

Concept Paper

Prospects of organic certification and participatory guarantee system (PGS) in Tamil Nadu

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Received: 2.3.2017/Accepted: 12.6.2017

ABSTRACT

Organic production much of Indian agriculture carried out under default organic management means the farmers had no access to chemical fertilizers, pesticides or other organically prohibited amendments for financial and other reasons. The default organic farmers never made a choice to organic. Under these circumstances organic guarantee system for India needs to address the issue of educating farmers on organic agriculture. Majority of the women farmers of Tamil Nadu reported that the participatory guarantee system (PGS) supported the sustainable agriculture-based livelihoods. The PGS was completely new to the government officers and it was difficult to implement PGS with women farmers without landholding, entitlements, access to markets, nutritional security etc. Problems in PGS were that organic laws did not include the PGS. The use of the word organic is regulated by law and requires third-party certification. Without allowing for a PGS model it can complicate and even slow the organic movement. The present paper includes suggestions to strength the PGS in Tamil Nadu, create more intensive awareness on organic PGS among both conventional and certified organic farmers, promote local market for organic products produced by PGS groups and promote premium price for them.

Keywords: Sustainable; organic guarantee system; certification; default organic; third party certification

INTRODUCTION

India ranks 10th among the top ten countries in terms of cultivable land under organic certification. The certified area includes 10.00 per cent cultivable area with 0.50 Mha and rest 90.00 per cent (4.71 Mha) is forest and wild area for collection of minor forest produce. The total area under organic certification is 5.21 Mha (Anon 2013). India exported 135 products with the total volume of 165262 MT including 4985 MT organic textiles. The organic agro-export realization was around 374 million US dollars including 160 US dollars organic textiles registering a 4.38 per cent growth over the previous year. Organic products are exported to EU, US, Switzerland, Canada, southeast Asian countries and South Africa. Among oilseeds, soybean (41.00%) leads among the products exported followed by cane sugar (26.00%), processed food products (14.00%), basmati rice (5.00), other cereals and millets (4.00),

tea (2.00), spices (1.00), dry fruits (1.00) and others (Anon 2013).

Growing number of organic farmers and operators in India

Out of total 2099 operators while processors account for 427 and individual farmers 753 majority of farmers (597873) are small and marginal covered by 919 grower groups. Out of the total organic producers in the world approximately half of them are in India. This is mainly because of small holdings with each producer (Anon 2011).

Status of organic farming in Tamil Nadu

It is a good movement towards organic in Tamil Nadu among the farmers, agricultural experts and scientists. Tamil Nadu Organic Certification Department (TNOCD) is established to carryout inspection and certification of organic production system in accordance with National Programme for

Organic Production (NPOP). Tamil Nadu has 29719.81 acre area under organic farming (2015-16) (Table 1).

Organic production system

The organic production system is based on specific and precise standards of production which aims at achieving optimal ecosystems which are socially, ecologically and economically sustainable.

Problems in organic agriculture

Production level: There is damage to environment; there are residues in produce and there are increased chemical contaminations etc. Thus it necessitates to have alternative safe inputs.

Marketing level: Certification procedure is quite complex (large number of formalities required to certification of the product and high cost involved).

In India default organic management means the farmers have no access to chemical fertilizers, pesticides or other organically-prohibited amendments for financial and other reasons. The problem is that default organic farmers never made a choice to be organic. There is no guarantee, no pledge and in fact no reason that these farmers won't start using unsustainable chemical pesticides, fertilizers and genetically modified organisms as soon as they gain access to them. Without knowledge of sustainable chemical free alternatives farmers will undoubtedly embrace easy solutions to long standing problems of fertility, insects and diseases.

PGS-participatory certification- a farmer empowering approach

It is an alternative to third party certification. In participatory guarantee system (PGS) organic farmers have full control over the certification process and are able to produce far more. It is credible and effective system of quality assurance compared to third party certification (TPC). It is an effort to make organic certification affordable to farmers.

Experiences in Tamil Nadu

The NGOs views on PGS- Tamil Nadu Pudhu Vazhvu Project (TNPVP), district Madurai

The Project (TNPVP) adopted PGS certification as the poverty alleviation programme in the year 2014 for practically document and solve practical problems of organic farming at field level. In all 185 groups with 1786 members were formed as groups and used the PGS certification as a means of poverty alleviation programme. They were exposed to the modalities of PGS certification and its application and relevance in the organic farming.

Hill (2016) reported that 342 farmers supported by SEVA organically-cultivated vegetables, pulses, paddy and oilseeds on about 35.5 acres (14.4 ha) of land most of which was irrigated by shallow and deep tube wells in West Bengal. Most of the year they sold their surplus in the local market and when production was higher in September-October they sent vegetables to the markets in Kolkata. Abdur Rahaman of SEVA's Agricultural Department (Anon 2015) said that by having small PGS groups ie of six farmers, control of the PGS process was easier. He said that over the years up to a 100 farmers had been thrown out of the PGS groups for using chemicals. Due to its low cost and easiness the farmers accepted and had a good opinion of the PGS process.

PGS with government officers of Tamil Nadu

Anon (2012) reported that the Tamil Nadu Women's Development Corporation organized a workshop under Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana to promote sustainable agriculture-based livelihoods for women farmers in Tamil Nadu. The PGS was completely new to the government officers and had discussion on implementation of PGS with women farmers without landholding, entitlements, access to markets, nutritional security, local marketing and pricing mechanisms.

Statistics of the World of Organic Agriculture 2016

Willer and Lernoud (2016) stated that India provided little land use or crop data for cereals, pulses, vegetables and fruits to FiBL. This was the impression that the actual extent of organic production in India was unknown. Through 1991 to 2015 the NGO, SEVA received no support from the government of West Bengal. Only in 2015 the central government launched the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) under which PGS groups could be formed and supported.

Problems in PGS

1. organic laws do not include the PGS

Table 1. Status of organic farming in Tamil Nadu

Year	Individual farmer		Group of farmers		Corporate sector	Total	
	Area (acres)	Number of farmers	Area (acres)	Number of farmers	Area (acres)	Area (acres)	Number of farmers
2007-08	3185.05	33	1059.21	232	1000.00	5244.00	466
2008-09	5270.84	98	19609.70	7575	167.07	25048.00	7673
2009-10	6428.43	150	21306.00	9516	484.46	28219.00	9666
2010-11	8204.27	247	19487.50	7945	422.86	28114.59	8192
2011-12	7972.06	209	20392.20	6127	698.00	29062.40	6336
2012-13	7042.30	220	15568.79	5900	266.43	22877.52	6120
2013-14	8300.87	230	19243.16	4394	474.63	28018.66	4624
2014-15	8190.59	276	20342.55	4730	1144.23	29677.37	5006
2015-16	9198.97	329	19597.94	4070	929.90	29719.81	4412

Source: Anon (2016)

- The use of the word organic is regulated by law and requires third-party certification without allowing for a PGS model; it can complicate and even slow the organic movement.
- It is applicable only for crop production and processing.
- Only group of producers can participate in it.
- Not applicable on wild harvest and individual producer.
- It is not applicable on organized processing units.
- It is not for organic input approvals/certifications.
- It is not supported with any legal act therefore it is purely voluntary,
- It is applicable in local as well domestic markets.
- Premium price should be promoted for organic products produced by PGS groups.

REFERENCES

Suggestions to strength the PGS in Tamil Nadu

- There is need to create more intensive awareness on organic PGS among both conventional and certified organic farmers.
- A linkage between public private partnership may be established for the promotion of PGS.
- The issue of organic certification should be dealt through a single window system.
- There should be promotion of local market for organic products produced by PGS groups.
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