



Outstanding Practice in
AGROECOLOGY 2019



FACTSHEET

India – Promoting organic farming and marketing among small peasants in an ecologically fragile region (Timbaktu Collective, 2005)

IN BRIEF

The Timbaktu Collective is a grassroots organization working towards sustainable development of marginalized people across 58 villages in the drought-prone and ecologically challenged Ananthapuramu District in Andhra Pradesh, India. In 2006, the Collective initiated its Organic Agriculture Programme by educating farmers groups in organic farming methods and providing them with inputs such as seeds for millets or indigenous cattle (for manure). The Collective has created a holistic project that includes the agriculture and food production through the Timbaktu Collective and transforming, marketing and selling through the Timbaktu brand. In 2017, they worked with 2,080 farmers covering 8,700 acres and supplied 350 individuals and institutional customers with 242 tons of produce through 1,245 orders. As a grassroots practice, it could be reproduced anywhere.

ABOUT THE PRACTICE AT A GLANCE

Organisation: The Timbaktu Collective (NGO)

Implemented in: Ananthapuramu District, Andhra Pradesh (India)

Year: 2005

Beneficiaries: Smallholder farmers, women, people with disabilities

Topic(s): Production, processing, distribution, organic, livestock

PROBLEMS TARGETED / CONTEXT

The programme is implemented in the Ananthapuramu District in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, one of the more impoverished and the second most drought prone region of India.

Due to a misdirected 40-year policy, most farmers in the district of Ananthapuramu have shifted from traditional resilient mixed-crops and millet-based agriculture to cash cropping chemical-intensive monocultures. Moreover, Ananthapuramu is the highest cultivating groundnut district in the country, even though the culture is water-intensive. This culture has negatively impacted yields, soil health and moisture retention, food and security and farmers had to deal with inadequate rainfalls, drought and reduced water table.

This situation was particularly hard for small farmers, who constitute 90% of the district's farmers. While expenditures of farmers increased (health, education, food, family needs), their incomes stagnated. Consequently, this resulted into migration for daily wage labour, farmer suicide due to the high rates of debt, and even human trafficking. The raise of social, economic inequalities also reinforced patriarchy, marginalizing women, and the disillusion of the youth. The Timbaktu Collective aims to address all these problems and to reframe agriculture as a viable and attractive future for the youth of the region.

The Timbaktu collective was formed 1991 by Bablu Ganguly and Mary Vattamattam - a couple engaged against land degradation - and farmers from villages around Timbaktu. Built on the basis of the Collective's experiments on agroecology in the Timbaktu agro-forest habitat, the programme first specialised in natural regeneration and watershed development. It particularly focused on the empowerment of women (collectivization of women in credit cooperatives) and children's rights, and set up the Seeds of Hope project to re-train farmers in sustainable agriculture and seed sovereignty. In 2005, the Collective took the decision to promote organic farming and collective marketing of produce. Throughout its implementation, the project adopted a participatory approach that involved peasants. From 27 farmers from one village at its beginning, the project grew to 2,080 farmer families from 58 villages.

KEY FEATURES OF THE SOLUTION

The goal of the Timbaktu Collective is to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers on a sustainable basis in order to revitalize local economy. Its objective is to promote agroecology by small peasants and to support a producer-owned business enterprises to participate in the organic value chain, so that they have additional earnings.

The project is composed of two branches that are separately registered. First, the Timbaktu Collective, which provides farmer families with training, resources and extension services. Second, the Dharani Farming and Marketing Cooperative Limited (Dharani FaM Coop), a membership-based company in which farmers become shareholders of the business.

Key features are financial and technical support to farmer families for organic cultiva-

tion of millets (Foxtail millet, Little millet, Kodo millet, Proso millet, Barnyard millet, Finger millet, Pearl millet, and Great millet), pulses, oilseeds, and paddy. In terms of agroecological practices, the focus lies around the reintroduction of traditional cropping knowledge, including millet-cultivation methods; re-introducing multi-cropping with millets and pulses; regenerating on-field biomass of plants and trees which have been extensively destroyed by groundnut cultivation; bringing back indigenous cattle breed (Halikar) through a loan-grant model; ensuring no external inputs and to instead champion organic fertilisers and pesticides. It is a decentralised, profit-making, producer-owned enterprise that provides for a fair, transparent and incentivized procurement, high-quality processing, value addition, and marketing of products such as cold-pressed groundnut oil, rice, semolina, flour, and a range of ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook items. Also support and mentoring is provided to the Cooperative in institution building, business development, crop planning, procurement, branding, strategy, marketing, sales, organic certification, recruitment, infrastructure development, staffing, data management, customer/ networking/institutional linkages, and in raising working capital loans.

In terms of physical structures, the Cooperative comprises of one central processing facility, two decentralized processing facilities, 8 mini-mills, and 59 village-level resource centres for farmers. The main stakeholders implementing the practice are the leadership and staff of the Collective, a team of professionals responsible for the day-to-day management of the Cooperative, and the 2,080 primary members of the Cooperative (and their families), who undertake governance, planning, production, distribution and/or reinvestment of profits, etc. Finally, the Board of Directors of the Cooperative, selected from among its members, provides supervision, guidance, and sign off on all major policy decisions.

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

- An ethical, holistic, and participatory model of local self-governance that addresses the rights of the most disadvantaged rural people.
- Advances ecological balance, livelihoods, food security and collective entrepreneurship. Awakening the power of collective bargaining.
- Promotes self-sufficiency; all inputs are produced by the farmers.
- Proving that small-scale farming can not only be viable but thrive, in an ecologically deprived region.
- Bringing nutrient-rich and climate-resilient crops back into cultivation through a multipronged strategy, by fixing a premium procurement price for millets before the start of the agriculture; accurate, fair, and timely procurement at the farm gate, sourcing good quality seeds, and sharing of profits based on the amount of crop sold.
- Includes the whole food chain, from seeding to the marketing of products,
- Offers an alternative banking system that especially benefits women.
- Advances education of children and inclusion of people with disabilities.

FACTS & FIGURES

- 2,080 farmer families supported in 2017-2018 (shareholders of Dharari FaM Coop).

Revenue: Rs. 35 million (€437,152) in FY 2017-18.

- In 2016, the Timbaktu Collective worked with 1,632 farmers in three mandals of Ananthapuramu District, covering 8,700 acres under agro-ecological farming practices.
- In 2017, Dharani FaM Coop had net sales of Rs. 2.43 crores (€299,442), a 19,11 % increase from the previous year. In 2018, this had risen to Rs. 3.05 crores (€379,648), equal to a net profit of Rs. 5.37 lakhs (€6,684).
- 350 individuals and institutional customers were supplied with 242 tons of produce through 1,245 orders.
- 13,000 days of employment created for 50 women (i.e. 260 days per woman) from Chennekothapalli village, who undertook cleaning, grading, value addition and packing of produce at the central processing unit.
- 25 lakh (€ 307,896) were added to the local economy.
- The credit cooperative has a total membership of 20,973 women (1,425 new members) and a capital of 20,43 crore (€ 2,79 million).
- 23 one-day Member Education training programmes were conducted in 2017 to enhance the capacity of 526 members in organization structures, roles and responsibilities, project objectives, and livestock management.
- Four training camps were held for 11 forest watchers, who build among other things basins for 1,427 trees.

OUTCOME, IMPACT & EFFECTIVENESS

- Correct weighing practices add 25 % to farmer's income. Price fixed before season especially for millets to prevent price shocks. No ceiling on produce that would be procured by the cooperative (as per crop plan) – this helps farmers liquidate all their stocks in the current season. Providing 20-50% premium prices over market prices to ensure fair market access. Additional patronage incentive of 3% to 7% as incentive at the end of the year.
- The practice witnessed growth over three years (from 2015-16 to 2017-18) in the following areas: Net sales of Cooperative: Rs. 20 million (€284,950) to Rs. 30.05 million (€374,040); Cooperative members: 1,620 farmers to 2,080 farmers; No. of members supplying to the Cooperative: 402 farmers to 676 farmers; The total procurement in tons: 318 tons to 877.45 tons; Total cost of procurement: Rs. 13.2 million (€164,307) to Rs. 33 million (€410,757).
- In 2007-2008, walnut and millet production represented about 100 and 14 tons respectively, compared to 500 and 344 tons in 2017-2018.
- Change in cropping diversity: millets are now produced as much as groundnuts.
- Improved ecological balance, biomass, soil health, etc.
- Dharani FaM Coop created 18,092 work days and provided wages of 26.35 lakhs (€32,799) to its workers. Of these, 183 women labourers accounted for 15,162 work days, earning a total of 20.50 lakhs (€25,571)
- The Timbaktu brand is growing in recognition across Southern India.

OUTLOOK, TRANSFERABILITY, SCALABILITY & COST-EFFICIENCY

The practice is growing and in 2017-2018 generated net sales of Rs. 30,5 million (EUR 375,824). The programme is financed by NGOs (for example through German organi-

sation, Bread for the World, and Indian donor, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust) up to Rs. 577,16 lakhs (Total sources of funds Rs. 602,60 lakhs – opening balance Rs. 25,44 lakhs) and has a total expenditure of Rs. 602,60 lakhs (EUR 733,165). The cooperative has ongoing working capital loans arrangements. While the model may not be cost efficient from a purely economic point of view, the Cooperative will be soon able to pay back its loans and not to have to rely on any external support. The practice does not anticipate expansion in the coming year, as they intend focus on improving yield and increasing marketing capacity of the Cooperative.

According to the nomination form, it is difficult to assess the transferability of the project, since it relies on variables like land ownership patterns, quality of the soil, climate, laws governing the functioning of Cooperative, socio-economic conditions, capacity of the promoter organization, varying rainfall etc. Thus, the Timbaktu Collective believes that setting grassroots and independent people's organization is applicable for every region.

The Cooperative gives an emphasis to the necessity for technology to be an ally of the peasant, and has therefore not promoted motorised ploughing, weeding, cultivation, harvesting, etc. However, a tablet-based Management Information System has been adopted to boost efficiency in operations. Technology would be needed to test the soil nutrient quality and pesticide residue, to GIS map of farmer fields, to ensure better quality of millet seeds (R&D) and to process machinery for millets efficiently.

INTERVIEWEE FEEDBACK

Number of points: 22.5 out of 23

Summary: The interview allowed for additional information to be shared on top of the already comprehensive documentation provided with the nomination. The practice performed excellently in all principles.

1 (Sustainable use of resources) – 5.5/6 - The Timbaktu Collective practices organic farming and uses only local material, produces compost, biodynamic systems, systemic pest control techniques at landscape level that increase soil fertility. Furthermore, the work of eco-restoration (flora, grassland, forest) has a positive impact on biodiversity, and genetic diversity. However, 0.5 points were withdrawn, because the Collective is not fully self-funded (donations).

2 (Equity and eradication of poverty) - 4/4 - The achievements of the practice in terms of eradication of poverty must be pointed out. Indeed, the Timbaktu Collective not only works with the most disadvantaged people (smallholder farmers, children, and people with disabilities), it also has a strong gender-focus (women self-help groups), creates jobs opportunities for the local community and the youth in the agricultural sector and in food processing.

3 (Precautionary approach to human health, natural resources and ecosystems) - 2 / 2 – The practice stands entirely against GMO and chemicals. Revival of traditional water harvesting systems. Use of solar energy. All activities based on people's views and direct line of communication exists.

4 (Public participation and access to information) - 3/3 - All projects are developed collectively in partnership with relevant people/organizations from civil society, that information is communicated with the citizens, and that knowledge is shared among the farmers according to the Farmer Field School philosophy.

5 (Governance and human security) - 3/3 - Apart from the managing and steering committees, members from each cooperative have regular meetings to speak about the development of projects. There are an ethics committee, the money committee, the committee against sexual harassment, etc.

6 (Integration, interrelationship- human rights, social, economic and environmental objectives) - 3/3 - The practice restores soil, forest, and flora and grassland which is good for ecosystems, contributes to social justice and in particular promotes healthy and culturally appropriate diets by conducting demonstrations of cooking traditional food. Justice and cooperation between and for all parties, especially the disadvantaged.

7 (Common but differentiated obligations) - 2/2 - Practice has been designed specifically for this context and works symbiotically within the community, adapting itself to constant and changing local conditions. No burden afforded, rather alleviated - and participative approach ensures best practice at all time.

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