

## **Sustainable Partnerships Partnerships among Small Farmers for Sustainable Livelihoods**

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Key words: organic, agriculture, markets, women, cooperative, PGS

### **Author's Background**

Joy Daniel has spent the last 8 years in the promotion of PGS at local, national and international levels. He has also been active in organizing small and marginal farmers as farmers' cooperatives..

### **Summary**

*This paper presents a case of the farmers' producer company (otherwise known as a farmers' cooperative) where mainly women farmers from a semi-arid region use small-scale technologies at their homesteads and at their homes to produce organic inputs and organic foods, and markets these produce at local and domestic markets. Besides definite advantages of individual farmers from their own enterprises, the business systems and the strategies followed ensure that there are gains in the participation as a group and encourage contribution to farmer communities involved and other stakeholders.*

### **Background**

In the developing countries of the world, there is a large number of small and marginal farmers whose livelihoods are being increasingly affected by the current trends of development. In the case of India, the reducing farm sizes and the effects of climate change adversely affect their incomes.

Small-scale technologies and businesses systems that are simple, affordable, provides for better income distribution, and builds self-respect, are sustainable solutions for small-holder farmers. One such case is described in this paper. Although the case is of the central Marathwada region in India – a semi-arid region, the conditions are very similar in many parts of the world.

### **Main chapter**

Although India has been recording an impressive economic growth rate of above 7 % during the past few years, the entire Marathwada region and Aurangabad district in particular does not share this same growth story. As per the economic data of 2005, the per capita income in most districts of Marathwada fell far below the national growth rate. Aurangabad district had negative per capita income growth (-0.1 %). The recent drought from 2010-2013 has further reduced the incomes among small farmers. The last few years have seen unseasonal and scanty rains. The average rainfall and the number of rainy days show a decreasing trend as well in most of the districts of Marathwada. Over the past two decades, the average rainfall has fallen from 900 mm to less than 400 mm in most districts of Maharashtra . Further, the ground water in Aurangabad District has dropped to about 10 metres from the last year - 2012. During the last year, it had already fallen by about 6 metres from the year before that. This has led to acute distress among farmers in the region. The rainfall during 2012 was less than 35 % of the average rainfall in many areas of Marathwada. Aurangabad and Jalna districts are the ones most affected. This further exasperates the overall human development in the region which is already among the lowest in the country. The majority of the people in the district depend on agriculture for their livelihoods and this negative trend in incomes indicates the decreasing income from farms and lack of other livelihood opportunities in the rural areas.

Along with the challenges of water scarcity, the fragmentation of lands will tend to continue with the increasing population. The reducing area of farm further decreases the income potential from cultivation. Government census statistics show a 6% annual increase in marginal farmers (< 1 hectare) and 3% annual increase in small farmers (1-2 hectares) with reducing medium and large farmers. This indicates that future of farming and food sovereignty will rest with the small and marginal farmers. Therefore, any development intended for sustainable food production and livelihoods cannot neglect the marginal and small farmers.

The problems of farmers in Aurangabad district is the same as in other rainfed areas of the country but more acutely so due to the agro-climatic conditions and overall economic situation of the region. The challenges include – plateaued or even reducing productivity of farms, soaring cultivation costs, diminishing response to chemical fertilizer application, and reducing water availability.

Efforts are undertaken globally to improve incomes and livelihoods of the small and marginal farmers. Albeit the best efforts, there has been generally dwindling incomes among farmers. The case in Aurangabad district has however observed encouraging results. Small farmers in Aurangabad district have come together as groups for the following objectives.

- Promote and implement Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) to ensure organic farm production at the farm levels.

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PGS is based on the premise that farmers have adequate knowledge to gauge their own methods of cultivation consistent to local standards. Therefore, social systems can be put in place to facilitate peer appraisals and support to encourage organic farming among the small farmers

- Share knowledge and resources (composts, farm produce, skills, etc) on organic farming

Farmers adequately share knowledge on organic farming practices as per their farming season. For instance, the pest management in crops is discussed during the meetings from October - November when the incidence of pests is the highest. Farmers also share organic resources like crop residues.

- Promote small farm-based enterprises in their homesteads.

Farmers, through their regular financial contributions that are saved by the farmers group and linkages to financial institutions, are able to establish small and micro-enterprises through access to financial credit. These farmers' enterprises are farm-based and cater to the services required in the villages, value addition of organic produce, and its marketability.

The farmers groups in about 50 villages have federated to form the farmers cooperative or the farmer producer organization – Alexander Mahagreen Producer Company Limited or "Mahagreen" in short. The company is owned by the farmers and the products offered by Mahagreen are what the farmer shareholders or members produce. Produce of many small and marginal farmers, even value added food products using simple technologies, are many times combined, packaged, and sold under the label of Mahagreen. Currently, Mahagreen has about 1000 members representing farmers groups in 50 villages. These farmers are actively engaged in the production of organic foods, organic farm inputs, and value added food produce mostly from small and marginal farms. Their products – particularly organic farm inputs - are sold to rural markets within their own and surrounding villages. The rural demands are mostly for farm inputs like vermi-compost, Cow Pat Peat (CPP), and biodynamic composts while there is also some demand for value added food produce.

### **Core messages and conclusions**

The civil society networks, NGOs, donors, and multi-lateral development agencies, have a role in promoting individual and group efforts by farmers. This role varies from building capacities of the stakeholders to lobbying for national and international policy reforms to promote livelihoods of small and marginal farmers. These interventions need to ensure increased ownership of the farmers in production, processing, marketing, and the decisions on incomes.

The Mahagreen experience demonstrates that a mix of decentralized local systems to facilitate individual production and marketing of organic produce together with farmer-owned cooperatives/ organizations that can collectively plan and market the organic produce will have the advantage of direct incomes, complete ownership of the processes, and the benefits of pooled volume.

The organic inputs and value added food produce are mostly sold in the local markets. In addition, the food grains and some basic value added food produce have found markets in other cities and towns of India - Aurangabad, Mumbai, Pune, Secunderabad, Chennai, Bangalore, Coimbatore, and Nilgiris. The incomes of the farmers have substantially increased through the individual small and micro-enterprises and by the collective marketing of the organic produce.

### **References**

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Online-Documents

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Compilation from [www.indiastat.com](http://www.indiastat.com)