



Agriculture and Organic Farming Group (AOFG) **ANNUAL REPORT 2002 - 2003**

An over view

Agriculture and Organic Farming Group (AOFG) India has been interacting with technical agencies, organic agencies, agriculture promotion agencies, agri-business agencies, forest conservation agencies, biodiversity agencies, project funding agencies, national and international bodies to benefit the rural farming community living in the rainfed and hill slope farming areas. AOFG India has promoted a vigorous plan on farmers organizations and local NGOs to promote ecological farming and organic agriculture for rural development.

AOFG India has participated the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM) conference at Nurenberg, Germany and Victoria, Canada. The attempt is reaching the right message to the farmers in the rural areas fully depending upon farming for livelihood and survival. Organic agriculture is a way of life and is good for the nature and biodiversity. The rural population is part of the biodiversity, forest and environment. The pressure on owning up sufficient food materials are the primary concern of the rural population. The nature is disturbed due to over exploitation of resources unmindful of the consequences. The role of AOFG India is to promote a common consensus in the life of the large section of the rural population to live in peace with nature and work for the conservation of nature and natural resources while working hard for food production and income generation activities.

The AOFG India network is spread into Kerala, Andhrapradesh, Orissa, Uttaranchal, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. The Regional Group Office set up at Adimali, Kerala State is a working experience in organizing the local groups for the promotion of organic farming and conservation of nature and natural resources. During the year 2003 such regional group offices will be opened at Andhrapradesh, Orissa and Nagaland.



Participation in IFOAM Conference, Canada.

AOFG India has represented the IFOAM Conference held at Victoria, Canada during August, 2002. The membership of AOFG India is under the active consideration of IFOAM. The conference has given a correct perspective on the role of small and marginal farmers in organic farming. The issues confronting the small farmers for the promotion of organic farming is a misnomer. Invariably the small and marginal farmers living in the rainfed and hill slope farming areas are generally not with the practise of high external inputs for crop production. They are using the local materials for better crop production and is cost effective.

Numerous low cost traditional knowledge is applied by the local farmers which is to be further scientifically studied and new appropriate technologies are to be developed. The cultural and traditional life of the rural people should get attention in organic farming.

Nature conservation, ecological farming, forest conservation are essential and integral in a rural society. The rural population invariably depended upon the forest and its resources. Traditionally, the rural population in all possible way promoted the forest and the natural resources. The population increase has suddenly brought in the problems of over exploitation of the forest and the natural resources. The consumer goods and the modern way of life has created sudden problems pertaining to the need of increased finance. The farmer and the local population found the easy way of more money through over exploitation of forest and natural resources. In several areas, this trend has gradually slowing down and people are looking for the protection and management of natural resources. AOFG India is promoting this trend and is in constant interaction with the local population for the conservation of nature and natural resources. The network NGOs are being involved in the promotion of various activities and provided with training to its staff members to reach the maximum population in the rural areas.



Participation of Alter Organic Workshop at Bonn, Germany.

AOFG India and seven network NGOs participated the Alter Organic Workshop at Bonn, Germany in October, 2002. The Alter Organic Workshop is organized by AGRECOL e.V., Marburg, Germany. The workshop was the result of one year e-mail interaction on various issues relating to organic farming in the developing countries, specially the small and marginal farmers. The e-group participation from AOFG India NGO network group was 14. Reasonable amount of data has been generated through this e-group discussion. The workshop was attended by NGOs from 22 Countries. AOFG India and its network NGOs could point out the importance of the traditional knowledge practised by the small and marginal farmers from the rural areas and the importance of considering the traditional values and practises which are on the other side of the organic farming. In every respect, the practise of the farmers are organic but short of a certified organic product.

The concentration of small and marginal farmers are generally in the difficult areas where the modern farming or to say the conventional farming has not yet reached and accepted by the farmers. The traditional farming is the method of small and marginal farmers. The huge infrastructure built up for agriculture production is utilized by the large land holding conventional farmers. The huge government subsidy is going to these farmers who often utilize costly external inputs such as seeds, fertilizer and pesticides. They also apply farm mechanization for large scale production. The small and marginal farmer does not come nearer to these farmers.

The context of nature conservation and management is part of the life of the small and marginal farmers. The protection and promotion of environment and forest is part of the life of the farmers. The government policies relating to forest has a source of revenue to the government has caused more damaged to the forest and forest wealth rather than the small and marginal farmer. Therefore, the small and marginal farmer is the promoter of nature and natural resources. We could explain this in the workshop.



Education, training and program support to member NGOs.

The NGO networking is now with 20 NGOs from various States in India. Support for programme, education and training is provided. The local NGOs and their human resource development is very important for the promotion of farmers organizations, crop production, forest conservation, nature conservation and management. AOFG India has supported all the 20 NGOs who are part of the network.

Training programme in organic agriculture in rural development.

AOFG India understand that the rural development is linked with farming, specially organic agriculture, conservation and management of nature and natural resources. AOFG India is implementing a regular programme on training on organic agriculture in rural development. The training programme is for the personnels of the network NGOs and they in turn train the farmers and the leaders of the local population.

Rural development is understood in a broader sense by AOFG India. The rural population is as much part of the biodiversity and therefore, concerted efforts in creating a bond between nature and the man/women is required. It may be philosophical, but it hold substance and is meaningful. The forest provide him/her fuel wood, good rainfall, edible items, medicine and many other things. The destruction of forest has caused severe problem to the villages in respect of less drinking water availability, scarce fuel wood supply, and non availability of essential medicinal items which are used to be abundant. This harmonious situation is ideal and AOFG India is promoting this concept through the network NGOs.

Fifteen network NGOs has promoted programmes and projects on this direction and is encouraging. The farmers organizations in the respective areas has responded and fully involved in the implementation of the activities.



Farmers training programme

AOFG India has promoted a continuing programme on farmers training for the development of local standards, harmonization and organic certification. The staff members of the network NGOs are trained. Organizations such as SGS International and ECO-CERT and ENCORN, Aurangabad are involved in this programme. The support structure created for the training programme is helpful to the participating NGOs. This programme will continue.

Marketing by farmers organizations

The farmers organizations in the village are focal to the promotion of all activities. The network NGOs are promoting the establishment of 10 - 15 member independent farmers group of mutual interest. Each village usually have 5 - 10 groups. The groups are involved in setting up of farmer to farmer demonstration programmes and marketing set up to sell their produced products. The promotion of local marketing can be possible only through local farmers organizations/groups. The activities have gained good amount of acceptance and the farmers themselves could decide on the scope of market and market potential for their produced products. The marketing set up has helped the farmers to locate the potential buyer points where they could get the best price. The middle man in the process of marketing is totally out of the picture and the actual price is reaching at the hands of the farmer producer.

Organic spices processing by farmers groups

The AOFG India regional group office has promoted a programme on spice production, processing and marketing. Coffee, black pepper and cardamom is carried out together with the other spices such as ginger and turmeric. The farmer groups, mainly women are involved in the activities through the women self help groups (SHG) and are successful in selling the product direct to the consumers.



Programme on natural resource management.

AOFG India and five NGOs are involved in natural resource management programme in areas of nature conservation, promotion of forest and eco-tourism. The joint forest management (JFM) promoted by the forest department of the government has created certain problems. The government is protecting the forest for revenue generation and alienating the people living around the forest in any form of involvement. The local population has not given a mandate in promoting the forest conservation, even though, so much is being talked about joint forest management and eco tourism. The need is organize the local population for the conservation and management of nature and natural resources. The projects are giving us good opportunity in understanding the dynamics of the inter linked bond between the nature and the local population.

The programme activities are on the other hand is called watershed management and are focussed for conservation and management of water, conservation and management of soil, conservation and management of forest, promotion of organic farming, application of local resources for crop protection and man power training to build up local capability.

Study programme on forest management.

The natural resources and forest are important where AOFG India and its associated NGOs are working. The country as a whole has different climate and different ownership patterns in respect of land and forest. The land and forests in the North East India except the State of Assam and Tripura is owned by the village community. The forest in other States is fully owned by the government under law. The people living around the forests have no right over the forests particularly the reserved forests. There is lot of complex situation prevails in India and the area in particular worked by AOFG India and the associated NGOs. In view of this, a study programme is promoted in few areas and would be completed by 2004.



Networking

AOFG India is a body associated with 24 NGOs who are working in 10 States of India. Various topics are discussed and an advisory committee headed by Dr. Suraj Bhan, one of the prominent soil scientist in India is looking after the technical works. AOFG India is interacting with GTZ, Germany, Both Ends, Netherland, CIDA and Organic Reserch Foundation, USA.

Future Plan

AOFG India is planning to organize an International Conference on Shiftcultivation, Hill slope farming, and the maintenance of mountain eco system. Suitable studies will be commissioned and a film will be produced. It is expected that the conference will be conducted during April 2005. AGRECOL e.V and Both Ends will be contacted to assist the conference.

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