

महिलाओं को मास्टर फार्मर ट्रेनर के रूप में प्रशिक्षित करने के लिए तीन चरणों में 15 दिवसीय प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम का आयोजन किया गया। प्रत्येक चरण में 5 दिनों को ध्यान में रखते हुए प्रशिक्षण के विषय को निर्धारित किया गया। सितंबर 2022 में प्रशिक्षण के पहले चरण में कुल 27 प्रतिभागियों ने भाग लिया। प्रशिक्षण का दूसरा चरण फरवरी 2023 के महीने में आयोजित किया गया। दूसरे चरण में प्रतिभागियों की संख्या में गिरावट हुई और कुल 15 अभ्यर्थियों ने भाग लिया। प्रशिक्षण का तीसरा चरण जून 2023 के महीने में संपन्न हुआ एवं दूसरे चरण के सभी 15 उम्मीदवारों ने प्रशिक्षण जारी रखा और सफलतापूर्वक प्रशिक्षण पूरा किया। प्रशिक्षण में

सम्मिलित होने वाली महिलाएं आगा खान ग्राम समर्थन कार्यक्रम (भारत), उत्थान ट्रस्ट, वाग्धारा तथा शिक्षण एवं समाज कल्याण केंद्र से सम्बंधित थीं ।

## प्रशिक्षण के चरण:

प्रशिक्षण के तीन चरणों को क्रमशः बुनियादी, माध्यमिक और उन्नत (बेसिक, इंटरमीडिएट एवं एडवांस) में विभाजित किया गया। बेसिक मॉड्यूल में विभिन्न भागीदारी गतिविधियों के माध्यम से किसानों को प्राकृतिक खेती (जैव-इनपुट, बीजों का रख रखाव, विपणन आदि) के बारे में जागरूक करके प्रशिक्षण देना शामिल था। इस मॉड्यूल में उन्हें कृषि पारिस्थितिक तंत्र, विभिन्न अवशेषों के खेती में उर्वरक के रूप में प्रयोग, बायोगैस और उसके अवशेषों के उपयोग आदि की व्याख्या को सम्मिलित किया गया।

इंटरमीडिएट मॉड्यूल में अन्य गतिविधियों के साथ-साथ किसानों को बाज़ार के सम्बन्ध में जानकारी और मार्केटिंग तकनीकों व उनकी अभिव्यक्ति के विषय में अवगत कराया गया। साथ ही साथ किसानों को एकीकृत खेती (मत्स्य पालन, शहद के लिए मधुमक्खियों का पालन) के



विषय में प्रशिक्षित कर प्राकृतिक खेती के लिए मॉडल फार्म विकसित करने का कार्य दिया गया।

उन्नत मॉड्यूल में प्रशिक्षुओं को बायो-इनपुट संसाधन केंद्र की बारीकियों, समय प्रबंधन, समुदाय के व्यक्ति और प्रबंधन स्तर के अधिकारियों के साथ व्यवहार के बारे में सिखाया गया। इस प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम में आगा खान ग्राम समर्थन कार्यक्रम (भारत) के प्रशिक्षकों को शामिल

किया गया। क्योंकि यह पाया गया कि एक संसाधन व्यक्ति की आवश्यकता है जो किसानों और संगठन के बीच मध्यस्थ के रूप में काम कर सके।

प्रशिक्षण के उपरांत आत्मविश्वास से लबरेज सभी प्रशिक्षुओं ने सम्बंधित संस्थाओं के साथ जमीनी स्तर पर कार्य प्रारंभ किया। प्रशिक्षित अभ्यर्थियों ने अपने-अपने क्लस्टर में किसानों को प्रशिक्षण देना शुरू कर दिया है। सतत कृषि में काम करने वाले संस्थानों ने प्राकृतिक खेती को

बढ़ावा देने के लिए भविष्य के कार्यक्रमों में प्रशिक्षित कार्यबल को समायोजित करने की योजना बनाई। NCNF के आंकड़ों के अनुसार, जून 2023 से अगस्त २०२३ तक 15 महिला किसान मास्टर ट्रेनर द्वारा 200 किसानों को प्राकृतिक खेती तकनीकों में प्रशिक्षित किया गया है। गठबंधन (NCNF), प्रशिक्षित पेशेवर तैयार करने एवं प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम में तेजी लाने के लिए राज्य सरकार के साथ समन्वय की तलाश में है। NCNF उन मास्टर ट्रेनर के लिए पुनश्चर्चा प्रशिक्षण (Refresher Training) आयोजित करने की आशा कर रहा है जिन्होंने सक्रिय रूप से क्षेत्र में काम करना शुरू कर दिया है।

## कार्यक्रम क्रियान्वयन में चुनौतियाँ:

गठबंधन ने कृषि क्षेत्र में महिलाओं की सक्रिय भागीदारी को बढ़ाने के उद्देश्य से महिलाओं को प्रशिक्षण में सम्मिलित करने का फैसला लिया। महिलाओं का घर से बाहर रहकर प्रशिक्षण लेना भी उनके लिए चुनौतीपूर्ण था। लेकिन गठबंधन की सदस्य संस्थाओं के विश्वास और सहयोग के कारण उनका भाग लेना संभव हो पाया। प्रथम चरण के उपरांत लगभग एक तिहाई महिलायें अगले चरण में हिस्सा नहीं ले पाईं।

प्रशिक्षण के द्वितीय चरण में कुछ महिलाओं के भाग न लेने के कई कारण थे, जैसे उनका विवाह होने के कारण दूसरे जिले में प्रवासन, या सम्बंधित संगठन के साथ कार्य छोड़ना या पारिवारिक बाधाएं इत्यादि। दूसरा कारण कार्यक्रम की रूपरेखा थी, इसके आधार पर जिन प्रतिभागियों ने इंटरमीडिएट अर्थात द्वितीय चरण में भाग नहीं लिया था उन्हें उन्नत प्रशिक्षण के लिए अनुमति नहीं दी गई।



कुल १५ महिलाओं ने सफलतापूर्वक तीनों चरण पूर्ण कर अपने सम्बंधित क्षेत्र में किसानों को प्रशिक्षण देना प्रारंभ किया। प्राकृतिक खेती पद्धति को पूर्ण रूप से अपनाने के लिए किसानों को संसाधनों की आवश्यकता है। गठबंधन से सम्बंधित संस्थान सहयोग प्रदान करने की दिशा में प्रयासरत हैं।

## आगामी योजना:

आगामी योजना के तहत गठबंधन ने सीएसओ के साथ कृषि विषयों पर कार्यरत अन्य मध्य स्तर के पेशेवरों के केंद्र को प्रशिक्षित करने की आवश्यकता पर बल दिया है, जिससे प्राकृतिक कृषि पद्धतियों को अपनाने की दिशा में चल रहे प्रयासों को कुशलतापूर्वक प्रबंधित किया जा सके।

वर्तमान प्रशिक्षकों द्वारा किसानों के बीच मौजूदा चुनौती यह देखी गई कि वे सतत कृषि के लिए अनुशंसित कृषि पद्धतियों को अपनाने हेतु संसाधनों की कमी के साथ जूझ रहे हैं। सीएसओ किसानों के ऑन-फील्ड समर्थन के लिए काम कर रहे हैं, लेकिन सतत कृषि के लिए काम करने के लिए और अधिक मदद की आवश्यकता है। उत्साही किसान वित्तीय संसाधनों से भी जूझ रहे हैं जिनकी प्राकृतिक खेती तकनीकों को अपनाने के लिए प्रारंभिक निवेश के रूप में आवश्यकता होती है। गुजरात राज्य में NCNF सतत परिवर्तन की यात्रा की दिशा में प्रारंभिक चरण में किसानों की सहायता के लिए संस्थात्मक ढांचा बनाने की ओर प्रयासरत है। इस कड़ी में राज्य सरकार का भी सकारात्मक रुझान भी द्रष्टिगत है।

NCNF ने इन प्रशिक्षित संसाधनों को कृषि प्रौद्योगिकी प्रबंधन एजेंसी (ATMA) के साथ जोड़ने की योजना बनाई है। प्रशिक्षित मास्टर्स किसान कृषि विज्ञान केन्द्रों के कार्यक्रम के अनुसार ATMA के साथ समुदाय संसाधन व्यक्तियों (Community Resource Person) के रूप में कार्य करेंगे। इस प्रकार की साझेदारी से यह अभिसरण राज्य संस्थानों द्वारा प्रशिक्षित संसाधनों के उपयोग के उद्देश्य को पूरा करेगा और ज्ञान प्रसार प्रक्रिया समावेशी और सहयोगात्मक बन जाएगी।

किसानों को प्रशिक्षित करने के लिए महिला मास्टर ट्रेनर को पारिश्रमिक भी दिया जाएगा जिससे उनको आर्थिक लाभ भी होगा। इस पहल से कृषि-पारिस्थितिकी क्षेत्र में कार्य करने वाले विभिन्न संगठनों के साथ कार्यरत मध्य स्तर के पेशेवरों के विकास को बढ़ावा मिल सकता है, जिससे ज्ञान हस्तांतरण में तेजी लाने और अपनी कृषि पद्धतियों को उन्नत करने के इच्छुक

उत्पादकों को सहायता प्रदान करने में मदद मिलेगी। इस बात स्पष्ट संकेत हैं कि गठबंधन और राज्य सरकार के सहयोगात्मक प्रयास से गुजरात में कृषि की स्थिरता में अंतर आएगा।



NCNF ने मैपिंग प्रक्रिया के दौरान पाया कि किसानों के साथ-साथ अन्य प्रबंधन स्तर पर भी इस प्रकार के प्रशिक्षण की आवश्यकता है। उन किसानों के लिए सीधे तौर पर क्षमता-निर्माण प्रशिक्षण की आवश्यकता देखी गई जो अपनी भूमि पर प्राकृतिक खेती करने के लिए जैविक संसाधनों को बढ़ावा देना चाहते हैं।

इस कार्यक्रम के पीछे का उद्देश्य रसायन मुक्त कृषि पद्धतियों को पुनर्जीवित करना और एक मॉडल फार्म बनाना है। NCNF का दृढ़ विश्वास है कि खेती में इस्तेमाल की जाने वाली प्राचीन पद्धतियां प्रकृति के अनुरूप थीं जबकि आधुनिक तकनीकें मिट्टी और अंततः खाद्य श्रृंखला प्रणाली को क्षति पहुंचा रही हैं जिस पर ध्यान देने की जरूरत है। प्रशिक्षण के माध्यम से इस तथ्य पर जोर दिया कि यदि किसानों को व्यवस्थित रूप से शामिल किया जाए तो यह कार्यक्रम इच्छुक किसानों को अपने अनुभव साझा करने और नई कृषि पद्धतियों को अपनाव की सुविधा प्रदान कर सकता है। इस प्रकार की पहल से भविष्य में प्राकृतिक खेती को बढ़ावा मिलेगा एवं कृषि क्षेत्र में महिलाओं की सशक्त भूमिका सामने आएगी।

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अंकित कुमार लिविंग फार्म इनकम प्रोजेक्ट, इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ रूरल मैनेजमेंट आणंद (IRMA) में रिसर्च एसोसिएट हैं।

शुभा खड़के लिविंग फार्म इनकम प्रोजेक्ट, इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ रूरल मैनेजमेंट आणंद (IRMA) में प्रोग्राम और आउटरीच कन्सल्टन्ट हैं।

आदित्य मिन प्राकृतिक खेती के राष्ट्रीय गठबंधन के गुजरात चैंप्टर के फैसिलिटेटर हैं।

# आशा किसान स्वराज सम्मेलन 2022

शुभा खड़के

अलायन्स फॉर सस्टेनेबल एंड होलिस्टिक एग्रीकल्चर (ASHA) -किसान स्वराज नेटवर्क द्वारा एक सम्मेलन आयोजित किया गया जिसमें भारत के विभिन्न राज्यों से आये 1900 से ज्यादा किसानों, सामाजिक संस्थाओं के प्रतिनिधि, संशोधक एवं शैक्षणिक संस्थाओं के प्रतिनिधियों ने भाग लिया जिसका उद्देश्य भोजन, किसान और स्वतंत्रता को केंद्र में रखकर लोगों को जागरूक करना था।

"जल, जंगल, बीज और जमीन, सब हो किसानों के आधीन"

लाभ से समृद्धि की ओर - सजीव / जैविक खेती

छोटे किसानों के हित में हो सरकारी नीतियाँ...

इन्हीं सारे मुद्दों के साथ पांचवा आशा किसान स्वराज सम्मेलन 11 से 13 नवम्बर को मैसूर में संपन्न हुआ।

विविधता, रंग, उत्साह और सबको बांधने वाला अपनापन ही आशा किसान स्वराज सम्मेलन 2022 का वैशिष्ट्य था। इसे किसानों का सबसे बड़ा उत्सव कहना अतिशयोक्ति नहीं होगा। अलायन्स फॉर सस्टेनेबल एंड होलिस्टिक एग्रीकल्चर (ASHA) यानि

सतत और समग्र कृषि के लिए गठबंधन या आशा-किसान स्वराज नेटवर्क द्वारा आयोजित इस सम्मेलन में भारत के विभिन्न राज्यों से आये 1900 से ज्यादा किसानों, सामाजिक संस्थाओं के प्रतिनिधि, संशोधक एवं शैक्षणिक संस्थाओं के प्रतिनिधियों ने भाग लिया।



## सम्मेलन की पृष्ठभूमि

आशा-किसान स्वराज गठबंधन संगठनों और व्यक्तियों का एक अनौपचारिक नेटवर्क है, ये स्वयं सेवकों द्वारा संचालित है जो 2010 में किसान स्वराज यात्रा आयोजित करने के लिए एक साथ आए थे, यात्रा का उद्देश्य देश से संबंधित मुद्दों मुख्यतः भोजन, किसान और स्वतंत्रता को

केंद्र में रखकर लोगों को जागरूक करना था। नेटवर्क में किसान संगठन, उपभोक्ता समूह, महिला संगठन, पर्यावरण संगठन, व्यक्तिगत नागरिक और विशेषज्ञ शामिल हैं जो ग्रामीण भारत में स्थायी कृषि आजीविका के लिए प्रतिबद्ध हैं, जिसमें यह सुनिश्चित करना शामिल है कि उत्पादक संसाधन कृषक समुदायों के नियंत्रण में हैं और इस प्रकार, सभी भारतीयों के लिए सुरक्षित, पौष्टिक, विविध और पर्याप्त भोजन उपलब्ध है।

किसान स्वराज यात्रा और उसके बाद के कार्यों के दौरान उभरे संवादों से, आशा ने 4-स्तंभ वाली किसान स्वराज नीति को स्पष्ट किया। किसान स्वराज नीति के चार स्तंभ हैं (1) किसान परिवारों के लिए आय सुरक्षा; (2) कृषि की पारिस्थितिक स्थिरता; (3) भूमि, जल और बीज जैसे कृषि संसाधनों पर लोगों का नियंत्रण; और (4) सभी के लिए सुरक्षित, स्वस्थ, पौष्टिक और पर्याप्त भोजन तक पहुंच।



## आशा किसान स्वराज सम्मेलन 2022

तीन दिवसीय सम्मेलन में मुख्य और समानांतर दोनों तरह के सत्र हुए। बीज विविधता, जैव विविधता, जैविक भोजन, किसान और उनसे जुड़े मुद्दों पर चर्चा, सार्वजनिक व्याख्यान, सांस्कृतिक कार्यक्रम एवं नवाचारी किसानों के साथ संवाद के साथ ही ये सम्मेलन संपन्न हुआ। तीन दिन सम्मेलन के बाद मैसूर के आस पास के नवाचारी किसान और उत्पादक संघ में क्षेत्र भ्रमण भी किये गए।



सम्मेलन का उद्घाटन केरल के कृषि एवं किसान कल्याण मंत्री श्री प्रसाद ने किया। मैसूर एक ऐसा शहर है जो अनुवांशिक संशोधनों (जेनेटिकली मॉडिफाइड)से तैयार किये बीजों से मुक्त है ऐसे में इस स्थान पर किसान स्वराज सम्मेलन का आयोजन बहुत महत्वपूर्ण हो जाता है। उद्घाटन कार्यक्रम में मंच कई

गणमान्य व्यक्तियों ने साँझा किया और खेती में विविधता के बारे में चर्चा की। खेती की परंपरागत पद्धतियों को फिर से अपनाने के साथ मिट्टी को मरने से बचाने, बीज और जैव विविधता को अपनाने एवं रासायनिक खाद पर सब्सिडी को पूर्णतया बंद करने पर जोर दिया गया। स्पष्ट किया गया कि छोटे किसानों को अपना जोखिम कम करने के लिए साथ आना होगा जिससे बाजार तक उनकी पहुंच बढ़े। स्थानीय उत्पादों / संसाधनों का अधिकतम उपयोग हो जिससे स्थानीय अर्थव्यवस्था को मजबूती मिले। जलवायु में हो रहे परिवर्तनों को भी गंभीरता से लेने की जरूरत है। संक्षेप में बढ़ती जनसँख्या की भोजन आपूर्ति के लिए वातावरण को समझकर किसानों को सहयोग प्रदान करने होंगे। इन्हीं सारे विषयों पर चर्चा हुई।

इन विषयों पर आशा द्वारा किये गए प्रयासों का भी जिक्र किया गया। स्थायी जैविक खेती और देशी बीजों के संरक्षण और संवर्धन के लिए सतत कार्य करने वाले भारत के पारिस्थितिक खेती आंदोलन के अग्रदूतों को श्रद्धांजलि भी दी गई।

उद्घाटन कार्यक्रम के बाद सामानांतर सत्र शुरू हुए। ये मुख्यतः अंग्रेजी, हिंदी और कन्नड़ में रखे गए थे जिस से भाषा की सुविधा का ध्यान रखते हुए सभी के द्वारा इन कार्यक्रमों का लाभ लिया जा सके।

## अन्य आकर्षण



कार्यक्रम के उद्घाटन के साथ ही बीज विविधता महोत्सव भी शुरू हुआ जिसमें १८ राज्यों के लगभग १०० बीज संरक्षकों ने २००० से ज्यादा विभिन्न फसलों की किस्मों को प्रदर्शित किया। जड़ और कंद उत्सव में विभिन्न प्रकार के कंदों रखा गया था जिस से इन के बारे में स्पष्टता मिल सके।

इसके साथ ही शहरी बागवानी कार्यशाला, सूती धागे की कताई और प्राकृतिक रंगाई सम्बन्धी कार्यशाला, मिट्टी के बर्तन, हस्तनिर्मित साबुन बनाने की कार्यशाला भी आयोजित की गई। तीनों दिन सांस्कृतिक कार्यक्रम रखे गए थे जिस में केरल, तमिलनाडु और कर्नाटक के पारम्परिक नृत्य एवं नाटक को देखने का अवसर

मिला। सम्मेलन में भारत के जाने माने जैविक और नवाचार करने वाले लगभग २० किसानों से सीधे संवाद का भी अवसर था। उनका मार्गदर्शन और खेती में आ रही चुनौतियों से वे कैसे सामना कर रहे हैं इस पर चर्चा निश्चित ही प्रेरणादायी रही।



सम्मेलन का एक आकर्षण जैविक भोजन भी रहा। विभिन्न राज्यों के स्वसहायता समूहों और जैविक कृषकों ने भोजन के स्टॉल लगाए थे जिसमें रुचिकर पारम्परिक खाद्य पदार्थ थे।

## सत्रवार विवरण

उद्घाटन के बाद सामानांतर सत्र शुरू हुए। सम्मेलन में कुल १९ सामानांतर सत्र चले और उपस्थित प्रतिभागियों ने अपनी रुचि के अनुसार इन सत्रों में भाग लिया।

सामानांतर सत्र इस प्रकार से थे -

1. कृषि में जलवायु परिवर्तन से निपटना
2. पारंपरिक किस्मों का पुनरुद्धार - संरक्षण, गुणन, खेती और उपभोक्ता मांग - औपचारिक बीज प्रणालियों और नए संस्थागत मॉडल में एकीकरण
3. मृदा स्वास्थ्य और पौध पोषण और पौध संरक्षण सहित पारिस्थितिक अभ्यास। सिंथेटिक रसायनों के बिना "खरपतवार" प्रबंधन
4. किसानों का बाजार
5. किसान सामूहिकता (सरकार की 10k एफपीओ योजना में जैविक/प्राकृतिक खेती एफपीओ और सहकारी/समूह खेती के अनुभव शामिल हैं)
6. जैविक/प्राकृतिक उत्पाद का विपणन (प्रसंस्करण/मूल्यवर्धन आदि और विविध संस्थागत विकल्प सहित)
7. उपयुक्त प्रौद्योगिकियां (उत्पादन और उत्पादन के बाद दोनों)
8. व्यापक पशुधन प्रणाली
9. भारतीय किसानों के बीज अधिकार-खतरे और भविष्य के कदम

10. व्यापार न्याय (डब्ल्यूटीओ और एफटीए को कवर करते हुए)
11. कृषि-डिजिटलीकरण
12. फूड फोर्टिफिकेशन
13. जीन टेक्नोलॉजीज, सहित जीनोम संपादन
14. मानव-पशु संघर्ष - क्या कोई लाभकारी समाधान हैं?
15. महिला किसान
16. काशतकार किसान
17. आदिवासी किसान
18. कृषि श्रमिक
19. जैविक और प्राकृतिक खाद्य/उत्पाद प्रमाणन

प्रथम दिवस में सामानांतर सत्र के बाद सांस्कृतिक कार्यक्रम हुए। इस के बाद पद्मश्री भारत भूषण त्यागी और पद्मश्री साबरमती जी एवं श्री प्रकाश भट्ट ने भारत में कृषि में आ रही वर्तमान समस्याओं और संभावित उपायों और किसानों के लिए नीति नियमों में किये जाने वाले सुधारों के बारे में बात की। उन्होंने बताया कि वर्तमान में कृषि में विरोध नहीं संवाद की जरूरत है। प्रकृति की व्यवस्था को समझना ही सजीव खेती है। अनुसन्धान और नीतियां प्रकृति की व्यवस्था के अनुरूप होनी चाहिए। राष्ट्रीय नीति के साथ राज्य सरकार की क्रियान्वयन की नीति भी समेकित कृषि कार्य योजना की होनी चाहिए। खेती के बाज़ारीकरण के बजाय लाभ से समृद्धि की ओर अग्रसर होना चाहिए।

दूसरा दिन; भारत में एगो इकोलॉजी को बढ़ाने में किये गए प्रयासों और उनसे मिली सीखों के साथ शुरू हुआ। इसमें आंध्रप्रदेश के विशेष मुख्य सचिव श्री विजय कुमार, कर्नाटक की कृषि निदेशक श्रीमती नंदिनी कुमार, छत्तीसगढ़ के मुख्यमंत्री के सलाहकार श्री प्रदीप शर्मा, हिमाचल के श्री परमार एवं केरल की श्रीमती लिसिमोल ने अपने अपने राज्यों में सरकार के सहयोग से एगो इकोलॉजी में किये गए कार्यों का विस्तार से वर्णन किया। इसमें वासन के श्री रविंद्र ने स्वैच्छिक संस्थाओं के अनुभवों को साँझा किया। इस सामूहिक सत्र के बाद सामानांतर सत्र हुए। सांध्यकालीन सत्र का विशेष आकर्षण श्री देविन्द्र शर्मा एवं श्रीमती नंदिनी जयराम का व्याख्यान रहा। उन्होंने कृषि करने वाले परिवारों के आर्थिक सुरक्षा के बारे में चर्चा की। इसके बाद भारत बीज स्वराज मंच ने वाविलोव एवं रिचारिआ अवाई दो बीज संरक्षक किसानों को प्रदान किया।

तीसरा और अंतिम दिन जानकारियों से भरा हुआ था। प्रथम प्लेनरी सत्र "सीमांत और हाशिये के किसानों को सशक्त बनाना" पर था। इसमें देश के कोने कोने से आये किसान प्रतिनिधियों, किसानों के साथ और उनके लिए काम करने वाले कार्यकर्ता और विशेषज्ञ ने अपने विचार व्यक्त किये। महाराष्ट्र से आई दलित किसान द्वारिका ताई ने बहुत ही बेबाकी से महिला

किसान अधिकार मंच (MAKAAM) द्वारा किये जा रहे कार्यों पर बात की।



इस सत्र में महिला किसान, किराये से जमीन लेकर खेती करने वाले किसान, आदिवासी किसान आदि की चुनौतियों के बारे में चर्चा की गई। भारत में कई सारे प्रगतिशील कानून हैं जो किसानों के हित में भी हैं परन्तु उनका कार्यान्वयन एक बड़ी समस्या है। खेती में ७०% काम महिलाये करती हैं फिर भी महिला को

किसान के

रूप में मान्यता नहीं मिलती। जमीन सम्बन्धी किसी भी दस्तावेज पर उनका नाम नहीं होता। अतः उनकी जागरूकता, प्रशिक्षण और क्षमता वर्धन पर काम किया जाना चाहिए। बड़ी जमीन और सिंचाई के साधन अक्सर बड़े किसानों के पास होते हैं ऐसे में छोटे और सीमांत किसानों को ज्यादा पैसा देकर पानी का प्रबंध करना पड़ता है। उनकी उपज का दाम कम मिलता है और उनको बाजार से महँगी वस्तुएं खरीदनी पड़ती है। किराये पर जमीन लेकर खेती करने वाले किसानों की समस्या अधिक है क्योंकि अधिकतर योजनाओं का लाभ उनको ही

मिलता है जिनके नाम जमीन होती है। ऐसे किसानों की पहुंच ऋण देने वाली संस्थाओं तक भी नहीं होती। छोटे किसान अक्सर खेती के लिए ऋण लेते हैं परन्तु उनकी उपज को बाजार में बेचते समय उनके पास सौदेबाजी का अवसर नहीं होता। बाजार द्वारा तय कीमत या कई बार उस से कम कीमत पर भी उनको अपनी उपज बेचनी पड़ती है। समाज सरकार और बाजार यदि मिलकर किसानों के हित के बारे में सोचे तो ये चित्र बदल सकते हैं।

सामानांतर सत्र में युवा और खेती इस विषय पर युवा किसानों ने अपना पक्ष रखा। आज भी किसानों को या खेती को उत्तम व्यवसाय के रूप में नहीं देखा जाता जिसकी वजह से युवा खेती

करने के लिए हिचकते हैं। समाज की सोच को बदलना, मानसिकता में बदलाव बहुत ही जरूरी है।

समापन सत्र का मुख्य फोकस जलवायु परिवर्तन में खेती की भूमिका और उसमें किये जाने वाले बदलाव पर था। जमीन और प्रकृति के साथ मानव का जो गहरा रिश्ता था वो धीरे धीरे धीरे खतम हो रहा है और इसलिए ही समस्या बढ़ रही है। प्राचीन समय में लोग प्रकृति को ध्यान में रखकर कार्य करते थे, जमीन को सिर्फ आय का जरिया नहीं मानते थे बल्कि धरती माँ के रूप में पूजते थे। इसलिए ही पर्यावरण का ध्यान भी रखते थे। हमें पुनः उसी और लौटना होगा। हमारी परम्परागत कृषि पद्धतियों और ज्ञान को जो एगो इकोलॉजी पर आधारित था फिर से अमल में लाना होगा। निचले स्तर तक स्थानीयकरण को बढ़ावा देना होगा। गांव में स्थानीय स्तर पर उपलब्ध संसाधनों और उत्पादों के उपयोग को बढ़ाना होगा। जब तक केंद्र सरकार, राज्य सरकार, युवा और हर व्यक्ति जलवायु परिवर्तन के मुद्दे पर एकमत होकर काम नहीं करेंगे तब तक इस समस्या का समाधान नहीं हो पायेगा।

## सामानांतर सत्र -



हालाँकि सभी सामानांतर सत्र बहुत ही दिलचस्प थे परन्तु सभी को सुनना संभव नहीं था। ऐसे में कुछ सत्रों में भाग लिया। प्रथम सत्र किसान सामूहिकता/ किसान उत्पादक संघ के बारे में था। पुरुषों का ध्यान केश क्रॉप पर ज्यादा होता है वहीं महिलाएं खाद्य सुरक्षा, मोटा अनाज या मिलेट्स, देशी बीज आदि के संवर्धन में विशेष रुचि रखती हैं। ऐसे में उनकी आवाज को महत्व देते हुए उनके

उत्पादक संघों के निर्माण की आवश्यकता है। सत्र में वर्धा और यवतमाळ में मिशन समृद्धि से लेकर आर्गेनिक फार्मिंग एसोसिएशन ऑफ इंडिया तक के बारे में विस्तार से चर्चा हुई। सत्र के सहजकर्ता प्रोफसर शंबुप्रसाद ने कोपरेटिव और उत्पादक संघों में अंतर बताया और जोर दिया कि संघों में छोटे और सीमांत किसानों की भागीदारी कम है। सभी को साथ में लेकर जो सामाजिक प्रक्रियाएं होना चाहिए वो नहीं हो पा रही हैं इसकी मुख्य वजह एफपीसी (Farmers Producer Company) के पंजीयन का टारगेट पूरा करना है। वर्तमान में २२००० से ज्यादा

रेपंजीकृत एफपीसी है जो ज्यादा तर इनपुट प्रदान करने का काम ही कर रहे हैं। कार्यशील पूंजी का अभाव भी एक समस्या है। बिज़नेस प्लान्स भी नहीं बनाये गए हैं, ऐसे में सिर्फ उपज के एकत्रीकरण से समस्या का समाधान नहीं होगा। बाजार की व्यवस्था को समझना और स्थायी सतत प्रक्रिया में विस्तार करने की जरूरत है।

इस के बाद जैविक उत्पादों की मार्केटिंग सम्बन्धी सत्र था. इस सत्र में स्पष्ट किया गया कि जो कुछ भी प्रकृति के विरुद्ध है वो जैविक नहीं है. वर्तमान में भारत में केवल १% ही आर्गेनिक बाजार है जिसे बढ़ाने की आवश्यकता है। महिला किसान और उनसे जुड़े मुद्दों एवं मकाम (महिला किसान अधिकार मंच) द्वारा किये जा रहे कार्यों पर महिला किसान सत्र में चर्चा हुई। "मृदा

स्वास्थ्य और पौध पोषण और पौध संरक्षण सहित पारिस्थितिक अभ्यास" इस सत्र में सिंथेटिक रसायनों के बिना "खरपतवार" प्रबंधन पर बात की गई। मिट्टी की उर्वरकता को बढ़ाने, सूक्ष्म पोषक तत्व की मात्रा बढ़ाने, उपलब्ध संसाधनों में जैविक उर्वरक बनाने आदि को विस्तार से समझाया गया।



## सारांश

तीन दिनों में खेती से जुड़े कई मुद्दों पर चर्चा हुई। ये स्पष्ट हुआ कि प्रकृति को संरक्षित करने के लिए प्रशिक्षण देने होंगे। लोगो की जागरूकता बढ़ानी होगी। खेती की विभिन्न पद्धतियों को एक प्लेटफॉर्म पर लाना होगा जहाँ

समन्वित कृषि की बात हो। खेती में परस्पर सहयोगी फसलों का चुनाव हो, मिट्टी और पानी उपलब्धता के आधार पर मल्टीलेयर क्रॉपिंग सिस्टम बनाये जाये। मोनो क्रॉप या एकल फसल पद्धति को रोकना चाहिए जब तक जैव विविधता को नहीं बढ़ाएंगे तब तक समय पर्यावरण का विकास नहीं होगा। क्योंकि जब फसलों में विविधता होगी तो मिट्टी को पोषण मिलेगा और उत्पादन भी बढ़ेगा। सरकारी नीतियां छोटे और सीमांत किसानो के हित में हो। अनुदान भी जैविक खाद, देशी बीजों के संवर्धन करने वालो को मिले तो सजीव खेती की दिशा में हम आगे बढ़ पाएंगे। यहाँ सम्मिलित प्रयासों की नितांत आवश्यकता है। कुल मिलकर कहा जा सकता है

कि जो लोग खेती में रूचि रखते हैं उनके लिए आशा किसान स्वराज सम्मेलन में भाग लेना निश्चित ही लाभकारी रहा। देश भर से मतलब लद्दाख से तमिलनाडु तक के सजीव खेती करने वाले किसानों से मुलाकात, उनके अनुभवों को सुनना, कृषि विशेषज्ञों का मार्गदर्शन, भारत की जैव विविधता का तीन दिनों में अनुभव करना और जैविक भोजन का रसास्वादन करना वाकई अलौकिक रहा।

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*शुभा खड़के लिविंग फार्म इनकम प्रोजेक्ट, इरमा (IRMA) में प्रोग्राम और आउटरीच कन्सल्टन्ट हैं।*

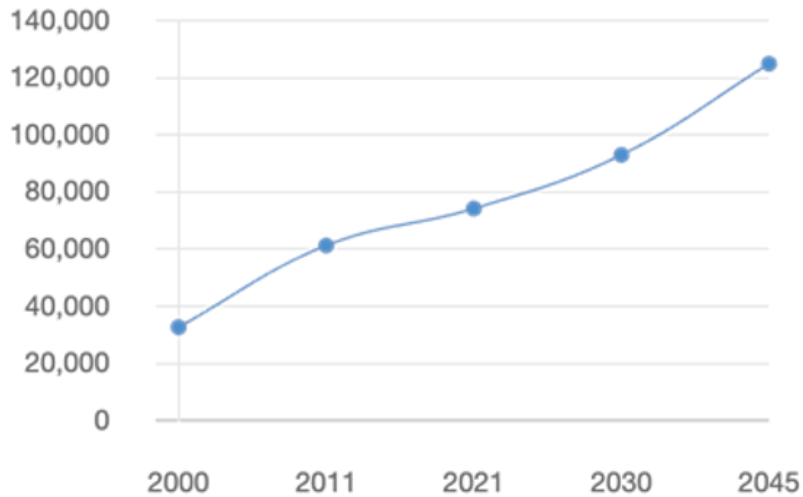
# The false divide: Nutritional security and agrobiodiversity are two parts of the same plate

Deborah Dutta

*The spectre of food insecurity is often raised as a critique of agroecological farming suggesting that these practices are unable to produce at a scale needed to feed the world. However, mere food availability is not the same as nutritional security, and the right to wholesome nutrition is not separate from the need for biodiverse farming.*

## The homogenization revolution

Even as a plethora of culinary shows and cuisines seem to inspire an unprecedented interest in food, our edible palate is probably the most impoverished version since humans began cooking. [Studies](#) reveal that 75% of our food is derived from just 12 plants and five animal species. Just wheat, rice and corn contribute to 60% of the calories consumed globally. The dominance of a few staple crops became possible due to the rise of Industrial Agriculture with its focus on yield-oriented, large-scale monocultures since the early 20th century. Consequently, nearly 90% of edible crop varieties have disappeared from cultivation. Some don't see this as a crisis, given that 'affordable' food seems to be widely produced and available. India today has millions of tons of stocked granaries and is a net exporter of cereals, a far cry from the situation in the 1960s when the fear of possible famine gripped the country. However, many scholars have questioned this framing and argue that corporate interests and technology-driven institutional arrangements have promoted monocultural production and standardized consumption under the guise of food security. Ironically, the policies and incentives used to ramp up the production of wheat and rice adversely impacted the cultivation of mixed crops, oilseeds, fruits and the rearing of livestock, which would usually comprise a farming system. The resulting skewed nutritional basket is evident in the rise of diseases such as malnutrition, vitamin deficiencies, obesity, diabetes and other ailments despite the supposed abundance of food. The creation of large monocultures led to the conversion of common lands and forests that were sources of nutritious, uncultivated food for marginalized populations in rural areas. In the growing absence of such sources of food, many rural and tribal areas rely on Public Distribution Systems, which just provide staple grains.



*People with diabetes in India, in 1,000s; Source: <https://diabetesatlas.org/data/en/country/93/in.html>*

## Resilience at risk

Human health isn't the only trade-off in the current mode of industrial agriculture. Reduced agrobiodiversity puts the entire food production through over-reliance on fewer crops that are vulnerable to widespread pest attacks. In the 1950s, [bananas were on the verge of extinction](#). Specifically, a variety called Gros Michael had been cultivated extensively through tissue culture, that were genetically identical and thus extremely vulnerable to the same threats. In the 1900s, a deadly soil fungus called Panama 1 began spreading through the world and almost wiped out the variety. The sobering lesson should have proved the crucial need for biodiversity in food, but instead, plant scientists and agri-business groups switched to a genetically similar type called Cavendish that is supposedly fungal resistant. However, a new fungus variety called Panama 4 is already impacting Cavendish cultivations, and warmer temperatures are almost sure to give rise to many more fungal and bacterial varieties that could severely impact food production. Diversity is our best bet in mitigating the impact of aggressive pathogens by ensuring the continuing survival of different species and breeding favourable characteristics, something our ancestors did for millennia and provided us with a mind-boggling diversity of edibles. Yet, within a single century, we risk losing generations of cultivated knowledge and resilience, even as multiplier threats of climate change become more apparent by the day.



*Diversity of leafy greens in a local market*

## **The one health paradigm**

In a [recent webinar](#) hosted by Biodiversity Alliance, activist Kavitha Kuruganti emphasized the fundamental interconnections between soil, plant and human health by drawing attention to the concept of ‘One Health’, an integrated, unifying approach that recognizes the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and inter-dependent. Citing a comparative analysis done by the National Institute of Nutrition, which studied the nutrition profiles of 28 food items between 1989 and 2017, she explained how the nutritional composition of the same food item has decreased due to poor soil conditions, disrupted geochemical cycles and widespread pollution. As food crops become less nutritious, compromised health and immunity of populations is an inevitable outcome. Controversial attempts of fortifying items like rice, wheat milk, etc. have arisen to compensate for a lack of nutrition that wouldn’t exist if people could access diverse foods (most food an average person eats during the day can be traced back to wheat, rice, corn syrup and a cocktail of preservatives). The factory farming model extending to livestock and fisheries has also stressed the wild habitats of many creatures and created conditions for increased transmission of zoonotic diseases. The natural mechanisms to counter potential outbreaks are severely impacted by the network of global demand-supply chains and extensive dependency on a narrow range of food sources.



*Left: Variety of tomatoes and brinjals in a home garden*

*Right: A farmer harvesting groundnuts as part of mixed cropping*



## **Flavours of the same dish: Food, Ecological, Social and Economic Justice**

The advent of mass-produced and processed foods has further compromised the availability of wholesome food. Locally milled flour and cold-pressed oil have ironically become a niche market for elite populations interested in accessing healthy food. Millets, for instance, were once a staple produce in rain-fed areas and an important food source but were marginalized with the GR push for wheat and rice production. Now hailed as ‘climate-resilient’ ‘nutri-cereals’, the once shunned ‘coarse-grains’ now find prominent spaces in upscale supermarkets. [Such skewed practices](#) result from practices and policies that are unable to protect the needs of the farmers or vulnerable populations who need nutritional security the most. A great deal of cultural engineering took place in the 20th century to create aspiration and perceived dependency towards standardized, processed foods (such as [using sugar instead of gur](#)) and another socio-cultural shift is urgently needed now. Encouraging people to incorporate millet into their diets, for instance, must be accompanied by incentives and a supportive ecosystem for farmers to switch back from paddy cultivation. Community seed banks can be managed and supported by state and local government agencies to help farmers cultivate diverse crops. Newer institutional arrangements stemming from grassroots practices and contextual needs can pave the way for reimagining the agri-food system based on principles of reciprocity, care and stewardship instead of reductionist efficiency and skewed productivity. Health, encompassing human and planetary wellbeing, has to develop on principles of biodiversity and dignified livelihoods. We treat these concepts as separate at our own peril.

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# Can agroecology pave the path for India's agricultural transformation?

Sayali Dongare and Minhaj "Min" Ameen

*India's agriculture sector is at the cusp of a profound transformation that could revolutionise how we grow and consume food. The recent Agroecology Donor Convening from 10-11 August 2023 in Bangalore sought to understand the diverse roles that stakeholders need to invest in to support sustainable food system transitions. The inspiring journey of farmers, along with insights and recommendations from donors and CSOs, shed light on agroecology's potential to reshape India's agricultural landscape.*

## Building momentum for agroecological practices in India

Agroecology is a [multifaceted cluster](#) of practices aims to incorporate ideas about a more environmentally and socially sensitive approach to agriculture with a focus on ecological sustainability. While India is home to diverse forms of agroecological initiatives at different scales, there is a growing need for a sustained push and direction to mainstream agroecological practices. The [Bharat Agroecology Fund](#), committed to supporting local leadership and governance towards promoting agroecology, held a convention. It was a donor-focused event where other stakeholders were invited to give their perspectives to help build donor awareness and interest in agroecology. The discussions revealed that merely increasing fund availability is insufficient to enable the much-needed sustainable transition. A longer-term, collaborative multi-stakeholder investment is critical for transformative change. Donors need to engage with grassroots leaders, build community trust, and adopt accounting systems conducive to ecosystem-level initiatives. Monitoring and evaluation should shift towards processes that seek to understand and value the interconnected nature of health, nutrition, and local economy rather than focusing solely on production metrics.

## Farmers' Stories

The compelling narratives and experiences shared by farmer participants helped stakeholders empathise with the challenges faced on the ground. Bhairab Saini, hailing from West Bengal, owns approximately four acres of land where he cultivates grains, pulses, and rice. He is also deeply committed to conserving traditional rice varieties and has pioneered innovative multi-layer farming

models. The young national award-winning Akash Chaurasia, based in Madhya Pradesh, not only manages diverse crops through multilayer farming through his popular [Youtube](#) channel that has inspired farmers like Basrahat Ahmed in remote Mirzapur to adapt these methods on his farm, following his return to his village after being a mechanic in the Middle East.



Bhairab Saini's agroecological journey was a two-decade-long commitment to promoting organic and ecological farming practices and conserving traditional seeds, including over 120 varieties of rice. Agroecology, he believes, can enhance crop health and community well-being. Chaurasia, driven by a desire to improve human health through better diets and nutrition, suggested that agroecological methods could address multiple ecological issues, such as biodiversity loss, soil health degradation, and declining water availability, while offering improved economic returns for farmers.

Transitioning to agroecology is not without its difficulties. Chaurasia mentioned the lack of acceptance, limited resources (including seeds and water), and the absence of a market for agroecological produce as challenges. For Saini, finding buyers willing to pay fair prices for the efforts and quality was a challenge, and he depends on his personal networks, an advantage not all farmers enjoy. To a question posed on the availability of food for the nation through agroecology or organic or natural farming, Saini remarked,

'We farmers can ensure enough production for everyone's survival, but access to it and no one dying of hunger is another ball game of the country's politics that we all have to solve together'.

Long-term investments and collaboration can push agroecology transformation. Donors were reminded that their influence extends beyond financial support,

impacting policy, advocacy, and innovation. With 60% of the Indian economy linked to agriculture, the sector's reform can have a significant climate-positive impact.

“We have to start the conversations; there are distinct and impactful efforts by different actors, but they are not strategically aligned. In order to scale up, all actors have to come together from different sectors such as funders, implementers, community and farmers to draw roadmaps that could push this (scale of agroecology) going forward” - Shloka Nath, ICC



## **Agroecology can empower rural youth**

The average age of the Indian farmer has crossed 50, despite Indian youth comprising over 40% of its population. Reskilling youth to overcome the embedded risks in agriculture, compounded by the uncertainties of climate change, is critical to attracting youngsters towards farming. As the majority seek job security in urban areas, generations of experiential knowledge possessed by farmers are at risk of being lost. The question is, should only rural youth bear the burden of the risk and its consequences? There is a need to encourage youth participation in agroecology by promoting better returns and amplifying knowledge about natural farming practices, technology, and seeds.

“Agriculture should be a glamorous profession that should attract the youth of our country, and we have to create that glamour as a leader” - says Akash Chaurasia.

## **Policy Driving Agroecology –View of the Government**

The Natural Farming Movement in Andhra Pradesh by the Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RySS) shows the importance of the government's push in such movements for landscape-level transition. It started as a solution to the recurrent issue of drought and distress. A key element of the program design is leveraging the power of women collectives in the state and acknowledging the role of women in agroecology. The new JIVA programme of NABARD aims to use

principles of agroecology to attain long-term sustainability and social and natural transformation. They define diversified crop systems, multi-tiered cropping, farmer-led extension, the use of natural manure, and the internalisation of markets as the five pillars of agroecology. In the collaborative efforts with the government, the donor's role could be exchanging knowledge and learnings from their experiences to avoid duplication of efforts. Funders can play supplementary roles by bridging capacity gaps for policymakers by creating collaborative multi-stakeholder platforms, strengthening CSO capacities, and documenting organisational learning. This movement should start with farmer leaders from communities who can play an essential role in spreading the message. Market demand is the critical factor where the government and each stakeholder must support communities to identify opportunities.

### **Paving the path for a resilient future**

Conversations at the Donor Forum underscored the importance of continued support, collaboration, and policy advocacy to ensure the success of agroecology for India's greener future.

'Food and our food systems are at the core of a lot of economic activities and have a huge impact on what happens to our health, to economic outcomes, and our river systems.... So, irrespective of what you are doing, there is a link to agroecology whether you like it or not' - Sameer Shisodia, Rainmatter Foundation.

With this, the next steps involve a commitment to long-term investments and partnerships, collaboration with local stakeholders, advocacy for favourable policies, awareness-raising, comprehensive measurement frameworks, and support for research, innovation, and market linkages. With concerted efforts, India's agriculture sector can embrace agroecology and pave the way for a sustainable and resilient future for everyone.

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# Navigating Agricultural Complexity: The Food Systems Dialogue, 2022

Jonathan Donald Syiemlieh, Nitya Jadeja and Prachur Goel

*The Food Systems Dialogue (FSD), 2022 was a unique space that enabled learning across diverse actors with divergent perspectives. Through facilitated dialogues and curating systems thinking there were 'movements' from divergence to convergence, from particular themes to exploring intersectionalities, and from disagreement to respectful understanding. Together, these dialogues provided opportunities for building and strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration and solutions in otherwise fragmented food systems.*



## Complex systems are not solved through specialization

We face complex systemic challenges, yet solutions proffered often move towards more specialization creating silos that prevent exploring interconnections. The production of rice in India, for instance, is deeply connected to government policy of procurement at Minimum Support Prices, national food security, the rise of lifestyle diseases, the burgeoning fertilizer subsidy and imports (more than 2 lakh crores last year), huge water consumption, electricity subsidies, international trade (India exports 40% of global rice trade) and soil health. Making any policy change without understanding this interconnected complexity is a recipe for failure.

The discourse in Food Systems is usually done separately as agriculture, nutrition, environment etc which often circumvents the intersectionalities and complexities, becoming unilateral and one-dimensional instead. There are currently very few spaces that enable dialogues that enable navigating this complexity. For this, a large number of people across various levels who appreciate this complexity and are willing to engage in systemic solutions is needed. The Bharat Krishak Samaj and Socrates Foundation collaborated to host the Food Systems Dialogues (FSD) India 2022.



*Participatory interaction from the Finance & Financial instruments session*

## Diversity is key to understand systems

FSD was co-organised with ten reputed institutions who brought their unique perspectives to Food Systems. The institutions were a mix of government affiliated, civil society oriented, domestic and international think tanks as listed in the diagram below. Each partner organized a session on a particular theme.



## Partner Organizations for the Food Systems Dialogue

The dialogues were designed for inclusivity and diversity by inviting participants from different regions and backgrounds, including those who are traditionally underrepresented in such discussions. By inviting more than 200 individuals from various networks associated with our partners, we were able to gather a diverse and multifaceted group of participants, including representatives from academia, policy-making bodies, industry, government agencies, private organizations, research institutions, think tanks, civil society groups, innovators, international organizations, and farmers.

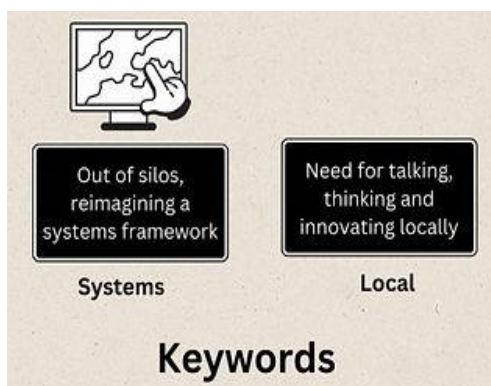


*A glimpse from Day 1 of the plenary session*

FSD featured ten thematic tracks, with each track being led by a partner organization. Each participant was able to attend sessions across three themes. A participant compared this to being at a global food court where each counter gave a different taste profile and expanded the palette. For example, a scientist in the government's ICAR system who has largely been exposed to research on the Green Revolution, could take a bite out of the session on global trade that delved into issues of Adivasi farmers. By weaving together these different threads, the conference was able to create a rich tapestry of ideas and perspectives that helped to advance everyone's understanding of complexities in Food Systems.



interactions to flourish. Reforming food systems is an existential imperative for us today and it cannot be done piece by piece. We need a Food Systems approach. There is no playbook for this, yet. Such an approach needs to be introduced, cultivated and nurtured amongst all the stakeholders. The need for grassroots involvement was aptly summed up by Arun Maira, "People on the ground are natural systems thinkers. We need a new model - an organic model of institutions and systems. Nothing better to teach than nature itself and the people who live with nature - #farmers."



*Keywords from the Food Systems Dialogue 2022*

For this, spaces like FSD 2022 are essential. The synergy that results from the interactions at the FSD 2022 can lead to the creation of innovative solutions to complex problems. The dialogue brought about shared insights among participants, built relationships across the actors and committed to working together to advance a specific food system solution. FSD 2022 was marked by major shifts in people - from

thinking about organizations to talking in systems, from focusing on specific issues to considering intersectionalities, and from rejection of contrarian viewpoints to a deeper understanding of each other.



*Participants at the concluding plenary*

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*Jonathan Donald Syiemlieh, Nitya Jadeja and Prachur Goel are part of the Socratus Foundation*

*Field stories and grassroots  
innovations*

# The promise and potential of Bio-input Resource Centres (BRCs): Scaling-Up Grassroot Innovations

**Aneesh Mohan, Abhishek Saxena, Asmita Chaudhari and C Shambu Prasad**

*The government of India's ambitious plans to set up 15,000 decentralized BRCs to provide quality alternatives to synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, while welcome, suffers from lack of clear guidelines for farmer engagement. Existing practices from BRCs in villages of Gujarat and Rajasthan provide insights for the potential scaling up of these micro-initiatives.*

A key aspect of the National Mission for Natural Farming (NMNF) includes an ambitious goal to engage ten million farmers in the Ganga-belt and rain-fed in natural farming practices. A crucial step towards fulfilling this goal involves providing quality alternatives to synthetic fertilisers and pesticides in the form of bio-input resources. Recognising the labour, cost and quality constraints, The Centre aims to provide for these resources through setting up 15,000 decentralised bio-input resource centres (BRCs) to cater to local needs and contexts.



Multiple models of BRCs are being carried out on farmers' fields and need to be **documented** to work out to replicate processes and potential business models for sustainability. The National Coalition for Natural Farming (NCNF) has brought out a **technical process manual** for natural farming that talks about BRCs and the technical and managerial aspects of such

centres and the role of civil society organisations in the process. While this document describes the ideal parameters for a BRC to function in terms of products, processes, business model, role in the local village economy etc.,

understanding the situational factors governing the running of BRCs is best understood on the field.

An opportunity to visit 6 BRCs arose through the Rajasthan and Gujarat chapters of NCNF, helped understand the contextual and general challenges of the BRC, as seen on the ground and opportunities they present the farmers both as entrepreneurs selling the bio-inputs and as buyers/users of bio-inputs.

## Bio-input Resource Centres: Shed, Storage and Shop

BRCs come in many forms and sizes but the common thing about them is that essentially the farmer(s) locally produce bio-inputs for the purpose of sale. The BRCs can be owned by a farmer or a group, like an SHG. Having cattle and a shed are essential components since cow urine is a prime ingredient of the myriad bio-inputs produced. Depending on the inputs a BRC produces, the costs of setting up a BRC can vary from as little as Rs. 14,000 to as high as Rs. 80,000. The one-time set up and basic infrastructure required for preparing, storing and packaging the bio-inputs such as vermicompost, *jeevamrut*, *beejamrut*, etc. is often provided by the civil society organisation (CSO). CSOs may also support the BRCs in terms of covering the cost of raw materials, as witnessed in BRCs being managed by AKRSP(I) in Netrang and Sayla, in Gujarat, until there is a steady customer base and reliable profit.

Other costs include consumables such as bottles for packaging, and less frequently, new drums, jars, and composting bags. In some instances, enterprising farmers have been able to reduce these costs by linking up with suppliers beyond those introduced by the CSOs.

## Allied-agri activity or an enterprise?



In Abu Road, Rajasthan, a region dominated by *Bhil* and *Garasia* tribals, bio-inputs associated with natural farming are not known, beyond a few SHG leaders and proactive farmers. Pesticides are applied only if necessary. It is also not uncommon to see the chemical fertilisers being used in conjunction.

Use of farmyard manure can also be seen as the traditional practice of using *gobarkhaad* on the fields is still prevalent. Similarly, in Pratapgarh, while utilisation of bio-inputs has been adopted by farmers, through sustained intervention of CSOs, the inputs are mostly produced on-farm for personal use. In families or groups that manage the BRCs, selling bio-inputs is seen as value-additions rather than an enterprise of their own. They do it since they are able to use it in their own fields and also sell it to someone through their social network, which in most cases is not very huge. The record of quantities produced, costs incurred, and sales made are maintained by many farmers. Predominantly scattered hamlets also discourage large-scale operations.

With a more market-focused approach, BRCs in Netrang and Sayla in Gujarat, have branded the bio-inputs with flashier and creative names such as penta-fighter, *panchh yoddha* and *soya shakti*. While the CSOs are investing a similar amount of money in BRC set-up in the two states (Rs 14,000 – Rs 16,000), the difference lies in where that money is invested. In Rajasthan, the investment has gone into creating compost bags, whereas, in Gujarat, the emphasis has been on better-quality packaging bottles and branding.



The BRC in Wankaner *Naseeb Jaivik Dawa Utpaad Kendra*, supported by Aga Khan Foundation has adopted an entirely decentralized approach and was formed through a three-party quasi-agreement. Women of Naseeb SHG provide labour to produce bioinputs, at a rented plot of a farmer with large land holdings. An FPO, the Macchu Agri Producer

Company undertakes sales and marketing. They also purchase cow-urine from a *Gaushala* in large quantities (about 20 Litres/day). Similar to BRCs in Netrang and Sayla, the investment of the supporting CSO has been in terms of purchase of recipe raw materials and providing packaging for 'branded' bio-inputs. The scale of production is very high (with about 7,000 Litres of *Jeevamrut* (branded as G-amrut) and 410 Litres of *Dashparni Ark* (branded as Herbo-power) in the last year and they sell/deliver to farmers with large land holdings. Smaller orders are delivered only if there is a larger delivery happening in the vicinity.

## What holds BRCs back?

Regardless of the approach a BRC might take, there are still hurdles to overcome. For instance, cattle urine collection, without a dedicated infrastructure, prevents farmers from utilising all the available urine. Urine was most often only collected in the morning at the time of milching their cattle. At other times, collecting it manually would require a lot of patient labour.



Geographical realities naturally impact the profitability of a BRC. Crop failure due to reasons such as water scarcity (like in case of Sayla and Wankaner), unanticipated rainfall, or salinity of soil are reasons why farmers cancel their bioinput orders, causing wastage of production and labour. Low density of households in a village reduces the outreach potential of a BRC, as the transport costs start to add up for both the consumer and seller. In some cases, as NF practices become more popular, farmers could be unwilling to buy bio-inputs as these can be produced by them at their homes for their farm's consumption.

Most BRC owners expressed difficulties in meeting big orders since their production level as per regular requirement is low. The pricing of bioinputs also differed between the two states. In Pratapgarh, a one litre bottle of *jeevamrut* could sell for as little as Rs. 15 (and still self-report being profitable), whereas, in Gujarat the same sells for Rs. 80. While it can be explained by the costs incurred in high quality packaging material and better product branding in the latter case, there is still ambiguity regarding the other costs incurred in obtaining the raw materials and storing and processing infrastructure like cans and drums and bags.

Visits to BRCs indicate diverse experimentation in terms of practices and institutional structures with multiple models suited to local conditions. Incubating these BRCs requires both one-time capital investments and repeated interaction



with farmer-experimenters. Sustaining support over two-three cropping seasons and some training on basic business skills can help BRCs sustain growth and incomes and can lead to growth of rural entrepreneurs. The various models of BRC however prove that multiple forms of engagement and functioning are possible if farmers are provided a supportive ecosystem. Plurality of visions are embedded in the growth of BRCs, and ways in which multiple ideas find space might decide the possible success of these ventures.

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# Champion farmers and keen stakeholders: transitioning to natural farming in the Thar

Abhishek Saxena

*The Government seeks to promote more bioinputs and natural farming practices as is evident in the latest budget speech. farmers who are innovative and early adopters can be a great resource towards this goal. Rajasthan's novel attempt to upscale natural farming through Gram Panchayat plans can benefit through documenting innovative practices of champion farmers.*

## The Natural Farming Thrust

The announcement of the Finance Minister of a scheme to enable states to transition to sustainable agriculture has received a boost through [the PM-PRANAM](#) yojana, the latest in line of the previous schemes aimed at pushing for sustainable agricultural practices such as Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) that promotes farming through Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati Program (BPKPP). Civil Society Organisations have independently collaborated to promote agroecology-based farming. [The National Coalition for Natural Farming \(NCNF\)](#) is one such coalition formed in 2020-21 with five state chapters including Rajasthan. In Rajasthan NCNF partners have sought to integrate natural farming into the gram panchayat development program (GPDP). Rajasthan has 10 agroclimatic zones and correspondingly crops, farming practices, and resource availability with the farmers. A few vignettes of natural farming practices in the 'arid western plains' that form part of the desert region known as Thar, are presented.

## Farmer to farmer learning and innovation

Jogaram of Hathi Tala village in Barmer used to work in a stone quarry. Like most people involved in stone mining and cutting he suffered from Silicosis. This is when he returned to farming. He grows pearl millet (bajra) and psyllium (isabgol) as the principal crops with vegetables such as brinjal, legumes such as green gram (mung) and moth and some locally used herbs and condiments like ber, kair and sangri. The highlight of his farm is the variety of bajra and the isabgol that he grows. Jogaram shares that he brought the seeds of bajra and isabgol from his relative and crossed them with the variety that he was growing on his field.

This was few years back, when he was still using chemicals on his field and was in the process of transition. He shifted to natural farming around 2019 and uses the castor, neem and other weeds growing on his field, along with the cow urine and dung, to make bioinputs.



Now, when he farms naturally, his bajra grows to a height of 12-14 feet having a 3-4 feet long grain ear! Even the yield per bigha (local unit of land measurement with 6.20 bigha being 1 ha) of land is more for this cross-pollinated variety at 7 Qt (as compared to 4 Qt for the desi bajra that farmers grow).



Jogaram does not sell this bajra at the farmers' market yard (mandi) at Barmer. Instead, he sells it at a very high premium (Rs. 800/Kg, as compared to Rs. 25-35/Kg of pearl millet sold at the mandi) to anyone who is willing to buy. It was a similar story with the psyllium, however that was sold at the farmers' market, even as his cross-pollinated variety stood out in the field as compared to the normal variety that he had also planted. Even though Jogaram owns 10.75 ha of land and has access to irrigation, which many others in the regions are not fortunate enough to have, his experience of turning to natural farming and experimenting with seeds obtained from other farmer can be a lesson.

## **The significance of local support ecosystem**

Ganesharam (Ganesh) is a community resource person with the RCD Social Service Society (RCD) in Aati gram panchayat, Barmer. He comes from a farming background and is knowledgeable about desi farm inputs and pesticides. The 5 bighas of land that he has is divided into vadis or bagiyas where his parents grow

vegetables such as brinjal, radish, carrot etc. apart from the land where he had sown bajra and isabgol. The 'wasteland' that his farmland consisted of is where a treasure of trees, weeds and grasses existed. These were used in making seed treatment concoctions, pesticides etc. A few commonly known included neem, castor and milk weed. He prepares vermicompost for his own use and showed us the vermicompost unit that he had at his place established with the help of RCD.

Ganesh's experience has led to another vermicompost unit managed by a women's SHG. This unit was supported by NABARD. It yields close to 1 quintal of compost from a single pit. There are 12 such pits and it takes 3-4 months to convert cattle dung to compost, under conditions of 60% moisture, and optimum earthworm activity. The local ecosystem consisting of RCD and NABARD have been able to promote vermicomposting in the region to a large extent, demonstrating the significance of support ecosystems.



### **Engaging stakeholders through GPDP: The significance of NCNF's interventions**



NCNF's focus on GPDP for inclusion of 'promotion of ecologically sustainable practices' in the plan has huge significance in the region. Interacting with GPDP can help include local knowledge and practices and come up with bioinput based

farming that can be sustained using the local flora and fauna with minimum import from outside. This would require collaboration between various stakeholders. Toward this end, engaging with gram panchayats through the GPDP seems a promising step taken by NCNF. It helps to scale up the initiatives taken by individual CSOs in two ways viz. collectively researching and designing interventions to be implemented through panchayats, and utilising the resources allocated to the panchayats. Next, and more importantly, it can help leverage the strong on-ground knowledge and data that exists with the panchayat, on farmers, their landholding, popular practices, crops, livestock, other flora and fauna, and post-harvest consumption and marketing behaviour of the farmers. Research institutions and local agricultural universities can collaborate to help in the documentation of these knowledge, practices and behavioural trends to inform relevant policies and initiatives. Creating participatory forms of co-learning initiatives is important to recognize the embedded wisdom in the community and possibilities of innovation through wider interactions. This point is [illustrated through the involvement of student interns](#) (as part of the LFI internship) in collecting ground-level knowledge, such that the experiences also serve to expand their own educational horizons and aspirations. Given the nascent stage of transitions in the area, in-depth field documentations can also help raise more critical questions. Some of the most prominent questions that emerge are: how is the livelihood of farmers impacted by a shift to natural farming? Whether the changes in farming methods have led to crop diversification and has their diets been impacted by expected demand of particular crops? What is the effect of natural farming practices on the larger ecology. These are generative questions that will benefit from increased dialogues and collaborations between CSOs, educational institutions, farmers and government agencies and it is hoped that the GPDP would explore these dimensions in their plans. A few promising pilots can serve as models for similar initiatives in other districts and states too providing insights for ground level implementation of PM\_PRANAM.

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*Abhishek Saxena is a Research Fellow in the project and also pursuing his doctoral research at IRMA.*

# Transitioning to Sustainability: Vignettes from the Field

**Aneesh Mohan**

*Centre for microfinance, in collaboration with National Coalition for Natural Farming for the past 2 years has been trying to bring about a sustainable transition in the region of Pindwara. The routes to sustainable transition are plural and diverse and is reflected in the three transition journeys of farmers from Sirohi district in Pindwara, Rajasthan.*

Sirohi, sandwiched between the erstwhile kingdoms of Mewar and Marwar, presents a contrast to earlier sustainable transition stories from [Mewar \(Dungarpur\)](#) and [Marwar \(Barmer\)](#). [Centre for microFinance \(CmF\)](#), in Pindwara block of Sirohi, got introduced to the [National Coalition for Natural Farming](#) in 2021 and is promoting sustainable agricultural practices in the region.



Pindwara is semi-humid with a rainfall of 600 – 800 mm. The farmers of Pindwara depend mostly on rainwater, but there has been an increasing trend in irrigating lands through wells/tubewells. About one-third of the population is tribal, mainly, the Garasiyas. Farmers, historically, have used gobar-khaad to fertilise their agricultural land but with introduction of chemical fertilisers and the many subsidies, gobar-khaad got slowly replaced with chemical-fertilisers. Sirohi is famous for its namesake goat breed, however, the use of goat-faeces in

preparation of biologically active recipes like Jeevamrut is something that has not yet been fully explored.

CmF has been trying to promote natural farming in this region through support from [Krishi Vigyan Kendra \(KVK\)](#), [Sirohi](#) and NCNF. In the absence of a differentiated market for organic or naturally-farmed produce in the district, the reason for transition becomes cost-saving rather than profits. A few vignettes from the field demonstrate a new dawn in Pindwara.

### **“She wants to join me too” – Dasubai, an inspiration to others**



Dasubai is a farmer of the Garasiya tribe from Thandiveri village in Pindwara and stopped using any chemical inputs on her 3 bigha land, for the last three years. Around the same time, she received a training from Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) on producing bio-inputs like Jeevamrut and Khaati Chhas. In the Kharif season, she grows wheat for sale and self-consumption and grows various pulses and corn during Rabi. Apart from that, she has many tall papaya shrubs, and is growing brinjal and tomato on her field. She is also raising 3 buffaloes and has 9 goats. She has a borewell at her disposal for irrigation and other purposes.

She procures her seeds from both CmF and KVK, and regularly calls CmF for the deworming and vaccination of her animals. Ever since she switched to using bio-inputs, she has saved a lot of money (estimating around Rs 4000) from not having to use Urea or DAP. Not only that, but she has also found a channel to sell her wheat to the factory workers of the nearby UltraTech Cement Factory

Her customers are willing to pay a premium as they trust her produce and she sells the wheat at Rs 35 per Kg, compared to the market price which is Rs 20 per Kg. The same, however, is not true for the chickpea she grows, and she is yet to find a more profitable market for it.



Seeing Dasubai's success with bioinputs, her neighbour wants to follow in her footsteps. She was skeptical of her methods initially but after seeing the length and health of her wheat crops, she too is considering using bioinputs.

## **Kalaram – the Persistent Natural Farming Champion**



Kalaram, from Mori village, is not very educated but possesses immense farming knowledge. Two years back he started using Jeevamrut on his 2 bigha land (1.2 acres) after he started seeing cracks on his land. Although, he has been making use of gobar-khaad for even longer. While his wife is employed in MGNREGA and works as a wage labourer, he is more active on the field and prefers to spend at least an hour every day in his farm. Their family farms entirely for sustenance and

also has three cows for their own use. They get their seeds from the nursery in Pindwara. Last year, they also got a tubewell to quench their water needs and he plans on adding solar panels for it as currently the electricity is erratic. His family is food secure and the only things they purchase from the market are turmeric and salt.

He came across CmF and they later took him for a training at KVK, Sirohi, where he learnt how to make Jeevamrut and Khaati Chhaas. Ever since switching to bio-inputs, the effort he puts on the field has increased but he has no complains and instead finds it 'relaxing'. Kalaram is a 'Resource Farmer' for CmF and his field is often used for exposure visits by other farmers.



## **Basubai's ongoing journey from an FPO staff to natural farming**



Basubai has been a member of the Samruddhi FPO for the past six years. She has 1.5 bigha land. There are five members in her family. Both her husband and son used to be employed in silica mining. However, her husband developed silicosis and that severely impacted their finances. She took a loan of Rs 30,000 from RMGV Bank and is repaying Rs 2030/month. She has 3 cows, 3 buffaloes, 3 goats (which she had bought 12 months back for about Rs 3000 each). She hopes to sell them at Rs 10,000 each. Earlier, she used to sell her goats to Samruddhi. She grows 'Desi gehun' which gets sold at Rs 30 per Kg. She is also growing garlic, onions and goat feed. She uses urea, DAP and also gobar-khaad. She would like to switch to natural inputs but says that the soil is too conditioned to the Urea and DAP and so the transition cannot be immediate. When asked, when she thinks

she can start the transition, she shares that having a proper fence is a priority as her efforts on the farm will be rendered useless if animals enter her field. Previously, she got a 100ft fence from CmF but requires 200-300ft more to cover her entire plot. CmF had also given her a vermicompost training but she has not yet started doing it.

She used to be a community support person for the FPO and had a salary of Rs 1,500 per month. There are about 55 shareholders in the FPO from her village and used to share a common tractor. However, the FPO has stopped procuring from their village for the past 1.5 years as they are skeptical of the quality and quantity the village can guarantee, due to constant disturbance caused by loose livestock that would enter the farmers' fields and spoil the produce.

When the FPO was still active, they used to take tomatoes and ladyfinger and their seeds from her. She estimates that if for 1 Kg, they would get a market price of Rs 200, then through the FPO the rate was Rs 300 per Kg.



## **Managing Diverse Sustainable Transitions**

It is encouraging to find traditional practices still alive in Pindwara but at large, these must be documented. The presence of CmF and a strong FPO like Samruddhi, add to it the strong SHG network built by CmF over the years can pave the road to moving towards sustainable agriculture. However, It is important to acknowledge and address small local issues in farming to ensure sustainable

transitions, as plural practices may be required for diverse farms. Women are considered natural leaders in facilitating transitions towards sustainable agriculture. However, the journey of resource farmers like Kalaram suggests that men can also play a significant role in this process.

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## मरुस्थल में संगठित होती महिला किसान

शुभा खड़के

रेत के बवंडर और उनके बीच चलती महिलाओं की बैठक, जहाँ महिलाएं घूँघट में बड़े आत्मविश्वास के साथ अपनी खेती और उससे जुड़ी चुनौतियों पर बात करती हैं। ये विशेष दृश्य पश्चिमी राजस्थान के बाड़मेर जिले के पाटोदी ब्लॉक का है, जहाँ जय भीम महिला किसान संगठन की सदस्य अपनी बैठकों में खेती और आजीविका के विभिन्न मुद्दों पर चर्चा करती हैं। वर्तमान में जहाँ महिला किसान खेती में अपनी पहचान के लिए प्रयासरत हैं वही पश्चिमी राजस्थान में अनुसूचित जाति और जनजाति की महिला किसानों का संगठन निश्चित ही सराहनीय पहल है।

पश्चिमी राजस्थान में आज भी महिलाएं घूँघट करती हैं, और जब घूँघट में कोई महिला अपने संगठन के बारे में, उसके कार्यों के बारे में बात करती है तो उनके आत्म विश्वास को देखकर मन प्रफुल्लित हो जाता है। पर इस तरह संगठन बनाना इतना आसान भी नहीं था। उनकी ये यात्रा निश्चित ही प्रेरणादायक है।



### महिला किसानों के योगदान को पहचान देता 'उन्नति' का संगठन

इस यात्रा की शुरुआत 'उन्नति विकास शिक्षण संगठन' के सामुदायिक विकास कार्यों के साथ हुई। 'उन्नति' महिलाओं के साथ स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा, आजीविका, प्राकृतिक संसाधन प्रबंधन,

सुशासन, महिला सशक्तिकरण आदि कई मुद्दों पर कार्य कर रही है। महिलाओं के साथ काम करते हुए संस्था ने अनुभव किया कि खेती में उन्नत तकनीक की जरूरत है, महिलाएं खेती में बराबरी से सहयोग कर रही हैं अतः संगठन के माध्यम से कई महिलाओं को एक साथ मार्गदर्शन प्रदान किया जा सकता है, रसायन मुक्त खेती की जानकारी दी जा सकती है। रासायनिक उर्वरकों के नुकसान से महिलाओं को अवगत कराया जा सकता है साथ ही कम संसाधनों में भी एक दूसरे की मदद हो सकती है।

## जय भीम महिला किसान संगठन का गठन और विकास



इसी उद्देश्य के साथ और खेती में महिला किसानों के योगदान को पहचान मिले इस हेतु से 'उन्नति' ने अपने कार्यक्षेत्र पश्चिमी राजस्थान में 2017 में जय भीम महिला किसान संगठन (जेबीएमकेएस)" के गठन में मदद की है। पाटोदी संकुल के 25 गाँवोंकी 700 और सिणधरी संकुल के 25 गाँवों की 700 महिलाएँ इस संगठन की सदस्य हैं। सभी 1400 महिलाकिसान अनुसूचित जाति और जनजाति की महिलाएं हैं। 100 रुपयेके सदस्यता शुल्क के साथ ये सभी महिलाएं इस संगठन की सदस्य है।

'उन्नति' के प्रत्येक गांव में एक ग्राम स्तरीय संगठन है, जिसमें 18-30 महिला सदस्य हैं। इन सदस्यों में से 2 सदस्यों को खेती साथण (कृषि सखी) के रूप में चुना जाता है। वे अन्य सदस्यों को सहयोग करती हैं और अपने समूह का प्रतिनिधित्व करती हैं। ये 2 खेती साथण ब्लॉक लेवल समिति में जाती हैं। इस तरह 25 गांव में से 50 महिलाएं ब्लॉक स्तरीय समिति में भाग लेती हैं। पाटोदी के 25 गांव की 50 महिलाएं और सिणधरी के 25 गांव की 50 महिलाएं ब्लॉक स्तरीय समिति में हैं। दोनों संकुल की ब्लॉक स्तरीय समितियां हैं और चुनी गई 50 खेती साथण अध्यक्ष, कोषाध्यक्ष एवं सचिव का चुनाव



करती है। दोनों ब्लॉक स्तरीय समितियों में संगठन सम्बन्धी सभी निर्णय लिए जाते हैं। इन दोनों समितियों के बैंक खाते हैं जिसके माध्यम से पैसे का लेन देन होता है जैसे कृषि उपकरणों का किराया आदि उसमें ही जमा होता है।

## संगठन से सशक्त होती महिला किसान

संगठन को मजबूत करने हेतु 'उन्नति' ने संगठन को कृषि विश्वविद्यालय, कृषि विज्ञान केंद्र एवं कृषि विभाग से जोड़ा। मिटटी की जाँच, बीज उपचार तथा तकनीकी जानकारी जैसे जैविक उर्वरक, जैविक कीटनाशक, कम्पोस्ट खाद आदि बनाना महिलाओं को सिखाया। कृषि विभाग की सहायता से मिनी किट, बीज खाद आदि उपलब्ध कराये। इसके साथ ही 'उन्नति' रसायन मुक्त जैविक खेती की पद्धतियों के बारे में जागरूक करने का सतत प्रयास कर रही है।

'उन्नति' ने संगठन के कार्य को व्यवस्थित करने के उद्देश्य से प्रत्येक 5 गांव में दो महिला मैनेजर को नियुक्त किया है। इनका काम खेती उत्पाद खरीदना, मार्केटिंग करना, महिलाओं को तैयार करना, विभिन्न सरकारी योजनाओं की जानकारी देना और आवेदन की प्रक्रिया पूर्ण करना आदि है। मैनेजर को काम के आधार पर मानदेय दिया जाता है जो लग-भग 3000/- प्रतिमाह है।

***“बड़े उपकरण खरीदना हमारे लिए कठिन है ऐसे में संगठन की वजह से खेती के लिए जरूरी उपकरण हमें समय से मिल जाते हैं। हमारे परिवार को भी पता है कि हम संगठन से किराये पर उपकरण ला सकते हैं। यहाँ से हमें अच्छे बीज भी मिल जाते हैं जिससे उत्पादन अधिक होता है। इस से परिवार में भी हमारा सम्मान बढ़ा है।”- ममता देवी***

ममता देवी की सास उन्नति से जुड़ी हुई थी अतः वे भी संगठन से जुड़ी। वे बताती हैं कि संगठन निरंतर प्रयास कर रहा है कि महिलाओं को सरकारी योजनाओं का लाभ मिले, उनको अपनी पहचान मिले और सामूहिक प्रयासों के माध्यम से खेती में फायदा मिले। संगठन ने उन्हें उन्नत कृषि पद्धतियों के लिए भी सहयोग दिया है। उन्नति ने अनुदान सहायता के साथ संगठन को ट्रैक्टर, ट्रॉली, पानी के टैंकर और छोटे कृषि उपकरण प्रदान किए। संगठन के सदस्यों ने कुछ दरें तय कीं और इन उचित दरों पर ये उपकरण सदस्यों को किराये पर उपलब्ध कराये जाते हैं। इस से महिलाओं को जैविक खेती में सहयोग मिल रहा है।

उन्नति के पाटोदी कार्यालय में जय भीम महिला किसान संगठन के पाटोदी ब्लॉक स्तरीय समिति का भी कार्यालय है जहाँ संगठन के पास उपलब्ध विभिन्न कृषि उपकरण रखे जाते हैं।

संगठन की वार्षिक बैठक में इन उपकरणों को किराये पर देने के लिए दरें निश्चित की जाती हैं।

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संगठन की वार्षिक बैठक में इन उपकरणों को किराये पर देने के लिए दरें निश्चित की जाती हैं।

संगठन के पास दांतली, खुरपी, स्प्रे पम्प, कुदाल, कटर मशीन, कल्टीवेटर, झाल, क्रॉप हार्वेस्टर से लेकर पानी के टैंकर, ट्रेक्टर तक उपलब्ध है। इनकी किराया दर घंटे से लेकर एक दिन के हिसाब से है जो न्यूनतम 10 रुपये से 700 रुपये तक है। इन उपकरणों की संख्या भी वर्तमान की मांग के अनुरूप है। खेती साधण के माध्यम से गांव से महिलाओं की मांग आती है। प्रत्येक गांव का हिसाब रखने की जवाबदारी मैनेजर की होती है।

## कदम दर कदम बढ़ता संगठन का कारंवा

पिछले 5 सालों में उन्नति निरंतर प्रयास कर रही है कि संगठन मजबूत हो हालाँकि अभी भी संगठन अपनी शैशवास्था में ही है। संगठन के पास लगभग 5 लाख रुपये की राशि है। संगठन के सदस्य अपनी उपज को संगठन को ही बेचते हैं। संगठन अपने सदस्यों को 1 बीघा के लिए बीज के रूप में मूँग 2.5 किलो, मोठ 2.5 किलो और बाजरा 1 किलो उपलब्ध करता है। उत्पादन होने पर सदस्यों को दुगुना अनाज संगठन को लौटाना पड़ता है। अधिक उत्पादन बाजार भाव से संगठन को बेच सकते हैं। संगठन हर उपज की कीमत बाजार भाव से अधिक देने का प्रयास करता है। ये भाव संगठन की बैठक में सर्वसम्मति से तय किये जाते हैं। इस वर्ष संगठन ने 56 रुपये प्रति किलो के हिसाब से सदस्यों से मोठ खरीदा है। उसे 60 रुपये प्रति किलो के भाव से बाजार में बेच दिया। इस तरह प्रति किलो पर 4 रुपये का फायदा संगठन को मिला। इस वर्ष संगठन ने 748 किलो मोठ और 110 किलोबाजरा खरीदा। ज्यादा बरसात की वजह से इस वर्ष मूँग नहीं हुआ। इस तरह संगठन की आमदनी उपज बिक्री से

होती है साथ ही खेती के उपकरण, ट्रैक्टर, पानी के टैंकर आदि के किराये से भी होती है। सिर्फ पानी के टैंकर से इस वर्ष संगठन ने 60000/- कमाए।

ये तो बस शुरुआत है विगत 5 वर्षों के प्रयासों से अब महिलाएं अपने निर्णय लेने में सक्षम हुई हैं। उनके परिवारों में भी उनकी अहमियत बढ़ी है। अब महिलाएं 'उन्नति' के मार्गदर्शन में किसान उत्पादक संघ में पंजीयन कराना चाहती हैं। संगठन के माध्यम से उपज की खरीद और बिक्री प्रारम्भ हो चुकी है। ये क्षेत्र सांगरी के लिए जाना जाता है। अतः महिलाएं संगठन के माध्यम से सांगरी को थोक में खरीदना चाहती हैं। जैविक खेती को बढ़ावा देना भी उनकी भविष्य की योजना में शामिल है।



पश्चिमी राजस्थान के दुर्गम क्षेत्र में संगठन के माध्यम से महिलाएं एकजुट हो कर सशक्त हुई हैं। छोटी छोटी जोतें, कम पानी, रेतीली जमीन और संसाधनों की कमी के परिदृश्य में महिलाओं का साथ में आना, खेती में एक दूसरे की सहायता करना, खेती के बेहतर तरीकों को सीखना और जैविक खेती की नई नई पद्धतियों को अपनाना, खेती में महिलाओं को मिलती पहचान का एक सुखद संकेत है।

पश्चिमी राजस्थान की इन महिलाओं ने संगठन बना कर एक बहुत कठिन पड़ाव पार कर लिया है अब निश्चित ही वे आगे की चुनौतियों का भी दृढ़ता से सामना करने के लिए तैयार हैं। संगठन ने इन महिलाओं को स्वास्थ्य और पोषण से जुड़े मुद्दों पर चर्चा करने का प्लेटफॉर्म उपलब्ध कराया है अतः संगठन के माध्यम से जैविक खे के बारे में महिलाओं को जागरूक करना आसान है। जैविक खेती के प्रचार प्रसार में महिलाएं महती भूमिका निभा सकती हैं क्योंकि वे अपने परिवार के स्वास्थ्य को ले कर सर्वाधिक सजग होती हैं। ऐसे में सरकार की जैविक खेती सम्बन्धी नीतियों को महिला संगठन के माध्यम से महिलाओं द्वारा क्रियान्वित

किया जा सकता है। इस दिशा में सरकार, संगठन और आमजन सभी के सम्मिलित और सक्रिय प्रयास अपेक्षित है।

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*शुभा खड़के लिविंग फार्म इनकम प्रोजेक्ट, इरमा (IRMA) में प्रोग्राम और आउटरीच कन्सल्टन्ट हैं।*

# मरुधरा में जैविक खेती की ओर बढ़ते महिलाओं के कदम

शुभा खड़के

खेती में महिलाओं का योगदान सर्वविदित है, खेत की तैयारी, बुवाई, निंदाई, गुड़ाई से लेकर फसल कटाई और सफाई तक सभी में महिलाओं की भागीदारी होती है। राजस्थान के सन्दर्भ में बात की जाये तो यहाँ महिला किसानों द्वारा अपनी समस्याओं का समाधान खोजने के लिए कृषि के नए और रचनात्मक तरीकों को अपनाया जा रहा है। वे जैविक खेती की ओर भी कदम बढ़ा रही हैं। राजस्थान में सीकर जिले के झीगरबाड़ी गांव की श्रीमती संतोष पचार को 2 बार राष्ट्रपति पुरस्कार मिल चुका है। उनके गाजर के बीज के नए प्रयोग से गाजर का न सिर्फ उत्पादन बढ़ा है बल्कि वो अधिक मीठी हुई है। श्रीमती संतोष खेती में महिलाओं की भागीदारी का प्रतिनिधित्व करती हैं। इसी तरह राज्य के अन्य भागों में भी महिलाएं जैविक खेती के लिए प्रयासरत हैं ।

प्रस्तुत आलेख मुख्यतः दक्षिणी राजस्थान में पीडो संस्था के कार्यक्षेत्र डूंगरपुर और पश्चिमी राजस्थान में उन्नति संस्था के कार्यक्षेत्र बाड़मेर में जैविक खेती में महिलाओं की भागीदारी को साँझा कर रहा है ।

“जो हम नहीं खाते वे ग्राहकों को कैसे खिलाये” - लीलाबेन हूरजीभाई, डूंगरपुर

लीलाबेन जन शिक्षा एवं विकास संगठन (People's Education and Development Organization - PEDO) की सदस्य है और संस्था से ही उन्होंने जैविक खेती के बारे में जाना।

PEDO एक स्वैच्छिक संगठन है, जो 1980 से गरीब समुदायों के साथ ग्रामीण विकास के क्षेत्र में सक्रिय रूप से कार्यरत है। संगठन मुख्य रूप से महिला सशक्तिकरण, सतत आजीविका को बढ़ावा देना, प्राकृतिक संसाधन प्रबंधन, स्वच्छता और स्वच्छ जल, लघु सिंचाई प्रबंधन, खेती विकास, पंचायती राज संस्थाओं का मजबूतीकरण आदि मुद्दों पर दक्षिणी राजस्थान में डूंगरपुर क्षेत्र में कार्यरत है। PEDO का महिला महासंघ मॉडल बहुत मजबूत है और उनका सभी महिलाओं के साथ अच्छा जुड़ाव है। उनके कार्यक्षेत्र में आत्मविश्वास से भरी महिलाओं और

विकास पर उनके विचारों को जानने से स्पष्ट ज्ञात होता है कि संस्था का समुदाय से गहरा जुड़ाव है ।



इसी महासंघ से जुड़ी है लीलाबेन । वे इंगूरपुर से 18 किलोमीटर दूर रातापानी गांव में रहती हैं। उनके पास कुल 5 बीघा ज़मीन है जिसमें 1-1.5 बीघा ज़मीन में वे सब्जियां उगाती है, बाकि में वे घर के लिए अनाज उगाती है. पहले वे रासायनिक खाद और दवाओं का उपयोग करती थी परन्तु संस्था ने

जब रासायनिक दवाओं से स्वास्थ्य को होने वाले खतरों के बारे में बताया तो उन्होंने जैविक सब्जियां उगाना शुरू किया। वह संस्था के मार्गदर्शन में पिछले 5-6 वर्षों से जैविक सब्जियां उगा रही है। वे पौध नर्सरी खुद तैयार करती है और बीज उपचार से लेकर सब्जियों की तुड़ाई तक समय समय पर जीवामृत , जैविक खाद , ब्रम्हास्त्र आदि जैविक दवाओं और खाद का उपयोग करती है। लीलाबेन बुवाई के समय से थोड़ा पहले ही सब्जियों की बुवाई कर देती है । जिससे मार्केट में सब्जियां आने के पहले इनकी सब्जियां आ जाती है , और अच्छा भाव मिल जाता है।



मुख्य बात यह है कि उनके पति प्रतिदिन सुबह इंगूरपुर की 4 से 5 कॉलोनियों में बंधे हुए ग्राहकों के घर सब्जियों की होम डिलीवरी करते हैं। हर शाम को लीलाबेन सब्जियाँ तोड़ कर रखती है और उनके पति सुबह 6 से दोपहर 2 बजे सब्जियाँ देने जाते हैं। प्रतिदिन लगभग 2000 रुपये की सब्जियां बेचते हैं उसमें 200 रुपये तो पेट्रोल

के लिए खर्च हो जाते हैं। वे और उनके पति बेहतर योजना के साथ सब्जियाँ लगाते हैं जिससे ग्राहकों को पूरे वर्ष सभी मौसमी सब्जियाँ मिलती रहती हैं।

लीलाबेन ने सब्जियों के अपने व्यवसाय के बलबूते पर अपने एक बेटे को वेटरनरी डॉक्टर बनाया है, दूसरा एग्रीकल्चर में M.Sc कर रहा है और बिटिया B.Sc, बी.एड कर चुकी है। लीलाबेन कहती है कि जैविक खेती में मेहनत ज़्यादा है पर जब बात स्वास्थ्य की होती है तो उसके साथ समझौता नहीं किया जा सकता। लीलाबेन से चर्चा करना बेहद उत्साहपूर्ण था।

पीडो ने जब काम शुरू किया था तब इस क्षेत्र में लोग बीटी कॉटन लेते थे, परन्तु इसमें खर्चा अधिक था और जमीन की उर्वरकता भी धीरे धीरे कम हो रही थी इसलिए संस्था ने लोगों को हल्दी लगाने के लिए प्रेरित किया। संस्था ने अपने परिसर में जैविक हल्दी प्रसंस्करण यूनिट "माही" को शुरू किया, आज लगभग 1500-1600 महिलाएं इस यूनिट से जुड़ी हुई हैं। ये पूरी तरह जैविक पद्धति से हल्दी उगाती हैं। संस्था बाजार भाव से महिलाओं को 5 रुपया प्रति किलो ज्यादा भाव देकर हल्दी खरीदती है। प्रति वर्ष लगभग 10 से 15 टन हल्दी खरीदी जाती है फिर उसको प्रोसेस कर माही ब्रांड के साथ रिटेल में बेचा जाता है।



गत कुछ वर्षों से संस्था निरंतर प्रयास कर रही है कि महिलाएं जैविक खेती की दिशा में आगे बढ़ें। इसमें महिला संघ की महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका है। लीलाबेन की तरह लगभग 10000 से अधिक महिलाएं संस्था से जुड़ी हैं।

## "हम बिना ज़हर की खेती करते हैं" - हीरादेवी, बाड़मेर

रेतीलापश्चिमी राजस्थान ढाणियों में बसा हुआ है। ऐसी ही एकढाणी कबीरनगर में रहनेवाली हीरादेवीगत एक वर्ष से जैविक पद्धति से सब्जियाँ उगार रही हैं। वे उन्नति संस्था द्वारा २०१७ में गठित जय भीम महिला किसान संगठन (JBMKS) की सदस्य हैं। उन्नति एक स्वैच्छिक संगठन है जो स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा, आजीविका, प्राकृतिक संसाधन प्रबंधन, सुशासन, महिला सशक्तिकरण आदि मुद्दों पर कार्य कर रहे हैं।

जयभीम महिला किसान संगठन (JBMKS) में पाटोदी संकुलके 25 गाँवों की 700 और सिंदरी संकुलके 25 गाँवों की 700 महिलाएँ सदस्य हैं। सभी अनुसूचित जाति और जनजाति की महिलाएँ हैं। इस संगठनका उद्देश्य महिला किसानों को पहचान देना और महिलाओं को सरकारी योजनाओंका लाभ पहुंचाने में सहायता करना है। संगठनने उन्हें उन्नत कृषि पद्धतियों के लिए भी सहयोग दिया है। संस्था ने अनुदान सहायता के साथ संगठनको ट्रैक्टर, ट्रॉली, पानी के टैंकर और छोटे कृषि उपकरण प्रदान किए। संगठन के सदस्यों ने कुछ दरेंतय की और इननिश्चित दरों पर ये उपकरण सदस्यों को किराये पर उपलब्ध कराये जाते हैं। इससे महिलाओं को जैविक खेती में सहयोग मिल रहा है।

माल्टेसर इंटरनेशनल और जीआईजेड (GIZ) पाटोदीके 25 गाँवों और सिंदरी के 25 गाँवों में भोजन और पोषण के लिए उन्नत संस्था को सहयोग प्रदान कर रहे हैं। इन गाँवों में उन्नति जैविक खेती पर काम कर रही है। "बागवानी विकास और सब्जी की खेती" परियोजना के तहत उन्होंने 132\*132 फीट में महिलाओं को 70 पौधे प्रदान किए। 70 पौधों में 42 पौधे बेर, 4 सुरजना, 21 गुंदा और 3 खेजड़ी हैं। 3-5 साल के अंदर सभी पौधे फल देने लगेंगे। बीच-बीच में महिलाएं मौसमी सब्जियां ले रही हैं। यह सूखा क्षेत्र है इसलिए पोषण सुरक्षा और फल बेचकर अतिरिक्त आय के लिए संस्था इस परियोजना को लागू कर रही है।



इस परियोजना कीलाभार्थी हीरा देवी ने बताया कि उसके पास 5 बीघा रेतीली जमीन है इसलिए वर्षा आधारित कृषि ही एकमात्र संभव विकल्प है। वे आमतौर पर केवल अपने उपभोग के लिए बाजरा, मूंग, मोठ और ग्वार उगाते हैं। बिक्री के लिए कोई अधिशेष नहीं होता है। जय भीम महिला किसान संगठन की बैठकों के दौरान उन्होंने जैविक खेती मतलब "बिना जहर की खेती" के बारे में जाना। अगस्त 2021 में संस्था ने उन्हें 70 पौधे उपलब्ध कराए। संस्था की टीम के मार्गदर्शन में वह मौसमी सब्जियां उगा रही हैं। वह बीज उपचार, बीजामृत, जीवामृत और अन्य जैविक खाद के बारे में बताया रही थीं।

पहले उनको सब्जियां खरीदनी पड़ती थी लेकिन पिछले एक साल से उन्हें ताजी सब्जियां मिल रही हैं जिसे उन्होंने अपने पड़ोसियों में भी बाँटा है। उन्होंने भिंडी, ग्वार, बैंगन, पालक, टमाटर आदि उगाए हैं।

इसी संगठन की सदस्य श्रीमती ममता देवी हेमारां ने जैविक खेती के अपने अनुभव साझा किए। उन्होंने बताया कि उनकी 4 बीघा जमीन में 3 बीघे में बाजरा और 1 बीघा में मोठ उगाया था। पहले वे एक बीघा जमीन में वह केवल 10 किलो मोठ लेती थीं लेकिन इस साल उसे 50 किलो मोठ मिला। उन्होंने नियमित रूप से खाद और जीवामृत का ही उपयोग किया और वे बिना जहर की खेती के अपने प्रयोग से काफी खुश हैं।

रेनफेड क्षेत्र में भी उत्पादन बढ़ाने के लिए रासायनिक खाद का प्रयोग किया जाता है ऐसे में जैविक खेती के लिए बढ़ती जागरूकता और महिलाओं द्वारा किये गए प्रयास निश्चित ही उल्लेखनीय हैं।

## राजस्थान में जैविक खेती का परिदृश्य

राजस्थान में जैविक खेती की नीति तो 2017 से है। वित्तीय वर्ष 2019-20 में "खेती में जान तो सशक्त किसान" योजना के माध्यम से प्राकृतिक खेती को बढ़ावा देने की बात कही गई थी। पायलट प्रोजेक्ट के रूप में यह योजना राज्य के तीन जिलों टोंक, सिरोंही और बांसवाड़ा में शुरू की गई थी परन्तु वर्ष 2020-21 में 15 जिलों तक बढ़ाई गई।

इस योजना में किसानों को उपकरणों पर अनुदान दिया जाता है। साथ ही प्राकृतिक खेती में रुचि रखने वाले किसानों को रासायनिक उर्वरकों और कीटनाशकों के उपयोग से होने वाले नुकसान के साथ-साथ प्राकृतिक खेती के लाभों के बारे में जानकारी प्रदान की जा रही है। कम लागत वाली खेती की तकनीक और जीवामृत, बीजामृत, घनामृत आदि का उपयोग भी सिखाया जा रहा है।



यदि इस योजना में महिला किसानों को वरीयता दी जाय तो निश्चित ही इसका फैलाव तेजी से होगा। चर्चा के दौरान ये स्पष्ट प्रतीत हुआ की महिलायें अपने परिवार के स्वास्थ्य को लेकर जागरूक होती जा रही हैं अतः खेती में जैविक पद्धतियों को अपनाने में उनका रुझान भी अधिक है। स्वैच्छिक संस्थाओं द्वारा बनाये गए महिला संगठन सशक्त रूप से आजीविका और महिला मुद्दों पर कार्य कर रहे हैं ऐसे में उनके माध्यम से महिलाओं में जैविक खेती की अलख जगाना आसान है। उम्मीद है कि आने वाले वर्षों में महिलाएं ही जैविक खेती की मशाल आगे ले जायेंगी।

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*शुभा खड़के लिविंग फार्म इनकम प्रोजेक्ट, इरमा (IRMA) में प्रोग्राम और आउटरीच कन्सल्टन्ट हैं।*

# A fizzy transition brews in the heartland of the Green Revolution

Deborah Dutta

*Many farmers in Punjab are finding their eureka moments in bubbling containers of fermenting fruits to make bioenzymes. With nearly 11 lakh tonnes production of citrus in Punjab, of which 20-30% goes waste, Bioenzymes just might become the hook for enabling farmers to move towards sustainable agriculture.*

The agricultural landscape of Punjab evokes disparate images. The lush green fields of paddy and wheat no longer hide the tremendous ecological cost incurred to maintain a focus on the grain yields. Known as a the country's bread basket, Punjab contributes to nearly 20% of the wheat, and 12% of rice production in India. However, the state is a cruel paradox of supposed food security. These yields are largely an outcome of the Green Revolution practices based on the introduction of High Yielding Varieties (HYV) of wheat and rice accompanied by a cocktail of fertilisers, pesticides and intensive irrigation systems. A 2020 assessment found that most of the districts in Punjab had over-exploited the groundwater levels, and predicted the unavailability of usable ground water by 2050 if the trends continue. In many districts the available groundwater is highly contaminated by pesticides and agricultural run-off rendering entire populations susceptible to long-term effects of pesticide poisoning. The list of adverse consequences go on, and prevailing economic incentives of offering price guarantee for grains are doing little to change the mainstream agricultural practices. Yet, an alternate narrative maybe be emerging from unlikely quarters; A growing number of farmers are finding their eureka moments in bubbling containers of fermenting fruits.

## A home-grown passion that turned into a mission

Vipesh Garg, a horticultural development officer at the Department of Horticulture, Punjab Govt., describes himself as a passionate gardener. He explained, "I have been growing vegetables since I was young, and strongly feel that everyone should grow atleast some food on their own. Trying to find ways that people can grow food and add low-cost nutrients to their soil brought to bioenzymes." Bioenzymes are organic solutions made through the fermentation of the organic waste including fruits, vegetables, plants. The organic waste is mixed with sugar, jaggery, and water and left for a period of 60-100 days to

create a healthy culture of bacteria that can help improve soil fertility and pH. A popular, and low-cost method employed by home gardeners to use their kitchen waste, Vipesh immediately saw its potential at a much larger scale. He knew of dung-based concoctions, usually employed in sustainable farming, and its limitations in farmers' unwillingness to handle to the work and odour. Bioenzymes on the other hand are easier to make and accept as an alternative. Vipesh set about building a narrative around bioenzymes highlighting its use for even personal hygiene as shampoos, soaps etc to build wider interest. His initial attempts to induct practitioners involved gifting almost anyone he met with a bottle of home-made bioenzyme. To scale the efforts he turned his attention to horticulturists in Punjab.



## **Brewing a fruity revolution**

Apart from grains, Punjab also produces 10-11 lakh tonnes of citrus (Kinnow), with nearly 40,000 hectares under kinnow orchard cultivation spread across various districts. He knew that roughly 15-20% of the kinnows fall from trees before harvesting due to various weather conditions, or pest attack etc. Farmers usually try and bury the fallen kinnows as swiftly as possible to deter the spread of fruit rot or fly attack that can impact the healthy fruits as well. The efforts are labour intensive and the fear of pests drives farmers to spray even more chemicals on their orchards. However, breaking this cycle of behaviour is not easy. Vipesh recalls how he started convincing farmers by encouraging them to

experiment at a small scale. “Back in 2018, I was given charge of 84 villages, and I wanted the farmers to switch to sustainable farming.



As I was frequently visiting villages, I ended up befriending an influential farmer, Kuldeep Singh of Mal Singh Wala village close to Faridkot. While talking to him, I noticed the carpet of jamun fruit lying at our feet and suggested to him to try making bioenzymes from the fruit since it would go to waste anyway. He agreed to make a batch of 10 litres and we were both amazed to see the vibrant purple of the prepared solution. He sprayed the liquid on a 2-acre patch where he grew chillies and was encouraged by the increased harvest and quality of chillies.” Soon Kuldeep Singh began making larger batches, and Vipesh used his farm as an exposure

site to convince other farmers in the area. Farmers found multiple incentives for using bioenzymes, once they learned how to make it. They could reduce cultivation costs by buying less or no chemical pesticides, with the enzyme acting as viable alternative. Farmers like Gurraj Singh Virk, have reported saving nearly 2.5 lakhs in the past two years after switching to use of bioenzymes in their orchards, and eliminating the cost of fungicides that were typically used earlier. Encouraged by his experience, Gurraj Singh has since then conducted many workshops and become a [vocal supporter](#) of bioenzymes. In Abohar, the kinnow belt of Punjab, at least 1,000 farmers have reportedly switched over to using bioenzymes instead of chemical pesticides with significant savings in the cost of production.

## Cultures in making

Well aware of the need to create cultural acceptance and a narrative, Vipesh began advocating various uses of bioenzymes beyond a pest repellent. He is confident that a vibrant market is possible for the sale of bioenzymes as personal hygiene products and household cleaners. He explained, “If farmers can sell a litre for even 20 rs, we can create a 3000 crore market in Punjab alone, given the fruit waste generated each year. I see bioenzyme as a design solution that is able to tackle multiple problems of waste disposal, depleting soil fertility, pesticide use

and chemical pollution.” In his bid to popularise the use of bioenzymes and create a market, Vipesh facilitated bioenzyme workshops across many schools in Punjab. During his initial interactions with farmers, some of them thought they could get into trouble if the police thought this to be some illegal alcohol brewing network (which are rampant in many places) so Vipesh curated a workshop at the State Central Jail to create awareness amongst the police directly. However, he is also aware that large scale implementation will require consistent state support, and he has repeatedly tried to involve higher authorities at public events to help the movement gain some official legitimacy. Simultaneously, he has also collaborated with farmers to tweak the process, and shorten the preparation period to 45 days, with lesser stirring involved. He additionally runs an active Whatsapp group where farmers and other fermentation enthusiasts regularly post their experiences and questions, with even sale and purchase of raw materials or the finished product happening organically.



## **The case for cautious optimism**

Alternate practices and methods are often criticised for lacking scientific rigour in terms of efficacy and evidence. Thus, in an effort to gain institutional validation, Vipesh has actively approached scientists in agricultural universities to test bioenzymes for their effect on plant health. Dr Urmila Phutela from Punjab Agricultural University is one of the scientists conducting research on the effects and uses of bioenzymes on different plant varieties. Slowly, other researchers are conducting systematic trials to establish the use of bioenzymes and standardise the optimal potency of the solutions. Such partnerships are integral to supporting and legitimising field experiences. Meanwhile, the increasing popularity has already spurred many enterprises selling bioenzymes for various purposes ranging from cleaning agents to health and hygiene products. One hopes that the momentum finds a solid footing in science and public perception.

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*Nurturing sustainable systems  
through producer organisations*

# Re-imagining Producer Collectives: Strategic Conversations for a post-pandemic future

C Shambu Prasad and Abhishek Saxena

*Well managed and governed producer collectives are organisations for the future as alternatives to existing investor-owned firms that increase inequality even as they increase wealth. A gathering of management scholars and development practitioners highlights new knowledge and insights on producer organisations that could hopefully correct the scant attention to this domain of inquiry by strategic management scholars.*

## Exploring alternative management paradigms

As business organisations, member-owned collectives have received little attention from strategic management scholars.

Successful cooperatives like Amul (the brand of the Gujarat Milk Marketing Cooperative Federation Limited) have been seen more as agribusinesses with impressive growth and marketing capabilities and



much less for their business models that allow, to use the ex-Managing Director of GCMMF, Dr R S Sodhi, for providing ‘value for many and value for money’. As member-owned, people-centred, and value-based enterprises, cooperatives are potentially better vehicles for promoting equality and inclusive economic development. Cooperatives have shown greater resilience during crises like the pandemic and have withstood shocks and carried on their businesses despite widespread disruption. However, despite leads from a few management scholars like Paul Adler, who urged to explore management paradigms [beyond profit maximization](#) the responses from management schools have been weak. Business schools have been ‘followers rather than leaders’ and slow to change despite several experiments on business with purpose.

The [24th Annual Convention of the Strategic Management Forum](#) from 21-23 December 2022 at the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) on the theme “Re-building organizations: Strategic conversations for a post-pandemic world” provided a great opportunity to explore alternative economic systems beyond the investor-owned firm and take stock of the future of collective enterprises like, and beyond, Amul. Some of the questions that scholars were invited to explore included: How can inclusion and equity in governance be hardwired into the design of the enterprise? How do we rethink the rural, - as a market for goods and services, a temporary sink for recovery, a space for renewal, or an opportunity to transform relations and rebuild a better India and the world? How do we better manage our producer collectives (cooperatives and producer companies)?

## **Reimagining Producer Collectives as learning organisations**



The track on “reimagining producer collectives” (RPC) invited empirically grounded and theoretical submissions on the broad theme of governance and management of producer organisations. The discussions also spanned policies and ecosystems that could support these

organisations as autonomous business enterprises.

The track was building on IRMA’s work on producer collectives over the years and the intensive efforts by the Living Farm Incomes team to actively engage the academia to work closely with practitioners promoting Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs). The [Fields of Change](#) (Prasad and Dutta 2022) volume and a larger set of thirty-eight [blogs](#) in the last 2-3 years were in a sense exploration of these questions during the pandemic. Authors of the fifteen FPOs whose case studies are part of a forthcoming volume, [Farming Futures: Reimagining Producer Organisations in India](#)” were encouraged to think beyond their particular cases exploring cross-cutting themes even as some of the leading academics who study FPOs such as Prof. Sukhpal Singh (Indian Institute of Management - Ahmedabad), Prof. Annapurna Neti (Azim Premji University) and development practitioners

involved in the nitty gritty of execution who face the challenges of building alternate institutions were pro-actively encouraged to participate in the event.

The RPC track received many submissions and twenty-three of them were presented across four broad themes viz. assessing producer collectives (7 papers), building inclusive institutions (6 papers), new knowledge on producer collectives (5 papers), and rethinking FPO policy (5



papers). Senior development practitioners explored many issues on policies and ecosystems and were willing to continue with their papers through blogs that explored the [legal dimensions of FPOs and the regulatory bondage](#), [promoting agencies support in a state with several FPOs like Uttar Pradesh](#), [the need for a different architecture in rainfed areas](#), [newer business models for FPOs](#) and [the need for larger Type 2 institutions](#) in the FPO ecosystem. The conversations among scholars led to further explorations like [understanding the governance of these member-based institutions through their AGM](#).

## **Bridging boundaries in Strategic management**

The conversations in the RPC theme and similar conversations between academia and practitioners, (industry more broadly defined) in other themes like “rethinking enterprises”, were important for four reasons. First, to create an incipient community of practice where ideas are exchanged beyond a conference. A WhatsApp group originally created for managing logistics continued beyond the conference with participants freely sharing their full papers and presentations and other work for comments, suggestions and leading to further dialogues.

Second, academic institutions need to pro-actively explore their role in facilitating innovative knowledge platforms that are non-hierarchical and inclusive with participation of academics with years of experience, graduate students and practitioners where ideas are shared and reflected upon. The typical form of academic publications in journals with limited access to a wider audience need not be the only contribution of the academia whose role in facilitating

knowledge dialogues is underrated. Third, is the exploration of several intersectionalities such as gender issues in producer collectives and assessing performance of hybrid organisations. The conference has interesting papers on these themes including rich conversations and disagreements too. It was also heartening to see at least three papers that were both engaging with the design framework of cooperatives by Tushaar Shah in the 1990s (Shah 1996) even as they extended it to non-perennial agricultural commodities (beyond milk or dairy). Newer insights on the management and governance of these institutions emerged including the application of stakeholder theories and frameworks.



Finally, industry or practitioner forums tend to be celebratory and are uncritical of existing paradigms of management or government policies. A pro-active exploration of alternative economic systems with an Indian context is critical for the challenges that the world faces today. Leading theoretical contributions on cooperatives or producer organisations from developing countries often are quite divorced from the Indian context of small holder farmers and the increasing [feminisation of agriculture](#). Taking forward the discussions that emerged during the Convention, we hope that future SMF conferences would build on the exploration of ideas and strategic conversations that emerged at IRMA in December 2022. As articulated through the interviews with management thinkers by Hector Rocha and others, business must [serve the needs of humanity rather than the needs of business](#). Business schools have to move beyond narrow parameters of efficiency and focus on addressing more fundamental questions of the human condition.

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# "Vital but scarce": Promoting Agencies Support to FPOs in Uttar Pradesh

Gouri Krishna and Rajnikant Prasad

*The role of promoting agencies is crucial in establishing, strengthening and ensuring the sustainability of FPOs. A qualitative survey of FPOs in Uttar Pradesh revealed that while they acknowledge the support received from the promoting agencies during the incubation period, the need for handholding beyond project-based timelines is often not being fulfilled.*

Uttar Pradesh, otherwise a laggard in the cooperative movement is the second largest state in the country in the promotion of FPO with over 4000 Farmer Producer Companies registered to date. Several promoting agencies (PAs) with funding from diverse funders such as SFAC, NABARD, NCDC etc have promoted FPOs. In an earlier [blog](#) the travails and innumerable challenges of promoting FPOs highlighted included time and resource limitations, frequent changes of deliverables, payment delays, a greater focus on quantity vs quality, and policy inadequacies.

We dive deeper into some of the implementation challenges through a survey that was conducted in the state to assess the role played by promoting agencies (PAs) from the perspective of the FPOs. The survey sought to get the response of FPO practitioners on five parameters. In what ways do promoting agency contribute significantly to the performance and effectiveness of the FPOs? Do promoting agencies spend adequate time laying a strong foundation for the FPO? How did FPOs cope after the exit of the promoting agency? What are the challenges faced in providing such support to the FPO? What kind of handholding support is beneficial to the FPOs?



*FPO survey Swami Ram Krishna Producer Company Limited*

The FPOs studied were funded by [NABARD](#), [SFAC](#), [NCDC](#), [UPBSN](#), [NAFED](#), [UPDASP](#) and [UP Bio Energy Board](#) who engaged the services of promoting agencies (PAs) for implementation. The field survey was conducted with 20 FPOs in Uttar Pradesh. 10 districts falling under the nine climatic zones in the state were selected and two FPOs from each district were chosen. Four of the 20 FPOs were self-promoted by farmers themselves without the involvement of any promoting agency. The age of the FPOs ranged from 2-4 years. The duration of the support given by the PAs ranged between 3-5 years. The 20 respondents for the survey included CEOs/Managing Directors and board members from each FPO. A structured questionnaire was designed for the survey which was administered by the surveyors in person by visiting the FPOs.

The themes of analysis and findings are discussed below:

## Contributions of the Promoting Agency

The survey data on the role of PAs assessed on six parameters indicated a significant role in institutional linkages for inputs and access to Government grants than financial and marketing and value-addition activities. Financial linkage was limited to facilitating the release of equity grants and project-related community investment funds:

- **Institutional Linkage:** 85% of the FPOs surveyed said that they benefitted from the linkages established by the PA. These included input distributorship for fertilizer supply, capacity building of BoDs and members and agricultural extension. An FPO director remarked, “Today 80% of our business turnover is contributed from input sales to members. It’s our PA who encouraged us to take the license and helped with procedural formalities.”
- **Financial Linkage:** 60% of the FPOs surveyed attribute that the support of PAs helped in receiving equity matching grants and community investment funds. However, most of the FPOs could not establish bank linkage even after the exit of PA.
- **Market Linkage:** 55% of the FPOs indicated that they sell the produce in mandis and the PAs supported in getting the required licences for this. Some of the self-promoted FPOs established tie-ups with institutions for the sale of produce.
- **Access to Govt grants:** 75% of the FPOs availed the farm machinery bank scheme and 25% FPOs availed the seed processing unit grant with the active support of PAs. The CEO of a self-promoted FPO remarked -- “We lost out on availing Government schemes like farm machinery bank

and seed processing unit grants for FPOs which the PA-promoted FPOs were able to benefit from it.”

- **Value addition:** Almost all the FPOs adapted sorting, grading and cleaning of produce at the instance of PA. The self-promoted FPOs were engaged in a small way in value-added activities such as flour making, neem powder, oil extraction etc.

## Elusive Ease of Doing Business for PAs

All the respondents of the FPOs expressed that the time duration over which PAs provided support was inadequate. In response, it seems that while the PAs were aware of these issues, they were constrained by available funds, and expected mandate. A representative from a PA commented, “It was a race against time. A three-year period to establish a well-knit community-based organization that can conduct business operations, enhance the incomes of farmer members, comply with statutory obligations and many other expectations was highly insufficient. We tried to address the input supply aspect and facilitated 100 FPOs in UP to become authorised centres of IFFCO-IFFDC for agri products.”

Another field staff explained the challenges of, “A [sudden deluge of demands](#) from the projects derails the entire plan of nurturing FPOs. I recall the order from the project leader to enhance membership in all the FPOs by two-fold to meet project targets, conduct training programs and increase business turnover in FPO to a mind-boggling number, all in a short span. It was quantity vs quality sometimes.”



*Figure 2 Cleaning and grading of produce by women members of FPO*

## Post-project survival of FPOs

Following the completion of project cycle and exit of the PA, 70% FPOs were still facing challenges in establishing market linkages. While there was an increase in the turnover of the FPOs over the years, the major contribution was from input supply to members. For 75% of FPOs access to capital is still elusive. 30% of FPOs surveyed expressed that PAs support helped in convergence with government schemes which did not happen subsequently. 25% of the FPOs expressed the need for technical and technological linkages in operations and an extension activity. 45% of the FPOs surveyed were currently being supported by other organizations after the exit of PAs under different programs. FPOs reckon such support has added value especially, in building knowledge and awareness of various business operations of the FPO.

## What support do FPOs need?

90% of the FPOs expressed the need for extended support beyond the incubation timeline to help them learn business tactics and become sustainable enterprises. The areas in which FPOs sought support include access to working capital, knowledge of emerging markets, and training on statutory compliance. The self-promoted FPOs expressed that they stand at a disadvantage in accessing government schemes. 10% of the FPOs surveyed pointed out that if an appropriate policy to direct banks to finance FPOs and trained manpower are in place, PAs support is not required.



*Figure 3 FPO Survey: Bahraich Farmer Agro Producer Company Limited*

Laying a strong foundation is an important guiding principle for any community-based organization. A farmer's collective, to develop and establish itself as a business enterprise needs not only a member-centric institution but adequate knowledge and wherewithal to operate in a competitive business environment. The complexity of markets, financial management, legal compliances and the knowledge of these aspects are not readily available and accessible to the farmers who are the owners of the FPOs and on whom the responsibility lies. PAs on the other hand are spread too thin in terms of time, human resources and budget constraints to provide much-needed support beyond the initial phase. Policies thus need to plan for providing PAs with longer timelines and reasonable targets. Given the right ecosystem, PAs can meet the expectations of the FPOs. As evident in the responses, the FPOs see the value of such support as it facilitates achieving the objective for which they are formed.

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# What FPO Capacity Building is NOT, and what can be done

Parthasarathy T and Jagdish Nayak

*This blog explores the challenges faced by Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) in current capacity building programs, emphasizing a one-size-fits-all approach and a lack of practical learning. SkillGreen proposes a comprehensive four-fold solution involving participatory methodologies, field-based content, open-source learning materials, and grassroots trainers. SkillGreen's efforts are in developing effective capacity building solutions and stresses the importance of continuous support for FPOs to achieve concrete business goals.*

The importance of capacity building for successful FPOs is well recognised. However, most capacity building programs fail to address the FPOs' actual learning and skilling needs, creating a situation of "Training, Training everywhere, but nothing for FPOs to learn". To understand what capacity building is, let us ask ourselves, what is NOT capacity building. Let's suppose you want to learn swimming. You enrol for training and attend a two-day training by experts and you see PPTs, motivational videos and lectures. Would u consider your "capacities built" enough to jump into water and swim?

There is a large number of capacity building programmes in the FPO ecosystem, our experience suggests that current capacity building programmes have the following shortcomings.

**One-size-fits-all mentality:** A standard set of trainings in the form of lectures and PPTs, are currently dished out for everyone working with FPOs. These could form a part of orientation, but cannot be called capacity building.

**Theoretical Gyaan:** There is a persistent lack of content based on field experience and learnings generated from various FPO initiatives so far.

**Money matters:** Resources available for capacity building of FPOs is meagre. In the 10k FPO programme, the allocation for capacity building is too little and less than 5% FPOs get post project support.

The lack of adequate time to form the FPOs, followed by insufficient orientation for the field staff members and target-based incubation practices compound the issue. The severe time pressure results in the supposed capacity building process being just a checklist criteria to complete. An FPO Director is expected to learn

basics of “What is FPO?” to advanced “NCDEX/Export Marketing” in a 2 day training, which most MBAs would not be able to!



*Learning happens through constructive discussions, debate, arguments in a friendly environment maintained by a facilitator.*

Benudhar Naik, an FPO director in Odisha says. “I have attended many trainings organised by Government and NGOs, the officials and resource persons come and lecture about FPO business. I am a tribal; many times, I do not understand the language they speak in. Sometime back we had to pay a fine as an FPO because we had not submitted our KYCs in time. Our members always ask me what the benefit of the FPO is.”

## **How FPO Capacity Building can be done**

SkillGreen sees the solutions to FPO capacity building as a four-fold approach.

First, there is a requirement for a wide range of participatory methodologies covering fundamental FPO topics like Governance, Compliances, Management and Business Planning. Second, there is a need to document situations and challenges faced by FPOs, i.e. empirical studies and content based on field experiences, as a basis for learning content. Third, low-cost learning materials such as Open-Source manuals for Capacity building are needed since financial resources available for FPO capacity building, beyond the project support, are limited. Finally, there is a need to nurture grassroot trainers for FPOs, who are familiar with the local language, context and can easily facilitate need based participatory sessions at regular intervals.

In its efforts to develop effective capacity building solutions, SkillGreen has worked with more than 450 FPOs across 17 states in the country in collaboration with over 50 partners till date.

## **Beginning with Competency Gap Assessment**



Participatory competency analysis is conducted with each participant group, existing directors of FPOs, and they are asked the question, “What would you want to learn if this was your first year as a director?”. Their role w.r.t FPOs and required skillset are clearly documented and used to design curriculum for FPO directors, Staff, CBBO and government officials.



Manuals are developed in collaborative write-shops where practitioners and experts collaborate to contribute voluntarily on topics they have experience in. The manuals are revised based on feedback from the field. 11 FPO training manuals have been developed, catering to various participant types and basic/advanced levels. As open-source manuals, the manuals originally in English, have been adapted, translated and published by other agencies as open source works.



*Training-of-trainers and decentralised support*



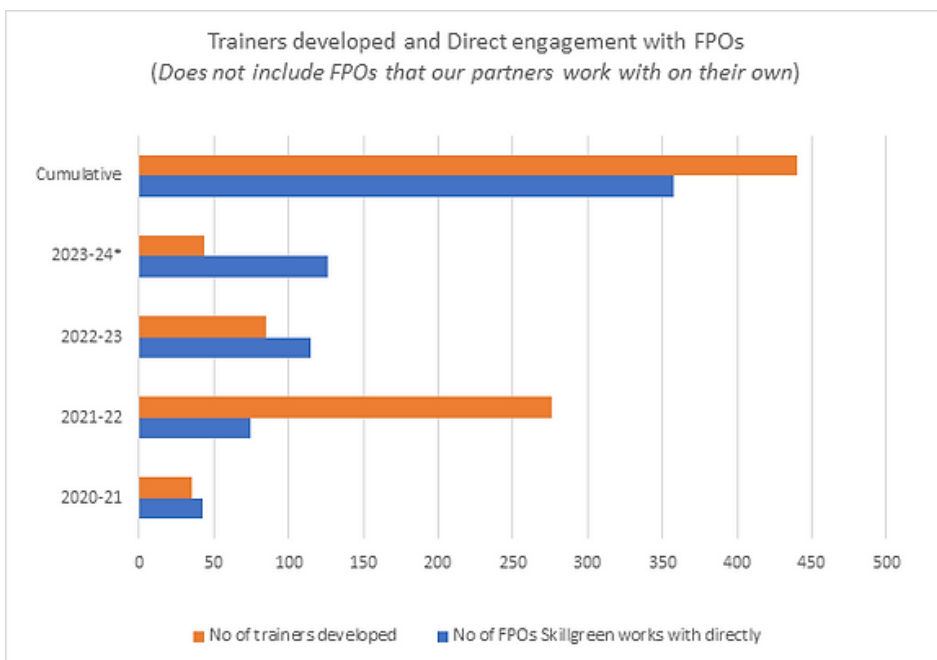
[SkillGreen](#) in collaboration with partners has organized Training-of-Trainers (ToTs) across the country. After ToTs, the trainers are supported by observers in facilitating FPO workshops using the training manuals. SkillGreen works with different partners in the FPO ecosystem – CBBOs like [Myrada](#), [APMAS](#), [AKRSP](#), Academia like [IRMA](#), CSRs like Reliance Foundation, Partners like

[Samunnati](#), [FWWB](#), Government and Bilateral Agencies like GIZ, World Bank, Centre of Excellence for FPOs, [TNVKP](#), SERP and FPO federations like MBCFPCL. FPOs are supported through need-based participatory capacity-building on statutory compliances, understanding financial statements and focussed work like developing business plans, annual planning etc. Currently our services are offered in 9 Indian languages - Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Assamese, Odia, Bengali, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu.

Mamataben Sayani, FPO Director in Gujarat, says, “Unique training! the facilitator involved us in various activities, explored our ideas and discussed topics elaborately. We developed understanding on the



activities of FPO. We did not realise how the time passed. Here we also prepared action plans for each FPO which was new for us. One-time training will not be enough for us to run the FPO. We need such trainings time-to-time on other aspects of FPOs functioning.”



## Capacity Building as a continuous process

Far from a success story, SkillGreen’s journey has just begun. Arvind Risbud, Myrada says, “Participatory Capacity Building is necessary but not sufficient”. It develops hygiene in FPOs, it results in better understanding of the participants’ role vis-à-vis FPO and increased motivation, confidence, participation of BOD / CEO in FPO activities, besides realistic planning. But concrete results depend on several factors – staff attrition, structural issues, dynamics within FPO and other external factors. We set realistic expectations and discuss processes to make capacity building more effective.

We also support partners with value chain and other studies used in designing intervention strategies. SkillGreen has worked on market linkage pilots and aiming to work with more FPOs to make them market ready and facilitate market linkages through continuous engagement over a period of 2-3 years. Here, Capacity Building is a means to achieve concrete business goals.

To improve our role in post training support, we do regular field visits, online mentoring and clearly designed hands-on assignments to be completed by

participants after training, in collaboration with our implementation partners. A key challenge we are working to address is finding trainers and mentors with a participatory mindset, willing to spend time with FPOs.

Older FPOs better understand the need for meaningful Capacity Building. For new FPOs being formed as part of the 10k programme, there is a need for greater collaboration with academic institutions like IRMA along with social enterprises like SkillGreen. The government can also take a leaf out of the SHG movement and programmes like National Rural Livelihoods Mission, which have established good practices, such as significant budgetary allocation for capacity building, peer-to-peer learning etc.

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# Unshackling FPOs from Regulatory Bondage

Emmanuel Murray, Mohan Kadimpalli and Atul Daga

*The progressive intent underlying the company structure of doing business by farmer collectives has nevertheless thrown up regulatory and compliance challenges. The bottlenecks need to be recognised and addressed to foster healthy growth of these promising nascent institutions.*



Despite the unprecedented growth in the number of FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations) being formed across the country, no systematic study on their performance on regulatory and statutory compliances has been undertaken. What are the issues faced by the FPOs? Are these mere teething problems or do they need policy changes?

Such questions prompted us to undertake a survey among FPOs to assess and quantify the issues rather than rely on anecdotal information. Towards this, we prepared a questionnaire and circulated among various FPO networks to elicit responses from promoting institutions and FPOs. In all, we received 129 responses, 101 of them being FPCs (Farmer Producer Companies). 75 of the 129, (50% of them registered in 2020 or thereafter) had done no business so far, while 17 had a turnover exceeding Rs 1 Crore. While responses were received from FPOs of 16 states, about half were from Andhra Pradesh due to the demand from members in the group. The emergent themes are discussed below:

## Challenges with Goods and Service Tax (GST)

Section 22 of the CGST Act 2017, makes it mandatory for anyone with a turnover in a financial year exceeding Rs. 20 lakhs to have GST registration. While Section 23 exempts an agriculturist from GST registration even if turnover exceeds specified limits, Section 24 mandates compulsory registration for interstate supply of goods/service with a few exceptions.

However, promoting institutions often advise FPOs to register for GST even if these are not immediately required for their scale of business/for the specified supply of goods. Once registered, invoices need to be GST compliant and returns need to be filed monthly/quarterly, even when there is no turnover, failing which penalties are levied.

While 111 of the 129 FPOs had GST registration, 63 had no turnover in the preceding Financial Year (FY22). The average annual cost of filing nil returns, even if on a quarterly basis is Rs. 24,000 a year if done through an accounting firm.



A workshop for FPOs and its members: First the participants did a group exercise to list their queries on charts and then these queries were addressed by the trainer.

Late filing of the GST returns attracts a penalty of Rs. 200 per day capped at Rs. 5,000 per month. In case GST dues are not paid within the stipulated time, interest of 18% per annum on the unpaid dues is charged. Amongst the 111 FPOs, 22 had paid GST penalty for non-compliance and the amount of penalty paid was nearly Rs one lakh in one case, and 12 FPOs with nil turnover paying penalty ranging from Rs. 1500 to 7500. 24 FPOs expressed difficulties in filing GST Returns.

A further complication is that Section 89 of GST Act imposes liability on the directors of the company in case of any dues/fines/penalties not being able to be recovered from the company. Such provisions could create hesitation in becoming a director when the post lacks incentives but is loaded with risk.

## Income Tax woes

In February 2018, the then Finance Minister announced exemption from Income Tax to FPOs (specifically FPCs) having turnover of upto Rs. 100 crore for a period of five years from the financial year 2018-19. However, the Income Tax Act has another provision called Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) applicable to companies. This has effectively nullified the tax benefit to FPOs. Currently MAT rate is 15% of the book profits plus surcharge and cess. This has resulted in FPCs suppressing profit to minimum, resulting in very little capital formation at the FPO level, stunting their growth and ability to leverage debt.

Turnover (Rs)	FPCs paying Income Tax
Less than 10lakhs	9
10lakhs-25lakhs	2
25lakhs-50lakhs	2
50lakhs-1crore	1
More than 1crore	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

## Challenges with Companies Act

The Companies Act was amended to facilitate registration of the FPCs under Part IXA of the Companies Act. Later, when Companies Act 2013 replaced the erstwhile act, Chapter XXIA was introduced and became effective from February 2021.

In the absence of any specific provision, the same law as applicable to the other corporates apply to FPCs. For instance, Director of an FPC is considered on par with any other company director and the compliances include having a Director Identification Number, annual KYC requirements, returns to be filed for appointment, resignation, or vacation of office. Moreover, on becoming director, they are being denied the facilities under Government programs such as PM Kisan, Rythu Bharosa, pension, even though the person is just a small farmer, and the position of Director of the FPC does not carry any remuneration.

Penalties for non-compliance are stringent, for example in the case of failure to file the financial statements before the stipulated time, a minimum penalty of Rs.

10,000 is levied with an additional Rs. 100 per day of continuing default subject to a maximum of Rs. 2 lacs levied on the Company and its directors.

DIN KYC introduced in 2018-19, as per which, individual who is allotted DIN as on 31st March of a financial year must submit his KYC on or before 30th September of the next financial year, failing which such DIN is 'Deactivated' until KYC is completed with a penalty of Rs.5000. Yearly DIN KYC verification is complicated, as FPC Directors do not access OTP from their personal mobile and emails.



### **Active disincentives for farmers to remain FPC directors**

Professional tax is levied by the state governments on any person engaged in a profession, trade, calling or employment. The Directors of FPCs are only paid honorarium and there is no employer-employee relationship, but are being asked to pay professional tax.

Professional tax is collected for the establishment and for the directors at Rs. 2500 each per annum. A workshop hosted to develop business plans for FPOs

Together, these factors have contributed to a growing unwillingness among directors of FPCs to continue as directors, some of the major reasons being:

1. Losing government benefits like PM Kisan/ Rythu Bharosa's benefits.
2. FPC's loan reflecting in their Credit Bureau report causing problems for personal loans.
3. Cumbersome compliances/ penalty provisions on non-compliance.
4. Lack of remuneration or incentives given that FPO directorship requires significant time and resource commitment.

## Roadmaps for building enabling ecosystems

Some actions that could immediately ease the regulatory and compliances burden on FPOs need to be implemented at national and state level. These include:

Central Government:

- Reduce MCA compliance on the lines of One Person Companies (OPC)/Limited Liability Partnerships (LLP) for FPCs.
- Exempt DIR 3 KYC for Directors of FPCs.
- Make it easy for the Directors of FPCs to be changed without DSC.
- Reduce the fees for the AOC4, MGT7 and other filings / exempt FPCs with upto Rs 50 lakh turnover.
- Exempt FPOs from MAT

State governments:

- Exempt FPOs and Directors of FPOs from levy of Professional Tax.
- Non-exclusion of Directors of FPOs from being eligible for getting benefits under government schemes.



*An ongoing training on building a strong FPO*

Regulatory compliances form an integral part of the conducive environment for FPOs to thrive. However, there is urgent need to rationalize and lessen the burden of compliances on FPOs and introduce a lighter regulatory regime. Failing to remedy these bottlenecks is hurting in achieving the intended objectives behind promoting FPOs. There is also a case for considering whether the company form is best suited in cases where the turnover is not large.

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# The need for viable intermediaries: Designing large, specialised FPOs

**Shirish Joshi and C Shambu Prasad**

*Every FPO should not be expected to be able to carry out end-to-end operations and realise full value in the value chain. Instead, depending on the capacity and market arrangements, FPOs should find the scale of operations suited to them. Having delineated the features of Type 1 FPOs, especially in rainfed areas, this article dwells on the need and design of a market facing Type 2 FPOs.*

## **Not all 'A's for Amul: The need for Type 2 FPOs**

Ground experiences indicate that not all FPOs can emulate the market linkages of an Amul or District Milk Producer Companies promoted by NDDDB in 70s or a Sahyadri FPO of the last decade. While Type 1 FPOs work well from seed to primary processing making farmer produce 'market ready', there is a need for a Type 2 FPO that can procure from smaller FPOs and move up the value chain.

If multiple private sector players can come in, competition between private players can lead to better price realisation for farmers in type 1 FPOs. Only a few FPOs like [Krushidhan](#) are able to build on clusters and SHGs to establish stable market that works across multiple districts since the process takes several years. Similarly, FPOs like [Ram Rahim](#) have linked to a social enterprise, [Safe Harvest](#), and able to generate produce that is market ready. These large (Type 1) FPOs may graduate to some of the Type 2 FPO activities but require sustained efforts and investments from promoting organisations that is clearly lacking in the ecosystem today.

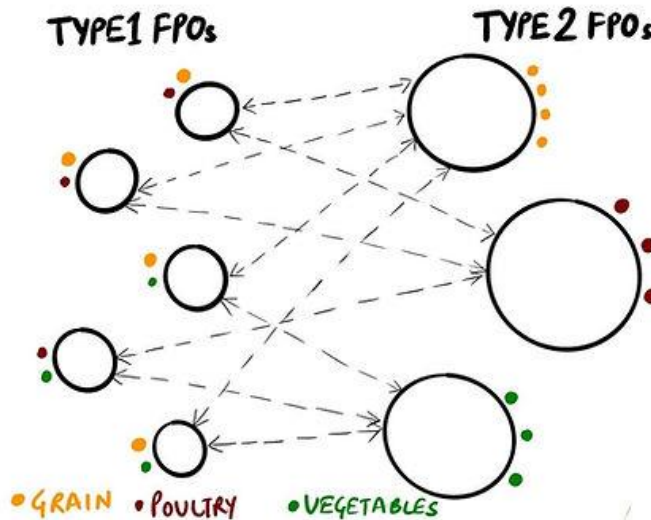
There is thus a need for creating type 2 FPOs to support Type 1 FPOs. Typically, farmers in Type 1 FPO may have a mix of agriculture and allied livelihoods of cultivation of agricultural crops like grains, fruits and vegetables, Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP), backyard poultry/ goat keeping/ dairy and non-food crops like cotton. Certain commodities e.g., Mahua flowers that are sold and consumed in nearby regions may not need large scale aggregation or processing. However there is a potential for moving up the value chain for other products that would require operating at scale, taking higher risk, undertaking further processing, reaching to distant urban markets and exports etc.



## **Understanding the multi-sided relationship of Type 1 and Type 2 FPOs**

The Amul model is predicated on the critical linkage between the village dairy cooperative societies to the District Milk union and the apex marketing federation of these milk unions under [GCMMF](#). This hierarchical, many to one relationship, does not work easily for non-perennial product FPOs. The competencies and capabilities needed for grains based Type 2 organisation like say Safe harvest are quite different from running a Type 2 organisation for dealing in fruits and vegetables like for example SAFAL. Thus, a Type 1 organisation may have to deal with many Type 2 FPOs. On the other hand, an organisation like Safe harvest may need to buy from many different types of Type 1 organisations to ensure that it has adequately diverse portfolio of staples. Thus, the relationship between Type 1 and Type 2 FPOs will be many to many.

This fundamental difference vis-à-vis the Amul model necessitates promotion of an ecosystem where both Type 1 and Type 2 have to be independently viable. The output per product per farmer in rainfed areas is expected to be low, as technically, farmers are expected to practise product diversification. This strategy can work if the number of Type 1 FPOs corresponding to one Type 2 FPO are large enough for Type 2 FPOs to achieve scale. As a thumb rule, possibly 3 to 4 Type 2 FPOs can correspond to 400 to 500 type 1 FPOs. The calculation will obviously depend on the specific product group, its business model etc.



*An illustration of possible relationships between Type 1 and 2 FPOs*

## **Some risks that Type 2 FPOs could avoid**

It is necessary to identify viable business models for Type 2 FPOs. Not all large FMCG giants like P&G, HUL, ITC open exclusive outlets. Amul and Patanjali haven't fared well as single brand stores either. Generally, consumers prefer different products from different brands so Type 2 FPOs should be wary of opening single brand standalone shops.

Similarly, Type 2 FPOs need to avoid their own distribution till they have both quantity and variety. Value chain players bring in not just scale but also variety and capabilities. It is necessary to define the business model based on comparative advantage and manageable complexity.

One well-known NGO was very successful in promoting a dairy in a Tier 2 city few decades back where the concept of packaged milk was new to the consumers. A similar effort, however, to promote a dairy near a big metro a few years back led to a financial disaster. One of the key reasons was that this city has more than 40 milk brands and the NGO did not have the staying power to sustain losses. We tend to forget that Amul was promoted in an 'underdeveloped', pre-liberalised market where it did not face competition from multiple national and international private players. FPO promoters need to temper the "dream" of becoming branded B2C distant market players that is not necessarily viable.



## **Promoting viable models based on contextual capacities**

There is a need for a closer examination of the business models to appreciate the comparative advantage built over years to see if they are truly replicable. Sahyadri (processing, contract manufacturing and exporting of high value fruits and vegetables) has mastered the art of exporting as per stringent western standards. They have utilised the facilities created for grapes storage and processing for yearlong processing of other fruits and exotic vegetables. FPO federations, on the contrary, have done well to act as procuring agency on behalf of the government for various price support schemes of the government. Based on these experiences they could be encouraged to take up buy, store, process, and supply operations for PDS and other schemes of the government. These entities can graduate to acting as aggregators for selling to large private sector players. Newer brands that are FPO friendly, like Safe Harvest, ABY Farmers could also play such a role.

## **Key factors beyond the business model**

Market facing, Type 2 FPOs or FPO-like institutions, are critical for doubling farm incomes. Mere aggregation and sale to corporates may not help FPOs or the farmers and these Type 2 institutions can bring in greater market democracy. State support can be varied and could be in the form of processing plants like rice

mills or pulp making or food processing etc. It may also be useful to explore the active promotion of joint ventures . These manufacturing units can produce for Type 2 FPOs as well as for private players in the market. If Type 2 FPOs outsource their manufacturing / processing operations, they are likely to remain more agile and competitive. Unfortunately, the current 10000 FPO scheme does not envisage a Type 2 institution and thus has no support for state FPO federations too. There is a need to go beyond a naïve expectation that all FPOs promoted would be market savvy to grow like a [Sahyadri](#) or even a [Ram Rahim](#). The next blog will delve into policy recommendations for reimagining the FPO scheme for more effective delivery and outcomes.

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# Steadying a rocky boat: Towards newer Business Models for FPOs

Shirish Joshi and C SHambu Prasad

*FPOs need to develop robust business models, to become 'atmanirbhar' and survive post-project or promotion activities. An earlier [blog](#) argued the case for an alternate design for rainfed FPOs. This article elaborates the possible business model and its limitations for Type 1 FPOs (that are standalone and not federated).*

The primary value proposition of Type 1 FPOs typically consists of equipping farmers to become informed players in the market and act as a platform of aggregation. FPOs try to ensure that farmers do not get exploited because of structural constraints of the prevalent value chain. However, a more compelling reason an FPO can offer any farmer to join the organisation is that of acting as a year-round partner for enhancing livelihoods. In Tushaar Shah's terms, stable FPOs need strong motivators or [unique member allegiance propositions \(UMAP\)](#) to ensure sustained and loyal farmer membership.

## Low-risk low-reward business activities

For smooth operations, standalone FPOs need to establish a collection centre owned or rented with basic facilities like weighing machines, moisture meters, packing facilities including gunny bags and primary processing facilities for cleaning, grading, destoning, storing. These activities add small, but significant value by making the produce market ready and are best done at the village level. Many FPOs purchase the output from farmers and then sell it at different price leading to profit or loss depending on their access to working capital. Can they instead just connect farmers to large buyers and take a commission for services rendered to farmers for aggregation, quality check, weighing, packing etc.? For instance, [Taptapani](#), an FPO in Odisha is involved in many different businesses including public procurement for the Odisha Millet Mission.



*A Kiosk set-up by Taptapani FPCL*

Similarly, on the input side, can the FPOs solicit advance demand from farmers and then work with wholesale markets instead of buying inputs in anticipation of farmer demand and then sell them to make profit? Can FPOs operate on near zero owned inventory of outputs or inputs? A [BAIF](#) promoted FPO in Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh practised an activity called common procurement and distribution unit along the same lines. We suggest that Type 1 FPOs are better suited to get into just the first mile connectivity to the output market and a Business-to-Business (B-to-B) model might work better. For example, the BAIF promoted FPO in Sirsi connected with a large arecanut cooperative to sell vermicompost prepared by its members. They also engaged with [SAFAL](#) to sell their sapotas (chikus). These FPOs try to establish long-term regular contracts or repetitive business models like farmer markets. In other words, they follow a low-risk low-reward business strategies rather than high-risk high reward strategy.

The government can help Type 1 FPOs minimise their risk by procuring a part of its PDS requirements from them ([NAFED](#) has done this for buying pulses and Odisha government has done this for procuring ragi). In Odisha Millets Mission, FPOs acting as procurement agency have leveraged these capabilities for connecting with large private buyers. Whenever MSPs are not available or are very low, the farmers can still use Type 1 FPOs' services to access larger markets and negotiate a better price.



*Ragi Threshing Machine*

## **Yearlong activities to improve member centrality**

Thus, the Type 1 FPOs can aggregate farmer needs not only for supplying to the market but also do business with the government. These services will keep the Type 1 FPOs connected to the lives of the farmers and keep the FPO staff meaningfully engaged throughout the year. The sustained engagement also helps in achieving financial viability.

In addition to agriculture inputs and outputs, Type 1 FPOs may also engage with aggregation of animal husbandry inputs like vaccinations, insurance. FPOs in Tamil Nadu promoted by [Vrutti](#) have successfully incorporated these activities as part of their portfolio. Such FPOs may also engage in other products like Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFPs) and act as service providers.

Type 1 FPOs could also help in aggregation of consumables like tarpaulin sheets, solar bulbs, and drudgery reducing equipments, which are not easily accessible to individual households. For instance, Ram Rahim, an FPO supported by [Samaj Pragati Sahayog](#) (SPS), supplies items of household consumption to its members. Additionally, they can help farmers efficiently access government schemes and benefits for a nominal service charge. For example, most farmers work as

labourers under NREGA in many rainfed areas and Type 1 FPOs can provide services to access benefits of NREGA.

## **Designing for Viability instead of Profitability**

Given multiple compliance related issues with FPCs, as indicated in an earlier [blog](#), not all FPOs need to register as Producer Companies, especially if their turnovers are low. The Self-reliant cooperatives in eight Indian states are potentially a better option for these primary FPOs and in other states, the nodal agency, NCDC can be more active in enabling ease of registration.

Type 1 FPOs that are good at maintaining viability while providing useful services to their target communities are generally incubated by NGOs/ development organisations that have contextual experience of working with the local communities at the ground level.

Observations indicate that women-led FPOs, especially those having women in leadership roles tend to opt for business models that prioritise stability. Women are less likely to take high-risk approaches (like shifting the entire land to a particular cash crop) and are often natural leaders in these FPOs. Thus a proactive focus on supporting such FPOs can also help engender agriculture in empowering ways.

## **Running a lean and effective organisation**

Type 1 FPOs should be financially viable and work with minimal fixed costs such as a two-member team of CEO and accountant with basic office infrastructure. Given the wide spectrum of work involved, it is better to opt for employees with diverse albeit shallow skills rather than hiring specialised workers. While promoting FPOs, Cluster Based Business Organisations (CBBOs) should ensure that activities like production and sale of bio inputs, renting out agriculture equipment are operated by SHGs, Water User Associations, Kisan clubs etc to reduce the overhead costs of the FPO. In activities needing seasonal support, FPO could hire services of local people or its members on daily wages to keep its expenses variable and direct. FPO needs to ensure that most of the activities create a small surplus, which can contribute to covering the running costs. The pricing of the various services should also cover creation of reserves to replace the assets over a period.

Promoting Agencies and CBBOs need to create simple but robust IT and accounting systems for Type 1 FPOs to aid in efficient management. Examples include Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems developed by the Centre for

Sustainable Agriculture that helped FPOs become both smart and sustainable. Unhealthy expectations of high profits can hamper their longer-term growth and ability to build a collaborative ecosystem even as they keep their focus on being member central. They can leverage their links to Type 2 market facing organisations, and provide more value to their members in ways that are financially and ecologically sustainable. In events marked by increasingly precarious markets and climate, the value of steady and secure livelihoods is bound to increase. Type 1 FPOs can potentially meet this challenge, and thrive in it too.

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# Towards newer FPO Designs for Rainfed Areas - I

Shirish Joshi and C Shambu Prasad

*The Amul model of collective enterprises is an important pilgrim's spot for seekers of successful collective enterprises. However, its application for seasonal commodities, especially in rainfed areas requires not replication but a reinvention of alternate business models. The first in a series of policy ideas for differentiated, and robust, FPO.*

Many recent landscape reports on the state of FPOs in the country have highlighted that, barring a few exceptions, many FPOs are stillborn with little scope of growth after the project period. These exceptions, and celebrated successes, often belong to irrigated areas or have had the significant support of agencies like the National Dairy Development Board for milk producer companies and more recently the state livelihood missions. Differentiated data on FPOs based on perennial products like milk, meat, fish etc. in comparison to FPOs based on seasonal products like grains, fruits and Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) is currently unavailable. Even as there are calls to replicate the Amul model in pulses and other crops, it is important to recognise, and plan for, the complex challenges that FPOs face in rainfed areas in non-perennial commodities.

## Why rainfed FPOs need alternate business models?

FPOs in the rainfed regions cannot easily overcome the Complex, Diverse, Risk (CDR) prone nature of rainfed farming. This has bearings on its business models too for the following reasons.



The first deals with seasonality and volatility of produce. Seasonal products like grains are harvested in a few months and lead to the accumulation of relatively large quantities as compared to perennial products like milk. Farmers are generally desperate to sell these

quantities at one go to release cash and pay off their debts for seeds and other agriculture inputs. If the farmers / FPOs want to sell it in tranches, they need both larger storage and working capital. These products are inherently volatile. Typically, if a crop say like soybean or onion attracts a good price in a year more farmers shift to that crop in the next season. Shifting costs, to use a business lingo, is negligible in comparison to horticulture or even cattle rearing. Oversupply and crashing of prices can lead to farmers shifting away from the crops in the third year with another cycle of scarcity and prices going up.

In addition to inter-year volatility, there is also with-in year or seasonal volatility. For most perennial products like milk, meat, and vegetables there have been successful technological interventions to manage volatility. For example, milk production increases in winter and reduces in summer. Technological interventions like converting milk into milk powder can help in managing the milk supply in winter and increasing it in summer through significant capital investments. These kinds of technologies are not prevalent in non-perennial products.

In rainfed areas, the possibilities of crop failure due to erratic rain are higher. Crop diversification is thus a desirable strategy in rainfed areas. However, the consequence of crop diversity is relatively lower quantity available for sale per crop. This makes the trading/processing operations more diverse and complex.



## **Managing expectations and negotiating markets**

Small and marginal farmers need institutions that provide voice and are governed in such a manner that they feel less alienated. They should be able to influence the functioning of FPOs, especially relating to the diversification of crop-mix. Promoting institutions often overburden these nascent FPOs with expectations. These include demands for social inclusion and farmer empowerment to ensuring commercial profitability, demonstrating entrepreneurial zeal and maximising the value to the farmer by directly reaching to the final consumer etc. This hybridity makes the management of FPOs extremely complex and the financial and human

resource support to manage this transformation is often limited. The salary structure does not allow the recruitment of well-educated professionals and FPOs have to deal with these complex challenges with under-resourced support in a very limited period.

One of the allures of the Amul model is the vertical integration and end-to-end ownership of the value chain. This was however built over decades and was not an option for FPOs since late 1990s. There have been fundamental changes in the strategic orientations of business organisations since then with business organisations aiming to minimise complexity through a few core competencies or capabilities to remain competitive in the market. An FPO embracing the entire value chain from procuring seeds to selling value-added products directly to end consumers is inherently ill-suited for Indian markets today. While there are demands to replicate the celebrated Amul model for FPOs, the modes of aggregation through farmer-owned institutions are unclear and significantly under-invested. With neither the capital nor the capability FPOs are expected to find significant value by taking on all operations or realise better prices for their producer by linking with corporates in an unequal market space.



### **Search for alternative models beyond Amul**

It is necessary to design at least two different types of FPOs with different mandates, business models and

organisation designs. The institutional structure and evaluation parameters for these two types of FPOs will also need to be different. Type 1 FPOs could consist of 300 to 1000 members (in tribal areas the Gram Sabha could double up as type 1 FPO). These FPOs will deal with the production or wholesale procurement of seeds and other inputs, providing agri equipment on rent, extension activities for various agriculture operations for relevant crops, and promotion of individual or group enterprises for activities like bioresource input production. They will also undertake aggregation of output, quality checking, and primary processing like

grading, cleaning, packing and selling to large buyers or Type 2 organisations. These Type 2 organisations will buy from type 1 FPOs, store, process, export, brand and sell in B-to-C format or in B-to-B format depending upon the commodities. Potentially these Type 2 organisations could be larger FPOs or Federations but also social enterprises like [Safe Harvest](#), [Earthy N Green](#), [Manyam grains](#) etc.

For a country as diverse and complex as India, we need many pilgrim spots even as some, like Amul, will maintain its primacy and pride of place. In future blogs, we shall delineate the salient design features of Amul se Aage collective enterprises for the large rainfed regions of India.

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# The three Ss of Successful Cooperatives: What Indian cooperatives could learn from Germany

C Shambu Prasad and C S Reddy

*A nine member Indian delegation found that the secret of success of the German cooperative system is built on three simple cooperative values – Self-Help, Self-Responsibility and Self-Administration. As India deliberates its National Cooperation Policy, learning from Germany's Sector Own Control (SOC) that has been continuously evolving over 175 years could help bring much needed vibrancy and business orientation in the cooperative sector.*

As early as 1995, scholars like Tushaar Shah have pointed to the inability of the Indian State to trust cooperatives and their members, overriding their autonomy and resulting in 'a vast and spineless cooperative movement'. The comprehensive task force report of the Vaidyanathan Committee for revival of cooperatives in the early part of the century pointed to irregular audits, poor governance, limited capacities and state interference that has continued to plague the cooperative sector. Despite cooperatives being an integral part of social and solidarity economy worldwide, a fact underscored by their resilience during the pandemic, Indian cooperatives have failed to attract much needed talent, ideas and interest.



*Indian delegation understanding the German banking supervision system at the Giessen Volksbank headquarters.*

The new National Ministry of Cooperation and the proposed National Cooperation Policy is a critical opportunity to reverse these trends and focus on Sector Own Control (SOC) towards greater autonomy and independence. Are there elements of governance and administration that India could learn from countries such as Germany with over 175 years of cooperative experience? This question was on our minds as part of a nine member Indian delegation of bankers, cooperators, Government officials and academicians to Germany for a week in late November 2022.

### **Pragmatically Idealistic: The Three Ss of Success**

Indian exposure to the German cooperative system has been limited due to the imperial legacy whose strength was more on consumer cooperatives. While there are interesting parallels to the Spanish workers' Mondragon cooperative in the [Uralungal labour cooperative](#), we have not seen significant interface between Indian cooperative credit system and Germany. Credit cooperatives in Germany have maintained strong members' and customers' relationship and have successfully competed with commercial and nationalized banks especially in rural areas. The resilience and member-centrality of the cooperative banks was evident during the pandemic with the cooperatives lending €30 billion from March - December 2020 to their 30 million customers (18.2 million being members) while their commercial counterparts, despite their higher asset size could lend only €8 billion. The bankers pride themselves on being less bureaucratic and focused on members needs to promote local economy without compromising on the entrepreneurial nature of cooperatives.

The German cooperative system emphasises three core principles -- Self-Help, Self-Responsibility and Self-Administration and has introduced regular audit of cooperatives since 1889. The cooperatives are treated as enterprises with the state neither providing any preferential treatment nor interfering in the inner organisation of cooperatives. Among factors attributed to the success of cooperatives in Germany are the understanding that each cooperative needs to be economically strong on its market, to grow (at least operate profitably) or merge with another cooperative bank. Enabling factors towards this goal include professional management, high member awareness, a strong cooperative organization that is decentralized with a supportive system of Federations that provide audit, rating, institutional protection, consultancy, lobbying and training. Our visit to the Raiffeisenbank Lorup, a cooperative bank located in the village Lorup, provided insights on the embeddedness of the bank in the economy of the region. The bank has been in operation since 1900 and has 4,463 customers (with 1672 members) and has high acceptance in the region providing loans and credit to support agriculture and forestry in the area. Apart from this the bank has a

renewable energy section and supports photovoltaic systems and wind energy establishments.



*The cooperative wind farm supported by the Raiffeisen Lorup bank*

## **Audit and Training Ecosystem**

Each of the five cooperative unions have their own training academy that is a service provider for seminars, trainings, coaching and individual offers for all member cooperatives. An academy could provide up to 20,000 training days per year and also offers a degree in collaboration with a university. The cooperative federation includes legal audit that is compulsory for member cooperatives and statutory aspects that include counselling and education that is optional. Promoting and safeguarding the economic performance of member cooperatives is paramount in all trainings. As per the German Cooperative law, all cooperatives have to be members of their own regional federation / association and can avail a package of services (training, audit, institutional protection, advisory & lobbying) for a fee. These Cooperative Associations are members of the Cooperative Confederation (DGRV) that provides oversight and guidance.



*The Indian delegation being debriefed on the auditing process followed in German coops by cooperative auditor Mr Winfried Hemken*

## **Beyond Credit: Agricultural Markets and Dairy**

The Raiffeisen cooperative structure has over 1729 agricultural cooperatives with over 1500 Raiffeisen markets that provides rural Germans inexpensive agricultural inputs, home gardening and other daily needs. The cooperative has a big warehouse to service its members and also operates 950 petrol stations in Germany. Apart from agricultural cooperatives there are also livestock and meat, dairy, horticultural, wine and commodity industry cooperatives. Together cooperatives have a commanding share ranging from 60% in milk processing and 50% of the grain trade to 33% in wine harvest. Even as number of farmers are decreasing and farm sizes expanding the cooperatives in Germany too have not fought shy of merging cooperatives to enable greater ease of doing business and remaining viable. Cooperatives are integral to German culture with 98% of farmers and even 65% of accountants being members of cooperatives!





*The Raiffeisen farmers market and modern warehouse in Filsum and Wiefelstede*

## **Lessons for Indian cooperatives**

While economic conditions, farm sizes between Germany and India are not comparable there are some lessons for Indian cooperatives that could benefit from a greater exchange with the German Cooperative system. These include:

A high focus on autonomy and member owned and driven collective business enterprises. This is a much-needed corrective in the Indian Cooperative system that is over dependent on and / or controlled by the State.

An enabling ecosystem that allows for professional inputs to members and their institutions through effective training and support. The strong enabling policy and regulatory framework in Germany with delegated supervision is worthy of emulation by cooperative banks in India.

High quality professional audit at lower costs, which is managed by their own association independent of the cooperative registrar / department, that is the backbone of effective functioning of cooperatives as business enterprises.

The focus on the entrepreneurial nature of cooperatives and the need to not lose sight of the business aspect (profit optimisation). German cooperative banks profitability ratios are low by international standards and maximize welfare of shareholders / members rather than profits and can be seen as social enterprises.

Not all elements of the German cooperative system would be applicable in India but a greater exchange of audit systems, academics involved in cooperatives and training structures can help India chart an alternate path of cooperative development with less interference from the state. Cooperatives in India must be seen as unique member-owned business enterprises that must have their own systems of training, audit, rating, institutional protection systems ensuring legal

and statutory compliances independent of the State. We need to remind ourselves that Gandhi's advice to Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya and LC Jain when they started the Indian Cooperative Union (ICU) in 1946-47 was to keep away from the state.

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# Feeling the pulse of FPCs: How AGMs can indicate their financial and social health

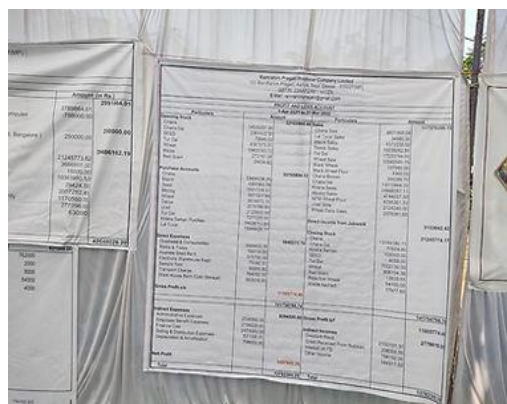
Abhishek Saxena

*The annual general body meetings (AGMs) are a place where many aspects of the governance and managerial health of an FPC can be seen. The AGM held by Ram Rahim Pragati Producer Company, commemorating 10 years of its existence, was a celebration for various reasons but also put forward some questions.*

Ram Rahim Pragati Producer Company (Ram Rahim) is a result of Samaj Pragati Sahyog's (SPS) work with the tribal population in Bagli tehsil of Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh, specifically the women, focusing on **balancing mitti (the soil), members (of the women SHGs) and the (agricultural) markets**. Ram Rahim is an enterprise doing more than Rs. 12 crores worth of business, connecting over 6000 tribal women to the market. They help source quality seeds, negotiate better prices for their farm produce and promote sustainable practices of crop cultivation focused on reducing the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Beyond the members who get direct benefits, secondary positive effects include good soil quality and better farm resource management, improved practices at the farmers' markets and competitive prices offered by the farm gate traders because of Ram Rahim's presence.

## Exemplifying transparent and democratic governance

The AGM was organised in Punjabura village (seat of one of the 5 SHG clusters that SPS has promoted). This was the first time in the last two years that a physical meeting of members and Board of Directors with several important guests was taking place in this region. Hundreds of women came from far and wide to attend this annual mela of sorts. It was their leaders who were to be on the stage, discussing the performance and experiences of their own enterprise, the Ram Rahim. Several



interesting things were on display, but the most interesting was a banner displaying the balance sheet and the profit and loss statement in the open, for everyone to look at, even before any formal revelations were made! The program was yet to begin and the SHG members as well as guests thronged the stalls put up by SPS extension teams exhibiting the various bioinputs as well as other farming and composting techniques that were promoted by SPS in the region. Another stall displayed the processed and packaged pulses, dalia and flour that Ram Rahim prepared for Safe Harvest. Women and their accompanying family members went around looking at these stalls, asking about bioinputs and seeds, even looking at Safe Harvest packets that contained their farm produce, in the form in which it makes its way to the consumers' food basket. Some of them also stood admiring the work done by Kumbaya, another women's producer company that worked in handicrafts and textiles sector.

As the Board members shared the dais with SPS founding members and other guests, the Board chairperson spoke or rather sang about her association with her SHG and the role of SPS, moving onto the formation of Ram Rahim and how the women and their households were benefitting due to these. We were astonished by the simplicity and the beauty with which indigenous communities describe their lives through songs. Some of the women spoke powerfully and passionately about the importance of linking SHGs with government schemes, the impact of Covid 19 on SHGs and Ram Rahim, the significance of crop diversity in farming and several other topics of relevance, facing hundreds of other women, SPS staff, media personnel and others.

The performance metrics were impressive. Who would have thought that a collective of women SHGs that faced resistance from the farm gate traders and APMC commission agents in 2012 would make a profit of more than Rs. 54 lakhs in 2022? But the icing on the cake were the dividends and bonuses, announced for the first time in ten years!



### **Being resilient in the face of the pandemic**

However, unlike mainstream businesses, Ram Rahim as a farmers' organization, needs to go beyond profits and

incentives. It is ultimately the governance and their strategic engagement with various stakeholders that assures long term viability. Even as SPS's role has gradually become more advisory in nature, cumulative experience has helped Ram Rahim develop some risk-taking abilities, as well respond to changing markets with agility. These skills helped with tide the pandemic in a pro-active manner. Coming out with farmer centric solutions such as providing packaged household rations to SHG members as well as working on increasing the member base with the help of SPS, has helped Ram Rahim by testing potential markets, partners and businesses, while also attempting to solidify its image as an enterprise that has 'mitti, members as well as markets' as its core strategy. Importantly, while doing all this, Ram Rahim has not compromised on building its reserves and surplus, a key resource, that may come in handy in tough times. A lot of this risk -taking and exploration can be attributed to the very proactive Board of Directors and the CEO, who has been an excellent steward of the Board and the women SHGs.

## **Achieving the holy grail of producer-owned collectives**



Ram Rahim awarded 'FPO of the year' in 2021 by Livelihoods India for its decade long focus on sustainable means of production and value-addition based business model through tie-ups with similar-minded stakeholders. Being able to do profitably for the past six years is no mean feat. Additionally, they have been able to get fresh capital infused through loans from Bank of India and Nabkisan and have secured their own space for Safe Harvest's operations instead of relying on the earlier rented premises at Avantee Mega Food Park, Dewas. In a way, Ram Rahim has been successful in achieving the rather elusive goal of benefitting the

people, planet and profit. Sustaining it, on the other hand, is always an ongoing challenge.

## **Beyond here and now: Some reflections**

As Ram Rahim aims for better profits, more bonuses and digital integration with the promise of smart phones in the hands of thousands of women, are there more intangible issues to consider?



With member incentives expected to become a regular feature in the coming years, it is expected and even encouraged that many more SHGs would sell their farm produce to Ram Rahim. This might be the right nudge for Ram Rahim to look at other markets and partners beyond Safe Harvest. Targeting SHGs and household grocery market is necessary step but not a sufficient one. Expanding business also calls for more storage and processing capacity. The enterprise may now have to decide whether it just wants to earn better profits and share with members who are patrons or to strive towards better inclusivity and cater to the members' needs and aspirations.

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