



**AGRICULTURE & ORGANIC FARMING GROUP - INDIA
(AOFG - India)**

Annual report 2003 - 2004

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Agriculture and Organic Farming Group (AOFG-India) **ANNUAL REPORT 2003 - 2004**

Agriculture and Organic Farming Group-India (AOFG-India) has been interacting with various government departments, ministries, 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. Reduction of poverty and livelihood support programs are central to various actions promoted by AOFG-India. The major area of actions during the year was motivation, education, training and capacity building on organic agriculture in rural development, organization of the stakeholders, livelihood support, and promotion of international conventions on climate, biodiversity and desertification at the grassroots level. The program will have its spill over to the next financial year.

Reaching the right message to the farmers in the rural areas through education, training and capacity building has been taken up as a priority program while emphasizing livelihood support and reduction of poverty. Organic agriculture is a way of life and is good for the nature and biodiversity. The rural population is part of the biodiversity, ecology, forest and environment. The pressure on producing sufficient food materials are the primary concern of the rural population. The upland agriculture and allied activities including collection of the scarce forest produces are creating conflict between resource base and availability. 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. They are motivated, educated and empowered to work for the conservation of nature and natural resources while working for the food production, food security and income generation activities to reduce poverty among the stakeholders.

AOFG India is primarily a NGO networking organization. The NGO net-



work is spread into Kerala, Andhrapradesh, Orissa, Uttaranchal, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. AOFG India has established a Regional Group Office at Adimali, Kerala State during 2001, which is a working experience in organizing the local groups for the promotion of organic farming and conservation of nature and natural resources. The main focus of the regional group office is women empowerment and organization of the resource poor stakeholders. The area is part of the western ghats and is important in many ways particularly the forest and environment.

IFOAM Membership

AOFG India is an associate member of International Federation of Organic Movements (IFOAM). The membership has given us an opportunity to highlight the importance of organic and ecological farming in the rainfed, hill slopes and shifting cultivation areas. The present standards of organic certification does not approve the recurring burning of clear felled vegetation for crop production. The practice is traditional which is closely linked with the culture, traditions and way of life of the ethnic communities. It is assumed that the burning may cause the elimination of soil micro nutrients, micro organisms and other properties enriching the soil. We believe that this is a hypothetical conclusion which is not yet substantiated with research evidence. Research studies and field analysis has not been scientifically carried out to prove this particular hypothetical decision. AOFG India is urging the IFOAM to conduct a realistic approach on this matter and also suggest to the organic certification agencies for group certification in aid of the small and marginal farmers. The indigenous communities, small and marginal farmers living in the rainfed, hill slope farming and shifting cultivation areas are generally not using the costly external inputs for crop production. They are using their own seeds, local materials and labour for crop production. Traditional knowledge and its application are evident in these areas which support productivity, soil fertility and to preservation own seeds and planting materials. These areas and its crop production are organic by fault. An exercise on structural adjustments and practices of local standards, systematic practices and desired documentation coupled with farmers field training can convert the areas and farmers to organic.



The opportunity of this area is the reduction of the mandatory wait period of three to four years unlike the conventional farming areas. Numerous low cost traditional knowledge are applied by the local farmers which is to be further scientifically studied and appropriate technologies are to be developed. The cultural and traditional life of the rural people should get attention and may be respected.

Nature conservation, biodiversity, natural resource management, ecological farming, forest conservation are essential and integral in a rural society. The rural population depended upon the forest and its resources besides their normal food production activities. Traditionally, the rural population in all its possible way protect and promote forests and the natural resources. The population increase and consumerism has brought in numerous problems. Over exploitation of the forest and the natural resources for fulfilling the family needs and costly consumer goods has reached its alarming heights. The consumer goods and the modern way of life has created the demand for increased money need to all rural households irrespective of their land holding, production capabilities, and assets. The farmers and the local population found the easy way of increased money sources through the over exploitation of forest and natural resources. Of late, in several areas, this trend is gradually slowing down and people are looking for the protection and management of natural resources, biodiversity and environment which is understood as supportive to their food production activities. 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 involved in the promotion of various activities and provided with training to its staff members who can reach out to maximum rural population.

Reprinting of Alter Organic Workshop Proceedings

AOFG India and seven of its network NGOs participated the Alter Organic Workshop at Bonn, Germany in October, 2002. The International Workshop is organized by AGRECOL e.V., Marburg, Germany. The workshop was the result of one year e-mail interactions on various issues relating to organic farming in the



developing countries, specially the indigenous communities, small and marginal farmers. Fourteen of the AOFG India network NGOs participated the e-group discussions. The e-group discussions brought in various issues and field experiences. The Bonn 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 indigenous communities, small and marginal farmers from the rural areas and the importance of considering the traditional values and practises which are at present on the other side of the organic farming. It could substantiate the practice of the farmers are organic but short of a certified organic product due to the strict rules and regulations which are built up on developed countries way of agriculture and crop production.

The concentration of indigenous communities, small and marginal farmers are generally in the difficult areas where the modern farming or to say the conventional farming is not practiced due to its high cost of investment for inputs. Traditional farming is the method with local resources and knowledge. The huge infrastructure facilities built up by the Government for agriculture production is utilized by the large land holding conventional farmers. The huge government subsidies are invested to benefit the conventional farmers who utilize the costly external inputs such as seeds, fertilizer and pesticides. They also apply farm mechanization for large scale production. The indigenous communities, small and marginal farmer does not come nearer to these farmers due to their economic backwardness, low land holding and lack of infrastructure facilities.

The context of nature conservation and management is part of the life of the small and marginal farmers. The government policies relating to forest is mainly driven by revenue generation which is damaging the forests and forest resources. The government often blame the rural and indigenous communities and population growth for the gradual destruction of forest and its resources. This is not true. However, the indigenous communities, small and marginal farmer are the promoters and protectors of nature and natural resources. The conference proceedings were published in India by AOFG India and is available on request.



Education, training & program support to member NGOs.

The NGO networking is now with 29 NGOs from various States in India. Program and technical support on education and training is provided to network NGOs. 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 supporting the 29 NGOs. This is a continuing program.

Training on 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 program on training on organic agriculture in rural development. The training program 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 the easy availability of drinking water, fuel wood supply, and essential medicinal items. AOFG India is promoting location specific training and educational programs through the network NGOs.

Fifteen network NGOs has promoted programs 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. In association with Naturland, a German organic farmers association with its office at



Gurgaon has been associated in the training program. 15 NGOs from Manipur State is currently trained. The training program is to train the agricultural staff members of the NGOs and a package of seven set of training will be imparted. This will enable the NGOs to effectively promote organic farming and certification. The program will be expanded to benefit all the net working NGOs in other states.

Farmers training programs

AOFG India has promoted a continuing programs 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 programs. The support structure created for the training programs is helpful to the participating NGOs. This program 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 programs and marketing set up to sell their produced products. The promotion of local marketing can be possible 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. The consumers are also equally benefited in terms of quality products and better price tag. This program has created a lot of enthusiasm among the farmers and consumers of the local areas and nearby towns.



Organic spices processing by farmers groups

The AOFG India regional group office has promoted a program 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.

Program on natural resource management.

AOFG India and five NGOs are involved in natural resource management program 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 to 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 program activities are watershed management and are focussed for conservation and management of water, soil, forest, promotion of organic farming, application of local resources for crop protection and man power training to build up local capability.

Shifting cultivation and forest management.

The natural resources and forest are important where AOFG India and its associated NGOs are working. The country as a whole has got different climate zones, monsoon pattern. The land holding, land ownership and forest ownership



patterns are different in many places, particularly in the areas populated by indigenous communities. 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 are fully owned by the government under the law. The people living around the forests have no right over the forests. The past fifty years has shown a decline in forest area and health due to the management by the government forest department. There exists a continuing conflict between the local population and the forest department authorities. A complex situation prevails in the area where AOFG India and the associated NGOs are working in respect of forests, cultivable land area and land ownership. Shifting cultivation is another contentious issue. Traditional practice of crop production is prevailing in all the seven North Eastern States, Orissa and Andhrapradesh. So far no affordable technologies has been developed for the farmers on fallow management, agroforestry techniques and management for the protection and promotion of natural resources, biodiversity and environment. In view of this, a study program is promoted in few areas and expected to be completed by 2005.

Networking

AOFG India is a body associated with 29 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 Both Ends, Netherland, Agrecol, Marberg, Central Ministries and State Governments. Fund raising is another area where AOFG India is providing support to net work NGOs. The NGO projects submitted to Central Ministries are negotiated and the staff members are guided to locate adequate funds for their field activities. AOFG India is working to attract external funding for its NGOs. So far results are negative and we hope that we may able to achieve better results later. The important initiative promoted during 2003-2004 are: International conventions on climate, biodiversity, desertification, national conference and study programs.



National Conference

AOFG India has initiated works for organizing a National Conference with a theme on **Shifting cultivation and sustainable development in the hills and mountain ecosystem**. The main objective of the conference is to create a platform of scientists, farmers and activists to promote management of food security, reduction of poverty, livelihood support, management of the mountain ecosystem, biodiversity and environment. Year long pre-conference activities are started. They are studies on shifting cultivation, ecological farming, and a film on shifting cultivation. A website is under creation and will carry the studies, case studies and success stories. The conference will be conducted during October 2005. AGRECOL e.V and Both Ends are the cosponsors of the national conference. Few Central Government Ministries and State Governments has shown interest in sponsoring the conference. Dr. Suraj Bhan and Mr. B. Rath are the chairman and vice chairman of the technical advisory committee of the conference.

International conventions

The international conventions on climate, biodiversity and desertification is adopted as an action program of AOFG India. The Nodal Focal Point of UNCCD-NAP India is the Central Ministry of Environment, Forests and Wild Life (MoEF). India has prepared its climate change, biodiversity, desertification national action plans. UNCCD-NAP is prepared in year 2002. In association with MoEF, AOFG India is planning to organize three regional workshops and one National workshops for NGOs/CBOs/CSOs and research Institutions. AOFG India is actively associated with Both Ends, Netherland for UNCCD-NAP India. A series of workshops are planned and a National workshop will be conducted during June, 2004 to involve NGOs to promote CCD-NAP India.

NGO's and business development

AOFG India has promoted an innovative concept on NGO's and business



development for local area development and self reliance. The NGOs, CBOs & CSOs are always on the look out of project financing from funding organizations and government. To promote and institutionalize the ownership of stakeholders, their self reliance, self reliance on core administrative finance of NGOs, AOFG India has promoted a model project on “ NGO’s and business development”. We have initiated negotiations for raising adequate start up finance for this project. 20 NGOs and 10,000 stakeholders are the field level implementing team of this project.

NGO facilitation center at Delhi.

AOFG India is promoting various innovative projects and programs on reduction of poverty, food security and livelihood support. Since 2001 onward we are receiving good number of guests from outside India as well as NGO staff members at Delhi for various works. It is very expensive and un-affordable. Contact program with Central Ministries, meetings at Delhi is consuming good amount of money by way of hotel rent and local transport. Government has several provision for project funding of NGO projects. Many NGOs are not aware of the rules and regulations. A news letter on prospective funding opportunities will be printed and circulated among the NGOs. Therefore, AOFG India has decided to set up a NGO Facilitation Center at Delhi with few facilities such as documentation on project funding opportunities from Government, transport, internet facilities and office support. This will facilitate many NGOs to come down to Delhi for its fund raising activities with minimum expenditure.

AOFG India website

AOFG India website has been remade with complete array of details and program activities. All activities and the activities of its 29 net working NGOs are displayed at the site. Special feature of the website is reading materials on shifting cultivation, activities on international conventions:- climate change, biodiversity, desertification, national conference and news letter.



Board Member of AOFG India 2003 - 2004

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Financial Auditors' to AOFG India

M/s. Sandeep Jain & Company, Chartered Accountants & Auditors, Delhi are the financial auditors of AOFG India.

Bankers to AOFG India

M/s. Indian Overseas Bank (IOB), Janpath Branch, New Delhi - 110 001 are the bankers' to AOFG India.





AOFG - India, NGO Networking

Twenty Nine NGOs are members to AOFG India. The NGOs are operating from Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Uttaranchal, and the seven North Eastern States. AOFG India is assisting the NGOs to promote organic farming, self help groups, women. Technical support, training and support services for resource mobilization is provided to the NGOs. AOFG - India has established a Regional Group Office at Adimali, Idukki district, Kerala. A seven member staff team is working in this area.

1. MATA Foundation
2. Jhumia Farmers Society (JAFAS)
3. Diocesan Social Service Society (DSSS)
4. Catholic Medical Center, Koirengi (CMC)
5. Community Builders Society (CBS)
6. Community Development Organization (CDO)
7. Social Upliftment & Resource Dev. Agency (SURDA)
8. Women Union for Prosperity (WUFP)
9. Tamei Organic Farmers Association (TAOFAS)
10. Senapati Tribal Farmers Association (STFA)
11. North East Welfare Society (NEWS)
12. Valley Welfare Association (VWA)
13. Development Association of Nagaland (DAN)
14. Rural Welfare Center, Phularthal (RWCP)
15. Jirsong Asong, Diphu
16. Tezpur Social Service Society (TSSS)
17. Bongaigaon Gana Seva Society (BGSS)
18. Mendipathar Multipurpose Society
19. North Eastern Diocesan Social Forum (NEDSF)
20. Dev Bhumi Vikas Sansthan (DVBS)
21. Social Trust for Empowering People (STEP)
22. People's Development Trust (PDT)
23. Chaitanya Welfare Institute, West Godavari
24. Pargati Mahila Mandali (PMM-P)
25. Basavannapalam Harijan Women Welfare Society (BHWS)
26. Navaratna Rural Development Society (NRDS)
27. Siddhartha Youth Welfare Society (SYWS)
28. Sumer Memorial Rural Welfare Society (SMRWS)
29. Aadi Cultural Center (ADC)